

# Climate Change Denial

Political  
Cultural  
Psychological  
dimensions

What does this mean for how we might approach collective action on climate change?

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# Climate Change Denial

Denial: The action of declaring something to be untrue; or, the refusal to accept or believe something.

## Types of climate change denial:

--Deny the reality of human-caused global warming (the planet is not warming; and even if it is, it is not caused by humans)

--Admit the fact, but deny its seriousness

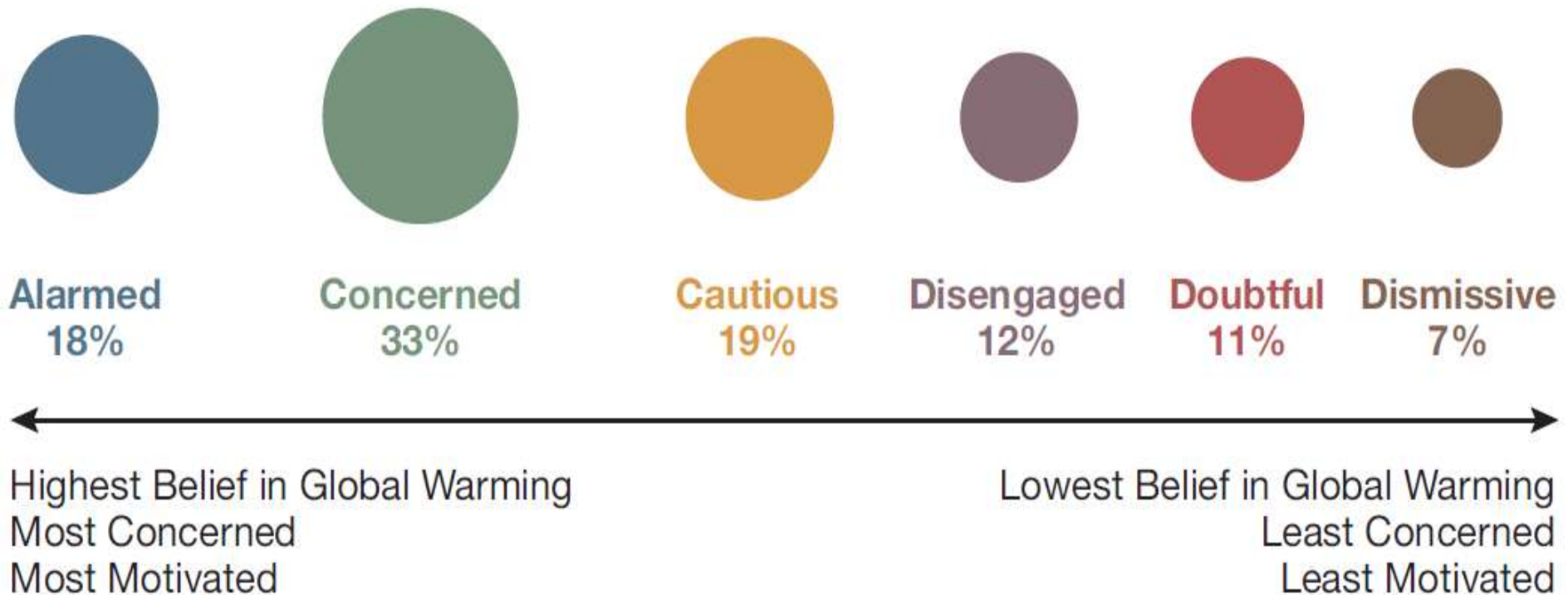
--Admit both the fact and seriousness, but deny responsibility for taking action (personal or collective)



