

## Climate Change and Citizen Involvement

Rob Sayre  
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At an October meeting in South Korea, the working group of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a revised report on the Paris Climate Agreement. It makes new forecasts, based upon new data assuming average world temperature rises 1.5 degrees C. compared to 2.0 degrees.

In my earlier article on this blog, "Climate Change: Rethinking the Debate," I argued that only using one metric was insufficient and proposed others. This article considers the implications of the new IPCC proposals to help people understand them

and offer some new thoughts and solutions. It is meant to complement Dr. J. Andrew Combs' article last week on this site.



*Rob Sayre*

### Probability vs. prediction

Conveying large and complex concepts and data that include probabilities can paralyze the general public. People confuse these with predictions like the weather forecasts they use everyday to plan their commutes to work and daily life. Probabilities with degrees of confidence do not mobilize people to act. Why is this?

Two cognitive biases come into play for both ardent believers in climate change and those who think it is a hoax.

The first is anchoring, the tendency to rely too heavily, or "anchor," on one trait or piece of information when making decisions (usually the first piece of information acquired on that subject). We tend to incorporate how we see an issue in its most simple explanation. This is as true for "deniers" as for "believers." These labels by themselves say a lot about the veracity of this bias.

Those who doubt humankind's role in climate change also show another bias: the ambiguity effect, the tendency to avoid options for which missing information makes the probability seem unknown. Very simply, complex probabilities that form the basis for assessing climate change seem fantastic and unrealistic for many.

Everyone is comfortable with predictions in weather, economics and elections to some degree. We accept that, within a margin of error, we are able to order our lives and make decisions. Probabilities, especially when they involve large sets of data, the climate, world GDP, exchange rates, and elections set for a time in the future, can be easily discounted.

### Insurance companies in forefront of costing probability of climate change

Climate change may be gradual, but the effects are volatile, meaning a company could become exposed to a large, unexpected hit if it doesn't understand the changing risks, says Junaid Seria, head of catastrophe-model research and development and governance at Paris-based reinsurer Scor SE (reinsurers are insurance companies who insure other insurance companies and act as a kind of hedge or backstop).

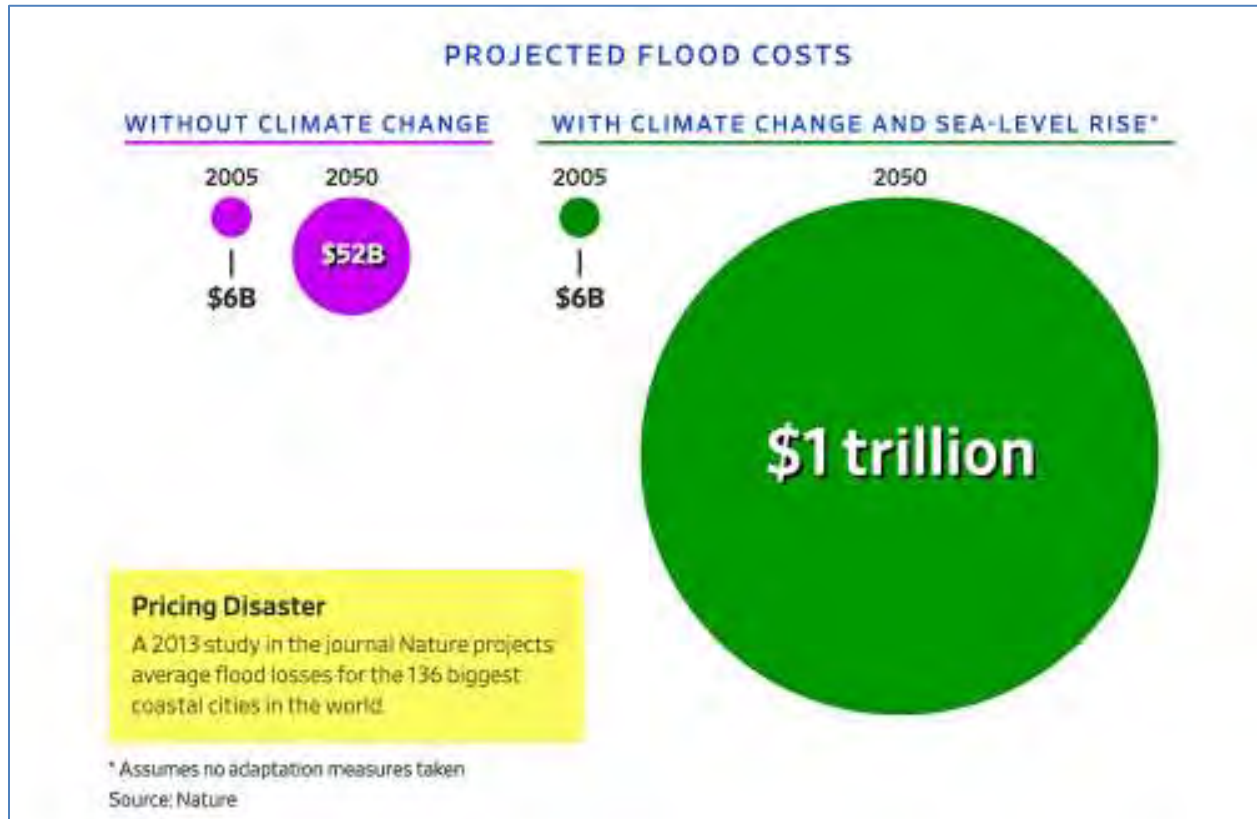
"We're in the camp that believes you can have an increased potential for an outsized loss in a single year," he says. "There's a cost for inaction." The graphic below illustrates how the insurance industry views the risk of floods with and without climate change. They are pricing in the probability that climate change is happening regardless of the exact impact of humanity upon it. Left alone, without any intervention from government, the cost of climate change will be calculated into their pricing.

