

THESIS

EXPERTISE UNDER FIRE:
FRAMING, MISINFORMATION, AND THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF CLIMATE
SCIENCE IN RIGHT-WING MEDIA — A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE EPOCH TIMES*

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ABSTRACT

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FRAMING, MISINFORMATION, AND THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF CLIMATE SCIENCE IN RIGHT-WING MEDIA — A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE EPOCH TIMES*

When engaging with news online, individuals often rely on sources they perceive as trustworthy, which can reinforce preexisting beliefs, even when the information presented is partially or wholly incorrect (Ecker et al., 2022; Kunda, 1990). Framing plays a critical role in shaping how audiences interpret complex issues, such as climate change, by providing contextual lenses that influence understanding and perception. This study examines how a right-wing media outlet, *The Epoch Times*, employs framing strategies to construct narratives around climate change and scientific consensus.

Using thematic textual analysis of *The Epoch Times*' online climate coverage, this research identifies recurring patterns in the portrayal of climate experts and scientific authority within misinformation-laden stories. The findings reveal that *The Epoch Times* systematically delegitimizes climate scientists by framing them as ideologically driven actors embedded in broader narratives of elitism, political control, and cultural conflict. The publication amplifies pseudo-experts while selectively presenting climate data to manufacture scientific controversy and uncertainty, effectively eroding public trust in legitimate science.

Moreover, climate change itself is framed not as a settled scientific issue but as a politically charged and contested topic, reinforcing ideological polarization and skepticism. This study highlights how framing tactics, such as exploiting scientific uncertainty, promoting false equivalence between expert and non-expert voices, and linking climate science to globalist or

elitist agendas, contribute to the legitimization of misinformation within right-wing media ecosystems.

These insights deepen our understanding of the complex mechanisms through which misinformation is disseminated and accepted, emphasizing that combating climate misinformation requires more than factual corrections. Effective science communication must address the cultural and ideological contexts shaping audience perceptions and work to rebuild epistemic trust in scientific expertise.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study employs a reflexive textual framing analysis to examine how *The Epoch Times* uses scientists and climate experts in its climate change coverage. Partisan media sources like *The Epoch Times* transmit ideological cues through strategic message frames that reinforce readers' preexisting beliefs and values (Bolin & Hamilton, 2018). By analyzing these frames, this research aims to interpret the meanings that conservative audiences may derive from each article, shedding light on how such readers understand climate change and perceive scientific authority (McKee, 2003).

The Epoch Times serves as a prominent example of a right-wing media outlet that disseminates misinformation about climate change within a highly polarized political environment. Given the deep partisan divides surrounding climate discourse today, this study contributes to broader scholarship by exploring how conservative media outlets strategically frame climate experts to advance their political agendas. Understanding these communication strategies is essential for grasping how scientific expertise is contested and reshaped in polarized media ecosystems.

1.1 Goals of Study

The goal of this research was to critically examine how *The Epoch Times* employed framing to portray scientists and climate experts in its climate change coverage, particularly within stories containing misinformation. Through a thematic textual analysis, the study interpreted how the publication constructed the perceived credibility of scientific experts based on what was explicitly presented in the text. By uncovering these framing strategies, the analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of how politically motivated media outlets used

communication tactics to shape public perceptions of scientific authority and disseminate misinformation.

1.2 Organization of Thesis

Chapter 2 will discuss the relevant literature applicable to this research study. Chapter 3 will discuss the selected methodology which will include background of the method, sampling procedures, and data collection. Chapter 4 explains how the analysis was conducted, and Chapter 5 provides a detailed timeline of the research study. Finally, Chapter 6 provides conclusions, including a critical analysis of the project that will incorporate its limitations and potential issues that may arise, as well as proposed solutions where possible.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Climate Change

Climate change has become one of the most pressing issues of our time, with the average global temperature increasing drastically by the decade (IPCC, 2023). The main contributor of increasing temperatures has been found to be greenhouse gas emissions, for which carbon dioxide constituted 80% of greenhouse gas emissions in the US caused by human activity (EPA, 2024). Extreme rise in temperatures has led to rising sea levels, reduced snowpack, and heightened frequency of hurricanes in coastal communities (Hicke et al., 2022). There is high confidence and strong scientific consensus supporting the role of human influence in causing climactic changes and negative affects to our environments (Hicke et al., 2022). But climate change has still become a highly politicized and polarizing issue (Bernauer, 2013).

2.2 Mis- and Disinformation

Climate mis- and disinformation, misleading information that is disseminated regardless of the intent behind it, has led to a distrust of scientists and climate experts (Treen et al., 2020; Amsalem & Zoizner, 2022). Misinformation and disinformation about climate change have been able to run rampant in the social media breeding ground (Sovacool and Schrag, 2023).

Misinformation is technically not the same as disinformation, they only differ based upon the intention to mislead. Misinformation may not be false information but is presented in an intentionally misleading way (Fallis, 2009). Disinformation is defined as misleading information that is created and spread intentionally to deceive audiences (Treen et al., 2020). Misinformation can be used as an umbrella term to also include disinformation, as disinformation is misinformation taken a step further (Treen et al., 2020). There is intention to deceive audiences

underlying both, but disinformation is inaccurate information whilst misinformation may be accurate information presented in a misleading way.

Misinformation and disinformation about climate change have been able to run rampant in the social media breeding ground (Sovacool and Schrag, 2023). For the purposes of this study, misinformation will be an umbrella term that includes disinformation. A textual analysis of news stories from *The Epoch Times*, an anti-China publication that has shifted into an influential far-right news source in the US, was conducted (Peng et al., 2023). Through conducting a textual analysis, the implications of stories about climate change from *The Epoch Times* will be derived from information and concepts included within the text (Van Dijk, 1988).

2.3 Use of Experts

Climate scientists have asserted that humans are responsible for excessive temperature increase on a global scale. This assertion has repeatedly been associated with greater certainty that climate change is happening, and it is human caused (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Myers et al., 2015; van der Linden et al., 2015). There is high confidence and a very strong consensus among scientists and climate experts that support the role of human influence in causing changes to climates and negative environmental affects (Hicke et al., 2022).

Experts are used in news reporting to increase credibility, offer the facts and data, and to provide an objective perspective (Boyce, 2006). When expert sources are included in a story, journalists are relying upon them to further explain and interpret an event or phenomena to enhance both parties' expert credibility and objectivity (Steele, 1995). In this case, the experts are shaping the news that is received by mass audiences by giving their perspective of the issue, event, or phenomenon through commentary and contextualizing the story (Conrad, 1999; Soley,

1994). Some experts are considered as “co-conspirators” when it comes to the news-gathering process, as they learn over time what exactly journalists want from them and not necessarily the whole picture of the given issue (Nisbet et al., 2003). The experts in this instance are “...formulat(ing) message strategies to accent drama and familiar story formats” (Nisbet et al., 2003, pp. 43-44).

Despite an increase in the use of expertise in stories, public trust in experts is declining (Gerrath et al., 2024; Kennedy et al., 2022). Competition amongst media outlets and lower levels of public trust in journalism have resulted in an increase of using expert sources (Albaek et al., 2003). When more experts are included in a story, there is more objectivity from individuals' perspectives which can highlight more conflict, which in turn makes stories more interesting (Kruvand, 2012). Complications arise when a nonexpert (a journalist) must identify a legitimate expert (a scientist) in a given field to explain and break down an issue in more generalizable terms (Boyce, 2006; Goodman, 1999). Some aspects journalists look for when selecting a scientific or health expert to comment on an issue mainly rely upon highly visible names, titles, affiliations, and the experts' celebrity status (Conrad, 1999; Gooddell, 1977; Shepherd, 1981).

Online climate change misinformation has relied on the portrayal of experts and scientists to rapidly spread misleading information, especially those who are not legitimate experts. The use of “fake experts,” or spokespeople conveying the impression that they are experts on a given subject matter without possessing any relevant knowledge or scientific expertise is a technique used to create a sense of legitimacy (Cooke et al., 2017). By using “fake experts,” a readers' perception of the communicator's credibility is determined by how credible or trustworthy the “experts” seem (Stiff, 1994). Framing “experts” also relies upon a source's perceived credibility (Besley and Tiffany, 2023).

In Trumbo's (1996) study, scientists were given less media coverage when it came to discussing climate change and its growing impacts on human life. Trumbo even went on to state that it would be interesting to see if scientists will be able to retake a share of media coverage (Trumbo, 1996). This would turn attention back to scientific issues and shift away from special interests and politicians (Trumbo, 1996). Furthermore, Trumbo added that scientists are a news source when covering climate change and they play a very important role in media coverage of scientific issues.

2.4 Framing

Frames are a central organizing idea that provide meaning to certain events, weaving connections among them (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Frames suggest what the ethos of an issue is and why it may be controversial (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Frames will thus guide individuals' thinking about a given event or issue in ways we can predict (Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004). This will then lead individuals to predictable conclusions about that event or issue, and how it works (Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004).

Communicators use media frames, a written, spoken, visual, or graphical message used to contextualize a given topic within a body of text disseminated to an audience (D'Angelo, 2017). This influences individuals to think about the given topic in alignment with the contextual information that has been encoded in the "frame of reference" (D'Angelo, 2017). Media frames and news frames have become interchanged, but they remain their own entities. News frames focus on a journalists' knowledge and on a specific news organization and how their conventions and routines shape how frames are selected from sources and processed into stories (D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010).

Frames give meaning to an issue by selecting aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient through a communication lens (Entman, 1993). These frames then define the given problem by identifying the cause of that problem and identifying the forces of the problem (Entman, 1993). Frames make moral judgments about the problem by evaluating the cause and effects of a problem and then suggest remedies by offering and justifying solutions to the problem and predicting the likelihood of their effects (Entman, 1993).

Frames are used to make sense of and discuss a given issue, such as climate change. In the context of news media, journalists are doing the work of framing an issue by condensing complex events or phenomena into stories that are interesting and appealing to their given audience (Nisbet, 2009; D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2009). Frames simplify complex issues by putting emphasis on certain considerations or arguments which aids in communicating how an issue is defined, why it does or does not matter, what entities are responsible, and what should be done to fix the issue (Nisbet, 2009; D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2009; Entman, 1993; Ferree et al., 2002). Frames are organizing ideas within a narrative perspective of an issue and give cues for how to interpret an issue that would otherwise be neutral (Kuypers, 2009).

2.5 Framing of Climate Coverage

Individuals seeking out scientific information about climate change are more inclined to seek out partisan sources aligning with their pre-existing beliefs due to selective exposure and cognitive biases (Yeo, 2019). When we intake information from a source(s) that we deem reliable or trustworthy because we are familiar with its content, we are more inclined to believe that information even if it is not true (Ecker et al., 2022). Partisan audiences are motivated to interpret and process information in a biased manner that reinforces their predispositions (Kunda,

1990). Exposure to information about an issue, like climate change, will activate one's political predispositions and increase issue polarization and partisanship (Mutz, 2008).

The ways in which media presents information to the public influences the choices the public makes to process that information (Goffman, 1974). Individuals evaluate expert credibility based on the ways issues are framed and on the dissonance between these expert communication frames and one's underlying worldview (Lachapelle et al., 2014). News framing further amplifies misinformation by garnering audience's attention and activating their emotions and attitudes about a partisan topic (Amsalem and Zoizner, 2022).

Communicating information about climate change has been found to bring forth various complex issues (Spence and Pidegon, 2010). What we as individuals consider to be 'dangerous' climate change is based on the judgements we make about uncertainties and complexities in science, potential future impacts, and personal values we use to determine acceptable outcomes (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005). Presenting "neutral" climate change information is thus impossible, it is always framed in some way (Hulme, 2009; Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). Different actors within the climate change science and policy domains are constantly competing to present and legitimize their personal interpretations of climate-related information, thus further framing the information (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Nisbet, 2009). Attribute framing in particular highlights specific aspects or attributes of the target issues (Spence and Pidgeon, 2010). Previously, an example of this was the fact Republicans and right-leaning individuals tended to emphasize perceived uncertainties of climate science (Nisbet and Mooney, 2007).

Individuals denying the reality of climate change stated their viewpoint is based off information they received from right-leaning news outlets and political commentators (Mullinix, 2024). Politicization of climate change is a big driver in climate change misinformation (Kahan,

2015; Hart and Nisbet, 2012). Thus, climate denialism is directly linked to the politicization of climate change by right-wing news outlets and commentators.

While framing plays a significant role in shaping public understanding and perception of climate change, it is important to note that its influence may be limited when it comes to the small segment of the population engaged in outright climate denialism. Research suggests that only about 14.8% of Americans deny climate change is real (Mullinix, 2024), and these individuals often hold strong ideological or identity-based commitments that make them largely impervious to reframing efforts (Kahan, 2015; Hart and Nisbet, 2012). In such cases, denial is not simply the result of informational gaps or framing but stems from deep-seated cultural worldviews and political identities. As such, while framing remains a critical communication tool for engaging the broader public and those uncertain or skeptical, its effect on hardline denialists is likely minimal. This distinction underscores the need for targeted communication strategies that differentiate between persuadable audiences and those entrenched in ideological opposition.

2.6 Climate Denialism

Climate change denialism is the outright rejection of the scientific consensus that human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions, are contributing to climate change (Grantham Research Institute, 2024). A more nuanced approach of misinformation intended to thwart climate action, known as climate delayism, has also emerged within the broader sphere of denial and skepticism (Grantham Research Institute, 2024). Unlike denialism, delayism does not outright reject climate science. Instead, it employs rhetorical tactics to diminish or discredit scientific evidence and delay policy responses to climate change. Individuals engaging in both denial and delay tend to be skeptical of the

scientific consensus and frequently reject some aspect of climate change or the need for urgent mitigation (Grantham Research Institute, 2024).

A critical distinction exists between these two approaches, despite their shared goal of obstructing climate action. Climate denialism challenges the existence, causes, or severity of climate change and often reflects ideological opposition, mistrust of scientific institutions, or political partisanship. For instance, 14.8% of Americans deny that climate change is real, with many citing former President Donald Trump and other right-leaning sources as key influences on their views (Mullinix, 2024). Denialists typically claim that climate change is either a hoax, exaggerated, or not caused by humans. These views are fueled by media ecosystems that promote contrarian perspectives and misinformation designed to protect economic or political interests.

In contrast, climate delayism operates more subtly. Delayists acknowledge the scientific consensus but use arguments that reduce the perceived urgency of action. These include claims that climate policy is too costly, that technological innovation will eventually solve the crisis, or that other countries should take the lead first. This form of messaging often appears reasonable or moderate, yet it effectively defers responsibility and weakens public support for immediate climate action. According to the Grantham Research Institute (2024), such rhetoric reflects a strategic evolution in climate misinformation, shifting from outright denial to more socially acceptable skepticism rooted in caution, fatalism, or economic concern.

Climate change skepticism, denial, and contrarianism have all played a large role in the spread of misinformation. The Mullinix (2024) study found that political beliefs and affiliation are the strongest predictors of whether an individual believes in climate change. Republicans showed the strongest correlation with denialist views, often shaped by influential figures and

partisan media. These actors leveraged major weather events and online platforms to more rapidly disseminate climate misinformation, further entrenching disbelief among politically aligned audiences.

