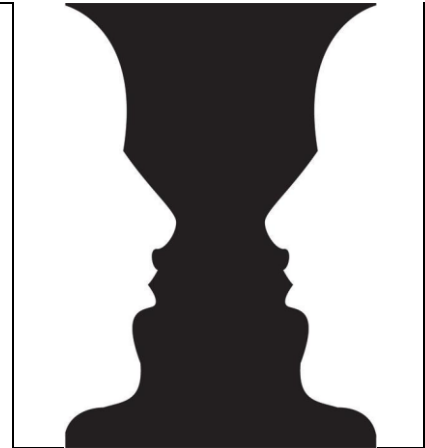

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The social and temporal construction of climate change. A comparative study of *The Guardian* and *Washington Times* newspapers

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Abstract

This study examines how media outlets with opposing political orientations construct different temporal narratives around climate change. Through a comparative content analysis of The Guardian and Washington Times' online platforms, I analyze how these newspapers use time as a rhetorical device to shape the public understanding of climate change. The analysis reveals distinct temporal frameworks: The Guardian emphasizes urgent future threats and immediate action, while Washington Times employs past-oriented narratives to minimize climate concerns. These contrasting temporal constructions reflect broader ideological divisions and demonstrate how media outlets use time work to support their political perspectives on climate change. The findings contribute to our understanding of how temporal framing in media discourse influences public perception of environmental issues.

Keywords

Climate change; Temporal work; Argumentative temporal work; Social construction of reality; Utopia; Dystopia; Retrotopia;

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Introduction

Climate change represents a sociological phenomenon where temporal dimensions play an important role in shaping public understanding and response. This study examines how two ideologically opposed newspapers - *The Guardian*, a British left-wing publication, and *Washington Times*, an American right-wing outlet - construct different temporal narratives around climate change. These publications are influential platforms where competing interpretations of climate change are produced and disseminated, shaping public discourse and policy responses.

The analysis centers on what Flaherty (2003) terms “time work”, as the strategic manipulation of temporal experience and on what Ciocănel et al. (2021) defines as “argumentative time work” as the use of such temporal manipulation in social discourse. The main point of focus is how media outlets rely on different temporal frameworks to support their ideological positions. *The Guardian* and *Washington Times* provide rich examples of how temporal framing can be used to either amplify or minimize the perceived urgency of climate change. Rather than treating time as a simple linear progression, this research reveals how these publications weave together past, present, and future to construct their narratives.

This comparative analysis helps us understand not just how climate change is discussed, but how temporal frameworks serve as powerful tools in the social construction of environmental issues. By examining these contrasting approaches to time work, we can better grasp how media discourse influences public perception and policy responses to climate change.

Climate change is a topic that is not limited to one country or group of people but affects the whole planet, requiring the cooperation of all or at least most countries to mitigate the harmful effects of human activity on the environment. Climate change has a strong political character and thus gives rise to controversial opinions. Discourses used to describe this phenomenon are varying widely depending on the political leanings of the source.

In this paper I will analyze the various discourses found within left-wing and right-wing publications and describe the way in which they present various aspects of climate change. I will point out their differences and similarities and discuss the way in which the two narratives form two different perceptions of reality and how these constructs can be perceived through a sociological perspective.

Conceptual background

The theoretical framework of this study draws on several concepts that help us understand how media outlets construct temporal narratives around climate change. The terms “climate change” and “climate crisis” are used interchangeably throughout this analysis, though their emotional resonance differs. While “climate crisis” suggests greater urgency and alarm, both terms describe the fundamental phenomenon of long-term alterations in global weather patterns resulting from warming temperatures. The choice between these

terms itself reflects different temporal orientations toward environmental change, with “crisis” emphasizing immediate threats and “change” suggesting a more gradual process.

Central to this analysis is Flaherty’s (2003) concept of *time work*, which examines how individuals and institutions actively shape temporal experiences and understanding. In media coverage of climate change, time work manifests in how newspapers frame relationships between past events, present conditions, and future predictions. Publications can compress or expand time scales, emphasize specific temporal horizons, and create different senses of urgency or delay through their narrative choices. These choices reflect and reinforce different political orientations toward environmental change.

The concept of *argumentative time work* (Ciocănel et al., 2021) complements Flaherty’s (2003) previously explained concept, referring to the way in which shared temporal experiences and expectations are used in order to create a shared perception of reality with the purpose of legitimizing a point of view.

In addition, the concept of boundary work (Rughinis & Flaherty 2022) is also essential to this paper as it refers to the way groups of individuals create imaginary boundaries between themselves, the information and perspectives from outside the group being perceived as biased. In this way the perception of reality becomes split between the narrative of the in-group and that of the out-group, the latter being presented as untrustworthy.

