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RESEARCH INSIGHT



# Race/Ethnicity and Climate Change Reporting: Perceptions and Interests of News Personnel's Interest to Cover Climate Change based on Race

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## ABSTRACT

In light of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities, there is merit in seeking to understand any differences in climate change beliefs and reporting behaviors for news professionals of non-White ethnicities. Unsurprisingly, considering the greater environmental hazards that many minority communities contend with, there is a racial gap in environmental concern in the United States. This disparity in concern extends to climate change. There is a clear and troubling lack of diversity in the American newsroom. Women and people of color are dramatically underrepresented in all positions. Understanding the viewpoints of minority news professionals is essential for both diversifying the newsroom and for incorporating their perspectives into news content as a whole. In this paper we sought to answer three research questions about the relationship between race/ethnicity and news professional's interest in, perceptions of, and experience with local climate change reporting. In this essay we report survey results from 616 participants who identified themselves as professional journalists, and who provided both their race/ethnicity and whether they reported on climate change within the last 12 months. This segmentation approach allowed us to compare news professionals from different racial/ethnic groups with similar levels of climate reporting experience.

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Climate change; ethnicity; race; reporting

## Introduction

Despite the prodigious body of evidence supporting the reality of anthropogenic climate change, a significant number of Americans remain uncertain or unconvinced of the existence, causes, and consequences of climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2017). Much of this confusion and disbelief is the result of deliberate campaigns of climate denial intended to shape public discourse on the topic (Dunlap & McCright, 2015). While certain news organizations have intentionally contributed to this disinformation environment—Fox News being especially prolific in this regard (Dunlap & McCright, 2011)—most news organizations strive to deliver factual, unbiased reporting. Good intentions notwithstanding, climate change reporting in the United States has often understated risks (Nisbet, 2009) and highlighted false debate (Boykoff, 2011). The role that the news industry plays in influencing public discourse on a topic—from deciding how “newsworthy” it is to stylistic framing decisions—cannot be understated (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Some of the most enduring questions in journalism and mass communication research have revolved around how news professionals select and frame news stories. A rich body of literature

has delved into questions of who and what influences news content on a multitude of levels—from the macro “social system” to the micro “individual” level (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). While the bulk of gatekeeping studies suggest that organizational factors play a stronger role than individual factors in shaping the content of mainstream news, the personal characteristics of individual journalists can have significant effects (Shoemaker et al., 2001; Tanikawa, 2017). Moreover, there is a strong history of “alternative press” in the United States—alternative sources of media that offer a platform for voices that have long been excluded from traditional media systems. These alternative presses, including the Black press and the Latinx press, have provided a venue for increased reporting on social justice and marginalized communities (Guzmán, 2006; Mastin et al., 2005).

Given the complex interface between news media, public opinion, and U.S. political agendas, studying the attitudes and climate change reporting behaviors of American news professionals may reveal opportunities to improve climate change reporting—and ultimately increase public understanding of this important issue. In light of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities it is crucial to seek to understand the climate change perspectives and reporting practices of non-White—as compared to White—news professionals.

## Literature review

### *Community vulnerability*

There is stark inequity in the impacts of climate change. Although all people have the potential to be harmed, certain populations face disproportionate consequences to health and well-being. In America and across the globe, the poor and disenfranchised are being hurt first and worst (IPCC AR 5; U.S. Climate and Health Assessment, 2016). For a variety of reasons (including poor quality housing and infrastructure, lack of access to healthcare, and greater exposure to environmental hazards), marginalized groups are already bearing the brunt of the costs of climate change.

In the United States, Blacks and Hispanics are significantly more likely to live at, near, or below the poverty line than Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Socioeconomic status is an important predictor of vulnerability to climate change, and wealth gaps can impede the ability of both the individual and the community to adapt or recover from disaster events (Cutter et al., 2003). Other factors—like structural racism and language barriers—can also contribute to disparate rates of risk that people of color face in the United States (Cooley et al., 2012).

