

Researching topic #14 -- SOCIETAL RESPONSES – CLIMATE ACTIVISM; THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT

[last revised 3/12/2021]

This prompt offers two kinds of help:

- A brief overview of the kinds of questions you might wish to explore as you study how climate change is likely to affect the food supply;
- A suggested strategy for how to search the literature as you prepare to write your paper.

OVERVIEW – SOCIETAL RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE – ACTIVISM; SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Kitsuse and Spector were the authors of what came to be known as the “social construction of social problems” idea. Their insight was that there is a difference between some social problem that *objectively* exists and society’s belief or perception, *subjectively*, that that problem is real and worth being concerned about. Someone, some individual or some group has to engage in what they called “claimsmaking,” mounting what amounts to a campaign to convince society (or, at least, the segments of society that set society’s political agenda) that that problem is real, is serious, and that “something ought to be done” about it.

Considering, now, climate change: Scientists understanding the causes of climate change, declaring it real and serious ... was not enough. Scientific understanding had to be taken and made into a campaign to persuade citizens that they should be concerned and that they should support various actions to address the threat.

How have environmental activists been doing this work, “constructing” climate change as a social problem?

Who? What are the organizations and who are individuals active in this campaign?
 Specifically about climate (e.g., 350.org; Citizens’ Climate Lobby)
 Older orgs that have taken up climate activism (Sierra Club; NRDC)
 Political action orgs with broader, not just environmental, political goals

Secondarily, the “who” should also include institutions or organizations or associations that we don’t ordinarily consider “activists,” such as various scientific bodies, liberal Protestant churches, and other social entities that advocate doing something about climate change.

What are their arguments?

How have they been trying to educate the public and grow support for action?

How have they participated in the formal political process?

Demonstrations, mass actions
 Advocacy and lobbying
 Electing pro-climate action candidates
 Litigation

SUGGESTED STRATEGY FOR SEARCHING THE LITERATURE

I recommend the following sequence for searching the literature:

- 1 Start with a search of the most recent **reports from top scientific bodies and government agencies**;
- 2 Search **academic articles** using Google Scholar (scholar.google.com);
- 3 Do a **more general search** using Google or another search engine;
- 4 Search the **best newspapers** and **reputable climate websites**.
(NOTE that I do not suggest using Wikipedia.)

- 1 Search the most recent **reports from top scientific bodies and government agencies**

(NOTE: There are many excellent reports one can consult. You will find a lot of repetition, so you do not need to consult every source. Here I start with a handful of the most recent reports, followed by a more complete list.)

These publications should, in most cases, supply you with all you need:

IPCC's most recent full set of reports:

<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>

EPA: https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climate-impacts/climate-impacts-society_.html

U.S. Global Change Research Program:

<https://science2017.globalchange.gov/> (the science)

<https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/> (the impacts)

American Meteorological Society:

www.ametsoc.net/sotc2017/StateoftheClimate2017_lowres.pdf

A more complete list of best scientific and governmental sources:

International

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)
World Meteorological Organization

Agencies of the U.S. federal government

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
U.S. Global Change Research Program

Scientific bodies – U.S.

National Academic of Sciences
Climate Change at the National Academies (climatechange@nas.edu)
National Science Foundation

Other professional bodies – American Meteorological Society

2 Search **academic articles** using Google Scholar (scholar.google.com)

(NOTE: Narrow and focus your search by using several phrases in quotes – such as “climate change”. For example, if you are searching for how climate change will increase the frequency of extreme weather events, don’t just enter “climate change,” search, instead for” “climate change” AND “extreme weather events”)

Search terms to use (you may certainly choose others):

“climate change” AND x, where x can be:

Social movements

Environmental movements

environmental organizations

Scientific bodies

National security, national security establishment, national intelligence, CIA

Military, Navy

(NOTE: For some citations you find on Google Scholar, you can directly download the PDF. For other citations, you may be able to find and download PDFs if your University library offers on line access to academic journals.)

3 Do a **more general search** using Google or another search engine

Use the same search terms to do a general search on Google or another search engine.

This will bring up information more recent than you find on scholar.google.com (it takes several years for research to be published in academic journals).

4 Search the **best newspapers** and **reputable climate websites**

New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian

On line sources

Climate Central

GRIST

Society of Environmental Journalists

The Daily Climate

Climate Nexus

InsideClimate News

DeSmogBlog

Skepticalscience.com

Yale 350

(NOTE about on line sources: You will run into a lot of denialist disinformation on the internet, on websites, on blogs, on youtube. FYI, skepticalscience.com has a comprehensive list of denialist talking points (and refutations of those talking points).

See, for example: <https://www.skepticalscience.com/argument.php>)

Finally, here are some good citations to help you get started:

For the environmental movement: (1) the climate statements of the more traditional organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Environmental Action, Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, etc.; (2) newer organizations specifically focused on climate: 350.org, Citizens' Climate Lobby.

For scientists becoming activists:

-- search the internet for [Joint Statements on Climate Change from National Academies of Science Around the World](#)

-- search the internet for the Commonwealth Academies of Science, "Consensus Statement on Climate Change," 12 March 2018

-- see message to Congress, sent by the leaders of 31 major US scientific bodies, June 28, 2016. Download the PDF at <https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2013/07/2016climateletter6-28-16.pdf>

-- see "An Open Letter Regarding Climate Change From Concerned Members of the U.S. National Academic of Sciences," <https://www.eri.ucsb.edu/events/news/open-letter-regarding-climate-change-concerned-members-us-national-academy-sciences>

-- "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice" (2017) -- <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/12/1026/4605229>

Other possibilities:

Pro-climate action private sector bodies – see prompt for research team # 22.

The American military and national security apparatus – see prompt for team # 20.

Additional sources, March 2021 revision:

Doug McAdam, “Social Movement Theory and the Prospects for Climate Change Activism in the United States,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol 20, pp. 189-208, 2017

<https://www.thenation.com/article/sunrise-movement-climate-change-varshini-prakash-green-new-deal/>

https://grist.org/article/for-the-sunrise-movement-2020-is-just-the-beginning/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=daily

<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/ny-pol-climate-change-kids-lawsuit-against-government-ethical-20190130-story.html>

<https://www.dw.com/en/greta-thunberg-fridays-for-future-movement-win-amnesty-human-rights-award/a-49096921>

videos about Extinction Rebellion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAH3IQwHKag> (London action)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2VkC4SnwY0> (ER overview)

<https://newrepublic.com/article/152844/green-leftists-prepare-give-democratic-candidates-hell>

<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060111515>

60 minutes episode on Juliana v United States

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/juliana-versus-united-states-the-climate-change-lawsuit-that-could-stop-the-u-s-government-from-supporting-fossil-fuels-60-minutes/>