# Public Concern about Climate Change

**Figure 1:** Proportion of the U.S. adult population in the Six Americas

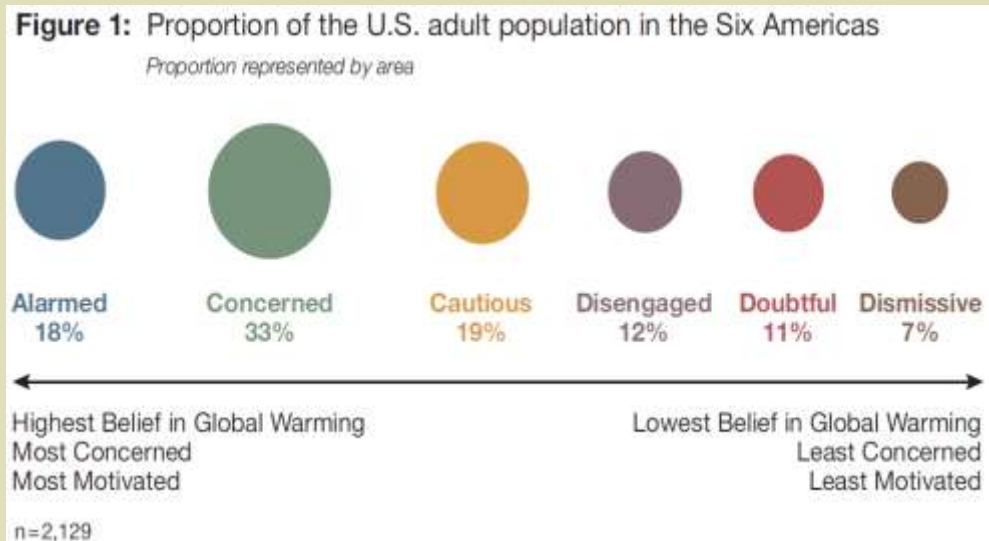
*Proportion represented by area*



n=2,129

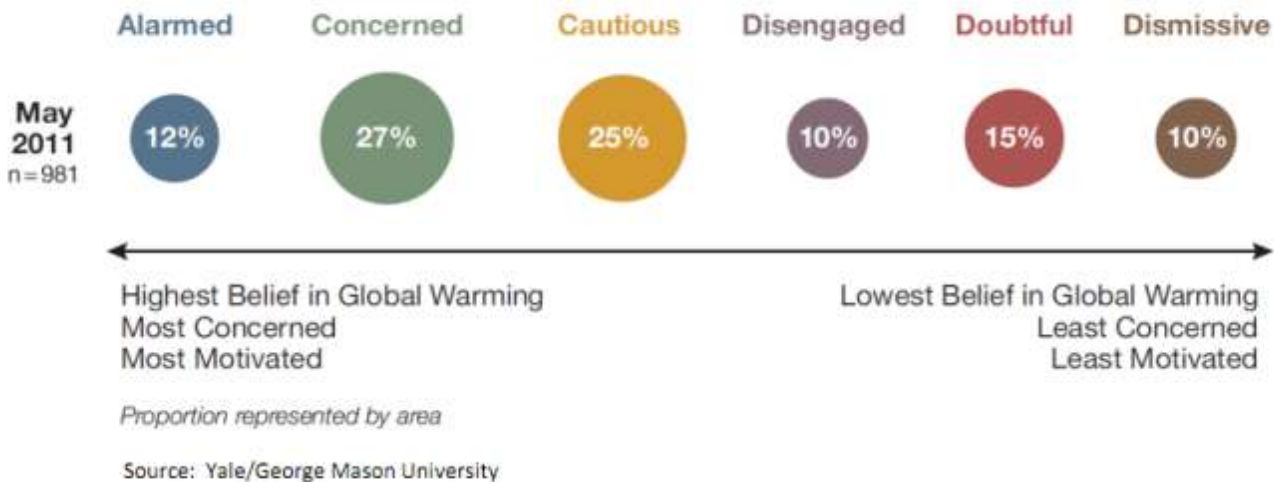
# Public Concern about Climate Change

2008



Anthony Leiserowitz

2011



September 2012,  
 16% alarmed,  
 8% dismissive.  
 Report released  
 March 5, 2013

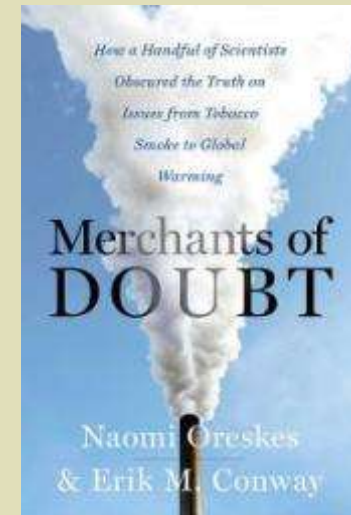
# Political Drivers – Creating a culture of doubt and delay



Dr. Fred Singer



Lord Christopher Moncton





# A Culture of Doubt and Delay in the Montana Legislature



Senate Bill 281: Require the Montana DEQ to collaborate with a climate office at the University of Montana on climate change efforts --Senator Mike Phillips (D)