Decades of widespread racial discrimination in the housing sector (from insurance markets to infrastructure development) have led to residential inequity (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). In comparison to White Americans, people of color are more likely to reside in areas with higher vulnerability to hazards (such as hurricanes) or in neighborhoods that are more exposed to pollution from industrial sites (Ard, 2015; Jones & Rainey, 2006; Laska & Morrow, 2006). As a result, some of the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are predominantly Black and/or Hispanic populations living in underserved, low-income areas (Shonkoff et al., 2009).

### *Risk perception*

Unsurprisingly, considering the greater environmental hazards that many minority communities contend with, there is a racial gap in environmental concern in the United States. Non-White Americans report greater vulnerability concerns and awareness of personal risk than White Americans, even controlling for income (Satterfield et al., 2004). This disparity in concern extends to climate change—there is a well-documented gap in the extent and severity of the perceived risks associated with climate change between Whites and non-Whites in the United States (Leiserowitz & Akerlof, 2010; McCright & Dunlap, 2011b). Latinx Americans have been found to be more

engaged with climate change, both in conviction that the consequences will be harmful and in willingness to support public action, than non-Latinx Americans (Leiserowitz et al., 2017). Black and Hispanic Americans are more likely to believe that climate change is a personal threat than White Americans (Jones et al., 2014).

This gap between White and non-White populations is evident even when accounting for political ideology. Political ideology has been consistently identified as one of the primary factors that shapes public opinions about climate change in the United States; conservative political affiliation strongly predicts disbelief in the existence of anthropogenic climate change (Collomb, 2014; Palm et al., 2017). However, within minority communities, political ideology is a significantly weaker predictor of climate attitudes than it is for White Americans (Schuldt & Pearson, 2016).

Differences in the perception of climate change risks also exist between minority racial groups. However, for a variety of reasons, the majority of studies that examine race and climate change employ a White/non-White dichotomy (Pearson et al., 2017). However, this simplification can be reductive, masking variances in priorities and concerns that may be important for communication strategies that resonate with different racial and ethnic groups (Speiser & Krygsmann, 2014).

### **Hierarchy of influences**

News creation is a complex process shaped by confluence of many forces, from the societal to the individual. The hierarchy of influences model identifies five levels of influence that impact how media is produced and what it contains: social systems, social institutions, media organizations, routine practices, and individuals (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Many studies have paid particular focus to the role that personal characteristics of journalists may play—results, however, have been mixed. A study by Shoemaker et al. (2001) concluded that the influence of routines on media content is stronger than individual, demographic factors. However, other studies have identified personal factors—gender, in particular—to play a role in reporting decisions such as story and source selection (Armstrong, 2004; Craft & Wanta, 2004; Tanikawa, 2017; Zeldes & Fico, 2005). In their interviews with journalists, Pritchard and Stonbely (2007) found that having members of a racial minority on the newspaper's staff improved their coverage of minority issues. Even so, there is a clear and troubling lack of diversity in the American newsroom.

Women and people of color are dramatically underrepresented in all positions; a 2017 survey by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) found that racial minorities comprise just 17% of the workforce in U.S. newsrooms. News content is a social construction ("or mirror of reality") and at present the news and journalism workforce is not representative of the US. As such, whiteness remains the default in the US media, where other races and ethnicities are labeled but whiteness often is not. (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 4, 47). Therefore, considering the potential role that personal characteristics may bring to reporting practices, understanding the viewpoints of minority news professionals is essential for both diversifying the newsroom and for incorporating their perspectives into news content and providing news that serves marginalized audiences.