In terms of cognitive processing, individuals are limited in how much new information they can absorb at a time (Druckman and Lupia, 2017). Those already skeptical of climate change tend to resist ideas that conflict with their preexisting worldviews. Even though climate change is not a new issue, it can feel like a “new” or threatening idea to those whose political identities align with climate skepticism (Druckman and Lupia, 2017). Kahan (2015) notes that people often seek out scientific information that aligns with their political values, reinforcing their existing beliefs rather than challenging them.

Additionally, humans rely on heuristics, or mental shortcuts, to process information. When information comes from a source perceived as trustworthy, people are more likely to believe it, even if it's inaccurate (Ecker et al., 2022). Psychological responses such as fear, anxiety, or denial can make people more receptive to misinformation that minimizes the severity of climate change (Boncu et al., 2022). Delayist narratives are particularly effective in this psychological space, as they validate emotional discomfort without fully rejecting the science.

While climate denialism and climate delayism differ in method, both contribute to the same outcome: inaction. Denialism discredits the science entirely, while delayism erodes the political and public will to implement necessary climate solutions. Understanding these differences is essential for crafting effective responses to climate misinformation and mobilizing support for urgent climate action.

2.7 Politics in Climate Coverage

Far-right media has been relying upon the “us versus them” dichotomy, founded upon the sentiment of perceived threats from internal and external sources (Sik, 2015). White culture and identity are often depicted as being under threat by “population subgroups” in right-wing media (Atton, 2006; Back, 2002a). LGBTQ+ rights and feminism have also been centered as destructive forces aiming to upend traditional values while simultaneously highlighting themes of illegal immigration and crime within Black communities. Individuals who consumed this kind of content from far-right news sources exhibited what is known as a perception gap, or a difference between what a group believes what the opposing group thinks versus what they believe (Marston, 2022). The perception gap was found to be nine to eleven percentage points larger than amongst those who did not consume right-wing media (Marston, 2022).

Several other characteristics of far-right media that contribute to the phenomenon of extremism include constructing and perpetuating closed communities, concealing repressive content beneath surface-level narratives, and sowing confusion and distrust within other media institutions (Atton, 2006; Daniels, 2009; Faris et al., 2018; Padovani, 2016). *The Epoch Times* uses these tactics to segregate their audience into an extremist far-right bubble that distorts the truth, gives prejudicial viewpoints, and relies on animosity towards those not holding similar viewpoints (Nguyen, 2025). When it comes to covering climate change, these tactics are heavily employed.

The far-right movement has heavily used and relied upon the small group of contrarian scientists who deny anthropogenic climate change to substantiate false claims by framing, spinning, and slanting facts to advance their agenda (Dunlap and McCright, 2010; Nguyen, 2025). While some scientists and experts with advanced scientific degrees, qualifications, and

experience may be used in these cases, not all these individuals have experience or expertise related to or within climate science specifically (Dunlap and McCright, 2010). Conservative politicians have been very receptive to climate change skepticism and denial from the outset, inviting contrarian scientists to hearings to rebut scientists supporting the consensus about anthropogenic climate change, even harassing and intimidating them at times (Clarke et al., 2019). The Reagan and W. Bush administrations, now followed by the Trump administration, have brought anti-environmentalism and climate denialism directly to the White House (Fredrickson et al., 2018).

Conservative media entities like Joe Rogan, Charlie Kirk, and Jordan Peterson have long repeated the litany of charges pushing denial on the reality and cause of global warming and shared inaccurate climate information (Yale Climate Connections, 2025). These entities further give platforms and visibility to contrarian scientists and spokespeople for conservative think-tanks working to battle the realities of climate science and subsequent policy (Dunlap and McCright, 2010). This media assault is repeated and amplified by other media organizations like the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Post*, and *Washington Times* (Dunlap and McCright, 2010).

The Epoch Times has become their own massive machine of disseminating climate misinformation to align with the right-wing values of their organization and to contribute their own spin on climate skepticism and denial. One of their notable tactics is the relentless criticism of the IPCC and climate science. This includes promoting and recycling virtually any claim made against human-caused global warming, discrediting the IPCC and individual climate scientists, and fueling public debate by featuring “experts” who support these opposing views (Dunlap and McCright, 2010). Linkages between conservative think-tanks, media, politicians, and contrarian scientists are firmly grounded in all parties’ shared commitment to long-held

conservative ideologies including free markets and opposition to all governmental regulation (Douglas, 2007; Oreskes and Conway, 2008).

2.8 Misinformation Online

People holding platforms with large followings, like Trump and other right-wing politicians and commentators, disseminate misinformation which is then repeated and amplified online (Treen et al., 2020). Once a piece of misinformation is shared to an audience, individual users will amplify or repeat that misinformation. Whether that is via retweeting, reposting, responding to, or liking the content, individuals doing this are part of the echo chamber of misinformation. Algorithms also play a part in this, generating content it thinks you will like based on previously interacted with content (Gao et al., 2023).

But politically motivated misinformation is not the only attribute to blame when it comes to climate change denial and skepticism. Climate change misinformation can also stem from a genuine misunderstanding of scientific data (Grantham Research Institute, 2024). Individuals may draw conclusions from incomplete information or misinterpreted data, which can lead to inadvertent dissemination of misconceptions about climate change (Grantham Research Institute, 2024).

On social media, after Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter (X), many misinformation policies were redacted and tweets containing "climate scam" or other terms linked to climate change denialism rose by 300% in 2022 (Associated Press, 2023). Posts and replies by verified accounts are automatically boosted on the platform, making this content more visible than that of users who do not pay (CCDH, 2023). Subsequently, this aids in giving a platform to those engaging in and sharing misinformation about climate change which further boosts the dissemination of climate denialism and skepticism.

2.9 The Epoch Times

Based in New York City, *The Epoch Times* was founded by and is affiliated with the Falun Gong religious movement. Falun Gong was outlawed by the Chinese government in the late 1990's (Peng et al., 2023). The religious movement opposes the Chinese Communist Party and holds anti-evolutionary views, opposes homosexuality and feminism, and rejects modern medicine (Xinzhang and Lewis, 2020). This religious affiliation has resulted in the paper being blocked from publication and access in mainland China. Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun Gong, alongside practitioners of the movement were exiled to the United States after the movement was outlawed in China (Peng et al., 2023).

Once in the US, Hongzhi and other practitioners set up their own media outlets to promote their beliefs and ideas amongst a widespread audience (Peng et al., 2023). Hongzhi is referred to by his employees and Falun Gong practitioners as “Master” (Roose, 2020). Initially focusing on Chinese-language publications, they have since expanded to founding *The Epoch Times* which has joined a platform of other far-right media outlets on the international level. Publishing in 21 languages, the site is accessible and distributes their articles in 33 countries. Print editions are available in eight languages: Chinese, English, Spanish, Hebrew, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian. Special print editions have occasionally been published in French (*TheEpochTimes.com*). The publication receives much attention on social media, particularly Meta (Facebook), as well as receiving approval from President Trump's constituents (Roose, 2020; van Zuylen-Wood, 2021; Peng et al., 2023). Trump administration officials have sat for interviews with the publication and in 2020, a reporter asked Trump a question at a White House press briefing (Roose, 2020).

A previous investigative report by *The New York Times* found that the publication has rapidly grown in popularity amongst right-wing politicians by relying on and employing social media tactics like feel-good videos and clickbait via ads to lure in prospective readers (Roose, 2020). Between February and August 2020, *The Epoch Times* spent \$1.5 million on 11,000 pro-Trump ads on Meta, becoming the second largest donor to pro-Trump ads only behind the Trump campaign itself (Zadrozny and Collins, 2019). The publication has evolved in popularity, gaining recognition as one of the most popular Apple newspaper apps in the US (Zuylen-Wood, 2021). Since gaining such recognition, the publication's profit margins have rapidly increased from just \$3.9 million in revenue in 2016 to \$15.5 million in 2019 to \$122 million in 2021, mostly due to targeted ads aimed at Trump supporters (Markay, 2021).

The Epoch Times has been found to push many dangerous conspiracy theories while simultaneously downplaying their affiliation and connections to Falun Gong (Roose, 2020). The publication has become a far-right misinformation machine, especially when it comes to highly politicized and controversial topics like COVID-19, vaccines, Black Lives Matter, and climate change. *The Epoch Times* has been a big promoter of the "Spygate" conspiracy theory, claiming the Obama administration illegally spied on President Trump's 2016 campaign (Roose, 2020). Ties to the conspiracy theorist platform QAnon have been found, and conspiracy theories from the platform have been promoted by the publication including voter fraud and COVID-19 being created as a bioweapon by Chinese laboratories (Roose, 2020). The publication has gone as far as to call COVID-19 the "CCP virus," or Chinese Communist Party virus (Roose, 2020).

When it comes to climate change, *The Epoch Times* has published many stories challenging or altogether dismissing established climate science and scientific consensus. Running hundreds of anti-climate ads on social media was one tactic they were found to have

partaken in (Grostern, 2024). *The Epoch Times* runs various Meta (Facebook) accounts based in different countries disseminating climate misinformation. Their website is home to hundreds of articles dismissing, delegitimizing, and trying to deconstruct the established science supporting human-caused climate change. Published articles on their website include statements about arctic ice not actually melting, higher CO2 levels not affecting temperatures, and discussing how climate change data is based on “faulty” temperatures.



While governments pour billions of dollars into lowering CO2 emissions, several climate experts say CO2 is essential and higher levels are not a problem.



Figure 1

2.10 Research Question

As experts can play a critical role in how the public understands complex scientific topics, the media also have a significant influence in framing stories. This study will explore the relationship between media misinformation and the use of expert sources when writing about a scientific topic like climate change.

Research Question: How are experts framed within stories containing climate change misinformation from *The Epoch Times*?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

To explore the relationship between partisan conservative news outlets, such as *The Epoch Times*, and the framing of climate change through the portrayal of scientists and experts, a thematic textual analysis was conducted on articles containing misinformation about climate change. By selecting stories within the specified timeframe, emerging themes were identified regarding how scientists and climate experts were framed in these articles. Analyzing these climate change stories helped reveal how the issue itself was framed and portrayed to *The Epoch Times* readership. It also illuminated how scientists and experts were depicted and the framing strategies employed by the publication. This analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of how scientists are used and framed in misinformation-laden stories to propagate climate change disbelief and confusion.

Themes were identified based on information and concepts explicitly present in the analyzed texts (Van Dijk, 1988). This thematic identification facilitated a clearer understanding of how *The Epoch Times* conveyed cues through message framing to reinforce readers' pre-existing perceptions of climate scientists and experts (Bolin and Hamilton, 2018).

3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Method

Framing theory helps explain how the media presents information in ways that influence how audiences interpret and process that information (Goffman, 1974). By applying framing analysis to stories from *The Epoch Times*, this study aimed to understand how the perceived credibility of experts shapes readers' perceptions of climate change. Research shows that individuals assess expert credibility not only based on the content of expert communication but

also on how well these expert frames align or conflict with their own worldviews (Lachapelle et al., 2014).

This study is also informed by Philip Kitcher's account of science in democratic life, particularly as outlined in *Science in a Democratic Society* (2011). Kitcher challenges both technocratic and populist distortions of expertise by proposing a model of "well-ordered science," in which scientific inquiry is democratically accountable yet still guided by trained experts. According to this view, the democratic value of expertise lies in its ability to contribute to collective, deliberative problem-solving; *not* in replacing public input, but in ensuring that public values inform the direction of inquiry while still deferring to trained judgment in assessing evidence.

My vision of democracy in this study aligns with Kitcher's model: an ideal where scientific expertise retains epistemic authority but is situated within a broader democratic conversation about public priorities, risks, and values. The problem arises when misinformation or ideological filtering, as seen in partisan outlets like *The Epoch Times*, distorts both the perception of expert consensus and the role of science in democratic discourse. Understanding how these frames operate, and how they erode the democratic potential of expertise, was central to the analysis conducted here.

Readers of *The Epoch Times* make sense of climate change through the framing devices embedded in the articles they consume. Frames highlight particular features of events or policies, guiding individuals' reasoning toward predictable interpretations and conclusions (Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004). Because individuals tend to select news sources that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs, readers are more likely to engage with articles that align with their opinions (Yeo, 2019; Ecker et al., 2022). Consequently, the way *The Epoch Times* frames scientific

expertise significantly influences how its readership evaluates climate science and expert authority.

3.2 Instruments

When conducting textual analysis and gathering data, texts were initially coded based on anticipated themes found in the literature. Some anticipated themes included references to scientific experts and how they were described in dismissive ways, ambiguous or vague language referring to scientists, and selective inclusion of scientific data to discuss climate change. As the analysis progressed, themes related to narrative construction and the strategic framing of climate change information also emerged. These themes became central to understanding how *The Epoch Times* framed climate science and expertise.

To identify misinformation and assess how the publication created an illusion of accuracy, I conducted fact-checks of specific claims made in the articles. These fact-checks focused particularly on statements attributed to named individuals or organizations. I examined whether the individuals quoted or cited possessed credible expertise in climate science. This involved reviewing their academic backgrounds, professional affiliations, and records of peer-reviewed publications. While many held advanced degrees in adjacent fields such as forestry, ecology, physics, or astrophysics, they often lacked explicit credentials or a research record in climate change science. Their authority was sometimes overstated or presented without necessary context, contributing to a false impression of scientific legitimacy.

Additionally, I cross-referenced claims with information from authoritative climate science sources such as NASA, NOAA, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In several instances, statements from these organizations were quoted out of context or selectively edited to align with the narrative of the given article. This technique, along with the

use of complex or technical language, lent the articles an appearance of scientific credibility while subtly distorting the underlying evidence.

Some of the individuals or groups cited were affiliated with organizations known for promoting climate denialist views, such as the CO2 Coalition. These affiliations were often not disclosed or were presented in ways that masked the ideological orientation of the source. This strategy reinforced the illusion that dissenting views within the articles reflected mainstream scientific debate, rather than the perspectives of ideologically driven think tanks.

By combining these investigative checks with thematic coding, the analysis revealed how misinformation was embedded not only in overt factual inaccuracies but also in subtler framing practices that undermined scientific consensus while maintaining an outward appearance of credibility.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

A general Google search for “climate change misinformation” led to *The Epoch Times*, a far-right U.S. publication that has become an influential misinformation source (Roose, 2020). A search for “climate change” within its website yielded 1,956 articles.

Specific texts from *The Epoch Times* were selected based on search terms and their publication dates. Articles published within the defined timeframe were analyzed to identify recurring themes and coded into thematic groups. Texts were extracted directly from the publication's website. Taguette was used to highlight relevant excerpts and organize them into designated codes.

The data for this study were gathered in March 2025 by collecting articles published between December 2023 and March 2025. Only texts from the “Premium Reports,” “Science,” and “US News” sections were included. Videos, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and columns

were excluded. Articles that focused centrally on climate change or climate-related topics and policies were analyzed, while those that only mentioned such topics in passing were not included.