“In 2007-08, when prof. Running came to talk with us about climate change, he said that 2,000 peer reviewed people believed in climate change. Did you know that 20,000 scientists, also peer reviewed, disputed that report?” --Senator John Brenden (R)



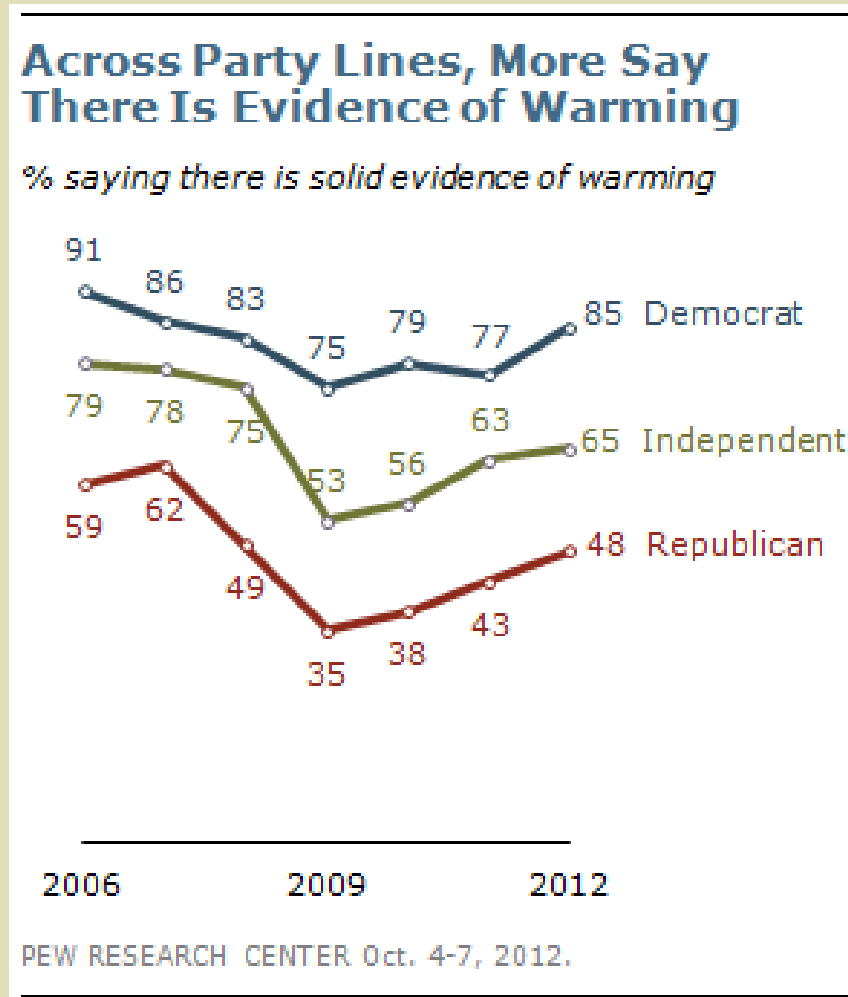
“I became interested in global warming a while ago, I have a wheel barrel full of books I’ve read and studied it all summer...I’ve determined that it is the sunspots that determines the increase of heat on the earth. We really don’t know what the impact is of carbon dioxide from the scientific method.”

--Senator Verdell Jackson (R)



# National Polls

Americans are divided along political lines as to whether or not there is solid evidence of warming



Americans also differ on what is causing the warming

## Republicans Divided Over Global Warming; Democrats Divided Over Its Cause

<i>Is there solid evidence the earth is warming?</i>	<i>Among Reps</i>		<i>Among Dems</i>	
	<b>Conserv</b>	<b>Mod/ Lib</b>	<b>Cons/ Mod</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	58	83	91
Because of human activity	16	38	51	77
Because of natural patterns	23	18	23	11
Don't know	5	2	10	3
No	51	37	10	7
Mixed evidence (Vol.)/DK	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 4-7, 2012. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.



Is the difference just because people aren't well informed?



Dan Kahan, et al. (2011). The Tragedy of the Risk-Perception Commons: Culture Conflict, Rationality Conflict, and Climate Change. Cultural Cognition Project, Working Paper #89.