### **Triadic reciprocal determinism**

Social Cognitive Theory posits that human behavior is best understood as being influenced by—and, in turn, influencing—people's internal personal factors including their perceptions of agency, and by attributes of their social and physical environment (Bandura, 1986). This notion of triadic reciprocal determinism is a useful framework for examining journalists' climate reporting behavior because it examines the behavior in the context journalist's underlying agentic beliefs (e.g. *Will climate reporting make a difference?*) as well as the social/environmental conditions in which journalists are reporting (e.g. *Is climate change causing harm in the communities where I work?*). The lack of diversity in U.S. newsrooms could have a deleterious effect on the agentic beliefs of non-White

journalists. Conversely, the elevated climate risks in many non-White communities could heighten the perceived relevance of climate reporting for non-White journalists.

## Research questions

In this paper, we sought to answer three research questions to explore the relationship between race/ethnicity and news professional's agentic beliefs about climate change reporting, perceptions of local climate impacts, and interest in and performance of reporting climate-related news stories. Specifically, we ask:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' perceptions of the ability of climate reporting to benefit society (i.e. their agentic beliefs about climate reporting)?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' perceptions of the social/environmental relevance of climate change?

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' interest in—and performance of—local climate change reporting?

## Methodology

To answer these research questions, the analysis presented below uses data from three surveys conducted in early 2018. On January 3rd, we invited all 6,755 members of three professional journalism societies, Radio Television and Digital News Association (RTDNA;  $n = 1,217$ ), National Association of Black Journalist (NABJ;  $n = 3,491$ ), and National Association of Hispanic Journalist (NAHJ;  $n = 2,047$ ), to participate in a survey administered via *Qualtrics*. The surveys took a median time of about 15 minutes to complete. Non-respondents were sent up to three to five additional invitations until the survey was closed on February 1, 2018. In total, 1,370 people participated in the survey (NABJ = 620; NAHJ = 515; RTDNA = 235)—a response rate of 20.3%.

Here we report results from a sub-set of the remaining three professional societies ( $n = 616$ ), specifically participants who identified themselves as professional journalists currently working (salaried or freelance) in the news business, who provided their race/ethnicity, and answered the majority of the following survey measures. Participants who were salaried outside of newsrooms, retired, or students were excluded ( $n = 287$ ). To segment participants by race/ethnicity we used four mutually-exclusive racial/ethnic categories: Non-Hispanic White ( $n = 142$ ), Non-Hispanic Black ( $n = 234$ ), Hispanic ( $n = 182$ ), and Multiracial ( $n = 58$ ).

## Findings

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' perceptions of the ability of climate reporting to benefit society?

Respondents were asked, "To what extent will covering climate change be beneficial or detrimental to society?" The 7-point response scale ranged from "very detrimental" ( $-3$ ) to "very beneficial" ( $+3$ ). Overall, across all racial/ethnic groups, the mean ( $M = 1.51$ ) response for each group fell midway between "slightly beneficial" (1) and "moderately beneficial" (2), demonstrating weak to moderate levels of agency; there were no significant between-group differences (White  $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = .87$ , Black  $M = 1.50$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , "Hispanic"  $M = 1.50$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ , "Multiracial"  $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) (see [Table 1](#)).

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' perceptions of the social/environmental relevance of climate change?

Respondents were asked, "To the best of your knowledge, has the climate in your region changed over the past 50 years?" The response options were "Yes", "No", and "Don't know." Respondents

who answered yes or don't know where then asked: "Which of the following best describes the impacts(s) of climate change in your region over the past 50 years?" The 5-point response scale ranged from "the impacts have been exclusively harmful" (−2) to "the impacts have been exclusively beneficial" (+2), where the midpoint of the scale (0) includes survey participants who answered "Don't know" or "The impacts have been approximately equally mixed between beneficial and harmful."

A large majority of the study participants indicated that the climate in their region had changed over the past 50 years (Total = 85.1 %; White = 90.1 %; Black = 82.1 %; Hispanic = 86.3 %; Multiracial = 81.0 %), while relatively small proportions indicated they don't know (Total = 14.9%; White = 9.9%; Black = 17.9%; Hispanic = 13.7%; Multiracial = 19.0%). There were no significant between-group differences ( $F = 1.84$ ).

