Resilience vs. Adaptation: Framing and Action
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Problem Statement and Objectives

The terms “resilience” and “adaptation” are alternately used to frame discussion about taking action to meet the current and future risks presented by climate change impacts. Communicators interested in motivating the public to take action on climate change face numerous choices when designing their messages, one of which is deciding which of these frames to use. How framing affects public response to current and future risks is an empirical question.

Frames are used by a broad range of communicators to orient people’s thinking in a particular way about a topic. Psychological and political science studies find that frames matter — in that they influence attitudes and behaviors of lay audiences. In psychology, “resilience” emphasizes a general ability to master challenges, whereas “adaptation” emphasizes specific coping responses. The former is a trait, associated with active mastery. The latter is a state, associated with accommodating stressors. Resilience includes the “adaptive capacity” to acquire new capabilities, perhaps emerging stronger from the struggle. If lay audiences think of these two terms similarly, then their use as frames may elicit very different responses to the risks of current and future flooding due to sea level rise.

Here we ask people to consider coastal flooding risks in two ways:
1. Framing with a single word for current risk
2. Framing in a program for future risk

Study 1 – Framing in a Word

Experimental procedures
After brief introduction, informed consent, and screening for age (≥18), participants were randomly assigned to the Resilience or Adaptation condition (Figure 1).

Measures
- Scenarios: Linguistic and psychological processes, social concerns, and speech categories.

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