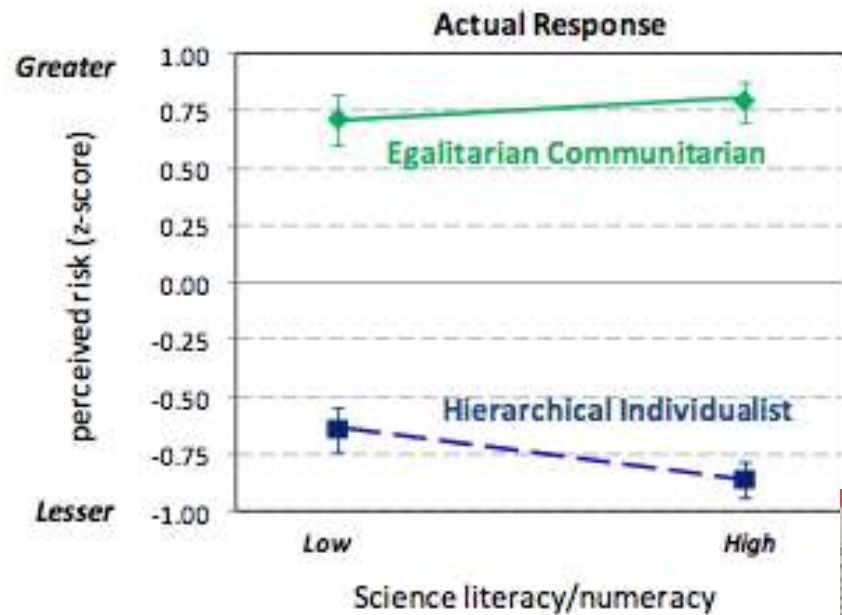
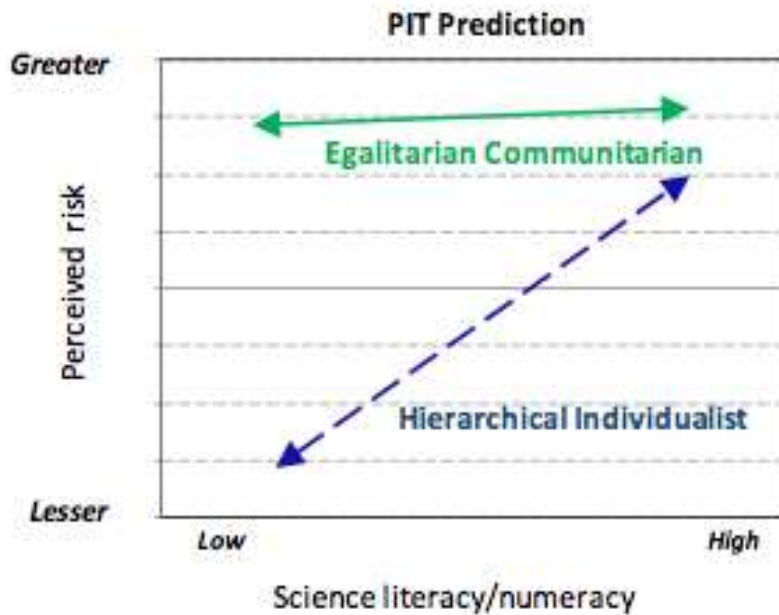


# Cultural Drivers

Cultural values have a bigger effect on perception of climate-change risks than does science literacy.



*"How much risk do you believe climate change poses to human health, safety, or prosperity?"*



Dan Kahan, et al. (2011). The Tragedy of the Risk-Perception Commons: Culture Conflict, Rationality Conflict, and Climate Change. Cultural Cognition Project, Working Paper #89.

# Psychological/Cognitive Drivers

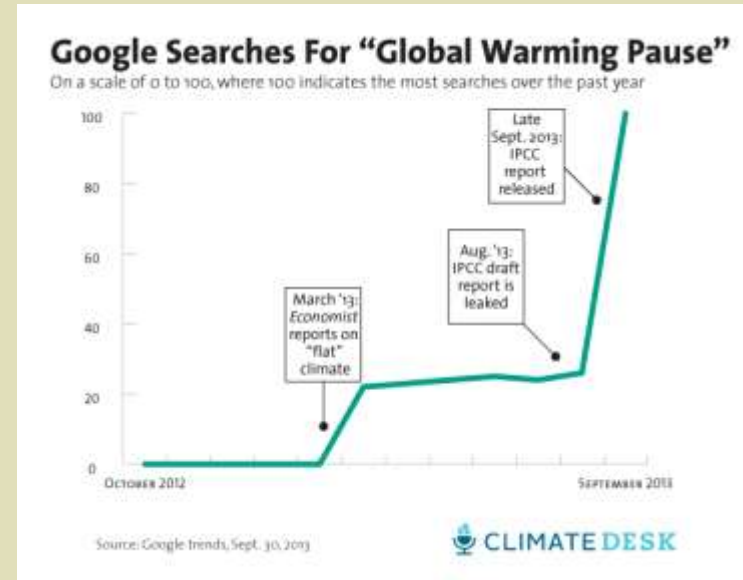
**Confirmation Bias:** A type of selective thinking whereby one tends to notice and to look for what confirms one's beliefs, and to ignore, not look for, or undervalue the relevance of what contradicts one's beliefs.