3.3.1 Pilot Study

A small pilot study was conducted in the fall of 2024. A sample of 5 articles were randomly selected from *The Epoch Times* website. A search of “climate change” in the general search bar of *The Epoch Times* website brings up 1,956 articles published within the website. In refining the search to the past year (November 2023 to November 2024), 342 stories are available. Articles were randomly selected based on a search of a given topic. The term “climate change” was searched followed by “arctic ice,” “CO2 levels,” “temperature,” “hurricane,” and “warming.” These are all common phenomena associated with climate change. Five articles were selected for the sample, published between November 2023 and November 2024. All stories were selected from the “premium reports” section. Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, videos, and columns were excluded from the sample.

The selection of random article titles and subheadings in a small-scale pilot study demonstrated that *The Epoch Times* website contained a substantial amount of text to analyze and interpret. A small sample of five titles and five subheadings generated seven initial code groups. In the subsequent larger-scale study, additional text was scraped and analyzed for emergent themes. This broader dataset provided a more comprehensive understanding of how *The Epoch Times* frames expert sources in its coverage of climate change.

3.3.2 Credibility

To ensure credibility, this project utilized a predetermined coding approach based on codes identified in previous research. Emergent codes were also incorporated into the process, as

some patterns differed from those previously identified due to the conservative nature of the publication. Explicit definitions were written for each code, along with detailed descriptions of emergent patterns and themes identified during the categorization process. An in-depth analysis of the articles was conducted by repeatedly analyzing and reanalyzing the texts to achieve sufficient depth and analytical rigor.

3.3.3 Reflexivity

As the researcher conducting this study, I acknowledged the importance of recognizing my own positionality and its potential influence on all stages of the research process. My background, experiences, and perspectives inevitably shaped the way I approached the formulation of my research question, the collection and analysis of data, and the interpretation of findings. Because thematic textual analysis involves identifying patterns and constructing meaning from texts, I recognized that the choices I made, such as which themes to emphasize and how to categorize data, were, to some extent, subjective.

I brought to this research a dual academic background in journalism and political science, along with prior experience conducting research on climate change and political misinformation. These experiences informed the lens through which I viewed the articles produced by *The Epoch Times*. My familiarity with climate science and my commitment to accurate science communication influenced how I perceived the presentation of scientific claims and the use of expert voices within the texts. As a science communicator, I was especially critical of the ways in which *The Epoch Times* framed scientific content, often in ways that misconstrued or overgeneralized expert statements.

I am also a strong advocate for political and scientific literacy, and I view both as vital components of an informed democratic society. These commitments shaped my interest in this

research topic and informed me of my critical stance toward the politicization of scientific issues in media coverage. I recognized that these beliefs had the potential to introduce bias into my interpretations.

To mitigate this, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practices throughout the research process. I regularly consulted with my advisor to ensure that my personal views did not unduly influence the coding, analysis, or conclusions drawn from the data. These discussions served as a critical check on my interpretations and helped ensure that my analysis remained grounded in the data rather than my assumptions.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYTICAL APPROACH

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis of climate change stories published by *The Epoch Times*, with a particular focus on how scientific experts were used and framed, and how climate change itself was presented. The analysis aimed to identify recurring themes related to the portrayal of experts, the language used to explain scientific phenomena, and the contextualization of scientific data. By identifying these patterns, the study offered insight into the discursive strategies employed to shape readers' perceptions of scientific authority and climate science more broadly.

Themes were identified both in relation to how experts were characterized, such as their credibility, neutrality, or ideological alignment, and how scientific concepts were conveyed or distorted. This thematic analysis helped contextualize the use of experts within *The Epoch Times'* reporting and provided a framework for understanding how the outlet framed climate change in a manner consistent with its broader political orientation. Ultimately, this approach allowed for interpretations about how readers might perceive climate scientists and experts based on the cues embedded within the publication's reporting.

The coding process followed a hybrid approach, combining both predetermined and emergent codes. Initial codes were drawn from existing literature on climate misinformation, media framing, and science communication. However, because of the unique ideological position of *The Epoch Times*, the analysis remained open to emergent patterns that may not have been previously documented. As the analysis progressed, new codes were added and, where necessary, initial codes were revised or discarded to better reflect the data.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, strict adherence to intercoder reliability measures was not necessary. Instead, credibility was maintained through expert checks conducted in collaboration with my academic advisor. This included reviewing a subset of the data and corresponding analytical notes to confirm the consistency and validity of the themes and interpretations generated. These checks provided an additional layer of rigor and helped ensure that the findings were grounded in the data rather than shaped solely by the researcher's subjective interpretations.

4.1 Stimulus Materials

This study analyzed articles published by *The Epoch Times* between December 2023 and March 2025. The dataset included texts drawn exclusively from the “Premium Reports,” “Science,” and “US News” sections of the website to ensure consistency in tone and editorial framing. Articles from these sections were used as the baseline for the study, as they offered more comprehensive reporting on climate-related topics than opinion or international news sections.

Articles were selected using a set of targeted search terms designed to capture content related to climate science and policy. These terms included “climate change,” “climate policy,” “CO2,” “IPCC,” “EPA,” “climate cult,” “net zero,” “climate alarmists,” and “climate alarmism.” These keywords were chosen to reflect both neutral and ideologically charged language often associated with climate discourse in right-leaning media. Terms such as “global warming” and “warming” were deliberately excluded after the preliminary pilot study revealed that they predominantly returned older articles. Many of these fell outside the defined timeframe or appeared in the “World News” section and focused on international contexts rather than U.S. policy or domestic scientific discourse. By focusing on articles within this defined scope, the

analysis aimed to capture how *The Epoch Times* frames climate change and scientific expertise within a politically charged domestic context.

4.2 Data Analysis

Past research found that the use of ambiguous or unqualified individuals presented as experts on climate change was a tactic used to lend unwarranted legitimacy to certain narratives (Cooke et al., 2017). These individuals conveyed the impression of expertise without possessing relevant scientific knowledge, which influenced readers’ perceptions of the credibility of the news source. In such cases, the perceived trustworthiness of the “experts” significantly shaped audience judgments (Stiff, 1994).

For the data collection and analysis, predetermined codes were applied based on previous literature concerning the framing of climate change and the portrayal of scientific experts. The analysis followed an iterative process, incorporating both pre-established codes and new, emergent codes that arose from the data itself (Tracy, 2013). Among the emergent codes identified were climate nationalism and sovereignty and global leadership, climate policy as elitist control, and economic opportunity in climate action.

Table 1.

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| <p>Global Leadership and Economic Opportunity in Climate Action</p> | <p>Captures arguments emphasizing the strategic, political, and economic costs of U.S. in international climate efforts.</p> <p>Highlights the loss of global influence, missed opportunities in the green economy, and contrasts between national isolation and global momentum. Like loss of geopolitical influence through climate disengagement, missed economic opportunities in the green energy sector, U.S. role in shaping</p> |
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| | <p>global climate standards and accountability, momentum of global climate action independent of U.S. participation, resilience and confidence in international climate cooperation, and critique of fossil fuel dependency as outdated and self-limiting</p> |
| <p>Climate Nationalism and Sovereignty</p> | <p>This captures narratives emphasizing national interests, economic sovereignty, and opposition to international climate agreements perceived as disadvantageous to the United States. This includes rejection of global climate commitments, economic prioritization over environmental regulation, framing international agreements as unfair or exploitative, anti-globalist rhetoric, policy reversals between administrations, and framing climate change as a partisan issue. Implying political motivations over national or local interests.</p> |
| <p>Climate Policy as Elitist Control</p> | <p>Emphasizes the idea that climate policies are driven by elite interests, disconnected from the general population, and involve authoritarian or restrictive measures that limit personal freedom.</p> |

The analysis began with the classification of texts into identified groups, while additional themes, codes, and patterns were identified throughout the process as they emerged. Codes previously determined in the pilot study were used (see Tables 2 and 3; Appendix A). The use of fake experts, individuals unqualified to discuss scientific topics such as climate change, was

found to create a sense of legitimacy for readers (Cooke et al., 2017). This insight informed the coding in the pilot study, where several recurring patterns were identified: (1) experts were often referred to ambiguously and remained unnamed; (2) climate experts were frequently politicized; (3) non-expert, or fake expert, sources were used to establish a sense of legitimacy; and (4) experts were regularly accused of manipulating scientific data to advance a particular “agenda” related to climate change.

Table 2.

| Type | Definition | Example |
|--------|---|--|
| Expert | An individual with deep, extensive knowledge or skill in a specific subject or field. Expertise is typically developed through a combination of formal education, professional experience, and practical application over time. Experts are often recognized by peers and industry professionals as authoritative and credible sources. | “‘The last nine years have been the warmest since modern record keeping began. We’re on a trend of increasing temperatures and with those increasing temperatures we are seeing more impacts and that’s something that we as scientists have known for a while,’ said Kate Calvin, NASA Chief Scientist and Senior Climate Advisor, speaking at a NASA media briefing. ‘I think what’s |

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| | | sometimes different for people is when you actually experience it in your neighborhood” (Wilcox, 2023). |
| Ambiguous or vague expert(ise) | Refers to individuals whose professional background or expertise is not clearly defined or explicitly stated. These sources may possess some relevant knowledge, but their authority is obscured by vague references such as job titles without names. This vagueness can encourage readers to assume legitimacy without verification. | <p>“Meteorologist finds 96 percent of NOAA temperature stations located in ‘urban heat islands,’ including next to exhaust fans on ‘blistering hot rooftops” (Spence, 2024).</p> <p>“Climate policy based on an assumed relationship between CO2 and Arctic ice levels is problematic, say scientists” (Spence, 2024).</p> |
| Fake expert(ise) | Refers to individuals who may hold academic or scientific credentials but lack qualifications in the specific | ““The current climate outside of cities is not unusual,’ Willie Soon, astrophysicist and cofounder of CERES” |

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| | <p>field of climate science.</p> <p>These individuals present themselves as credible experts while making misleading or unsubstantiated claims. They may be used to create a false sense of legitimacy in misinformation narratives, despite having no peer-reviewed research or recognized expertise in the subject matter.</p> | <p>(Newman, 2024).</p> <p>“One criticism against Plimer over the years has been that he is not a climate scientist per se. But Plimer says that as a geologist, he knows a lot about climate. ‘Geology textbooks for the last 250 years had been dealing with climate,’ he told the audience” (Sun, 2024).</p> |
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Within these examples, the differences are clear. Ambiguous or vague experts may be referred to by their profession, such as “scientist” or “meteorologist,” but are typically not explicitly named. This rhetorical strategy places trust in the institution itself, encouraging readers to accept the information as factual without verifying the source. Referencing general professional titles to substantiate false claims lends a veneer of credibility and suggests that legitimate expert voices are being cited.

In contrast, fake experts are individuals who appear authoritative due to their academic credentials or scientific backgrounds but lack relevant expertise in climate science. Two prominent examples cited by *The Epoch Times* are Willie Soon and Ian Plimer (see Table 2). While both possess scientific training, neither has a background in climate or environmental

science. Soon's academic work is rooted in astrophysics, astronomy, and aerospace engineering. He has not published peer-reviewed research on climate change in credible scientific journals. Instead, his writings on the subject focus on the influence of solar variation and have been published through organizations known for promoting climate change skepticism (Desmog, n.d.).

Moreover, Soon has well-documented financial ties to the fossil fuel industry, including funding from the Western Fuels Association, ExxonMobil, the Texaco Foundation, and the Electric Power Research Institute (Greenpeace, n.d.). Similarly, Plimer is a geologist whose expertise lies in mining and Earth sciences, not atmospheric science or climate modeling. Although he claims that geology equips him to speak authoritatively on climate issues, his arguments often contradict established climate science and lack support in peer-reviewed literature (Grandia, n.d.). His books and public commentary are frequently cited by climate change denial groups but have been widely criticized by scientific organizations for misrepresenting data and promoting misinformation (Grandia, n.d.). Despite this, both individuals are presented as credible experts in *The Epoch Times*, illustrating how fake experts are used to legitimize misinformation and sow doubt about scientific consensus.

By contrast, legitimate experts such as Kate Calvin exemplify credible scientific authority on climate change. Calvin, NASA's Chief Scientist and Senior Climate Advisor, has published over 150 peer-reviewed articles on climate systems, land use, and the socioeconomic impacts of climate change (Google Scholar, n.d.). Her work has appeared in leading journals such as *Science*, *Global Environmental Change*, and *Energy Economics*. Notably, she has co-authored influential studies on greenhouse gas concentration pathways, including the RCP4.5 stabilization scenario and shared socioeconomic pathways central to climate modeling. In her role at NASA, Calvin guides critical scientific research and advises climate policy, grounding her public

statements in rigorous, peer-reviewed evidence. Her extensive publication record and leadership within a globally respected scientific institution underscore her status as a trustworthy and authoritative voice in climate science, highlighting the stark difference between genuine expertise and the misrepresentation found in misinformation sources.

Table 3.

| Quote | Background |
|--|--|
| <p>“Meteorologist finds 96 percent of NOAA temperature stations located in ‘urban heat islands,’ including next to exhaust fans on ‘blistering hot rooftops.’”</p> | <p>The Earth is warming due to an increased concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases, like CO₂, because of human activity. Cities and urban areas have been found to have warmer temperatures than rural areas for decades (NASA, n.d.). Temperature data from sensors impacted by urban heat is corrected and corroborated by sensors that are unaffected by urban heat (NASA, n.d.).</p> |
| <p>Climate policy based on an assumed relationship between CO₂ and Arctic ice levels is problematic, say scientists.</p> | <p>“Since the 1970s, the Arctic has warmed at least three times faster than anywhere else on Earth, transforming its waters and ecosystems... some of these changes promote more CO₂ outgassing in the region, while others lead to more CO₂ being absorbed” (NASA, 2023). Antarctic ice core records have found that major increases in CO₂</p> |

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| | <p>emissions are followed by warmer temperatures, increasing the melting of Arctic ice (Bauska, 2022).</p> |
| <p>“‘The current climate outside of cities is not unusual,’ Willie Soon, astrophysicist and cofounder of CERES.”</p> | <p>Soon is a well-known astrophysicist for the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. While he holds expertise in astrophysics, Soon is an anthropogenic climate change denier and has long claimed that variations in solar intensity are driving climate change rather than human activity (Palmer, 2015). Soon has accepted over \$1 million from the fossil fuel industry, which he failed to disclose as a conflict of interest on multiple papers (Palmer, 2015). Soon’s claims have been repeatedly debunked by NASA, IPCC, and the US Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.</p> |
| <p>“One criticism against Plimer over the years has been that he is not a climate scientist per se. But Plimer says that as a geologist, he knows a lot about climate. ‘Geology textbooks for the last 250 years had been dealing with climate,’ he told the audience”</p> | <p>Plimer is a geologist and emeritus professor at the University of Melbourne, best known for his work in mining and Earth sciences. While he holds expertise in geology, Plimer is a vocal anthropogenic climate change denier who frequently argues that natural geological</p> |

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| <p>(Sun, 2024).</p> | <p>processes, rather than human activity, are the primary drivers of climate change. He rose to prominence in climate skeptic circles with his 2009 book <i>Heaven and Earth: Global Warming – The Missing Science</i>, which has been widely criticized for containing scientific inaccuracies and misrepresenting climate data. Plimer has no formal training in atmospheric science or climate modeling and has not published peer-reviewed climate research in recognized scientific journals. His claims have been refuted by major scientific bodies, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), NASA, and the CSIRO (Australia’s national science agency). Despite this, his work continues to be promoted by conservative media outlets and climate denial organizations to cast doubt on the scientific consensus.</p> |
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Key differences between fake and ambiguous experts include intent, clarity and credentials, and the level of authority. Fake experts intentionally mislead their audiences to support a particular agenda or belief while the intention of ambiguous experts is difficult to assess because their qualifications or experience are not explicitly defined. Fake experts may

have expertise and relevant knowledge and background within a given field, but not within climate science. Ambiguous or vague experts may possess some knowledge on climate science, but their level of expertise or credibility is difficult to verify.