Bauman’s (2017) concepts of utopia and retrotopia provide additional analytical tools for understanding how different political perspectives approach time. In this analysis, utopia does not represent an idealized future but rather an uncertain yet potentially better alternative to current trajectories. It reflects how forward-looking climate narratives present possible futures that, while perhaps unattainable, serve to guide present actions. Conversely, retrotopia represents a backward-looking orientation that seeks solutions in an idealized past. While not necessarily advocating a return to past conditions, retrotopic narratives use selective historical examples as models for addressing current challenges.

These temporal orientations connect closely with Zerubavel’s (2015) concept of inattentive blindness, our tendency to overlook certain perspectives when focusing intensely on others. This selective attention shapes how media outlets construct both utopian and retrotopic narratives, choosing which aspects of past or future to emphasize or ignore. In climate change coverage, this manifests in how publications selectively highlight or downplay different temporal aspects of environmental change to support their ideological positions. Together, these concepts help us understand how media outlets use temporal framing to shape public understanding of climate change and influence policy responses.

Literature review

The subject of climate change is closely related to the study of sociology, as human action has an impact on the environment and the environment in turn comes to influence human activity. According to the text *Sociology and the Climate Crisis* (Klinenberg, 2020) climate change provides a much clearer perspective on issues of social inequality, with natural

disasters having a much greater impact on disadvantaged groups. Social class, gender, infrastructure elements and social policies have a major influence in determining the chances of survival in the event of a natural disaster and the possibilities of managing the damage caused by it. At the same time, climate change also has a major influence on migration strategies, determining the locations accessible to migration strategies, return possibilities and forced relocation needs.

In their paper, *Social psychology of making poverty history: Motivating anti-poverty action in Australia*, Thomas et al. (2010) offer recommendations for influencing social groups in order to promote action to reduce poverty. They highlight the significance of how people associate their social identity with the groups they belong to, as well as how people's motivation is influenced by their perception of how difficult a task is. According to these authors, participants will believe that there is no sense in becoming involved if the goal appears tough to accomplish; conversely, if the goal appears easy to accomplish, they will feel that there is no point in getting involved because everything will work out anyhow. This showcases the importance of managing the levels of expressed urgency within a discourse.

The concept of time work (Flaherty 2003) is also essential for this paper as its main purpose is to showcase strategies of manipulating temporal experience through news articles, interweaving both, temporal manipulation and the aforementioned management of urgency. I also use the idea of future projection from the text *Crystal balls and calendars: A structural analysis of projected futures* (Jones et al. 2019), being interested in the structure of discourse about the future of climate change.

Zerubavel (2015) introduces the concept of inattentive blindness which dovetails nicely with Bauman's (2017) concepts of retrotopia and utopia. Zerubavel's (2015) concept refers to the way in which some perspectives may be ignored not due to inattention but as a result of increased focus on a particular idea, thus ending up losing sight of alternative solutions to the problem.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how two ideologically opposed newspapers construct temporal narratives around climate change. *The Guardian* and *Washington Times* were selected as research sites based on several criteria. First, they represent distinct political orientations - *The Guardian's* center-left perspective and *Washington Times'* conservative stance - allowing examination of how political ideology influences temporal framing of climate issues. Second, both are established publications with substantial online presence and influence in their respective markets. Third, their contrasting national contexts (UK and US) enable insights into how different political and cultural environments shape climate change coverage.

The analysis focused on online content from both publications during 2022, paying attention to how temporal elements were deployed in climate change coverage. For *The Guardian*, articles were selected from their dedicated "Climate Crisis" section, focusing on the most recent publications at the time of data collection. This yielded six articles for in-

depth analysis. For *Washington Times*, which lacks a dedicated climate section, articles were identified through keyword searches (“climate change,” “global warming,” “climate crisis”) on their website, resulting in five relevant articles for analysis.

The methodological approach evolved during the research process. Initial expectations of symmetrical comparison between the publications proved unrealistic due to fundamental differences in how they position climate change coverage. This asymmetry itself became an important analytical finding, revealing how editorial choices about content organization reflect and reinforce different temporal orientations toward climate change.

The content analysis proceeded through several iterative stages. In the first phase, articles were read closely to identify explicit temporal references and framing devices. The second phase involved developing preliminary thematic categories based on patterns in temporal construction. These initial themes were then refined through repeated analysis, resulting in final analytical categories including “horizons of urgency,” “failed predictions,” “time wasted”, and “damage already visible.”

Each article was coded for these themes, with particular attention to:

- Explicit temporal markers (dates, deadlines, predictions);
- Implicit temporal framing (urgency vs. delay, immediate vs. distant threats);
- Relationships constructed between past, present, and future;
- Use of temporal examples to support ideological positions;
- Editorial choices affecting temporal presentation (placement, categorization, emphasis).