*It is the peculiar and perpetual error of the human understanding to be more moved and excited by affirmatives than by negatives.*

--Francis Bacon

**Cognitive Flexibility:** Learning to hold beliefs as the best working hypothesis one has at the moment, and being consciously willing to change belief systems, increases the likelihood of developing the ability to hold and consider multiple points of view, to engage with difference, and to find comfort in unfamiliarity.

--Dr. Marilyn Schlitz et al., 2008



Dr. Marilyn Schlitz

# We are all subject to confirmation biases

Our political orientation can get in the way of clear thinking, especially for “smart” people.

Medical researchers have developed a new cream for treating skin rashes. New treatments often work but sometimes make rashes worse. Even when treatments don't work, skin rashes sometimes get better and sometimes get worse on their own. As a result, it is necessary to test any new treatment in an experiment to see whether it makes the skin condition of those who use it better or worse than if they had not used it.

Researchers have conducted an experiment on patients with skin rashes. In the experiment, one group of patients used the new cream for two weeks, and a second group did not use the new cream.

In each group, the number of people whose skin condition got better and the number whose condition got worse are recorded in the table below. Because patients do not always complete studies, the total number of patients in each two groups is not exactly the same, but this does not prevent assessment of the results.

Please indicate whether the experiment shows that using the new cream is likely to make the skin condition better or worse.

	Result	
	Rash Got Better	Rash Got Worse
Patients who <u>did</u> use the new skin cream	223	75
Patients who did <u>not</u> use the new skin cream	107	21

What result does the study support?

- People who used the skin cream were more likely to get better than those who didn't.
- People who used the skin cream were more likely to get worse than those who didn't.

Kahan et al. (2013). Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government. Social Science Research Network.

	Result	
	Rash Got Worse	Rash Got Better
Patients who <u>did</u> use the new skin cream	223	75
Patients who did <u>not</u> use the new skin cream	107	21

(A) Rash Decreases

	Result	
	Increase in crime	Decrease in crime
Cities that <u>did</u> ban carrying concealed handguns in public	223	75
Cities that <u>did not</u> ban carrying concealed handguns in public	107	21

(C) Crime Decreases

	Result	
	Rash Got Better	Rash Got Worse
Patients who <u>did</u> use the new skin cream	223	75
Patients who did <u>not</u> use the new skin cream	107	21

(B) Rash Increases

	Result	
	Decrease in crime	Increase in crime
Cities that <u>did</u> ban carrying concealed handguns in public	223	75
Cities that <u>did not</u> ban carrying concealed handguns in public	107	21

(D) Crime Increases

The four problem scenarios from the study (each respondent received just one of these) Dan Kahan



# Climate and Sustainability initiatives draw debate and delay at national and local levels

## Activists Fight Green Projects, Seeing U.N. Plot



Jarod Soares for The New York Times

At a Roanoke County, Va., meeting, dozens opposed the county's paying \$1,200 to a nonprofit.

By LESLIE KAUFMAN and KATE ZERNIKE

Published: February 3, 2012

Across the country, activists with ties to the [Tea Party](#) are railing against all sorts of local and state efforts to control sprawl and conserve energy. They brand government action for things like expanding public transportation routes and preserving open space as part of a [United Nations](#)-led conspiracy to deny property rights and herd citizens toward cities.

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They are showing up at planning meetings to denounce bike lanes on public streets and smart meters on home appliances — efforts they equate to a big-government blueprint against individual rights.



## John Birch Society tied to ICLEI protest at Missoula City Council

Story Discussion

Font Size: - +

By KEILA SZPALLER of the Missoulian | Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2012 7:45 am | (20) Comments

2 retweet

Recommend

46 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

A relatively small bill to the city of Missoula recently packed the house in council chambers.