Table 4.

| Intention | Clarity and Credentials | Level of Authority |
|--|---|--|
| Fake experts intentionally deceive or manipulate | Fake experts usually try to fabricate credentials or misrepresent their area of expertise | Fake experts have no real expertise on the given subject matter |
| Ambiguous or vague experts may be more earnest but lack clarity or definitive qualifications | Ambiguous or vague experts might have relevant but unclear or incomplete qualifications | Ambiguous or vague experts might possess some knowledge, but their expertise or credibility may be harder to pinpoint or verify since they are typically not named |

Other more general codes coming from the literature that were further defined through the analysis are the emphasis of scientific uncertainty, selective inclusion of experts, and personal interpretations of climate data (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Nisbet and Mooney, 2007; Nisbet, 2009). When analyzing the experts used in the texts who are explicitly named, extensive checks were conducted to see if that “expert” is a legitimate expert in the given field (Boyce, 2006; Goodman, 1999).

Table 5.

| Code Group |
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| <p>Ambiguity and vague expertise: Focus on the use of unspecified or generalized references to experts or scientists, making it difficult for readers to assess the authority or credibility of the claims.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate policy based on an assumed relationship between CO2 and Arctic ice levels is problematic, say scientists. - While governments pour billions of dollars into lowering CO2 emissions, several climate experts say CO2 is essential and higher levels are not a problem. - UN claims that human-caused CO2 emissions are imperiling the planet are ‘totally garbage,’ says scientist. ‘CO2 doesn’t cause a change in temperature.’ - Fixation on CO2 Ignores Real Driver of Temperature, Experts Say |
| <p>Challenging established climate science: Question, refute, or downplay well-established scientific findings or data related to climate change, often using climate experts or alternative scientists to support claims being made.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UN Says Melting Arctic Ice is Key Indicator of Climate Change – But It’s Not Melting. - ‘There’s Been No Increase’: Scientists Debunk Climate Change Claims About Hurricanes. - Climate Scientists Say We Should |

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| | <p>Embrace Higher CO2 Levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fixation on CO2 Ignores Real Driver of Temperature, Experts Say. |
| <p>Selective inclusion of scientific data: Focus on misrepresentation, selective presentation, or misinterpretation of scientific data, often using vague or unspecified data sources or presenting information out of its original context.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meteorologist finds 96 percent of NOAA temperature stations located in ‘urban heat islands,’ including next to exhaust fans on ‘blistering hot rooftops.’ - Trillions Spent on ‘Climate Change’ Based on Faulty Temperature Data, Climate Experts Say. - UN Says Melting Arctic Ice is Key Indicator of Climate Change – But It’s Not Melting. |
| <p>Politicization of climate experts: Frame scientific experts as political actors or suggest their work is being used for political purposes, often to criticize or diminish their perceived authority.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hurricanes are now ‘smaller and more compact,” says a meteorologist, but the predicted ferocious season will become a ‘political football’ for climate alarmism. - UN claims that human-caused CO2 emissions are imperiling the planet are |

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| | <p>‘totally garbage,’ says scientist. ‘CO2 doesn’t cause a change in temperature.’</p> |
| <p>Casting doubt on integrity of experts: Cast doubt on the integrity, neutrality, or objectivity of scientists and experts, often accusing them of manipulating data or advancing a given political agenda.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trillions Spent on ‘Climate Change’ Based on Faulty Temperature Data, Climate Experts Say. - Fixation on CO2 Ignores Real Driver of Temperature, Experts Say. - While governments pour billions of dollars into lowering CO2 emissions, several climate experts say CO2 is essential and higher levels are not a problem. |
| <p>Alternative interpretations of scientific data: Suggest that data used to support mainstream climate change theories is incorrect, incomplete, or misleading, often by providing alternative interpretations of the data.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meteorologist finds 96 percent of NOAA temperature stations located in ‘urban heat islands,’ including next to exhaust fans on ‘blistering hot rooftops.’ - UN Says Melting Arctic Ice is Key Indicator of Climate Change – But It’s Not Melting. |

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| <p>Use of alternative experts: Focus on using non-expert voices or meteorologists as key figures to challenge climate science, which can create an alternative framing of climate issues outside the scientific consensus.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ‘There’s Been No Increase’: Scientists Debunk Climate Change Claims About Hurricanes. - Hurricanes are now ‘smaller and more compact,” says a meteorologist, but the predicted ferocious season will become a ‘political football’ for climate alarmism. - Meteorologist finds 96 percent of NOAA temperature stations located in ‘urban heat islands,’ including next to exhaust fans on ‘blistering hot rooftops.’ |
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Table 6.

| Code Groups | Categorized Pattern of Code Groups |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguity and vague expertise • Casting doubt on integrity of experts | <p>Ambiguity of Experts</p> <p>This category focuses on ambiguous references to climate experts or scientists and undermines their authority, often casting doubt on their credibility, objectivity, or integrity. The experts cited are often unnamed</p> |

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| | or generalized. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective inclusion of scientific data • Alternative interpretations of scientific data | <p>Data misrepresentation</p> <p>Misuse, misrepresentation, or selective interpretation of scientific data, questioning the quality or methods of data collection in climate science. The titles and subheadings often suggest that climate data is flawed, incomplete, or misleading, thus weakening the conclusions drawn from it.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicization of climate expertise • Use of alternative experts • Challenging established climate science | <p>Politicizing climate science</p> <p>Emphasizes the political framing of climate science, suggesting that climate experts are motivated by political agendas rather than scientific evidence. Titles and subheadings in this group suggest that climate issues are used as political tools to support alarmist narratives or ideological goals.</p> |

When it comes to the actual framing of climate change, the presentation of information about the issue alongside the use of expert sources in contextualizing that information plays a large role in how individuals interpret that information (Goffman, 1974; Lachappelle et al., 2014). In the pilot study, misinformation about climate change in *The Epoch Times* was often found to challenge established climate science, selectively include scientific data, and to give alternative interpretations of scientific data. Other codes that were used based on previous

literature were emphasis on lack of future impacts, “holes” in scientific data, delegitimizing scientific data, and emphasizing long term uncertainties of certain impacts, like CO2 levels or rising temperatures (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005).

Articles from *The Epoch Times* were collected by copying and pasting selected texts into Microsoft Word documents. Each file was labeled with the article’s title and publication date, then organized into a single folder to streamline the uploading process. This organizational system facilitated the import of documents into the qualitative analysis software Taguette, where they were scanned and prepared for coding.

Using Taguette, the articles were analyzed using a combination of emergent coding, based on recurring themes and patterns within the texts, and pre-determined codes derived from prior research and relevant literature. After initial coding, the texts were re-examined by code group to identify overarching patterns in the data. Similar codes were then merged into broader thematic categories. For instance, the codes personal interpretations of climate data and alternative interpretations of scientific data were often applied to the same texts and were therefore combined into a single code: interpretations & misrepresentations of climate data.”

This process of synthesizing codes into broader categories helped reveal how *The Epoch Times* frames climate change, scientists, and expert discourse (see Table 2 for a pilot study example). Grouping codes into categories allowed for a more consolidated thematic analysis, offering deeper insight into the meanings embedded in the texts (Saldaña, 2021). These patterns formed the basis for identifying key findings in the data.

Table 7.

| Code | Definition |
|---------------------|--|
| Ambiguity and vague | Focus on the use of unspecified or generalized references to |

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| expertise | experts or scientists, making it difficult for readers to assess the authority or credibility of the claims (Cooke et al., 2017). |
| Challenging established climate science | Question, refute, or downplay well-established scientific findings or data related to climate change, often using climate experts or alternative scientists to support claims being made (Goffman, 1974; Lachappelle et al., 2014). |
| Selective inclusion of scientific data | Focus on misrepresentation, selective presentation, or misinterpretation of scientific data, often using vague or unspecified data sources or presenting information out of its original context (Goffman, 1974; Lachappelle et al., 2014). |
| Politicization of climate experts | Frame scientific experts as political actors or suggest their work is being used for political purposes, often to criticize or diminish their perceived authority (Cooke et al., 2017). |
| Casting doubt on integrity of experts | Cast doubt on the integrity, neutrality, or objectivity of scientists and experts, often accusing them of manipulating data or advancing a given political agenda (Cooke et al., 2017). |
| Alternative interpretations of scientific data | Suggest that data used to support mainstream climate change theories is incorrect, incomplete, or misleading, often by providing alternative interpretations of the data (Goffman, 1974; Lachappelle et al., 2014). |
| Use of alternative experts | Focus on using non-expert voices or meteorologists as key figures to challenge climate science, which can create an |

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| | alternative framing of climate issues outside the scientific consensus (Cooke et al., 2017). |
| Emphasizing scientific uncertainty | Deliberately highlighting or exaggerating the unknowns or uncertainties within scientific research to mislead readers and undermine established scientific consensus (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Nisbet and Mooney, 2007; Nisbet, 2009). |
| Selective inclusion of experts | Specifically choosing or highlighting certain experts whose opinions support the particular narrative or agenda, while excluding or disregarding the views of other qualified experts who may disagree (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Nisbet and Mooney, 2007; Nisbet, 2009). |
| Personal interpretations of climate data | Selectively presenting or distorting climate-related data to fit the specific, biased, agenda. This involves interpreting or framing scientific data regarding climate change in a way that misrepresents the overall scientific consensus or downplays the seriousness of climate change (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Nisbet and Mooney, 2007; Nisbet, 2009). |
| Emphasizing lack of future impacts | Downplaying or dismissing the long-term consequences of climate change to create doubt or minimize its perceived urgency. This highlights short-term or localized data that contradicts broader trends and may focus on speculative claims that future impacts are uncertain or unlikely (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005). |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>“Holes” in scientific data</p> | <p>Selective emphasis on perceived gaps, uncertainties, or missing pieces in scientific research to cast doubt on the validity or reliability of the scientific findings. This creates the illusion that key aspects of climate science are uncertain or unresolved, even though these gaps are often acknowledged by scientists themselves as areas for further study, rather than evidence of falsity or inconsistency (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005).</p> |
| <p>Delegitimizing scientific data</p> | <p>Undermining the credibility and trustworthiness of scientific findings to promote the publications agenda. This includes questioning the integrity of researchers, attacking the methodologies used in studies, or portraying data as biased or manipulated without providing substantial evidence (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005).</p> |
| <p>Emphasizing long-term uncertainties of impacts</p> | <p>Focusing on the aspects of climate science that involve uncertain or complex future predictions to downplay the immediate or more certain risks associated with climate change (Dessai et al., 2004; Lorenzoni et al., 2005).</p> |

4.3 Analytical Procedures

By applying framing theory to this textual analysis, an examination was conducted of how information about climate change, as well as related scientists, experts, and scientific data, was presented. This approach contributed to a deeper understanding of how right-wing publications such as *The Epoch Times* shaped audience perceptions of climate change and

science (Goffman, 1974; Mutz, 2008). Identifying the frames used in the text was the first step in the analysis. This involved examining repeated keywords, phrases, and initial themes, while also looking for metaphors, narrative structures, points of emphasis, and omissions, key components of framing analysis.

After the frames were identified, categories were developed based on emergent themes from the texts. The texts were then reanalyzed for structural elements: how headlines set the tone, who was or was not given a voice, and the tone of the language used throughout. Any newly emergent themes were noted, and code groups and categories were reorganized accordingly.

By applying framing theory to this textual analysis and following the established steps of framing analysis, a deeper understanding was gained of the ways in which *The Epoch Times* framed climate change, climate scientists, and climate science. The publication's portrayals of these issues and entities offered insight into why readers of *The Epoch Times* were more likely to be skeptical of climate science (Kahan, 2015; Hart & Nisbet, 2012).

Through this analysis, misinformation about climate change was examined within the broader context of framing. The narrative constructed by *The Epoch Times* surrounding climate change and science was found to include the dissemination of misleading and false information to its audience (Treen et al., 2020). Analyzing this narrative structure constituted a key component of the framing analysis that was conducted.

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS

This analysis is based on a sample of 50 articles from *The Epoch Times*, published between December 2023 and April 2025. This period spans the highly politicized climate discourse surrounding the 2024 US presidential election. Articles were analyzed using a codebook developed from existing literature on climate misinformation and framing (e.g., Goffman, 1974; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Cooke et al., 2017), then revised with emerging codes from iterative engagement with the data.

Using a reflexive thematic framing analysis, I examined how scientific experts, and the broader scientific consensus, are represented in articles disseminating climate change misinformation. Initially, I generated a range of codes based on both emergent patterns in the texts and pre-determined concepts drawn from existing literature. These codes were applied to recurring language, rhetorical devices, and narrative strategies found across the dataset.

After the initial round of coding, I reviewed and compared codes for conceptual overlap, semantic similarity, and alignment with broader themes. Codes that conveyed related or overlapping ideas, such as challenging established climate science and delegitimizing scientific data, were grouped and refined. Through iterative comparison and re-coding, I merged these similar codes into broader thematic codes that captured the dominant patterns more cohesively.

The final set of merged codes represents nine key framing strategies *The Epoch Times* uses to shape public perceptions of climate experts. These consolidated codes reflect the strategic ways misinformation outlets distort or undermine scientific authority in order to influence public opinion on climate change. Each of these codes represents a distinct narrative approach used to

erode trust in scientific authority, cast doubt on climate data, and reframe expert discourse through ideological or political lenses.

Table 8.

| Pre | Merged |
|--|--|
| Personal interpretations of climate data Alternative interpretations of scientific data | Interpretations & Misrepresentations of Climate Data |
| “Holes” in scientific data Emphasizing scientific uncertainty | Uncertainty & Gaps in Scientific Data |
| Emphasizing Lack of Future Impacts Emphasizing Long-Term Uncertainties of Impacts | Downplaying Future Impacts of Climate Change |
| Global Leadership Climate Nationalism & Sovereignty | National Interests and Global Climate Action |
| Use of Alternative Experts Ambiguity and Vague Expertise | Ambiguity and Alternative Expertise |
| Casting Doubt on Integrity of Experts Politicization of Climate Science | Attacks on Expert Integrity and Politicization of Science |
| Challenging Established Climate Science Delegitimizing Scientific Data | Challenging and Delegitimizing Climate Science |
| Selective Inclusion of Experts Selective Inclusion of Scientific Data | Selective Inclusion of Data and Experts |
| Climate Policy as Elitist Control | Climate Policy as Elitist Control |

5.1 Key Themes

From these nine framing strategies, I identified three overarching patterns in how scientific experts and scientific consensus are portrayed within stories containing climate change misinformation. These patterns are not just descriptive; they reflect deliberate communicative strategies that work to shape public perception. This is often done in ways that cast doubt on scientific consensus, delegitimize expert authority, and recast climate science as ideologically or politically motivated.