This iterative coding process revealed how temporal construction operates at multiple levels - from explicit content to structural choices about article organization and placement. The analysis maintained sensitivity to both manifest content and latent meanings, examining not only what each publication says about time and climate change, but how temporal frameworks are constructed through editorial and organizational choices.

These publications’ asymmetrical approach to climate change, which was evident in everything from article volume to categorization, offered both methodological difficulties and opportunities for analysis. Instead of being viewed as a drawback, this asymmetry turned into a key finding that sheds light on the ways in which media outlets employ organizational and structural decisions as a means of temporal framing.

Research results

This study led me to note the differences in the discourses of the two publications under investigation. According to my analysis, there is a social bifurcation of reality between the discourse that affirms the presence of the climate catastrophe and the discourse that disputes its relevance or existence (Rughiniș & Flaherty, 2022).

There are strong elements of time work (Flaherty, 2003) in *The Guardian*, with a very strong emphasis on the idea of urgency and the need to act quickly to prevent a dystopian

future. *Washington Times* also has elements of time manipulation but these are combined with other elements designed to discredit the importance of the climate crisis.

While *Washington Times* encourages passivity and makes an effort to reject opposing ideas, *The Guardian* emphasizes the necessity for action through temporal aspects. The stark contrast between the two viewpoints emphasizes how relevant political orientation is when formulating discourse. Even while the occurrence of climate change is something that, in theory, cannot be denied any more, it is noted that the political environment leads to the bifurcation of socially constructed reality (Rughiniş & Flaherty, 2022) making cooperation impossible regardless of the gravity of the situation.

The Guardian

The Guardian is a politically left-leaning British publication and so its articles are representative of the discourse that accepts climate change as a real phenomenon and proposes changes to mitigate its negative effects. It is important to note that *The Guardian* has a special news section entitled “Climate crisis” showing that from *The Guardian*’s perspective, climate change is a topic that deserves its own news section.

Drawing on articles published in Climate Crisis in 2022, I will summarize the main elements of the discursively constructed world in *The Guardian* newspaper. The publication under study presents a left-wing political discourse, acknowledging the threat of the climate crisis and proposing the introduction of new reforms or changes to existing ones.

Klinenberg et al. (2020) use the expression “climate crisis” as they feel that “climate change” is no longer an adequate phrase for conveying the gravity of the situation. This notion appears to be reflected in *The Guardian*’s discussion, which refers to the occurrence as a “crisis”, revealing the urgency of the topic.

In order to better understand the factors that contribute to the temporal construction of climate change from the publication’s point of view, I have selected six pieces from 2022. In contrast to *Washington Times*, which is focused on the past, I expected to encounter discourses that are more future-oriented. Even though my expectations were met, I can argue that they were not fully realized as the articles mostly focused on the future while incorporating present-related parts. The future is not just the primary focus; it is also entwined with the present and, on occasion, the past.

Horizons of urgency, the idea that we are getting closer and have less time left, and the necessity of taking immediate action to prevent climate change calamities are major themes in the articles under study. The past is presented as a failure, with people who could have made big changes failing to act and opportunities to stop tragedies in the present being lost.

Table 1: Horizons of urgency (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>Wildfires likely to increase by a third by 2050 [...]</i>	Wildfires likely to increase by a third by 2050, warns UN - Weston, P. (2022)
<i>Wildfires that have devastated California, Australia and Siberia will become 50% more common by the end of the century, according to a new report that warns of uncontrollable blazes ravaging previously unaffected parts of the planet.</i>	Wildfires likely to increase by a third by 2050, warns UN - Weston, P. (2022)
<i>As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma'asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)
<i>Pacific Island countries and territories are the least responsible for global warming and biodiversity loss yet they are facing the harshest consequences that will continue to worsen in years to come. Their future is uncertain if the world fails to pay attention to the report's warnings.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma'asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)
<i>Parties and candidates should also "explain to the public how in the next term of federal parliament you plan to get national emissions plummeting by rapidly scaling up readily available renewable energy and building an economy that is free from fossil fuels".</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)
<i>It's time to show leadership and step up to the most critical issue not just of our time, but all time. We have everything to lose, the time for action is now.</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)
<i>The Australian Medical Association said last week the devastating floods in Queensland and NSW "added urgency for more to be done to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change".</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)
<i>Organisation urges all political parties to outline concrete steps on how to prepare for inevitable climate-fuelled disasters.</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)
<i>The Climate Council called on all federal political parties and candidates to outline concrete steps to prepare and equip emergency services and communities for inevitable climate-fuelled disasters.</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)

From the quotes above, one can see a temporal construction of a dystopian future that must be avoided. The passage of time serves as a warning that the effects of climate change will soon become apparent and that things will only become worse. This viewpoint is intriguing because, although Zygmunt Bauman (2017) portrays the future search for answers as utopian, the situation that is shown here appears to be more of a dystopia—or at the very least, a dystopia brought on by a failure to act quickly to address climate change. In this context, “utopia” refers exclusively to a better future than what would exist if we do nothing. However, there is also an idealistic viewpoint that aims to eradicate or at least lessen the harmful impacts of climate change; this is not a solution to all of the world's issues, but rather to a particular one. The discussion centers on minimizing possible harm in order to attain the optimal result.

