

Climate Change:

Worldviews, Political Attitudes and Implications for Education

Frank Alcock

Associate Professor of Political Science and
Environmental Studies
New College of Florida



Climate Change: Six Americas

YALE PROJECT ON

Climate Change
Communication

Bridging Science & Society

- Alarmed
- Concerned
- Cautious
- Disengaged
- Doubtful
- Dismissive

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

CENTER *for* CLIMATE CHANGE
COMMUNICATION

Alarmed

- Convinced, that global warming is happening, caused by humans, and is a serious and urgent threat.
- 18% in 2008
- 10% in 2010
- 13% in 2014



Concerned

- Believe global warming is a serious problem and support an active national response but are less personally involved.
- 33% in 2008
- 29% in 2010
- 31% in 2014



Cautious

- Believe global warming is a problem, but not urgent, and are unsure whether it is human caused.
- 19% in 2008
- 27% in 2010
- 23% in 2014



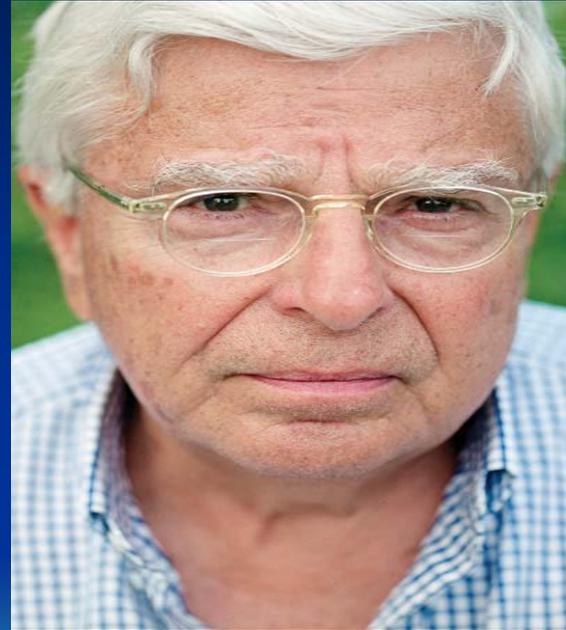
Disengaged

- Americans that do not know much about global warming and whether it is happening, and have not thought much about it.
- 12% in 2008
- 6% in 2010
- 7% in 2014



Doubtful

- Are not sure whether global warming is happening, but if it is, it is a natural and distant threat.
- 11% in 2008
- 13% in 2010
- 13% in 2014



Dismissive

- Believe global warming is not happening and probably a hoax.
- 7% in 2008
- 16% in 2010
- 13% in 2014



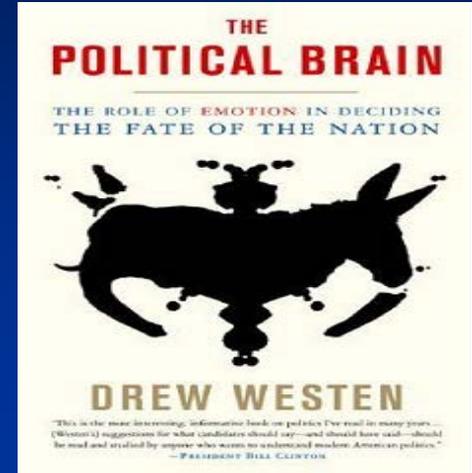
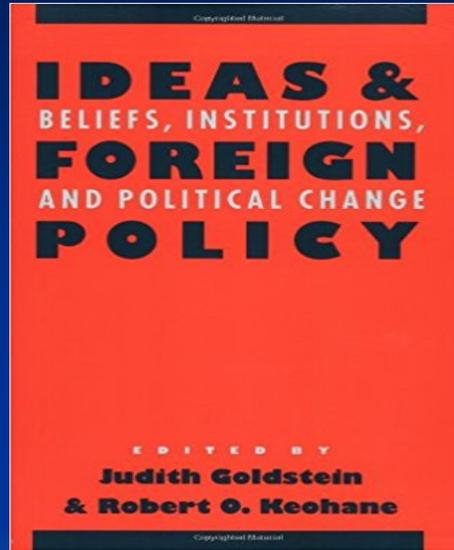
Climate Change: Three Americas