While each frame operates on a tactical level, whether by emphasizing uncertainty, highlighting fringe experts, or invoking nationalist fears, analyzing them thematically reveals a more cohesive and strategic narrative architecture. Grouping these frames into broader patterns allows for a deeper understanding of how misinformation operates not merely through isolated claims, but through a sustained, ideologically consistent worldview.

The framing strategies employed across *The Epoch Times*' climate coverage converge into three overarching thematic patterns. The first, manipulation and undermining of climate science, involves systematic efforts to discredit scientists and their findings, often portraying the scientific process as biased, corrupt, or driven by hidden agendas. The second, scientific uncertainty and gaps, leverages the inherent complexity and ambiguity of scientific research to depict climate knowledge as speculative and untrustworthy, thereby weakening the sense of urgency. The third, political and ideological dimensions of climate change, reframes climate action as part of a broader culture war, less a moral or practical necessity, and more a coercive project imposed by political elites, both foreign and domestic.

Together, these themes construct a coherent counter-narrative to climate science, one that transforms empirical debate into ideological struggle. In this framework, climate change is not

something to be understood, addressed, or planned for; it is something to be resisted. The result is a discursive environment in which misinformation thrives, skepticism is celebrated, and inaction becomes not only permissible but politically desirable.

Table 9.

| Thematic Patterns | Framing Strategies |
|--|--|
| <p>Manipulation and Undermining of Climate Science: Captures how climate science is distorted or undermined through selective data use, misinterpretation, politicization, and attacks on the integrity of experts.</p> | <p>Selective Inclusion of Data and Experts</p> <p>Challenging and Delegitimizing Climate Science</p> <p>Attacks on Expert Integrity and Politicization of Science</p> <p>Ambiguity and Alternative Expertise</p> <p>Interpretations & Misrepresentations of Climate Data</p> |
| <p>Scientific Uncertainty & Gaps: Focuses on emphasizing gaps, uncertainties, and unknowns in climate science to undermine the urgency of climate change or downplay its impacts.</p> | <p>Downplaying Future Impacts</p> <p>Uncertainty & Gaps in Scientific Data</p> |
| <p>Political & Ideological Dimensions of Climate Change: Explores the political, economic, and ideological forces that shape climate policy debates, framing climate action as a means of elitist control or highlighting</p> | <p>National Interests & Global Climate Action</p> <p>Climate Policy as Elitist Control</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| the conflict between national interests and global climate action. | |
|--|--|

5.2 Manipulation and Undermining of Science

The manipulation and undermining of climate science category captures a series of framing techniques that aim to distort, discredit, or outright devalue the field of climate science by manipulating how both scientific evidence and expertise are portrayed. These frames work together to cast doubt on the legitimacy and credibility of climate science, often relying on strategies such as selective inclusion of data, delegitimizing established scientific consensus, and attacking the integrity of the scientists involved. One prominent example of this approach can be seen in a statement like, “There is actually no scientific evidence that CO2 is responsible for climate change over the eons” (Spence, 2023). This assertion serves multiple functions: it delegitimizes the scientific authority by questioning the foundational evidence for climate change, it undermines the credibility of the experts involved in climate research, and it misrepresents the complexity of climate modeling by suggesting that long-term, scientific predictions based on CO2 levels are inherently flawed. Through this rhetoric, *The Epoch Times* frames climate science not as a consensus-driven discipline but as a field riddled with uncertainty and ideological bias.

Another crucial aspect of this manipulation is the use of ambiguous or alternative expertise to challenge established scientific authority. Often, articles cite unnamed or vague references to “experts,” positioning them as credible voices while deliberately leaving out crucial details such as their qualifications or affiliations. For example, a claim like, “UN claims that human-caused CO2 emissions are imperiling the planet are ‘totally garbage,’ says scientist. ‘CO2 doesn’t cause a change in temperature’” (Spence, 2024), is a direct appeal to a pseudo-expertise

that carries no transparent qualifications, thereby blurring the lines between legitimate science and fringe, contrarian views. The inclusion of such ambiguous or fringe figures further undermines the credibility of the mainstream scientific community by presenting a false sense of scientific debate, where expert consensus is depicted as just one side of an ongoing, unresolved dispute.

These tactics, when employed together, reshape climate data and expert opinion to support an ideological narrative that prioritizes skepticism over scientific rigor. Instead of presenting a balanced, evidence-based perspective, *The Epoch Times* and similar outlets selectively curate information and experts that align with a predefined agenda, one that reflects an ideological commitment to climate skepticism and challenges to scientific consensus. The result is a climate science narrative that is characterized by misrepresentation, distortion, and an ongoing attack on scientific consensus, leaving readers uncertain about the validity of climate science and its practitioners. This approach strategically undermines public trust in climate science, sowing doubt and creating an environment where misinformation can flourish.

5.2.1 Challenging and Delegitimizing Climate Science

Challenging and delegitimizing climate science represents one of the most fundamental and recurring framing strategies found in the articles analyzed from *The Epoch Times*. Rather than rejecting climate science outright with evidence-based counterclaims, this framing strategy works subtly to discredit the field through rhetorical and symbolic techniques that cast doubt on the legitimacy, integrity, and objectivity. Climate science is frequently portrayed not as a neutral, evidence-driven discipline but as a process motivated by political or ideological agendas, a framing technique that inherently undermines its credibility.

This strategy fosters the perception that the scientific consensus on climate change is overstated or unfounded, thereby undermining the authority of the scientific community's conclusions. For example, claims such as, “CO₂ is portrayed now as the cause of damaging weather. Our research indicates these extremes are not becoming more intense or frequent” (Spence, 2023), suggest that mainstream climate science is alarmist or misleading. Such statements reframe scientific inquiry not as a rigorous, evidence-based process, but as a tool for promoting ideological agendas. In doing so, these narratives portray scientists as politically motivated actors rather than impartial experts, eroding public trust in both specific findings and the overall credibility of climate research.

The framing observed in the articles often involved questioning the credibility, objectivity, or intentions of climate scientists and scientific institutions. This approach included subtle suggestions that climate data or research might be politically motivated or unreliable. Such narratives frequently emphasized controversy, uncertainty, or disagreement within the scientific community. The overall portrayal tended to highlight skepticism and doubt, rather than scientific consensus, which shaped how climate change and its associated actors were represented throughout the texts.

5.2.2 Interpretations and Misrepresentations of Climate Data

Interpretations and misrepresentations of climate data form a core rhetorical strategy through which *The Epoch Times* reframes climate science not by directly refuting its findings, but by subtly reshaping how those findings are presented and understood. Thus, intentionally deceiving audiences through the presentation of information. Instead of engaging in outright denial, this frame operates by selectively reinterpreting or misrepresenting climate-related data, creating the illusion that science is either deeply contested or inconclusive. This is accomplished

through techniques such as decontextualizing statistics, emphasizing anecdotal evidence over systematic research, and employing misleading visual or rhetorical comparisons that distort the underlying message of climate science.

For example, the claim that “The two researchers concluded that the Earth has warmed because it’s absorbing more sunlight because of reduced global cloud cover” illustrates how selectively chosen statistics can be presented without essential context. Whilst the statement appears driven by data at first glance, it oversimplifies the scientific process. This claim overlooks the fact that extreme weather attribution and analysis of climate trends involve complex, probabilistic modeling over long periods of time globally in different geographical contexts. Claims like this often disregard the significance of longer-term datasets and the nuances of climate variability. By isolating a singular metric within a narrow window of time, this kind of framing distorts broader, systemic dynamics of climate change, potentially misleading readers into believing that climate science is fragmented and lacks reliability.

Moreover, this strategy subtly promotes the idea that scientific data is inherently malleable, that it can be reinterpreted or reframed to suit a specific political or ideological agenda. This undermines the normative authority of the scientific method, suggesting that data is not a product of empirical observation and rigorous analysis, but rather a rhetorical tool open to manipulation. Representations like this deepen public skepticism, not just about specific findings (e.g., temperature trends, sea level rise), but about the very idea that objective knowledge can be derived from science at all.

This framing operates on an affective level: it often reinforces a sense of simplicity or common sense over complexity, inviting readers to trust their own intuition over expert analyses. When climate data is recast as either ambiguous or irrelevant, it encourages disengagement from

the scientific process and promotes ideologically driven understandings of environmental change. This encourages the belief that all viewpoints carry the same weight, diminishing the role of scientific expertise and making it indistinguishable from personal opinion in public debate

Ultimately, the strategy of misrepresenting and reinterpreting climate data doesn't just distort public understanding, it reconfigures the relationship between science, media, and truth itself. By presenting selectively framed data as neutral or even corrective, *The Epoch Times* contributes to a broader disinformation ecosystem where the credibility of climate science is continually eroded and public support for action is weakened through confusion and mistrust.

5.2.3 Selective Inclusion of Data and Experts

Another strategy used by *The Epoch Times* to undermine climate science is its selective inclusion of data and expert commentary. Instead of engaging with the breadth of peer-reviewed climate research, the outlet regularly highlights individuals with marginal, outdated, or ideologically motivated views, presenting them as credible authorities. These figures are frequently positioned in opposition to the scientific consensus, not simply to introduce alternative perspectives, but to imply that dissent is being actively silenced.

“...we'll hear a lot more alarmist messaging' if 2024 is a busy hurricane season, as predicted... Mr. Cohen said hurricanes aren't getting bigger or more intense. He said that as temperatures naturally warm coming out of the Little Ice Age, hurricanes and weather events will get less intense—not exponentially worse” (Spence, 2024).

This practice aligns with the phenomenon of false balance framing, where the media give equal weight to all viewpoints, even when one side represents a fringe minority (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). This approach is reinforced by other rhetorical strategies explored in this study,

particularly the framing of scientists as politically biased and the amplification of dissenters as brave truth-tellers or whistleblowers challenging a corrupt or ideologically motivated system. Together, these tactics create a self-perpetuating narrative in which skepticism becomes normalized, and the credibility of scientific institutions is systematically undermined

“‘The whole thing is a total scam,’ Mr. Moore said. ‘There is actually no scientific evidence that CO₂ is responsible for climate change over the eons.’... ‘They’re saying all the tornadoes, all the hurricanes, all the floods, and all the heat waves are all caused by CO₂. That is a lie. ... We’re part of the cycle” (Spence, 2024).

These framings do more than sow doubt, they suggest systemic conspiracy, reinforcing a populist narrative in which the public is encouraged to side with silenced outsiders against institutions portrayed as elitist and untrustworthy. Scientific consensus is reframed not as the outcome of rigorous inquiry, but as evidence of ideological collusion.

Complementing this is the selective presentation of data, a tactic that further destabilizes public understanding. Articles frequently highlight short-term anomalies or local deviations, such as isolated cold weather events, to suggest that climate patterns are inconsistent or random. These examples are presented without scientific context, obscuring long-term trends and creating informational noise that dilutes the credibility of climate science.

“‘Climate activism has become the new religion of the 21st century—heretics are not welcome and not allowed to ask questions,’ said astrophysicist Willie Soon” (Newman, 2024). Statements like this are emblematic of *The Epoch Times*’ rhetorical style. Soon, who holds a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering and has conducted research on solar variability, is not trained in climate science. Yet he is frequently cited to cast doubt on the role of greenhouse gases. His work, which attributes climate change primarily to ‘solar variation,’ is widely rejected by climate

experts. Moreover, a 2015 *New York Times* investigation revealed that Soon received over \$1.2 million in funding from fossil fuel interests, including ExxonMobil and the American Petroleum Institute, and failed to disclose these conflicts of interest in multiple publications. Despite this, his views are presented without context, giving him the appearance of a neutral expert rather than a figure with documented financial and ideological ties to climate denial networks.

These figures lend *The Epoch Times* a further sense of legitimacy while advancing ideologically convenient narratives. Scientific credentials are selectively invoked, often to obscure the relevant background of these 'experts' rather than to clarify their relevance. The outcome is a media narrative that glorifies dissent, casts doubt on consensus, and presents scientific institutions as politically compromised.

Crucially, these rhetorical choices do not construct an alternative theory of climate science. Instead, they function to destabilize the very concept of scientific authority. By amplifying fringe views and omitting critical context, the outlet fosters disinformation by dilution, a strategy in which selective facts are used to overwhelm, confuse, and erode the salience of clear, evidence-based conclusions.

This approach encourages the construction of a parallel epistemology, in which truth is no longer determined by empirical evidence or peer review but by ideological alignment and personal conviction. Readers are subtly invited to distrust institutional science and embrace a curated ecosystem of “alternative” experts. In this framework, science becomes interpretive, partisan, and ultimately malleable.

Taken together, the selective elevation of fringe experts and decontextualized data supports a broader discursive framework in which skepticism is normalized, expertise is contested, and the very standards of evidence are redefined. Rather than merely misinforming the

public, *The Epoch Times* cultivates a climate of epistemic instability, weakening public trust in science at a moment when collective action depends upon it.

5.2.4 Ambiguity and Alternative Expertise

Closely related to the tactic of selective inclusion is the deliberate ambiguity surrounding expertise. Many articles in *The Epoch Times* refer to “experts” without naming them, citing their institutional affiliations, or offering any means for readers to evaluate their authority. This rhetorical vagueness provides plausible deniability while weakening the audience’s ability to critically assess the credibility of the claims. For example, one article states, “While governments pour billions of dollars into lowering CO₂ emissions, several climate experts say CO₂ is essential and higher levels are not a problem” (Spence, 2023). Here, the term “several climate experts” functions as a vague placeholder—evoking scientific legitimacy without supplying evidence.

This strategy effectively bypasses critical scrutiny while appealing to readers’ desire for validation or reassurance. As Cooke et al. (2017) argue, such rhetorical ambiguity is central to the construction of misinformation, fostering the illusion of consensus among unnamed or unverifiable sources. The invocation of anonymous expertise satisfies a rhetorical need for authority, while simultaneously avoiding the accountability that would come with verifiable sourcing.

This ambiguity is compounded when individuals cited as experts are affiliated not with academic institutions or research organizations, but with ideologically motivated think tanks, commercial entities, or lobbying groups. One recurring figure in *The Epoch Times* is Greg Wrightstone, executive director of the CO₂ Coalition, a think tank organization that disputes mainstream climate science and minimizes the role of carbon dioxide emissions in global warming (Waldman, 2019). In one article, Wrightstone is quoted:

“Consensus is not science, and science is not consensus,” Greg Wrightstone, executive director of the CO₂ Coalition, told *The Epoch Times*. “We believe that carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas and causes some warming, just not very much. Compared with previous eras,” Wrightstone said, “the Earth’s atmosphere has relatively low levels of CO₂ at present.” NASA reports that atmospheric CO₂ levels are currently about 420 parts per million, up from 320 in the 1960s” (Stocklin, 2025).

While this excerpt presents Wrightstone as a credible scientific authority, his affiliation with an advocacy group that has clear ideological aims is downplayed or omitted. The result is a veneer of objectivity that conceals a politically motivated agenda. For readers unfamiliar with the CO₂ Coalition’s background, the organization’s name, and the presence of a titled “executive director,” may lend it an air of scientific legitimacy. In the absence of contextual information, such affiliations can appear reputable, especially when framed in scientific language and published within the science or U.S. news sections of a media outlet. Figures with financial or ideological incentives are thus presented as neutral scientific commentators, blurring the boundary between scientific evidence and partisan opinion.