In order to convey the idea of protracted inaction, I also observed the usage of the past to demonstrate that the climate change issue is not merely a new occurrence but rather a long-standing one. As previously said, the focus is on the concept of an old, persistent issue that has been overlooked or concealed for a long time but is now becoming apparent or unavoidable.

I also looked at how the future is described in the articles reviewed, using the text by Jones et al. (2019) we looked at how detailed the descriptions are and how far into the future the scenario described is. In the text *Crystal balls and calendars: A structural analysis of projected futures* (Jones et al., 2019) they talk about how people imagine the future

The horizons of urgency are primarily characterized by the idea of time pressure. Approximations of deadlines are given that predict the worsening of current disasters “by the end of the century” or “by 2050” (Weston, 2022). Time is presented as a precious resource that is running out, somewhat akin to an exhaustible natural resource.

It is interesting to note that as in Bauman's (2017) text, the future is presented as uncertain but only if immediate action is not taken (Howden & Ma'asi-Kaisamy, 2022). The horizon of urgency arises from the image that our time is running out and we must act now but also from the promise of a more certain future. This is where the Utopia described by Bauman (2017) comes in, just as the past is idealized in the retrotopic perspective, the future in this case is compared to a much worse scenario and the preventative actions promoted by the publication cling to the promise of a better future, not as bad as the dystopian alternative of inaction.

One contradictory thing, however, is that while the promise of an alternative, better future is offered, there are elements of inevitability in the discourse. The utopian promise of a safer future is contradicted by the description of an inevitable dystopia. The promised future is not a utopic future; rather, it is a better future that requires effort now. The promised future as a result of action is merely the improvement of one element. Future natural disasters will still occur, so we must change the way we live our lives to prepare for them while also preventing things from getting worse.

Table 2: We move to slow (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>I was once the only passenger on a four-hour “ghost flight” across Europe. I loved it - the exclusivity, the speed, even the meals. But that was 45 years ago, when flying was quite rare and seemed glamorous. The idea that air travel might one day threaten future generations seemed very far-fetched.</i>	Until airlines tackle the scourge of ‘ghost flights’, Britain will never reach net zero - Vidal, J. (2022)
<i>Travel is now a global commodity, and aviation is the world’s fastest growing major source of climate breakdown emissions. Flying empty or near-empty planes around just to hold on to landing slots at airports now seems close to “ecocide” - an act of deliberate destruction of the environment. A staggering 15,000 ghost flights flew from UK airports between March 2020 and September 2021.</i>	Until airlines tackle the scourge of ‘ghost flights’, Britain will never reach net zero - Vidal, J. (2022)
<i>Pacific Islands nations have been leading the call for emission-reduction action and climate adaptation for decades.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma’asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)
<i>The Climate Council said some politicians claimed the latest flooding disaster was something no one could have predicted. But “scientists have been warning us for decades that climate change will worsen all extreme weather in Australia.</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating’s role in ‘megafloods’ - Hurst, D. (2022)

Another main theme in *The Guardian’s* discourse is that of slow movement. The core idea is that, although we are aware of how harmful our actions are to the environment, we are moving too slowly and failing to take action in time to stop them. As with “ghost flying”, which was practiced 45 years ago and continues to be practiced today, contributing to some of the fastest rises in ecologically hazardous emissions, we end up absorbing those components into our daily lives through our inaction or gradual action (Vidal, 2022).

The idea of “we were warned” is blended with the slow action concept. The issue is not only that we haven’t done anything to stop climate change, but that we knew what we were doing was bad but still didn’t do anything about it. The dystopian scenario of catastrophic climate change appears to be a threat for the far future. We did nothing despite being warned and called to action “decades” ago (Howden 2022, Hurst 2022).

