

Beyond Debate: Answers to 50 Misconceptions on Climate Change

Preface

Whether we believe the climate is changing, or that humans are the cause, we can all at least agree that the climate is important—and critically so, allowing sun for our crops, rain for our streams, and so on. Because the climate is so important, almost everyone seems to have something to say about climate change, global warming, or whatever we want to call it—albeit *some* more than others! At times, such conversations can even get heated (no pun intended!). Isn't that weird?! The climate can literally change the “climate” of a room, perhaps disrupting a family dinner or a picnic at the park. Uncle Bob says the climate *always* changes. Aunt Jane points to government conspiracy. And your cousin calls them both crazy. Meanwhile, the children roll their eyes, turning instead to their iPhones.

In my career studying environmental science and public health, I've found it interesting to hear people's various perspectives on global warming and whether (or why) they believe the climate is changing. I've never been one to pursue arguments on the topic, but have instead found it more valuable to listen and hear why people feel the way they do. What kinds of factors or information cause people to think climate change is either a major threat or a total hoax? And of course, there are many people in between. As I write this preface, my local area is coming out of a record-breaking heatwave. Does this cause people to think of “climate change” or “human activity?” I'd like to know. I find these to be important questions to ask and conversations to have, which can help to positively move the dialogue forward.

While research takes most of my time, I'm a bit of a non-traditional scientist in that I've made it a point to not just study science, but to communicate that science to the public. All too often, scientists dedicate their careers to understanding and advancing an area of study, while their voices get channeled only through technical analyses and reports that the public never reads. How well the rest of the world comes to understand a given matter is therefore left at the mercy of journalists and the media to translate. This somewhat roundabout path from scientists to the media and then to the public is reminiscent of the game “telephone,” in which a message gets whispered through a chain of people only to become distorted by the time it reaches the last person. I believe a similar dynamic has played out with climate change, albeit with added layers of complexity that we'll discuss in later pages. As a result, the climate conversation can at times resemble a jumbled mess, in which no one seems to get anywhere. It's no wonder people shy away from the discussion!

In this book, I've done my best to pool together 50 of the top misconceptions concerning climate change. The chosen topics reflect those that I've most frequently encountered in my personal conversations with people, online research, books, and polling of students and friends. I even went door-to-door to speak with neighbors! By assembling these claims and questions, and breaking them down on-by-one scientifically and in a simple, thorough, and compelling fashion, I hope to provide valuable insights about this incredibly important issue which has become *the* issue of our time. In addition to discussing the science and

impacts of global warming, I've also highlighted a number of solutions that can help to curb greenhouse gas emissions and shift the world onto a more sustainable path.

While it may be best to read these pages in the order of their chapters, the book was designed so that this is not a necessity. I've done my best to let each chapter stand alone. Where prior chapters are helpful to understanding later chapters, I've been diligent to refer you to the exact chapter numbers where you can find supporting information. If, however, you're relatively unfamiliar with global warming or climate science, I recommend at least beginning with the introductory Climate Change 101 section. This will give you the foundation necessary to make the most out of the remaining chapters. Once you've got the basics, flip through the book in the order you prefer, letting your interest guide you!

Enjoy *Beyond Debate*. And importantly, share what you come to discover. It is only through sharing and conversing with our family, friends, and neighbors that we can expect to dispel the misconceptions around climate change and ultimately elevate the climate conversation.

— Shahir Masri
Newport Beach, CA