The amount was \$1,200 for membership dues City Hall has paid to the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, or ICLEI, since 1996. This year, though, the payment spurred a fight.

A crowd turned up for the meeting, most to urge the council to pay up. But people from as far away as Silver Star pleaded with Missoula to withdraw from ICLEI to preserve their property rights and other liberties.

# Missoula City Council Hearing, December 6, 2011

## Comments from those Opposed to Climate Action

### Perceptions of Climate Change:

- \*No proof that man has caused climate change
- \*Science not settled, “it’s a lie”
- \*Science can be manipulated to prove an ideology
- \*Conflicting knowledge barred from discussion
- \*No need to waste money on ICLEI



### Perceptions of ICLEI Funding:

- \*Will result in loss of freedom
- \*Threat to private property rights
- \*Will stifle economic growth – slippery slope to poverty
- \*Local government will fall under control  
of federal government
- \*Hidden agenda by United Nations, Agenda 21





\*Hidden agenda by United Nations, Agenda 21



# Republican Party Resolution, January, 2012:

WHEREAS, the United Nations (UN) Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of extreme environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control...; and,

WHEREAS, the UN Agenda 21 is being covertly pushed into local communities throughout the USA through ICLE local “sustainable development” policies such as Smart Growth, ... Regional Visioning Projects, and other “Green” or “Alternative” projects; and,

WHEREAS, this UN Agenda 21 plan of radical so-called “sustainable development” views the American way of life of private property ownership, single family homes, private car ownership and individual travel choices, and privately owned farms; all as destructive to the environment; and,

WHEREAS, the UN Agenda 21 policy, social justice is described as the right and opportunity of all people to benefit equally from the resources afforded us by society and the environment which would be accomplished by socialist/communist redistribution of wealth; and, ... now therefore be

# Missoula City Council Hearing, December 6, 2011

## Comments from those in Support of Climate Action

### Perceptions of Climate Change:

- \*Climate change is real, driven by humans
- \*Already seeing impacts to environment
- \*Need to reduce emissions
- \*Need transition away from fossil fuels (ICLEI helps us do this)



### Perceptions of ICLEI Funding:

- \*Provides a useful model
- \*Collective effort to bring down emissions
- \*Allows for planned transition to new society and economy
- \*Investment in sustainability and livable planet



“The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion,” by Jonathan Haidt (2012)

Moyers & Company, Feb, 2012 interview with Jonathan Haidt:  
<http://billmoyers.com/segment/jonathan-haidt-explains-our-contentious-culture/>

Moral Foundations Theory:

- 1) Care/harm
- 2) Fairness/cheating
- 3) Liberty/oppression
- 4) Loyalty/betrayal
- 5) Authority/subversion
- 6) Sanctity/degradation

# Living in Denial

Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life



Kari Marie Norgaard



Living in Denial

Dr. Kari Norgaard



The myth of apathy

Dr. Renee Lertzman

# Psychological/Cognitive Dimensions of Climate Change

1. We have a tendency toward selective attention:

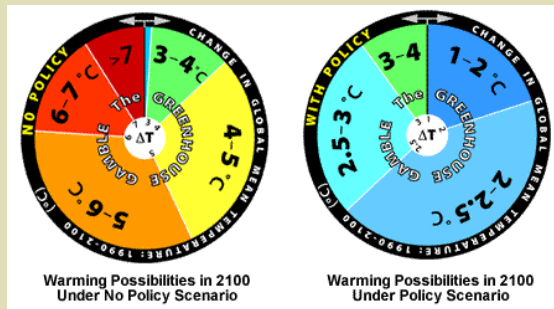


2. We make poor decisions when our brains are tied up:



4. Our brains evolved to deal with threats that are intentional, immoral, imminent, and instantaneous:

3. We tend to favor short-term benefits with long-term costs:



Harvard Thinks Big: "It's the End of the World as We Know it and I Feel Fine" – Daniel Gilbert



