

# U.S. National Survey: Terminology for Approaches for Directly Influencing Climate

Analysis commissioned by SilverLining and conducted by Patrick Ruffini & Eleanor O'Neil, Echelon Insights

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The terms used to describe approaches to directly influence the Earth's climate to reduce global warming drive understanding of the topic. Since the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) 2015 report on the topic, there has been variable use of the terms 'geoengineering,' 'climate intervention,' and other terms to refer to approaches for rapidly and intentionally reducing warming in climate. The older term, 'geoengineering,' has historically been widely used in literature and media, primarily by subject matter experts and enthusiasts. 'Climate intervention' was introduced in 2015 by the NAS study as a potentially more accurate and accessible designation, and its use has been concentrated in statements by U.S. agencies, policymakers, certain non-profits, and some recent literature and media. To understand how people respond to these terms, SilverLining commissioned a nationally representative survey led by survey research experts Patrick Ruffini and Eleanor O'Neil at Echelon Insights.

## Key Findings

- **35%** of respondents had heard a lot or some about 'climate intervention,' whereas only 19% of respondents had heard of 'geoengineering'—indicating that these terms may not have penetrated beyond expert audiences.
- **57%** of respondents, when given a list of possible definitions for each term, can correctly identify that 'climate intervention' is about efforts to combat climate change, versus 22% who are able to do this for 'geoengineering.'
- **45%** respond that 'climate intervention' sounds harder to understand, compared to 10% who respond that 'geoengineering' does.
- **32%** say 'climate intervention' sounds safer, compared to 11% who say 'geoengineering' does.

## Implications

'Climate intervention' may be a preferable term for approaches to directly reducing Earth's warming because of better comprehension, reduced confusion and more neutral perceptions of safety.

- Respondents are **more familiar** with the term 'climate intervention,' though familiarity with both terms is low.
- Respondents are **better able to comprehend** what 'climate intervention' refers to.
- By a **4-to-1 ratio**, respondents were also more likely to say 'geoengineering' sounds **harder to understand**.
- By a **3-to-1 ratio**, respondents also felt that of the two terms 'climate intervention' "**sounds safer**" than 'geoengineering.'

## Methodology

- Survey questions were fielded in Echelon Insights' Verified Voter Omnibus, an online survey of 1,006 registered voters in the likely electorate conducted from October 16-22, 2020, using a voter file-matched sample weighted to known characteristics (including gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, region)
- Margin sampling of error: +/- 4.3 percentage points
- For questions measuring familiarity, understanding, and reactions to a term, the sample was split. Margin of error for group asked about climate intervention (Form A, n=495): +/- 6.2 pp; margin of error for group asked about geoengineering (Form B, n=511): +/- 5.9 pp