This tactic distorts readers’ perceptions of scientific consensus and flattens the distinction between peer-reviewed research and ideologically driven rhetoric. In doing so, *The Epoch Times* participates in what Oreskes and Conway (2010) describe as the “manufacture of doubt,” a communication strategy historically used to resist regulation by sowing confusion about settled science. By replacing verifiable expertise with strategically vague or biased sources, the outlet disrupts public understanding and fosters mistrust in institutional knowledge.

Importantly, this ambiguity is not simply the result of inadequate journalism but appears to be a calculated discursive strategy. It creates a media environment in which anyone can claim

the mantle of “expert” and where all viewpoints, regardless of credibility, are treated as equally valid, so long as they align with the publication’s ideological positioning. In this context, expertise becomes a flexible, manipulable concept, stripped of the methodological and institutional rigor that once defined it.

Taken together, the selective amplification of fringe voices and the deliberate ambiguity around credentials function synergistically. While the former casts doubt on mainstream science by overrepresenting dissent, the latter destabilizes the very concept of consensus by obscuring the standards by which authority is judged. The combined effect is the erosion of public trust in science and the promotion of epistemic relativism, a worldview in which truth becomes subjective, contested, and ultimately unknowable.

5.2.5 Attacks on Expert Integrity and Politicization of Climate Science

This erosion of clearly defined expertise paves the way for a more aggressive discursive tactic: the direct attack on the integrity and motivations of scientists themselves. Once scientific authority has been destabilized through strategies such as selective inclusion, ambiguity, and false balance, it becomes easier to portray scientists not as objective investigators but as ideologically driven actors. This rhetorical shift aligns with the broader politicization of science, wherein climate experts are framed not as neutral stewards of knowledge, but as participants in a coordinated agenda aligned with liberal, environmentalist, or globalist ideologies.

This frame positions scientists as members of a technocratic elite who use their institutional authority not to inform policy through evidence, but to manipulate it in service of political objectives. Such portrayals deepen public mistrust by aligning scientific discourse with partisan identity and control.

A clear example of this framing appears in a quote from Anthony Watts, a former television meteorologist and Senior Fellow at the Heartland Institute, a think tank widely known for promoting climate denial (Fisher, n.d.). In disputing NOAA’s climate data, Watts states:

“All these different entities out there, like NOAA, GISS, BEST... use the same data from GHCN. And they all apply their own set of ‘special sauce’ adjustments... It’s almost like each of these entities is creating their version of the real, true God. You know, it’s like a religion” (Spence, 2024).

Here, climate science is not merely questioned; it is openly ridiculed and reframed as a quasi-religious belief system. The analogy equates empirical processes like data correction and statistical modeling with ritualistic or faith-based practices, suggesting that scientific institutions are engaged in self-validating dogma rather than objective inquiry. This rhetorical strategy collapses the distinction between science and ideology, advancing the idea that all forms of knowledge production are inherently biased and politically motivated. By reducing scientific expertise to ideological performance, this framing further erodes public trust and reframes climate action as a battle of worldviews rather than a response to empirical realities.

This framing reflects broader patterns of anti-intellectualism commonly found in populist discourse. Scientists are not merely accused of being mistaken; they are portrayed as dishonest, conspiratorial, and self-serving. Within this narrative, climate models are depicted not as tools for understanding complex systems, but as instruments of manipulation. Similarly, the peer-reviewed scientific consensus is reframed as political groupthink, suggesting that agreement among experts signals collusion rather than credibility. The authority of institutions such as NOAA and NASA is not challenged through evidence-based critique but is instead undermined through appeals to suspicion, derision, and cynicism.

The implications of this rhetorical move are far-reaching. When scientists are cast as political adversaries rather than neutral experts, scientific communication is reimagined as propaganda. This narrative reframes the public not as informed participants in scientific discourse, but as victims of elite deception. In doing so, it taps into core populist binaries, the virtuous, truth-seeking “people” versus the corrupt, manipulative “elites.” Such dichotomies fuel a climate of distrust in which empirical evidence becomes subordinate to ideological alignment.

This discursive strategy is particularly effective when paired with anecdotes or quotations that invoke moral failure or betrayal on the part of scientists: allegations of data manipulation, suppression of dissent, or collusion with political interests. These familiar tropes encourage audiences to interpret climate science not as a field of rigorous and evolving knowledge, but as a vehicle for ideological control. Consequently, public engagement with scientific findings becomes filtered through a lens of suspicion, allowing individuals to dismiss consensus-aligned evidence as politically contaminated, regardless of its empirical validity.

5.3 Scientific Uncertainty and Gaps

A second major theme in *The Epoch Times*’ climate coverage involves emphasizing the uncertainties and gaps within climate science to suggest that the threat is overstated or not urgent. This theme draws primarily from two merged codes: *uncertainty and gaps in scientific data* and *downplaying the future impacts of climate change*. Rather than denying climate change outright, this approach works more subtly, by exploiting the natural limitations and evolving nature of scientific research to imply that the science itself is fundamentally unreliable or exaggerated.

As one article states, “‘While it is ‘definitely warmer’ now than in the 19th century,’ Mr. Soon said that temperature proxy data show the 19th century ‘was exceptionally cold.’ ‘It was

the end of a period that's known as the Little Ice Age,' he said" (Newman, 2024). This kind of statement exemplifies how scientific context is selectively stripped away to cast doubt on broader conclusions. While it is true that the 19th century marked the end of a cooler period, this fact does not negate the overwhelming evidence of rapid anthropogenic warming in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, by drawing attention to historical variability and framing it as contradictory, the article implies that current climate trends are simply part of a natural cycle, thus undermining the urgency of human-driven change.

This tactic hinges on the deliberate conflation of scientific uncertainty with unreliability. In climate science, as in all scientific fields, uncertainty is an inherent and expected aspect of an iterative, evidence-based process. It reflects the probabilistic nature of predictive models and the continuous refinement of knowledge. However, within this narrative, uncertainty is reframed as a reason for skepticism. Climate models are depicted as speculative or alarmist, and the suggestion is made that science is not yet settled, casting doubt on the necessity or urgency of taking action.

Another common rhetorical device within this theme is the selective highlighting of short-term or local anomalies, such as cold snaps or specific regional climate events, that appear to contradict global trends. These instances are presented without scientific context, reinforcing a misleading perception that climate change is inconsistent, unpredictable, or exaggerated by the media and political elites. Such cherry-picking distracts from the long-term, aggregate evidence that underpins scientific consensus.

Moreover, several articles downplay the projected impacts of climate change by focusing on near-term economic costs or individual freedoms, rather than long-term environmental or humanitarian consequences. This reframing displaces concern for collective future well-being in favor of immediate, localized concerns, effectively reducing the perceived stakes of inaction.

The cumulative effect of these strategies is not to directly refute climate science, but to erode its epistemological authority. By repeatedly drawing attention to unresolved questions, marginal debates, or perceived exaggerations, *The Epoch Times* fosters a climate of epistemic ambivalence. In this narrative, climate change is not an urgent global challenge; it is a contested issue, still open to debate, and possibly being overblown for political or financial reasons.

This approach has significant discursive power. It introduces friction into the public's reception of climate science, not through conspiracy or denial alone, but through the strategic magnification of ambiguity. In doing so, it creates cognitive space for doubt, demobilization, and delay. By recasting uncertainty as a reason for hesitation, this theme functions as a sophisticated mechanism of misinformation, one that undermines urgency not by denying facts, but by obscuring their relevance.

5.3.1 Uncertainty and Gaps in Scientific Data

Expanding upon the strategy of selective reinterpretation, *The Epoch Times* frequently employs a rhetorical device centered on the amplification of scientific uncertainty. Rather than directly denying the reality of climate change, these narratives shift the focus to what scientists purportedly don't know, highlighting complexity, disagreement, and the probabilistic nature of climate projections. In doing so, the discourse moves from debating the existence of climate change to undermining the epistemic credibility of climate science itself.

At the heart of this strategy is a deliberate misrepresentation of how scientific forecasting works. Articles present the inherent uncertainty in models, such as projected temperature ranges or scenario-based outcomes, as signs of unreliability or internal inconsistency. Rather than acknowledging uncertainty as an integral and transparent part of scientific modeling, these

features are portrayed as evidence that climate science is speculative, flawed, or ideologically driven.

“If rising global temperatures were caused by greenhouse gases, there should have been more warming than observed... ‘The simple fact is that the solar forcing alone explains the entire warming of the 21st century and leaves no room for any anthropogenic forcing...’” (Spence, 2024).

This framing reflects a fundamental distortion of how scientific knowledge is constructed. Uncertainty in climate models does not indicate weakness; rather, it reflects methodological rigor, acknowledging multiple variables and emissions pathways. However, *The Epoch Times* repurposes this nuance as ambiguity, casting doubt on the reliability of science itself and suggesting that without absolute certainty, no claims can be trusted or acted upon.

This tactic aligns with the “merchants of doubt” strategy outlined by Oreskes and Conway (2010), which involves deliberately sowing confusion and skepticism even when a scientific consensus has already been reached. By capitalizing on the public’s limited scientific literacy, this approach aims to erode credibility and impede meaningful climate action. In this rhetorical frame, uncertainty is reframed not as a space for further inquiry but as a strategic tool to oppose intervention. Caution is equated with alarmism, and scientific consensus is recast as political overreach. The burden of proof is subtly shifted: unless climate scientists can eliminate all doubt, proposed policy responses are portrayed as unwarranted, extreme, or premature.

This distortion is often reinforced through false equivalency, where marginal viewpoints or outlier studies are presented as equally credible alternatives to the scientific mainstream. By suggesting that the field is fundamentally divided, *The Epoch Times* manufactures an illusion of epistemic stalemate. Readers are led to believe that all interpretations are equally uncertain, and

therefore equally valid, creating a discursive vacuum in which ideological narratives can displace empirical evidence.

This frame also draws on affective strategies, invoking emotional responses like confusion, mistrust, or indignation to deepen its impact. One article complains:

“In these days of apparent ‘climate crisis,’ you would think that maintaining actual temperature reporting stations would be a top priority, but they instead manufacture data for hundreds of nonexistent stations. This is a bizarre way of monitoring a climate claimed to be an existential threat...” (Spence, 2024).

Statements like this do more than challenge scientific methodology; they suggest a breakdown of institutional trust, encouraging readers to view climate science not just as flawed, but as deceptive or politically compromised. As a result, the authority of science as a foundation for policy or public understanding is eroded, replaced by suspicion and cynicism.

More importantly, this uncertainty framing does not function alone. It operates in tandem with other rhetorical strategies identified in this study, particularly the portrayal of scientists as ideologically motivated and the platforming of dissenters as heroic truth-tellers and whistleblowers. Together, these frames create a self-reinforcing narrative ecosystem in which skepticism is normalized and trust in scientific institutions is deliberately diminished.

Ultimately, the emphasis on uncertainty serves a deeper ideological function: it reframes scientific caution not as a prudent response to risk, but as evidence of unreliability or manipulation. In this narrative landscape, doubt becomes the default posture, and inaction is rationalized as the only responsible choice. *The Epoch Times*, in amplifying this view, contributes to a broader media logic in which the absence of absolute certainty is weaponized to obstruct both understanding and action.

5.3.2 *Downplaying Future Impacts of Climate Change*

Building on the broader strategy of amplifying scientific uncertainty, *The Epoch Times* frequently employs a rhetorical frame that minimizes the urgency and seriousness of climate change's projected long-term impacts. Rather than outwardly denying climate change, these articles recast it as speculative, exaggerated, or overblown, especially when it comes to future scenarios based on scientific models. This downplaying is often achieved by emphasizing short-term fluctuations, citing natural variability, or highlighting past model inaccuracies as evidence that long-term projections are unreliable.

“Although the detrimental effects of global warming are exaggerated, its benefits are ignored by climate alarmists... For example, higher concentrations of carbon dioxide have benefits such as greater greening of the planet and increased agricultural yields” (Ozimek, 2024).

Statements like this reframe uncertainty not as a reason for precaution, but as a justification for complacency. Instead of advocating for mitigation, the tone implies that future risks are distant, uncertain, and possibly even advantageous. This framing diverts attention from the existential threat of climate change, offering a more relaxed narrative that casts climate trends as manageable, misunderstood, or potentially positive.

This rhetorical strategy draws on the concept of temporal discounting, the psychological tendency to undermine future risks in favor of more immediate concerns (Denburg and Hedgcock, 2015). Articles frequently redirect attention to localized weather events or short-term anomalies to suggest that the present does not reflect the crisis that climate scientists have long predicted. By focusing on brief temperature plateaus or unusual cold spells, the broader patterns of long-term climate disruption are obscured.

“This 1.5 degrees that’s going to destroy the whole Earth? The Earth has been way more than 1.5 degrees warmer throughout most of its history” (Spence, 2023). Statements like this use broad historical contexts to downplay the significance of current climate risks, suggesting that the warming we are experiencing is neither unusual nor threatening. These claims lean on the rhetorical logic of historical precedent to dismiss the urgency of the present situation, even though past warm periods occurred under vastly different ecological and societal conditions. Furthermore, they promote a form of retrospective skepticism, implying that because the catastrophic outcomes once predicted have not yet occurred, earlier warnings must have been overstated. This narrative repositions scientific caution as fearmongering, ultimately undermining public trust in future climate projections.

Many articles also emphasize the economic or social costs of climate action, strategically juxtaposing uncertain future risks with immediate material sacrifices. Climate mitigation is portrayed as disruptive, costly, and ideologically driven, casting doubt not only on the science, but on the political motives behind proposed solutions. “With no climate crisis, the justification for trillions of dollars in government spending and costly changes in public policy to restrict carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions collapses” (Newman, 2024). This framing repositions climate action as a form of ideological overreach, suggesting that responses to climate change are more about political control than scientific necessity. It transforms environmental policy into a culture war issue, depicting climate regulations as threats to personal freedom, national identity, and economic stability. Climate change itself, in this view, becomes a distant, abstract, or exaggerated threat, while the present-day costs of intervention are rendered immediate and tangible.

More importantly, this minimization of future impacts intersects with other rhetorical strategies identified throughout this analysis. It builds upon and reinforces uncertainty framing, casts doubt on climate models, and echoes portrayals of scientists as politically compromised or alarmist. Together, these tactics construct a media environment in which inaction appears rational; the future is treated as speculative, and proactive environmental planning is dismissed as premature or manipulative.

5.4 Political and Ideological Dimensions of Climate Change

The third major theme identified in *The Epoch Times*' climate coverage involves the reframing of climate science and policy through overtly political and ideological lenses. Rather than directly engaging with scientific evidence, many articles recast climate action as a threat to national sovereignty, economic freedom, and individual liberties. Two dominant framing strategies emerge within this theme: first, portraying climate policy as a threat to national interests, and second, depicting climate action as a form of elitist overreach.

The first strategy situates international climate agreements and environmental regulations as foreign impositions that compromise national autonomy. Scientific experts are not framed as impartial authorities, but as ideological actors aligned with transnational or globalist agendas. This narrative reinforces nationalist sentiment by suggesting that climate initiatives favor international control at the expense of domestic welfare and democratic self-determination.