Table 3: The damage is already visible (Source: Author’s analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>In the past decade the two most intense cyclones recorded to date in the southern hemisphere ripped through the Pacific. Tropical Cyclone Pam, the second worst, devastated Vanuatu in 2015 while in 2016 Tropical Cyclone Winston, the worst, ravaged Fiji. Both not only caused extreme environmental damage but economic damage worth 64% and 20% of the respective nations’ GDP.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma’asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)
<i>The report shows climate change is already pushing some human systems and ecosystems beyond their tolerance and adaptation limits. It paints a stark picture; that climate change is adversely impacting every region in the world.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma’asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)

Damage is already showing up as a result of our lack of initiative in mitigating climate change. This subject is closely related to the one about slow action, but it differs in that it emphasizes warnings rather than the consequences of ignoring them. As a result, *The Guardian’s* discourse gives us points of reference for the dystopian future that would arise from inaction. It is also linked to the horizons of urgency and contributes to the formation of the dystopian future image by using the present as a point of reference. Our inaction has caused the natural calamities we currently confront, and they will only grow worse.

Table 4: The promise of dystopia (Source: Author’s analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>Pacific Island countries and territories are the least responsible for global warming and biodiversity loss yet they are facing the harshest consequences that will continue to worsen in years to come.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma’asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)
<i>Future extreme events and other changes in climate aren’t just devastating the Pacific’s environment, causing rising seas levels, more intense storms and deadly cyclones. They will also have widespread implications for key sectors including food, infrastructure, water and sanitation, marine ecosystems, disaster management, and health and wellbeing.</i>	As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste - Howden, M. and Ma’asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022)

The Guardian paints a picture of a bleak future in which the least guilty suffer for the inaction of the guilty. Once again, I return to the dystopian theme only this time it is no longer simply a warning or examples of our failures to heed past warnings but is combined with disasters already in the present and becomes a promise of a disastrous future. If the horizons of urgency urge us to act to avoid a catastrophic scenario, the promise of dystopia is presented as a certainty for which we must prepare.

Table 5: Irresponsibility of large firms (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>The research, published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, examined the records of ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and BP, which together are responsible for more than 10% of global carbon emissions since 1965. The researchers analysed data over the 12 years up to 2020 and concluded the company claims do not align with their actions, which include increasing rather than decreasing exploration.</i>	Oil firms' climate claims are greenwashing, study concludes - Carrington, D. (2022)
<i>The Morrison government last year bowed to growing international and domestic pressure to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, but it refused to lift its 2030 target from the Abbott-era level of a 26% to 28% cut on 2005 levels.</i>	Climate Council says too many leaders are silent on global heating's role in 'megafloods' - Hurst, D. (2022)
<i>Travel is now a global commodity, and aviation is the world's fastest growing major source of climate breakdown emissions. Flying empty or near-empty planes around just to hold on to landing slots at airports now seems close to "ecocide" - an act of deliberate destruction of the environment. A staggering 15,000 ghost flights flew from UK airports between March 2020 and September 2021.</i>	Until airlines tackle the scourge of 'ghost flights', Britain will never reach net zero - Vidal, J. (2022)

Another major problem is the governments' and big businesses' lack of responsibility, which has a big impact on social policies. More nations must be involved, and new socioeconomic regulations must be proposed, in order to take action to lessen environmental harm. Since the past and present both influence the future, politicians' and large companies' acts or inaction are criticized. This highlights how important it is for both the general public and large organizations to get involved.

Table 6: Intergenerational conflicts (Source: Author’s analysis)

Quote	Source
<p><i>The older generation won’t be around to feel the worsening effects of climate change, yet they are the ones putting a halt to our plans, just to argue over whose land it is,” says Elijah Yapuri from Banumo village and a member of the association.</i></p>	<p>‘A strange phenomenon’: new island in Papua New Guinea prompts territorial dispute - Jorari, L. (2022)</p>
<p><i>Our generation will feel the full brunt of climate change and are already seeing it with our corals dying, villages going under and so we are pushing to continue efforts to protect these resources for future. But they don’t see it that way.</i></p>	<p>‘A strange phenomenon’: new island in Papua New Guinea prompts territorial dispute - Jorari, L. (2022)</p>

Finally, generational conflict is another theme that I encountered and that appears in both of the discourses that were examined. This theme is focused on the belief that future generations would bear the full weight of climate change due to the irresponsibility of previous generations, who will not be able to experience its detrimental impacts. When it comes to climate change, resource management is an important issue. When resources are scarce or new resources are created, future generations who wish to exploit them clash with older generations who will eventually use them.

The topic of a recently formed island in Gona and the debate over who is entitled to the newly formed land are covered in Leanne Jorari’s article from 2022. Older generations are more concerned with who will own the new land area and, consequently, who will be able to benefit from its resources, while younger generations wish to conserve the newly established location because the area’s natural resources have started to diminish due to climate change.

Washington Times

Washington Times is an American publication with a right-wing political orientation, and its articles are thus representative of the discourse that denies or ignores the importance of climate change. Although my initial intention was to make a symmetrical comparison between *The Guardian* and *Washington Times*, I noticed that the two publications have different priorities, not only in the way they perceive and construct the image of climate change but also in the visibility of the issue on the online platforms studied.