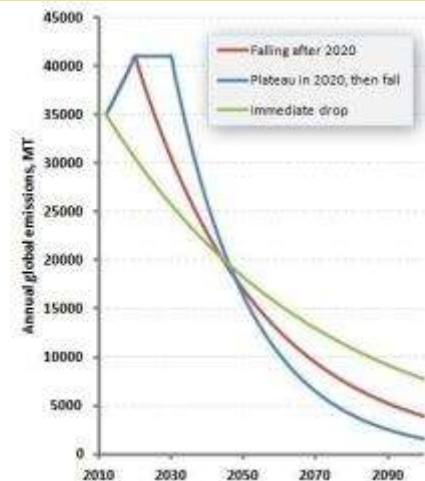
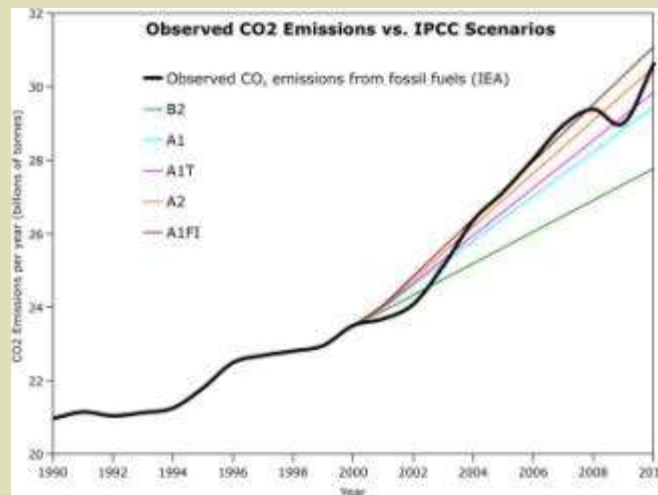


# Summary—climate change denial

## Thoughts on overcoming this denial?

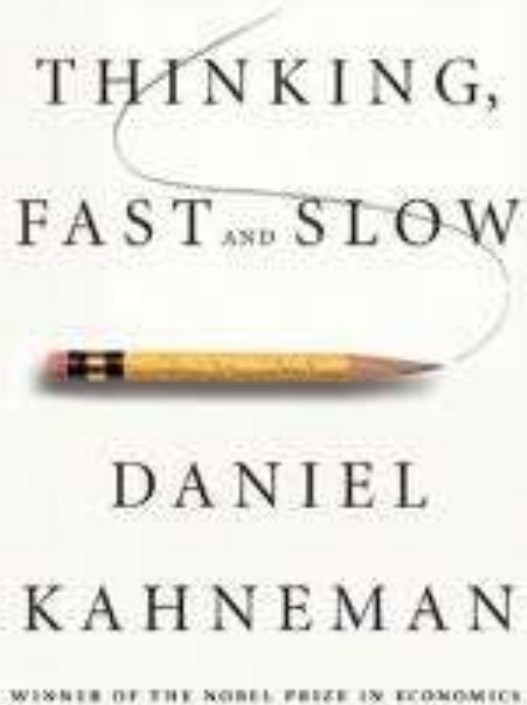
1. Political Drivers: Recognize the power of special interests to shape politics and public sentiment and bolster excuses for delayed action.
2. Cultural Drivers: Recognize the human tendency to be groupish, to protect our identity, and to be biased in our reasoning.
3. Psychological Drivers: Recognize that our brains are not wired to address the complex challenges climate change presents.