A clear example of this framing appears in the claim:

“The percentage of urban elites (as defined in the survey) who said they favor strict rationing of resources to combat climate change rises to a striking 90 percent among wealthy city-dwellers who attended the United States’ top universities. By contrast, 63 percent of all Americans said they oppose rationing of vital energy and food resources to tackle climate

change. Further, between half and two-thirds of urban elites said they favor banning things such as SUVs, gas stoves, air conditioning, and nonessential air travel to protect the environment” (Ozimek, 2024).

This rhetoric constructs a stark binary between “urban elites” and “ordinary Americans,” positioning climate policy as a project of cultural outsiders and socioeconomic elites. By invoking class, geography, and education, the article politicizes environmental science and frames it as inherently antagonistic to populist values and national interests.

The second strategy amplifies narratives of elitist control, portraying climate governance as the domain of unelected technocrats, global institutions, and wealthy philanthropists. Phrases such as “top-down mandates,” “unelected climate czars,” and “green tyranny” frame scientific experts not as conveyors of empirical knowledge but as agents of coercive authority. In this framing, climate science is not critiqued on empirical grounds, but rather delegitimized due to its perceived alignment with undemocratic power and social engineering.

A clear example of how *The Epoch Times* uses ideologically aligned sources to frame climate action as government overreach appears in its reference to a report by the Heritage Foundation:

“According to a report by the Heritage Foundation, enabling legislation in Congress ‘failed to reach President Barack Obama’s desk because constituents gave their members an earful that cap and trade would amount to a massive energy tax.’ Since then, Democrats have been successful in implementing these mandates only at the state level” (Stocklin, 2024).

The Heritage Foundation is a prominent conservative think tank known for its opposition to environmental regulation and advocacy for free-market policies (Fisher, n.d.). It has long been involved in shaping right-wing discourse around climate change, often framing environmental

policy as economically burdensome and ideologically driven (Fisher, n.d.). By citing the Heritage Foundation, *The Epoch Times* amplifies a familiar narrative within conservative media, that climate legislation like cap-and-trade represents an undue financial burden on American families and a form of top-down control.

This quote also illustrates how policy failure is framed not because of political gridlock or lobbying pressures, but as a populist victory against elite-driven climate mandates. It positions “constituents” as rational actors resisting oppressive regulation, thereby reinforcing the broader framing of climate policy as undemocratic and disconnected from the will of the people. In doing so, the article aligns with the broader ideological strategy of portraying climate science and policy as tools of elite imposition, while using ideologically sympathetic institutions to lend credibility to that framing.

This framing strategy recasts climate science as an ideological battleground, shifting the focus away from the objective evaluation of scientific evidence toward the scrutiny of intentions, institutional affiliations, and political legitimacy. In this context, expert consensus is portrayed not as empirically flawed, but as a tool of elitist control and manipulation. This reframing reinforces cultural resistance, fuels public skepticism, and further undermines the credibility of scientific expertise within climate discourse.

5.4.1 National Interests and Global Climate Action

These attacks on scientific integrity extend beyond individual experts or institutions to challenge the legitimacy of international cooperation itself. Once science is framed as politicized and ideological, global climate initiatives that rely on scientific consensus are readily recast as instruments of foreign influence or elite manipulation. Skepticism about the producers of knowledge thus seamlessly morphs into suspicion about the geopolitical uses of that knowledge.

This is where *The Epoch Times* introduces a nationalist framing of climate action, portraying it as a threat to American sovereignty, economic strength, and cultural identity. International agreements like the Paris Accord are not framed as collective efforts to address a global crisis, but as economic traps that disproportionately burden the U.S. while advantaging rivals like China or unaccountable transnational bodies.

“‘The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production,’ President Trump said at the time” (Spence, 2023).

This type of framing presents climate action as a zero-sum game: if the U.S. acts, others benefit at its expense. Environmental policy is thereby detached from ecological or humanitarian concerns and reinterpreted through the lens of economic competition and national victimhood. Climate cooperation becomes synonymous with weakness, submission, or betrayal.

Such rhetoric taps directly into the populist imaginary, where global institutions, whether political, economic, or scientific, are often portrayed as threats to national identity and self-determination. Within this narrative, climate treaties are not pragmatic solutions, but elite-driven impositions. International scientific bodies like the IPCC are framed as unaccountable technocracies that dictate terms without democratic input or regard for national interests.

This nationalist lens is particularly potent during election cycles, when appeals to sovereignty, jobs, and self-reliance resonate deeply with voters. It allows political actors and media outlets to reframe climate inaction not as negligence but as patriotism, resistance to global overreach. Moreover, by tying environmental policy to fears of economic decline or cultural

erosion, this framing mobilizes opposition not just to specific treaties but to the very idea of shared global responsibility.

Ultimately, this discursive strategy undermines the feasibility of multilateral climate governance. It delegitimizes not only the science behind such initiatives but the collaborative structures necessary to enact them. In doing so, *The Epoch Times* contributes to a broader narrative of climate nationalism, one that reorients the debate away from collective survival and toward individual national advantage.

5.4.2 Climate Policy as Elitist Control

Building on the nationalist critique of global climate cooperation, *The Epoch Times* also advances a closely related but more inward-facing frame: climate policy as elitist control. If international agreements are framed as external impositions on national sovereignty, then domestic climate policies are cast as internal threats to personal liberty, economic freedom, and cultural autonomy. In this narrative, it is not just foreign powers or global institutions that endanger the public; it is one's own political and cultural elites.

This standalone frame casts climate action as a form of authoritarian overreach by politicians, technocrats, NGOs, and billionaires who are seen as forcing compliance through top-down mandates. Articles using this framing frequently describe environmental regulations in dystopian or Orwellian terms, evoking images of government surveillance, loss of autonomy, and coerced lifestyle changes.

“President Biden and Democrats are leading a radical rush-to-green agenda that takes away people's vehicle choice and forces Americans to drive electric vehicles...” (Spence, 2024). Statements like this are not merely policy critiques; they are emotionally charged appeals that frame environmental regulation as an existential threat to individual freedom. This populist

rhetoric weaponizes longstanding distrust in elite institutions and government authorities. Rather than discussing emissions reduction or climate targets in terms of necessity or benefit, the focus shifts to the loss of choice, tradition, economic security, and cultural identity.

This framing aligns with broader anti-establishment narratives prevalent in right-wing media ecosystems. It casts climate action as inherently disconnected from the concerns of “ordinary people,” suggesting that elites are prioritizing abstract global goals at the expense of local realities. Working-class livelihoods, rural lifestyles, and national traditions are positioned as collateral damage in what is portrayed as a technocratic crusade, driven by ideology rather than practical need.

Among the frames observed, this one was one of the most politically potent. It taps into deeply held anxieties about freedom, class division, and legitimacy. Climate policy, when framed this way, becomes more than a political issue; it becomes symbolic of broader cultural and economic disempowerment. By depicting green policies as elite impositions, enacted without consent and harmful to the common citizen, *The Epoch Times* invites its readers to resist climate action not as policy dissent, but as a defense of personal liberty and national identity.

This convergence of fear, populism, and misinformation forms a crucial part of *The Epoch Times*’ climate discourse. To understand the outlet’s broader approach, it is essential to view these individual strategies, selective sourcing, ambiguity of expertise, attacks on scientific integrity, nationalist framing, and elite distrust, not in isolation, but as mutually reinforcing elements of a larger narrative architecture.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal how *The Epoch Times* employs sophisticated discursive strategies to frame climate experts in ways that undermine scientific authority and facilitate the spread of climate change misinformation. Rather than relying on outright denial, the publication systematically manipulates the presentation of scientific expertise, subtly reshaping public understanding through delegitimization, ambiguity, and selective amplification.

6.1 Undermining Scientific Authority and Expert Credibility

A key strategy evident in *The Epoch Times* is the erosion of expert credibility by framing climate science as ideologically biased or fundamentally flawed. This approach aligns with existing research on science denial and misinformation, which highlights how media outlets opposed to climate action use “epistemic fragmentation” to disrupt consensus by elevating fringe perspectives to the same level as established science (Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Lewandowsky et al., 2019). The publication amplifies pseudo-expert voices, individuals lacking legitimate credentials or clear affiliations, thereby creating a false equivalence between credible scientists and contrarian figures.

In addition, *The Epoch Times* employs the framing of scientific uncertainty as evidence of unreliability, a classic example of McCright and Dunlap’s (2000) “manufactured scientific controversy.” Natural scientific processes such as probabilistic forecasting and modeling limitations are reframed as signs of fundamental failure, distorting public understanding of how science operates. This tactic is particularly effective because it does not reject science outright; instead, it exploits scientific nuance to cultivate doubt—a strategy shown to be more persuasive and enduring than blatant denial (van der Linden et al., 2017).

By selectively emphasizing natural climate variability and local anomalies, the publication obscures the systemic and anthropogenic nature of climate change. This approach weakens the legitimacy of expert assessments and shifts the burden of interpreting complex scientific data onto readers who lack access to the institutional context that underpins scientific consensus. As Sovacool and Schrag (2023) argue, this amplification of contrarian views manufactures an illusion of controversy, complicating the public's ability to discern credible information.

6.2 Ideological Framing and Political Polarization of Climate Science

These strategies are compounded by ideological framing that displaces urgency and promotes skepticism. By portraying climate science as unsettled and politically motivated, *The Epoch Times* cultivates a narrative of epistemic ambivalence that delays action. This narrative is often paired with appeals to individual freedom and economic self-interest, redirecting public concern from collective environmental risks toward short-term personal costs—a tactic consistent with broader anti-regulatory and populist discourses (Nisbet, 2009).

Collectively, these findings highlight how *The Epoch Times* functions within the broader ecosystem of climate misinformation—not through overt denialism but by strategically undermining the credibility of scientific expertise and portraying consensus as uncertain or ideologically driven. This has profound implications for public trust in science and complicates efforts to combat misinformation in an increasingly fragmented media landscape.

Moreover, the publication frames climate science and related policies as instruments of elitist control, linking scientific authority to political agendas perceived as threats to national sovereignty, economic freedom, and cultural identity. This narrative reflects common themes in

right-wing populist discourse, which cast climate action as globalist overreach or technocratic imposition (Sovacool & Schrag, 2023; Kennedy et al., 2022).

Terms like “elitist control” and “green tyranny” weaponize anti-establishment sentiment, portraying climate science as an ideological tool wielded by detached elites. Environmental policies such as emission limits or resource rationing are framed not as democratic responses to scientific evidence but as coercive impositions, delegitimizing both climate policy and the experts who advocate for it. Nationalist rhetoric further politicizes expertise by positioning scientists as adversaries to “the people,” undermining scientific consensus based on the identities of its proponents rather than evidence.

6.3 Implications for Public Trust and Climate Communications

This type of framing erodes not only individual scientists’ credibility but also the public’s broader trust in scientific knowledge. Repeated exposure to such narratives may induce cognitive dissonance, prompting audiences to question both specific climate claims and the legitimacy of scientific institutions as a whole. By casting doubt on the objectivity and motives of climate experts, *The Epoch Times* fosters an environment of skepticism that contributes to a gradual epistemological shift, one where scientific authority is perceived as contested, politicized, and uncertain rather than universally accepted.

These dynamics have serious implications for climate communication in today’s ideologically polarized and epistemically fragmented media environment. The *Epoch Times* illustrates that misinformation often thrives not by spreading blatant falsehoods, but by systematically eroding trust in expertise, authority, and consensus. Consequently, traditional science communication strategies that focus solely on delivering accurate information or

emphasizing scientific consensus may prove insufficient unless they also engage with the underlying narratives shaping public perceptions.

Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond an informational model to one that integrates cultural identity, values, and worldview-based cognition. Audiences interpret climate information through their social and political lenses, and misinformation exploits these frameworks by casting science as politically motivated. Effective communication, therefore, demands attention to the messenger, framing techniques, and resonance with audience values, not just factual accuracy.

Additionally, these findings underscore the necessity of expanding media literacy efforts beyond fact-checking. Readers must be equipped to recognize subtler rhetorical tactics, such as selective sourcing, pseudo-expertise, and emotionally charged framing, that manipulate credibility. Building critical awareness of narrative construction can empower audiences to better identify when scientific authority is misrepresented or deliberately undermined.

6.4 The Role of Experts

The role of climate experts in shaping public perception is central to understanding how climate change is communicated in the media (Boyce, 2006; Conrad, 1999). However, the analysis of *The Epoch Times* reveals how experts advocating for climate action are systematically undermined. This aligns with Gerrath et al. (2024) and Kennedy et al. (2022), who note that public trust in scientific experts has declined, especially when experts are framed as ideologically driven or part of a globalist agenda. The delegitimization of expert voices in *The Epoch Times* directly echoes Nisbet et al. (2003), who argue that climate experts are often portrayed as co-conspirators with political elites, undermining their credibility and shifting the focus from their empirical evidence to their perceived motivations. This tactic reflects the

broader trend discussed in literature, where scientific credibility is increasingly questioned in polarized media environments.

Moreover, the rise of "fake experts," individuals with limited or questionable expertise in climate science, has been a significant concern in media coverage (Cooke et al., 2017). *The Epoch Times* amplifies these voices, aligning with Trumbo (1996), who discusses how media outlets selectively amplify unqualified experts to create the illusion of scientific disagreement to advance their own narrative and political agenda. This strategic manipulation further complicates efforts to communicate climate science, as the public is left navigating conflicting claims and uncertain expert authority. The reliance on pseudo-experts and fake experts by *The Epoch Times* exemplifies the broader media trend where legitimate scientific voices are marginalized or ignored, fueling confusion and skepticism.

6.5 Misinformation and Disinformation

Closely tied to the delegitimization of expertise is *The Epoch Times*' use of misinformation and disinformation, rhetorical tactics that blur distinctions between unintentional misleading information and deliberate deception (Fallis, 2009; Treen et al., 2020; Amsalem & Zoizner, 2022). Importantly, misinformation need not be factually incorrect; it often involves technically accurate facts selectively framed or stripped of context to mislead audiences.

The Epoch Times employs these techniques by strategically framing scientific uncertainty, selectively presenting climate data, and frequently citing pseudo-expert voices lacking credible scientific qualifications. These tactics mirror broader climate misinformation patterns, where amplification of fringe perspectives distorts public perceptions of scientific consensus (Sovacool & Schrag, 2023).

By disproportionately featuring contrarian viewpoints and marginalizing mainstream climate science, *The Epoch Times* perpetuates a “manufactured controversy” (Dunlap & McCright, 2010). This creates the false impression of ongoing scientific debate, fostering doubt and delaying necessary climate action. These narratives often circulate within ideologically aligned media ecosystems, or echo chambers, where they are reinforced rather than challenged. As Marston (2022) notes, this dynamic widens perception gaps across political groups, exacerbating polarization and deepening public confusion about climate change.

6.6 Climate Change and Political Polarization

Consistent with the literature, climate change has become deeply politicized, with polarization over its causes and consequences (Bernauer, 2013). *The Epoch Times* frames climate science through ideological lenses that reinforce broader political narratives, portraying climate action as contentious and aligned with foreign or elitist agendas. This mirrors findings by Sovacool & Schrag (2023) and Kennedy et al. (2022), who demonstrate how climate discourse intertwines with nationalism and anti-globalism, further polarizing public opinion.