### How the U.S. military views climate change probability

The U.S. military, the Navy in particular, must be able to respond regardless of the effects of a higher sea and volatile climate. It is their mission to be able to respond and outgoing Defense Secretary James Mattis is on record regarding his belief in the validity of climate change. In fact, the Pentagon has a \$2 billion budget to safeguard its facilities against its effects. They view climate change as a valid scenario that must be planned for.

## What do city planners and leaders think?

Cities around the world are already making significant changes to respond to rising sea levels and increased rainfall and runoff due to more paved surfaces and old infrastructure (click on these video links to learn more how New York City, Tokyo and London are responding). These cities and Miami are already spending billions of dollars and planning on more to respond to rising sea levels and stronger storms. These are levelheaded engineers tasked with coming up with solutions for millions of citizens they are charged with serving. They already are planning to provide solutions for the effects of climate change. While there may not be unanimous agreement on how much of a role humankind and carbon emissions play, there seems to be no doubt the overall effects are real and they are preparing for it.



## People are living in more dangerous areas

Probabilities do not help the average person make decisions that might make an impact on the climate and their own lives. Metrics brought down to their level can make a difference. Fires, brought on by drought, and flooding due to larger and slower moving hurricanes, seem to be the new norm. The federal government may have to step in and induce people to live in safer areas, perhaps with incentives to move. The insurance industry will begin factoring in the costs of more severe storms.

The recent wildfires in California and the West highlight the impact of the Wildlife Urban Interface. Citizens are moving farther into "natural" areas to take advantage of the privacy, natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and affordable living. Developers are building neighborhoods to accommodate the influx. As a result, fire departments are fighting fires along the Wildland-Urban Interface, defined as areas where homes are built near or among lands prone to wildland fire. When governmental agencies allow zoning that places more and more developments within this interface, catastrophic fires are the result. The same is true along the East Coast, recently battered by hurricanes and flooding. These unfortunately may cause policymakers and the public to act.

## Corn in Canada

Subtle changes in temperatures are already making corn a viable crop in Canada. "Temperatures around La Crete (Alberta) are 3.6 degrees F. warmer on average annually than in 1950, Canadian federal climate records show, and the growing season is nearly two weeks longer."

## We're asking too much of scientists

The world's policymakers asked climate scientists to come up with proposals for limiting catastrophic global warming, but with a hitch: recommendations should not curtail economic growth or GDP. In seeking to accommodate these two, rather incompatible goals, scientists came up with new, lower goals and a comparison between the two goals (see graphic below).