With regard to the valence of climate change impacts in their region, on average, participating journalists saw the impacts as being approximately midway between an equal mix of positive and negative impacts and seeing the impacts as being primarily negative (Total  $M = -0.60$ , White  $M = -0.54$ ,  $SD = .57$ , Black  $M = -0.47$ ,  $SD = .64$ , "Hispanic"  $M = -0.77$ ,  $SD = .62$ , "Multiracial"  $M = -0.67$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) (See Table 1). There were significant between-group differences ( $F = 8.73$ ; see Table 1) such that Hispanic and multiracial participants were more likely than White and Black respondents to see the impacts in their region as harmful (see Table 1), and Black participants were less likely than other groups, including Whites, to see the impacts as harmful (see Table 2).

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Is race/ethnicity associated with journalists' interest in—and performance of—local climate change reporting?

To assess their interest in reporting on climate change as a local issue, participants were asked two questions: "How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on the local impacts of climate change?"; and "How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on local solutions to climate change?" Both were measured on a four-point response scale ranging from "No interest" (1) to "Very interested" (4).

Overall, across all racial/ethnic groups, participating journalists expressed a moderate level of interest in reporting stories about the local impacts of climate change (Total  $M = 2.94$ ). There were significant between-group differences ( $F = 16.15$ ): White, Hispanic and Multicultural participants were more interested than Black participants in reporting on local climate impacts (White  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .80$ , Black  $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ , "Hispanic"  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .94$ , "Multiracial"  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) (see Table 1).

Similarly, overall, participants were moderately interested in covering stories about local climate change solutions (Total  $M = 3.00$ ), and there were between-group differences ( $F = 14.04$ ) Specifically, White, Hispanic and Multicultural journalists were more interested in covering these stories than Black journalists (White  $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .818$ , Black  $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ , "Hispanic"  $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .94$ , "Multiracial"  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

To understand what topics participating news professionals were interested in covering, participants were asked, "Which, if any, of the following (16) local climate change topics are you interested in covering (or supervising)?" A majority of all participants indicated an interest in reporting on all 16 impacts, with the top five impacts of interest being: 1) human health, 2) drought and water shortages, 3) air quality, 4) extreme precipitation and/or flooding, and 5) economy (See Table 3).

Finally, to assess participant's recent experience with local climate change reporting, participants were asked, "In the past 12 months, have you (or people you supervise) covered any local climate change-related stories?" Participants could respond "Yes," "No," or "Don't know." About half (45%) of all participants indicated they had reported a local climate change story in the past year. There were large, significant between group differences ( $F = 13.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ) such that White participants were much more likely to have had this reporting experience than Black, Hispanic or Multiracial

**Table 1.** Racial/ethnic between-group comparisons.

	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> (3, 612)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
To what extent will covering climate change be beneficial or detrimental to society?	White	1.62	.87	1.26	.29	.01
	Black	1.50	1.07			
	"Hispanic"	1.50	1.14			
	"Multiracial"	1.31	.94			
How would you describe the impacts of climate change in your local region?	White	−0.54	.57	8.73	< .001	.04
	Black	−0.47	.64			
	"Hispanic"	−0.77	.62			
	"Multiracial"	−0.67	.71			
How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on local impacts of climate change?	White	3.26	.80	16.15	< .001	.07
	Black	2.61	1.01			
	"Hispanic"	3.07	.94			
	"Multiracial"	3.02	1.03			
How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on local solutions to climate change?	White	3.31	.818	14.04	< .001	.06
	Black	2.70	1.02			
	"Hispanic"	3.14	.92			
	"Multiracial"	3.05	1.10			
Have you covered climate change stories in the past 12 months? (Y/N and DK)	White	.67	.47	13.65	< .001	.06
	Black	.34	.48			
	"Hispanic"	.44	.50			
	"Multiracial"	.43	.50			

Note. All correlations are significant at  $p < .05$ ,  $N = 616$ .

participants (White  $M = 0.67$ ,  $SD = 0.472$ , Black  $M = 0.34$ ,  $SD = 0.475$ , "Hispanic"  $M = 0.44$ ,  $SD = 0.498$ , "Multiracial"  $M = 0.43$ ,  $SD = 0.500$ ).