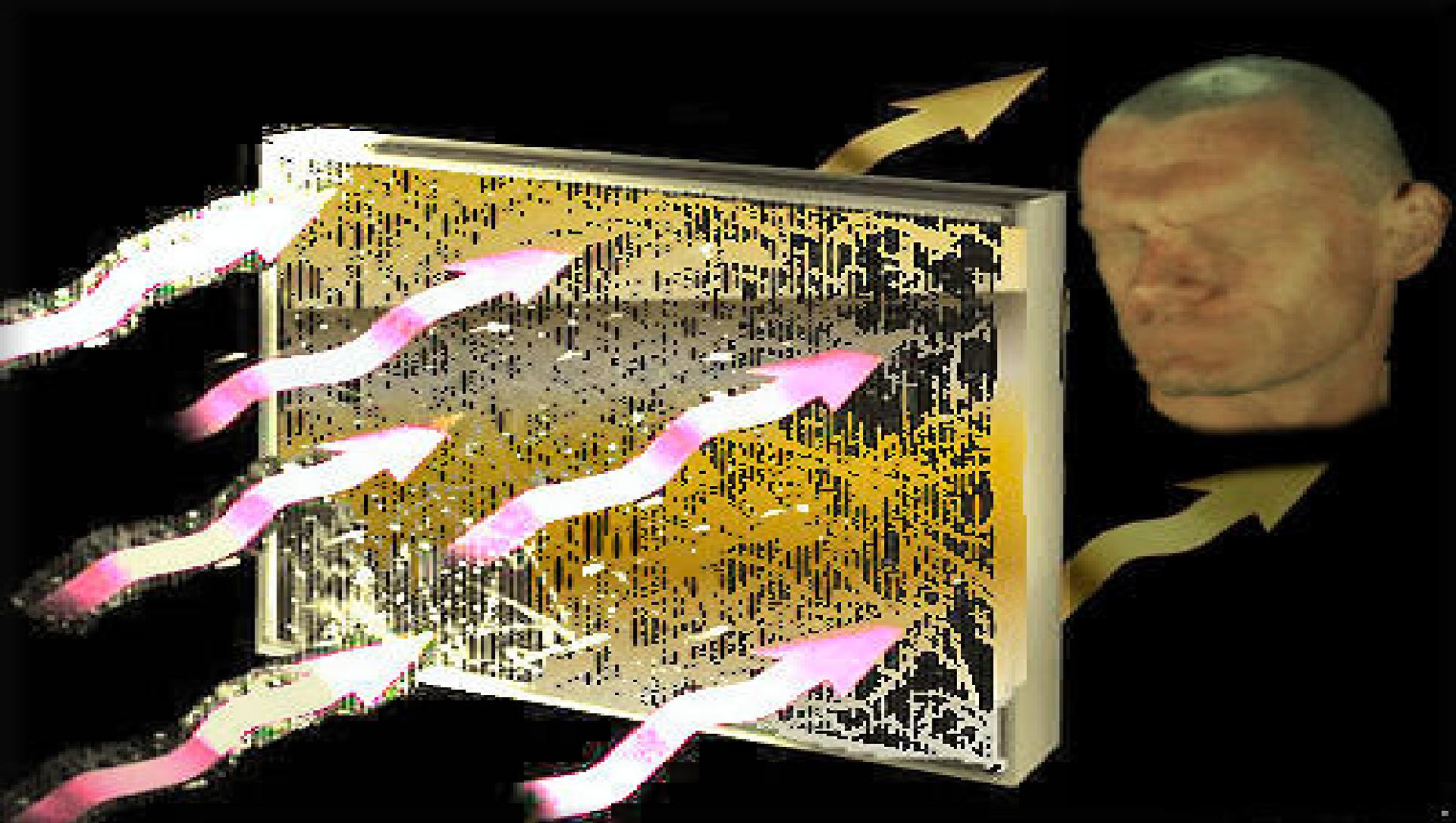
- Alarmed/Concerned (1/4 to 1/3)
 - Ready to act, willing to accept costs/burdens
- Concerned/Cautious/Disengaged (1/3 to 1/2)
 - Willing to support action, reluctant to accept costs/burdens
- Doubtful/Dismissive (1/4 to 1/3)
 - Resist action, refuse to accept costs/burdens



Simple Mental Hierarchy

- Core Values
- Principled Beliefs
- Causal Beliefs
- Facts





Information Revolution

- 24 hour cable & satellite TV
- Internet
- Social networking
- Amplification of frames
- Extensive filtering
- Explicit delegitimization strategies
- Self-reinforcing polarization of political discourse and media coverage