The framing tactics in *The Epoch Times* reflect this polarization by encouraging audiences to interpret climate change through entrenched political identities. Rather than directly disputing scientific findings, the publication undermines the credibility, motives, and identities of scientists and institutions, attacking their integrity instead of engaging with evidence. This approach exemplifies the politicization of climate expertise, where scientific authority is perceived as partisan (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). It reinforces political skepticism and cultural divides that hinder collective climate action.

This delegitimization also ties into broader science denial strategies by associating climate science with left-wing or progressive politics, casting it as a partisan issue and part of a

larger culture war (Nisbet, 2009). Such framing activates partisan identities, particularly among conservative audiences, who may reject climate science when linked to political opponents.

6.7 Implications

These findings hold significant implications for climate communication amid ideological polarization and epistemic fragmentation. *The Epoch Times* demonstrates that climate misinformation does not rely solely on falsehoods but thrives through the systematic erosion of epistemic trust, undermining public perceptions of expertise, authority, and consensus. Traditional communication strategies focused solely on factual accuracy or broadcasting scientific consensus risk falling short if they fail to engage with the deeper cultural and political narratives shaping public attitudes.

Effective climate communication must move beyond an informational deficit model to address cultural identity, values, and worldview-based cognition. As this analysis shows, misinformation exploits social and political identities by casting science as ideologically suspect or politically motivated. Messaging must therefore emphasize not only factual clarity but also the credibility of messengers, the emotional and cultural framing of messages, and resonance with the audience's core values. For example, messages from trusted in-group members, such as local leaders, religious figures, or center-right politicians, can be more persuasive than messages from distant experts or institutions.

A particularly effective strategy in this context is the strategic communication of scientific consensus. Research has shown that when people are made aware that an overwhelming majority of scientists agree on the reality and human causes of climate change, their perceptions of risk and support for climate action increase—even among skeptics. Communicators should highlight consensus statistics (e.g., “97% of climate scientists agree...”),

but do so in ways that feel inclusive and depoliticized. Visual aids, storytelling, and relatable analogies (such as consensus in medicine or engineering) can reinforce the legitimacy and nonpartisan nature of climate science. Importantly, repeating and normalizing the message of consensus across different platforms and cultural contexts can gradually counteract the perception that climate science is contested or fringe.

Moreover, these findings highlight the need to expand media literacy beyond simple fact-checking. Audiences must be equipped to identify subtle rhetorical tactics that manipulate credibility, including selective sourcing, pseudo-expertise, and emotionally charged framing. Enhancing critical awareness of how narratives are constructed can empower individuals to better recognize when scientific authority is misrepresented or deliberately undermined.

An effective media literacy inoculation campaign for a general audience would involve preemptively exposing people to common climate misinformation tactics, while teaching them how to critically evaluate the credibility of information sources. Drawing on inoculation theory, such a campaign would use simple, relatable messages to introduce “weakened” versions of common rhetorical techniques, like cherry-picking data, citing non-expert sources, or framing climate action as economically catastrophic, along with clear refutations. For example, short animated videos could show how pseudo-experts are used to manufacture doubt, then immediately explain how to verify expertise through credentials or institutional affiliations. Interactive web tools and quizzes could guide users through real vs. manipulated headlines, highlighting emotional appeals, misleading visuals, or manipulated statistics. By practicing this recognition process in a low-stakes, accessible format, audiences are better equipped to resist misinformation when they encounter it in real-world media environments.

To maximize reach and impact, such a campaign should be multi-platform and culturally inclusive, integrating content into social media, public service announcements, school curricula, and even popular entertainment. For instance, short “prebunking” clips could be delivered as ads on YouTube before climate-related videos, showing viewers how disinformation spreads and inviting them to learn more. Collaborations with local libraries, museums, and schools could facilitate workshops or pop-up exhibitions on climate misinformation and media literacy. Campaigns could also leverage trusted messengers like teachers, doctors, community leaders, and influencers to reinforce these lessons in familiar and credible voices. The goal is not just to increase factual knowledge, but to build psychological resistance to misinformation by normalizing critical engagement and promoting trust in legitimate sources of scientific information.

Importantly, climate communication efforts must also acknowledge that audiences are not homogenous. Different groups defined by race, class, political affiliation, geography, religion, and lived experience bring diverse worldviews, cultural values, and historical contexts that shape how messages are interpreted. A consensus-based or science-forward message may resonate with highly educated, urban audiences but may trigger skepticism or mistrust among communities with histories of institutional betrayal or political marginalization. For example, Indigenous communities may respond more positively to messages grounded in stewardship and intergenerational responsibility, rather than technocratic solutions. Similarly, economically vulnerable groups may perceive climate action messaging as threatening if it is framed around regulation or cost rather than opportunity or justice. To avoid reinforcing inequities or triggering disengagement, communicators should adopt audience-centered framing, conduct formative

research with communities, and partner with trusted, culturally embedded messengers who can tailor the message to the social realities of the audience.

Ultimately, confronting climate misinformation demands a comprehensive approach: one that builds cultural and cognitive resilience, reinforces the democratic legitimacy of expertise, and restores public trust in science as a legitimate, inclusive, and socially responsive institution. Communicating scientific consensus clearly and repeatedly must be part of that strategy, grounded in values-based engagement, narrative framing, and trust-building across ideological divides.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *The Epoch Times* does not merely misrepresent climate science; rather, it engages in a systematic reframing of scientific expertise to align with broader ideological and political agendas. In this framing, climate experts are not portrayed as objective, neutral conveyors of empirical evidence but are instead cast as ideologically motivated actors embedded within narratives of elitism, control, and cultural conflict. Such rhetorical strategies distort the essential function of science in public discourse by shifting focus away from the rigor and consensus of scientific inquiry toward questioning the perceived motives and political affiliations of scientists themselves. This deliberate delegitimization undermines the authority of climate science and contributes to the erosion of public trust in scientific institutions.

The analysis highlights how *The Epoch Times* amplifies so-called “fake experts,” individuals with little or no legitimate scientific credentials, while marginalizing or ignoring credible voices within the climate science community. This tactic not only manufactures an illusion of scientific disagreement but also strategically fuels confusion and skepticism among the public. By selectively framing natural climate variability as evidence against anthropogenic climate change and emphasizing uncertainties inherent in scientific models, the publication exploits the nuances of the scientific process to cultivate doubt. This approach is especially insidious because it does not outright deny climate change but instead weaponizes uncertainty, which has been shown to be a highly effective form of misinformation that can persist and influence public attitudes over time.

Furthermore, this study situates these discursive strategies within the broader context of political polarization, revealing how climate misinformation is deeply intertwined with identity

politics and ideological divides. The framing of climate science as part of a globalist or elitist agenda activates cultural anxieties and resistance, particularly among audiences who perceive climate action as a threat to national sovereignty, economic freedom, or traditional values. This intersection of science denial and political ideology exacerbates the fragmentation of the public sphere and impedes the development of broad-based consensus necessary for effective climate policy.

The implications of these findings are profound for both climate communication and public engagement with science more broadly. Traditional approaches that focus narrowly on correcting factual errors or highlighting scientific consensus may be insufficient or even counterproductive in a media landscape characterized by epistemic fragmentation and ideological entrenchment. Instead, climate communication must evolve to acknowledge the complex ways in which cultural identity, values, and worldview shape how scientific information is received and interpreted. This requires communicators to move beyond a deficit model of science communication toward approaches that build cultural resonance and trust, emphasize transparency about scientific processes, and engage respectfully with diverse audiences.

Additionally, these findings underscore the urgent need to enhance media literacy efforts that empower individuals to recognize not only blatant misinformation but also the more subtle rhetorical tactics that undermine expert credibility, such as selective sourcing, pseudo-expertise, and emotionally charged framing. Cultivating critical awareness of how narratives are constructed can help audiences navigate conflicting information and resist manipulative messaging.

Ultimately, confronting climate misinformation is not simply about debunking false claims but involves a broader, systemic effort to rebuild epistemic trust in science as a legitimate,

inclusive, and socially responsive institution. This requires reinforcing the democratic value of expertise and ensuring that scientific knowledge is communicated in ways that honor public concerns and cultural contexts. Only through such comprehensive strategies can society hope to bridge polarized divides, restore confidence in scientific authority, and mobilize collective action to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change.

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APPENDIX

Pilot Study Results

Data Collection

After looking at fact-checking websites including PolitiFact, Snopes, and FactCheck.org, results were appearing but difficult to sift through. These websites do not have the capability to sort by dates and do not offer whole articles containing misinformation to read. Rather, they only provide fact-checked data debunking the misinformation embedded within a given text, whether that be an article or tweet. While this is useful for combatting misinformation, it did not provide the texts necessary to conduct textual analysis of misinformation.

A further general google search of “climate change misinformation” brought about *The Epoch Times*, a far-right US publication that has become an influential misinformation machine (Roose, 2020). Within their website, a search of “climate change” brings up 1,956 articles published within the website. In refining the search to the past year, 342 stories are available. Articles were randomly selected based on a search of a given topic. The term “climate change” was searched followed by “arctic ice,” “CO2 levels,” “temperature,” “hurricane,” and “warming.” Five articles were selected for the sample, published between November 2023 and November 2024. All stories were selected from the “premium reports” section. Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, videos, and columns were excluded from the sample.

In analyzing the articles, both the article headlines and subheadings were analyzed and coded into groups. Headlines and subheadings are the first pieces of an article readers look at, giving the main idea and a short overview of what the article will discuss. The subheading gives further insight and context to the title, hooking and drawing readers in to continue reading and

scanning for information throughout the article. The rest of the text within the article, or the article itself, was not analyzed for this study. Only the 5 selected articles titles and subsequent subheadings were analyzed. For example, one of the selected articles had the title “Fixation on CO2 Ignores Real Driver of Temperature, Experts Say” whilst the subheading found directly below the title was “UN claims that human-caused CO2 emissions are imperiling the planet are ‘totally garbage,’ says scientist. ‘CO2 doesn’t cause a change in temperature.’”

Data Analysis

In reading through the titles and subheadings of the selected articles, common themes will be identified that will allow for coding groups to be generated. Codes will be determined based on commonalities identified in the use of experts. These codes will then be combined to identify emerging themes. If a code appears multiple times, there is a strong possibility of it becoming a theme since it appears so frequently amongst a sample of five titles and subheadings. Themes will then be named and defined with specific and easily understandable labels.

Results

Direct quotes included in the title or subheading were searched through Google to verify claims being made by *The Epoch Times*. This was to verify the claims being made and statements being included. Seven coding groups were identified from the sample of five titles and five subheadings.

Ambiguity of Experts

The identified codes were established based on the commonalities of language used within the article's titles and subheadings. Vague and ambiguous expertise and authority was a common occurrence amongst the titles and subheadings. There was a heavy reliance on referring to ambiguous, and at times unclear, “scientists” and “experts.” This undermines the authority of

climate experts and scientists who contribute to research about emerging issues related to climate change. Ambiguity also weakens the persuasive power of climate scientists and experts. The ways they are being framed by *The Epoch Times* will lead readers to hold skepticism towards scientists and experts.

Not naming experts or generalizing claims allegedly said by scientists or experts about climate change make it difficult for readers to analyze the credibility of the original “source.” When an expert is not named early on, it is not possible to use heuristics to evaluate the credibility, qualifications, or background of that scientist or expert. Framing “experts” also relies upon a source’s perceived credibility (Besley and Tiffany, 2023). So, when a reader sees that a scientist or expert is saying something about climate change that aligns with their own personal narrative or opinion about the given matter, they will likely be more accepting of that information. Readers who trust *The Epoch Times* also trust that they accurately report on topics. So, if they say “scientists say” or “experts say,” readers who trust in them to accurately report information will not question the authority of the given scientist or expert

Data Misrepresentation

Data misrepresentation was the second common theme emerging from the code groups. Titles and subheadings were found to often frame data relating to climate change in ways that would make readers question its integrity. Selective use of data or quotes from climate experts and reports also places the scientific data out of context. This means that scientifically established facts can be perceived as being flawed and in need of news sources, like *The Epoch Times*, to fact check their credibility and debunk the “flaws.” Manipulating scientific data by taking it out of context leaves room for readers to feel doubtful towards scientific institutions.

Misrepresenting data also makes way for suspicion to arise from readers, putting widely accepted scientific data and practices into a position to be suspect. This also aids *The Epoch Times* in promoting their own narrative about climate change that will be instilled in readers who trust them as an institution to do accurate and informed reporting. The selective use of data focuses on isolated findings to support *The Epoch Times*' narrative whilst ignoring the broader body of evidence and scientific consensus. For example, the subheading "UN claims that human-caused CO2 emissions are imperiling the planet are 'totally garbage,' says scientist. 'CO2 doesn't cause a change in temperature'" takes the data out of context. The UN has stated "as carbon dioxide emissions rise, the ocean and land will be less effective at absorbing and slowing the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere" (United Nations, n.d.). The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated in 2021 "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred" (IPCC, 2021).

Distorting the original meaning of scientific findings, oversimplifying statements, lack of contextualization, picking out specific anomalies, and delegitimizing established scientific methodologies all work to erode trust in science. Readers are thus not able to discern the facts and legitimate, evidence-based information from the text. *The Epoch Times* use of framing contextualizes climate change for their readers (D'Angelo, 2017). This influences readers to think about science, experts, and scientific methodologies in alignment with the contextual information that has been encoded in the "frame of reference" (D'Angelo, 2017). Fueling skepticism of science and further politicizing climate change is the ultimate goal of *The Epoch Times*, as seen in their framing of climate science and scientists.

Politicizing Climate Science

The Epoch Times politicization of climate science frames the issue to align with their political agenda and ideologies rather than focusing on scientific evidence. Rhetorical strategies are used to cast doubt on scientific consensus and frame climate change as a contested issue. This way of framing climate change skews reader perceptions and deepens polarization by encouraging readers to perceive climate science as a politically motivated and partisan process.

Framing climate scientists and meteorologists as politically motivated when reporting on climate change delegitimizes their findings by suggesting their findings are biased and opinionated rather than objective. Suggesting there are financial and policy motives behind climate action also frames these decisions as being driven by ulterior political motives rather than scientific necessity. This furthers the focus on economic or ideological arguments rather than scientific evidence. For example, “Trillions Spent on ‘Climate Change’ Based on Faulty Temperature Data, Climate Experts Say” emphasizes the cost of climate research and policies and questions the scientific data supporting those decisions. This title frames climate action based on scientific consensus as a wasteful and unnecessary means of government spending.

Framing climate concerns as exaggerated or politically motivated also downplays the urgency behind addressing climate issues. Portraying climate science as an alarmist means of pushing a political agenda, rather than a means of precaution for all living beings on the planet politicizes the matter further. Giving more attention to counter-narratives that challenge mainstream scientific consensus is another tactic used by *The Epoch Times*. For example, “‘There’s Been No Increase’: Scientists Debunk Climate Change Claims About Hurricanes” positions an opposing perspective against broader scientific claims of hurricane severity. According to the EPA, hurricane intensity has risen noticeably in the last 30 years (EPA, 2024).

The Epoch Times' title suggests the scientific consensus on hurricanes is overblown and politically motivated.