## Discussion

Overall, the journalists in our sample demonstrated only low to moderate levels of perceived agency in climate reporting—i.e. the ability of climate reporting to benefit society. This finding is consistent with accounts that journalists interests in reporting on climate change tends to center on familiar areas of news coverage, such as political conflicts (Revikin, 2016) extreme weather conditions or during disaster coverage (Boykoff et al., 2018).

Regarding perceived local impacts of climate, none of the journalists in our sample think the impacts of climate change have not yet arrived in their region, and 85.1% said yes climate change is having impacts in their region and 14.9% said they "do not know". Interestingly, 25.3% think those impacts are more or less equally balanced between beneficial and harmful impacts, those who said climate change reporting benefits society one way or another 26%.

Both of these perceptions are strikingly at odd with the results of the most recent USGCRP (2018) which catalogues a range of seriously harmful impacts that are already occurring in every region of the

**Table 2.** Results of Tukey HSD Post-Hoc Tests.

Item	White	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial
To what extent will covering climate change be beneficial or detrimental to society?	1.62 (0.87)	1.50 (1.07)	1.50 (1.14)	1.31 (0.94)
How would you describe the impacts of climate change in your local region?	−0.54 (0.57) <sup>c</sup>	−0.47 (0.67) <sup>c</sup>	−0.77 (0.62) <sup>a, b</sup>	−0.67 (0.71)
How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on local impacts of climate change?	3.26 (.08) <sup>b</sup>	2.61 (.06) <sup>a, c</sup>	3.07 (.07) <sup>b</sup>	3.02 (.12)
How interested are you in covering (or supervising) stories on local solutions to climate change?	3.31 (.08) <sup>b</sup>	2.70 (.06) <sup>a, c</sup>	3.14 (.07) <sup>b</sup>	3.05 (.13)
Have you covered climate change stories in the past 12 months? (Yes/No and Don't know)	.67 (.04) <sup>b, c, d</sup>	.34 (.03) <sup>a</sup>	.44 (.04) <sup>a</sup>	.43 (.06) <sup>a</sup>

Note. The present table displays race/ethnicity means with standard deviation in parentheses. Superscripts designate statistically significant differences between race/ethnicity from post-hoc Tukey HSD tests at  $p < .05$ . <sup>a</sup>White  $n = 142$ , <sup>b</sup>Black  $n = 234$ , <sup>c</sup>Hispanic  $n = 182$ , <sup>d</sup>Multiracial  $n = 58$ ,  $N = 616$ .