Unlike *The Guardian*, *Washington News* does not present a specific category of articles for the topic under study, thus requiring the use of the search engine available on the publication’s homepage to find articles relevant to my study.

The discourse present in *Washington Times* denies the importance of climate change and creates a well-defined boundary work (Rughinis & Flaherty 2022), the topic may be considered unworthy of more attention from the publication or at least not discussed enough to have its own news section. When the topic of the climate crisis is discussed, the

discourse is framed in such a way that people concerned about the topic are seen as paranoid.

Washington Times is an American publication that presents right-wing political perspectives, a position that normally perceives climate change as either non-existent, the result of a conspiracy, a minor problem, or too far in the future to require attention. The publication's conservative perspective itself presents a retrotopic model as described by Zygmunt Bauman (2017) placing much more emphasis on an idealized past. Considering that the problem of the climate crisis focuses mainly on the future, which contradicts the publication's retrotopic perspective.

Accepting the discourse of the climate crisis means accepting the need for change to avoid future disasters but the very concepts of change and future are the main issue that contradicts the typical *Washington Times* discourse. As explained by Bauman (2017), the retrotopic perspective has its merits; sometimes models of past societies can provide useful solutions to solve problems or meet present needs. However, the retrotopic perspective can also cause problems, as past models are recalled in a selective manner, emphasizing the advantages and forgetting the disadvantages. This idea of selective memory is similar to Zerubavel's (2015) concept of innate blindness in which the problem is not that we are not paying attention but that we are paying too much attention to one thing and so miss the other surrounding elements.

It is interesting to note that *Washington Times* also uses the concept of "climate crisis" as does *The Guardian*. However, when the term is used it is usually put in quotation marks, showing that this is how the issue is described in left-wing political discourse but at the same time seems to betray a derisive perspective on the subject.

In this paper I will have analyzed 5 relevant articles found through the publication's search engine. Since the online platform does not have a specific section for the topic of climate change and the search results were not in chronological order, these articles will not be needed from a close period of time.

As with *The Guardian*, *Washington Times* embraces a temporal viewpoint that appears to be dominant. Still, this dominant timeframe is entwined with the other temporal dimensions of present and future. This confirmed my anticipation of seeing a retrotopic perspective (Bauman 2017). The narratives employed in the articles are focused on the past, portraying the rhetoric of the left-wing political orientation as faulty and relating climate change or weather forecasts to climate change at the level of weather reporting. The views urging people to take action to stop climate change are viewed in this publication's retrotopic discourse as tainted by inaccurate predictions, and the past is seen as both proof of the failure of left-wing perspectives and proof of the success of right-wing perspectives, which are portrayed as being able to solve any problem brought on by climate change, reducing it to the status of mere weather vagaries.

Comparing the "News" section of the publication's home page with the same section on *The Guardian*'s homepage, I noticed that *Washington Times* has almost double the number of stories (21 compared to 11), 7 of which appear to be common: World news, national news, Covid-19, sports (although *The Guardian* has the football category while *Washington Times* has the entertainment category and a separate sports section),

technology, business and obituary. The topic of climate change doesn't seem to be a big enough or discussed enough topic to have a quick access point from the front page, instead I had to use keywords in the publication's search engine to find articles relevant to the research.

Table 7: Failed prediction (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>It looks like 2009 may very well turn out to be the fourth straight year of declining global temperatures at a time when carbon dioxide levels continue to rise - the opposite of what was predicted by vaunted climate models.</i>	Unforeseen climate 'crisis - Washington Times (2009)
<i>Everyone is aware of the folly of short-term weather forecasts. And, yes we know climate and weather are not the same! So, let's consider short-term climate forecasts.</i>	Unforeseen climate 'crisis - Washington Times (2009)
<i>If we can't accurately predict occurrences in a small portion of the globe in the short range, what then are we to make of the substantially more complicated art of long-range global climate forecasting?</i>	Unforeseen climate 'crisis - Washington Times (2009)
<i>The climate alarmists made the mistake of having too few years to their end-of-the-world predictions, and stuff like the end of the Arctic ice cap and global famine - the planet is actually getting greener with more food - have failed to occur, thus rightly damaging their credibility</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)
<i>Despite rising sea levels for the last 400 years, Manhattan Island gets bigger each decade rather than smaller - as the edges are expanded by land fill.</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)

A main theme addressed in the *Washington Times'* speech is that of failed predictions. If the left-wing perspective present in *The Guardian* is one that promises the possibility of a better future, the right-wing perspective in the *Washington News* focuses on past predictions that are perceived to be wrong. Predictions of the left perspective whether representing utopia or dystopia (Bauman 2017) are perceived as erroneous and untrustworthy anyway. *Washington Times* takes a retrotopic perspective (Bauman 2017), seeking answers to current issues in the past, by using selected memories to suit the needs of the discourse in which they are used.

