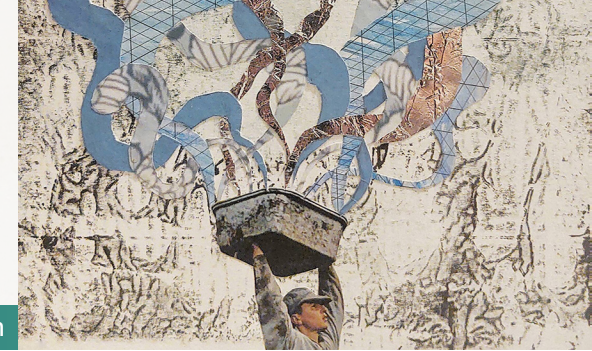


Social Systems and Justice

Artist: Spencer Owen



Key Message 20.1

Social Systems Are Changing the Climate and Distributing Its Impacts Inequitably

Social systems are changing the climate (*very high confidence*). Societal characteristics and processes shape greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, primarily through the burning of fossil fuels (*very high confidence*). Social systems also inequitably distribute the benefits of energy consumption and the impacts of GHG emissions and climate change (*high confidence*). Governance is a critical process that distributes these impacts (*very high confidence*) and provides access to adaptation (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 20.2

Social Systems Structure How People Know and Communicate About Climate Change

People's histories, educations, cultures, and ethics determine how they understand and experience climate change (*high confidence*). These knowledges take multiple forms (*high confidence*) and generate diverse approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation (*medium confidence*). Engagement across communities that builds clear objectives and benchmarks has been shown to produce more desired outcomes (*medium confidence*). Effective engagement is challenging due in part to the complexity and uncertainty associated with climate science and politics (*high confidence*). Including community perspectives and multiple forms of knowledge in climate discussions and decision-making helps promote justice (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 20.3

Climate Justice Is Possible If Processes like Migration and Energy Transitions Are Equitable

Climate justice—the recognition of diverse values and past harms, equitable distribution of benefits and risks, and the procedural inclusion of affected communities in decision-making processes—is possible (*medium confidence*). Complex social processes such as human migration affect climate inequities (*medium confidence*). Climate justice is also closely related to just transitions (*high confidence*), which involve equitably adapting societies, economies, and energy systems to climate change mitigation strategies and climate impacts (*high confidence*).

Climate Change Governance



Climate change governance is complex and multifaceted.

Figure 20.2. This figure recognizes the complex interaction of multiple social systems that give rise to governance. Climate change impacts, and the impacts of adaptation and mitigation strategies, will all be mediated by governance decisions and actions. Understanding this complex interplay allows the social scientists who study climate change to make predictions regarding climate impacts and to assess where governance systems are expected to produce climate justice or injustice. Figure credit: Jacksonville State University.

Recommended Citation

Marino, E.K., K. Maxwell, E. Eisenhauer, A. Zycherman, C. Callison, E. Fussell, M.D. Hendricks, F.H. Jacobs, A. Jerolleman, A.K. Jorgenson, E.M. Markowitz, S.T. Marquart-Pyatt, M. Schutten, R.L. Shwom, and K. Whyte, 2023: Ch. 20. Social systems and justice. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH20>