**Table 3.** Results of One-Way ANOVA.

Which, if any, of the following local climate change topics are you interested in covering (or supervising)?	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	F-value
Human health (e.g. mosquito-borne disease)	0.84	0.88	0.81	0.85	0.82	1.102
Drought and water shortages***	0.83	0.92 <sup>b</sup>	0.75 <sup>ac</sup>	0.85 <sup>b</sup>	0.82	6.840
Air quality	0.82	0.89 <sup>b</sup>	0.79 <sup>a</sup>	0.82	0.81	2.382
Extreme precipitation and/or flooding***	0.81	0.93 <sup>bc</sup>	0.76 <sup>a</sup>	0.78 <sup>a</sup>	0.79	6.389
Extreme heat events*	0.80	0.87 <sup>b</sup>	0.76 <sup>a</sup>	0.83	0.73	3.078
Economy***	0.79	0.94 <sup>bc</sup>	0.74 <sup>a</sup>	0.73 <sup>a</sup>	0.81	9.327
Energy***	0.75	0.88 <sup>bc</sup>	0.69 <sup>a</sup>	0.72 <sup>a</sup>	0.72	6.270
Local wildlife (i.e. animals & plants)***	0.72	0.88 <sup>bcd</sup>	0.62 <sup>ac</sup>	0.75 <sup>ab</sup>	0.67 <sup>a</sup>	10.387
Hurricanes and storm surge*	0.72	0.64 <sup>c</sup>	0.73	0.78 <sup>a</sup>	0.68	2.760
Infrastructure**	0.71	0.83 <sup>bc</sup>	0.68 <sup>a</sup>	0.68 <sup>a</sup>	0.68	4.022
Ecosystems***	0.71	0.81 <sup>b</sup>	0.59 <sup>ac</sup>	0.78 <sup>b</sup>	0.70	8.830
Transportation*	0.71	0.79 <sup>b</sup>	0.66 <sup>a</sup>	0.72	0.64	2.670
Sea-level rise and coastal flooding**	0.69	0.62 <sup>c</sup>	0.64 <sup>c</sup>	0.78 <sup>ab</sup>	0.76	4.750
Wildfires*	0.65	0.71 <sup>b</sup>	0.57 <sup>a</sup>	0.68	0.68	2.801
Crop and livestock production***	0.62	0.80 <sup>bcd</sup>	0.54 <sup>a</sup>	0.60 <sup>a</sup>	0.53 <sup>a</sup>	9.696
Forests***	0.60	0.73 <sup>b</sup>	0.48 <sup>ac</sup>	0.65 <sup>b</sup>	0.61	8.072
Other (please specify)	0.34	0.47	0.25	0.36	0.55	1.643

Note. The present table displays race/ethnicity means and F-test values. Superscripts designate statistically significant differences between race/ethnicity from post-hoc Tukey HSD tests at  $p < .05$ . <sup>a</sup>White  $n = 142$ , <sup>b</sup>Black  $n = 234$ , <sup>c</sup>Hispanic  $n = 182$ , <sup>d</sup>Multiracial  $n = 58$ ,  $N = 616$ .

nation. These findings suggest a need for more effective outreach to journalists about the pervasiveness and seriousness of climate impacts that are already occurring across the nation.

On the other hand, on average, the journalists in our sample demonstrated a moderate level of interest in reporting local stories about both climate impacts and climate solutions. The local impacts stories they are most interested in reporting pertain to human health, water shortages, air quality, extreme precipitation and flooding, and the economy. Serious impacts of each of these types are in fact occurring in most regions of the country, therefore these interests can become the basis of important reporting that will help Americans better understand the nature of the climate challenges faced by their community. In our subset of journalist a surprisingly large proportion of the respondents in our survey, 45.5%, had actually had the opportunity to report a local climate story during the past year.

Our primary aim here, however, was to investigate any differences between journalists in different racial/ethnic groups. We found no differences with regard to the perceived benefit of climate change reporting to society, but there were significant, and in some cases large, between-group differences on the other measures in our study. In brief, we found Hispanic journalists were most likely and Black journalists were least likely to see climate change as a locally relevant issue in their region. We also found that Hispanic, White and multi-racial journalists were more interested and Black journalists were less interested in reporting on local climate impacts and solutions, and that could ultimately influence the quantity and quality of climate change reporting reaching Black audiences. Lastly, we found that White journalists were much more likely than Hispanic, Black and multi-racials journalists to have actually reported a climate story in the past year. Below, we consider what these differences might mean.

As compared to White journalists, Hispanic journalists were more likely and Black journalists less likely to perceive harmful climate impacts in their respective region. Polling research consistently shows that Hispanics are the segment of the US general population that is most concerned about climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2017), thus mirroring our findings, but in contrast to our findings, polls also generally find Blacks to be more concerned than Whites about climate change (Jones et al., 2014). Although serious climate impacts are already being experienced in every region of the US, the southeastern region (with a high proportion of Black residents) and the southwestern region (with a high proportion of Hispanic residents) have experienced more



severe impacts, which may help explain enhanced perceptions of relevance among our Hispanic survey participants, but runs counter to the lower perceptions of relevance among our Black participants.