Washington Times focuses mainly on America while *The Guardian* reports news from various parts of the world. One also notes the selectivity with which the memories of failed predictions are used. Although there is a disclaimer that the difference between climate

and weather is known, weather predictions are given as a prime example of failed climate predictions, arguing that if short-term weather predictions can be wrong then long-term climate predictions cannot possibly be right.

Although there is a difference between climate change predictions and weather predictions, this comparison is used to build an argument that if we cannot predict the near future accurately then we cannot predict the far future. However, this argument becomes invalid precisely because of the different nature of weather predictions and climate predictions. Weather predictions relate to short-term weather in a region while climate change predictions are long-term and are not detailed descriptions but rather statistical approximations that allow us to intuit future changes. Despite the statement that the difference between weather and climate is known, the comparison of the two in the construction of this argument presents a misunderstanding of the two topics.

Comparing incorrect predictions to apocalyptic prophecies is another argument on the subject of misguided predictions (Rahn, 2021b). This portrays the leftist viewpoint as being similar to a cult that predicts the end of the world. According to this discourse, *Washington Times* portrays the climate change fear as overstated and unreliable apocalyptic prophecies rather than a warning of a dismal future.

As noted above, *Washington Times* focuses more on news related to America. Thus, the publication's discourse provides local examples to serve the discourse that denies the threat of climate change instead of looking at the problem from a global perspective.

Table 8: Time wasted on the wrong issue (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>For now, continuous falling temperatures are truly a global crisis, coming at a time when some very powerful people will soon be meeting in Copenhagen to remedy increasing temperatures.</i>	Unforeseen climate 'crisis' - <i>Washington Times</i> (2009)
<i>If you are determined to be a "climate nut" then worry about a New Ice Age - the most credible climate boogeyman. After all, the old Ice Age was only 11,000 years ago - the blink of an eye in geological time - and lasted nearly 2 million years.</i>	When the young are brainwashed by the climate hoax - Pry, P.V. (2019)
<i>Many politicians, particularly in New Jersey and New York, were quick to blame hurricane Ida on global warming - without evidence - but it was a handy scapegoat to cover for their own lack of preparedness.</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)

Time lost on the wrong issue is another point made in the *Washington Times* discourse. Using the term "climate nut" to characterize those who are concerned about climate change, this viewpoint places greater emphasis on the concept of a new ice age and contends that we should be worried about declining temperatures rather than rising

ones (Pry, 2013). Global warming is presented as an exaggeration and a waste of time and a distraction from more important issues. Rahn (2021b) presents the argument that global warming is an unsupported excuse that is used to divert attention from the true issue, which is politicians' lack of preparedness.

Table 9: We have plenty of time (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>The good news is that even with the current state of engineering knowledge, people will adapt to the expected slow rise of sea levels and CO₂ emissions, probably without much difficulty for the next century or two.</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)
<i>[...] and by then, the technology is likely to have advanced to such a point that what seems like a big problem today will be moot.</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)
<i>Banning lawnmowers will not stop the next Ice Age, which is not expected for another 40,000-50,000 years anyway.</i>	When the young are brainwashed by the climate hoax - Pry, P.V. (2019)

Washington Times argues that we have plenty of time and that by the time the severe effects of climate change materialize, we will already have a number of effective adaptation strategies in place, in contrast to *The Guardian's* emphasis on the urgency brought on by a shortage of time. According to the discourse of this newspaper, climate warming is a small issue of the far future that is not urgent enough to warrant concern.

Table 10: Nothing new (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>Sea level rise was a threat to Miami Beach - it was only built nine feet or so above sea level a hundred years ago.</i>	Good engineering is the solution for our so-called 'climate crisis' - Rahn, R.W. (2021b)
<i>Yes, sea levels are rising - and they have been since the end of the last Ice Age 12,000 or so years ago.</i>	The 'non-crisis' reality of climate change - Rahn, R.W. (2021a)

Using the example of the Miami Beach, which was constructed above sea level to prevent sinking, and implying that the same strategy can be applied in the future to adapt to sea level rise due to climate change. This approach diminishes the significance of the climate crisis (Bauman 2017, Rahn 2021b). However, sea level rise is viewed as a straightforward occurrence that has been since the end of the ice age (Rahn, 2021a), making it an easy issue to overlook because it is not considered as something new.