### Avoiding dangerous climate change



# Transformative Change: Psychological and Cultural Dimensions

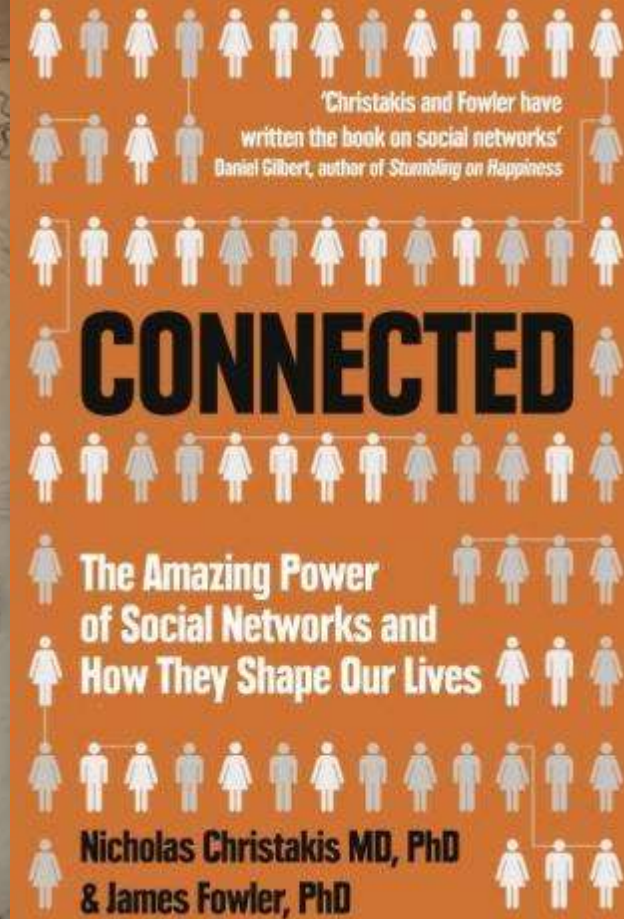
System II Brain



Mindfulness



Social Networks





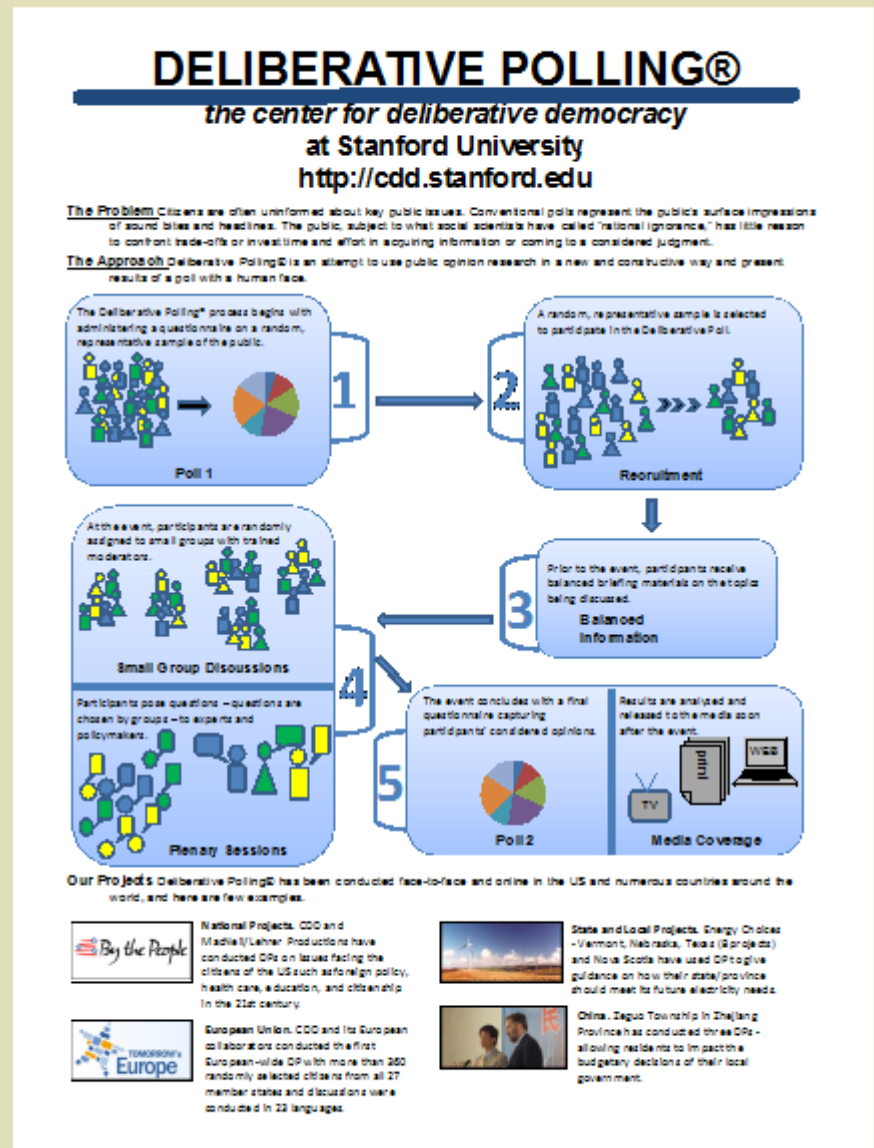
# Overcoming Climate Denial

## Nicky's Path (today)

1. Work to better understanding different beliefs/perspectives/world views
2. Create some sort of structure or process to facilitate deliberative dialogue that will engage system II brains and mindfulness and expand social/cultural networks.

Some possibilities:

- Deliberative Polling



# Creating Space: Fostering Deliberation about Climate Action



My father the mediator: “Integrating the diverse views and thoughts of others always improves the quality and scope of the final agreement.”