That Black journalists are less likely than other journalists to be aware of the harmful impacts of climate change in their region of the country may help to explain why they also have less interest in reporting on climate change stories. It is very important to note, however, that Black Americans (and Hispanic Americans) are in fact more likely than White Americans to be harmed by climate change in a wide range of ways, including their health, their property, and their economic prosperity (Shonkoff et al., 2009). Climate change communication organizations in the government (e.g. NASA, NOAA, EPA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and in civil society (e.g. Climate Central, Climate Reality Project) should consider enhancing their efforts to support climate reporting by Black journalists—as well as journalists in general.

However, it is also important to point out that experience with climate change reporting may not be an individual choice and may be shaped by organizational factors. Prior research found that African American journalists at a metropolitan daily newspaper were primarily assigned to cover “minority issues,” while White reporters covered more general topics like business and government (Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). This gap in experience suggests an underlying need to improve the presence and interests of people of color in environmental and climate reporting and possibly further investigation into how news organizations enable or constrain the reporting practices of non-White journalists.

### **Challenges and limitations**

The majority of White respondents in this analysis belong to RTDNA, and were subsequently more likely to hold news management positions than respondents from other organizations, which manifests in a skewed distribution of position across the sample. Additionally, given the sampling method, all of the participants of this study were members of focused (rather than general) journalism societies and therefore generalization of our findings to all news professionals should be done with caution.

### **Future research**

This analysis was exploratory and descriptive in nature, but the results indicate future examination into the influence of race/ethnicity on climate reporting behaviors is warranted. Our research indicates that, on the whole, news professionals are moderately interested in reporting local climate related stories. Further research on how to support and cultivate such reporting would appear warranted—with special consideration given to how to support Black and Hispanic journalists who are not currently as White journalists to be reporting climate stories.

Developing a deeper understanding of the story topics that most interest journalists of different racial/ethnic groups could be valuable in supporting climate journalism. Likewise, an analysis of barriers that inhibit climate reporting by journalists of different racial/ethnic groups—including individual-, organizational- and societal-level barriers—would be another potentially important way to support climate journalism.

Additionally, more research should be directed towards understanding the discernable gap between the interest and opportunity for Black journalists versus other journalists in reporting on climate change. To quote Propublica reporter Talia Buford:

I shouldn't be the single reporter who focuses on environment, race and intersectionality. It should become something that's ingrained in our coverage regardless of whether our main beat is environmental justice or not ... But we're not there yet. I do think a lot of news organizations are becoming more aware that we need to cover climate change in a different way, and you see the renewed awakening of civil rights coverage that is bleeding into other areas, like the environment. (Jain, 2018)

Lastly, future research may explore relationships of race/ethnicity and managerial positions to the coverage of climate related stories, “Part of the problem is a lack of diversity in newsrooms ...” (Jain, 2018).

## Conclusion

The results of this study are encouraging in the sense that there is potential for increased climate reporting across all groups of journalists surveyed. Given their higher rates of interest yet lower recent experience—or opportunity—to report climate stories, Hispanic journalists in particular would appear to have considerable potential become more active as climate reporters. Similarly, Black journalists, although currently less interested have also has less recent experience—or opportunity—to report climate stories. Recent research with TV weathercasters (Perkins et al., 2020) found that while personal interest in climate change was strongly associated with self-reported rates of on-air climate reporting, the strongest predictor was participation in Climate Matters, a localized climate reporting resource program that provides weathercasters with materials in English and Spanish. An extension of the Climate Matters program—called Climate Matters in the Newsroom—has now been developed to support non-weather journalists, which provides journalists with a set of localized climate reporting resources that were not available at the time of our survey. These reporting resources may help convert some of the climate reporting potential identified in our survey into enhanced rates of climate reporting by journalists of all racial/ethnic groups.

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