Table 11: Climate madness (Source: Author's analysis)

Quote	Source
<i>This is the left's next maneuver to control the populations of the world: jumping like a virus from coronavirus to climate change.</i>	Climate change alarmists warn of mo' viruses, mo' viruses - Chumley, C.K. (2022)
<i>The coronavirus has given these globalist-minded types the fear they need to call for crazy crackdowns on individual liberties. And now these same people are looking to extend this state of fear so as to complete "The Great Reset" of society.</i>	Climate change alarmists warn of mo' viruses, mo' viruses - Chumley, C.K. (2022)
<i>If you are determined to be a "climate nut" then worry about a New Ice Age - the most credible climate boogeyman. After all, the old Ice Age was only 11,000 years ago - the blink of an eye in geological time - and lasted nearly 2 million years.</i>	When the young are brainwashed by the climate hoax - Pry, P.V. (2019)

As noted above, the horizons of urgency in leftist discourse are treated as the aberrations of paranoid individuals, part of a cult that believes the end of the world will come in the near future. Specific "climate nut" language is observed in Pry's (2013) article but Chumley's (2022) article also portrays people with a left-wing political orientation as paranoid, panicking about the topic of climate change and taking every opportunity to link every issue to the topic.

Washington Times focuses in particular on denying the importance of the climate crisis, portraying the phenomenon as a minor, perhaps even non-existent, problem blown out of proportion by paranoid individuals who want to distract the population from more important issues and even force their dystopian agenda on society. The publication's discourse is US-centric, with other parts of the world irrelevant, the articles studied relating exclusively to situations in America and ignoring the rest of the world. Signs of climate change are interpreted as normal, hundreds or thousands of years old problems that are given more importance than they should be. Damage caused by natural disasters is blamed on incompetence and lack of preparedness.

Rahn's (2021b) speech, in which the blame for the destruction inflicted by Hurricane Ida is placed on unprepared authorities, entirely denies the role of climate change. Moreover, Klinenberg (2020) explains how the climate crisis problem reveals social injustice. Rebuilding infrastructure components and providing resources for victims to survive are extremely expensive, and not all communities have the resources necessary for efficient natural disaster management. Although being prepared is important, it is meaningless if the government lacks the funds to support it. Simultaneously, a community's unfavorable position combined with unpredictable climatic change produces a dilemma that cannot be resolved by improved governmental processes.

Conclusions

In my paper I have observed how perspectives on the temporality of climate change differ depending on the political orientation of the source and thus climate issues can either be seen as an urgent problem requiring immediate action or they can be perceived as a minor problem not even worth mentioning. My focus on the temporal construction of climate change discourses in disparate political contexts is addressed by this comparative analysis, which demonstrates how media outlets use intricate temporal techniques to create conflicting narratives about climate change. Although both publications incorporate perspectives from the past, present, and future, they do it in ways that are distinct from one another and support their own ideologies.

The Guardian's future-oriented temporal framework aligns with what Flaherty (2003) describes as time work aimed at creating urgency. The publication constructs a temporal narrative that compresses the distance between present actions and future consequences, making climate change impacts feel more immediate and actionable. This approach creates what we might call “temporal proximity”, bringing distant future threats into the present moment to motivate immediate action. However, this is not just a usual future-focused reporting; *The Guardian* integrates together historical warnings and current data to create a story of escalating disaster that necessitates action.

In contrast, *Washington Times* employs what Bauman (2017) terms a retrotopic perspective, using selective historical examples to minimize climate concerns. This manifests not only in content features but in structural choices. The absence of dedicated climate coverage itself represents a form of temporal boundary work (Rughiniş & Flaherty 2022). At an institutional level, this publication engages in what Zerubavel (2015) refers to as inattentive blindness by relegating climate change to sporadic coverage within other news categories. This structural choice frames climate change as a peripheral rather than central concern.

The findings extend our understanding of how temporal framing operates in media discourse. While previous research has focused on how media outlets present different factual claims about climate change, this analysis reveals how temporal construction itself serves as a powerful tool in shaping public understanding. *The Guardian's* compression of temporal distance between present and future contrasts sharply with *Washington Times's* expansion of that distance, demonstrating how time work can be used to either amplify or diminish perceived urgency.

This research also reveals how temporal framing intersects with spatial and social boundaries. *Washington Times's* focus on American examples and dismissal of global impacts demonstrates how temporal and geographic boundary work can reinforce each other. Meanwhile, *The Guardian's* global perspective allows it to construct a narrative of interconnected present and future impacts across different regions and communities.

These findings have important implications for understanding how media shapes public response to long-term challenges like climate change. The contrast in temporal framing between these publications could explain why different segments of the public have such divergent understandings of climate change urgency. Moreover, it indicates that

debates about climate change are not just disagreements about facts, but fundamental differences in temporal orientation toward environmental change.

This study opens several possibilities for future research. Further investigation could examine how readers interpret and respond to different temporal framings of climate change, or how temporal construction in media coverage influences policy decisions. Additionally, comparative studies across different countries could reveal how national political contexts influence temporal framing of environmental issues.

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