## One metric is not enough

Worldwide temperatures are too broad a metric to use as a decision-making tool. This one metric is being used to guide nations worldwide to make significant policy decisions and monetary investments. The scope is too large and, while not inaccurate, it is less relevant and helpful in making decisions. Does anyone use the average temperature of their country to determine their current driving conditions? Of course not. We use more relevant and local predictive tools. And so should it be with climate change.



It is not merely the use of just one metric, nor that our policymakers are asking scientists to do the impossible, but we have not given people a broad religious or philosophical reason to act. Both Reverend and Mrs. Moon (Father and Mother Moon) have spoken to these issues, though they use the term "pollution":

*Mother Moon on the environment and ICUS:*

"This planet is God's. It belongs to God. Humankind must also belong to God. You have invented many things [speaking of scientists] in a variety of fields so that we can enjoy abundance in the twenty-first century. However, the by-products of these inventions endanger the lives of human beings and endanger the lives of all living things in the cosmos. If there is no future for the planet, there is no future for humankind.

"In many ways scientific civilization caused much pollution. This is the reason I am reviving ICUS [International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences]. We have to stop the threats that endanger human life and the survival of the planet. In that sense, I know that you love Heaven more than anyone else does and that you have worked with dedication in your areas of research. I am reviving ICUS because your efforts are greatly needed to create one human family centered on God, the kingdom of heaven on earth, so humankind, all 7.4 billion people, can enjoy healthy lives of freedom, unification and happiness." (2017)

*Father Moon on pollution*

"The population problem is one of two very serious questions. The other is pollution. To me, the problem is how to see these questions in a new light. The worst aspect of pollution is in the air; exhaust fumes from cars, factories and such things. In the future, there will be a limit upon anything that produces exhaust, even cooking. Any kind of extra smoke or gas exhaust will not be tolerated." (1983)

## People need to participate

The debate has largely been about providing evidence and asking international policymakers to bring about large, leading changes. Average citizens are not asked to participate nor is any real

way provided for them to understand how to do so. Perhaps the campaign to stop littering and to recycle, that began from efforts during World War II to save and recycle every kind of material, is a place to begin. This expanded into a non-war setting in the 1960s and has grown ever since. Entire industries have arisen around this effort and it is something every citizen and community embraces to one extent or another. We need something similar now, allowing the average person to understand and participate.

## **The unique contributions of interfaith organizations**

The Civil Rights movement that also sprang up after World War II in the U.S. provides a useful way to think about citizen involvement. While prominent leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others provided the leadership, hundreds of thousands of churches played a role in organizing and funding activities on a local level. This kind of energy and vision is necessary and the Unification Movement could play a role in this. The Universal Peace Federation and the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) are working on a global basis. And the American Clergy Leadership Conference and Women's Federation for World Peace have unique memberships and perhaps perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change is a very real and present danger and humankind's increased use of carbon-based fuel and its emissions are a big factor in climate change. How much, I am not sure. But asking policymakers to enact big changes in policy based upon probabilities alone, which will likely have broad-ranging economic impacts and uncertainties, is more than they can do without broader support from the voting public.

We already are paying for mitigating the costs of climate change and will continue to do so via insurance, where the costs are passed on to all of us since so much of the U.S. population concentrates in coastal cities. The change from a fossil fuel-based economy to a sustainable one, while at the same time providing the poorest economies with the benefits of reliable electric power, could be as disruptive as Amazon.com has been to the retail business in the U.S. The role of UTS and the Unification Movement remains to be defined in this arena -- but perhaps this is a unique moment in history to do so.

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*Rob Sayre met the Unification movement in 1973, was blessed in the 1982 Madison Square Garden Blessing of 2,075 couples, and has three children and five grandchildren. He helped start Paragon House Publishers as its first CFO and then worked at Rodale Press, publishers of Men's Health and Prevention magazines, as business manager for its \$260 million book publishing division. He and his wife, Sally West Sayre, are one of the founding couples of the Shehaqua Ministries in Pennsylvania, an independent ministry still thriving after 24 years.*