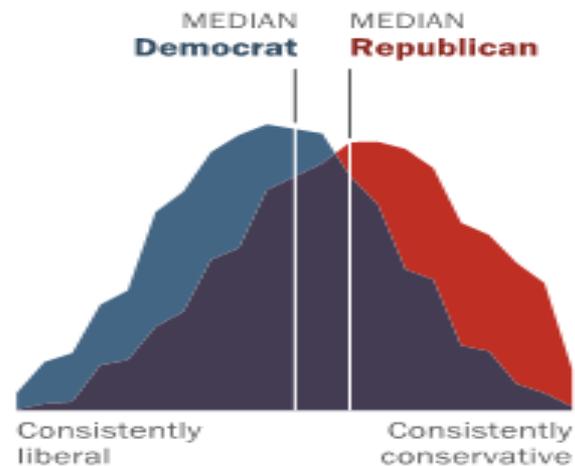


Political Polarization

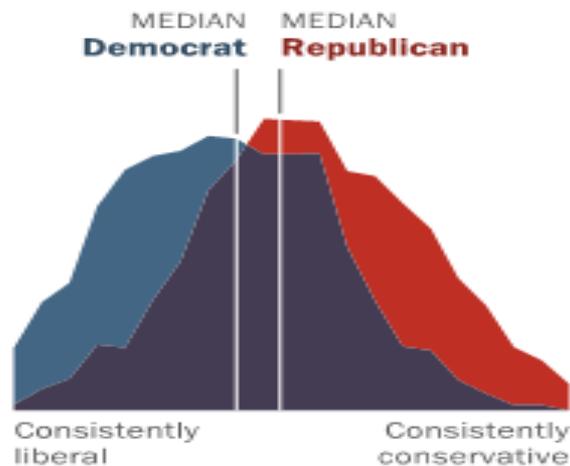
Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values

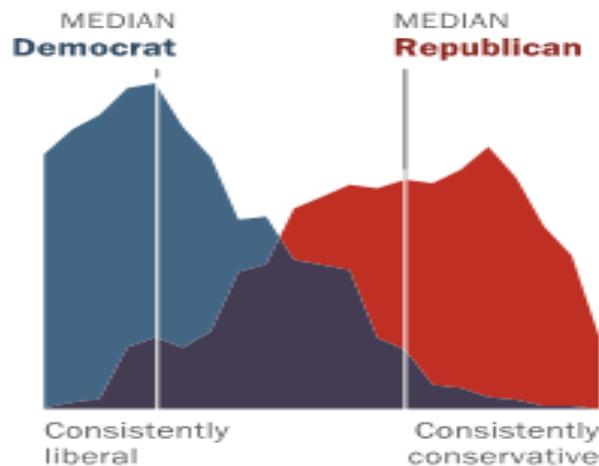
1994



2004



2017



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.



How People Approach Facts and Information

September 2017

- Eager & Willing
- Confident
- Cautious & Curious
- Doubtful
- Wary

Eager & Willing – 22%

- **DISPOSITION:** Exhibit the highest levels of interest in news and trust in key information sources, as well as strong interest in learning when it comes to their own digital skills and literacy.
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** More than half the members of this group are minorities: 31% are Hispanic; 21% are black and 38% are white, while the remainder are in other racial and ethnic groups.



Confident – 16%

- **DISPOSITION:** They combine a strong interest in information, high levels of trust in information sources, and self-assurance that they can navigate the information landscape themselves. They are very self-reliant as they handle information flows.
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** This group is heavily white, very well educated, and fairly comfortable economically. Some 31% are between the ages of 18 and 29, the highest of any group.



Cautious & Curious – 13%

- **DISPOSITION:** They have a strong interest in news and information but not a lot of trust in sources. They are twice as likely as all adults to be interested in getting training on digital skills and information literacy. At the same time, they report significant levels of stress over trying new things and have busy lives.
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** This group mostly mirrors the demographic traits of the general population. It has somewhat lower levels of educational attainment than average of any group.



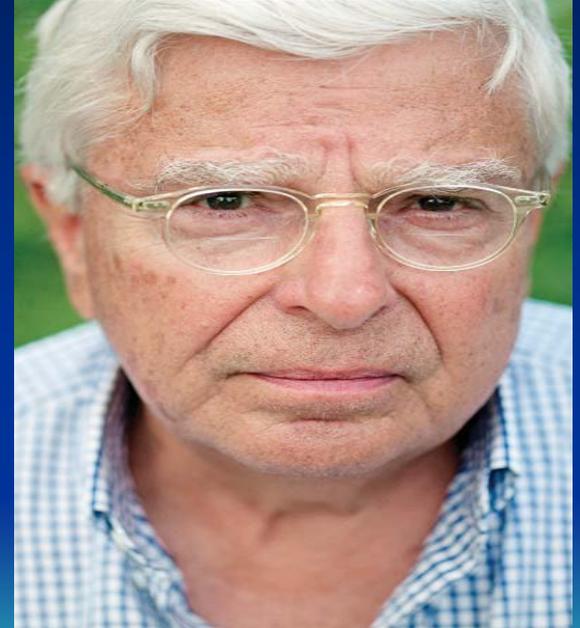
Doubtful - 24%

- **DISPOSITION:** They are leery of information sources, particularly local and national news. They also have very busy lives, which could be why they also show lower levels of interest in updating their digital skills or information literacy.
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** The Doubtful are the most middle-aged of the groups, mainly white, and also relatively well educated and comfortable economically.



Wary – 25%

- **DISPOSITION:** They have the lowest level of trust in information sources. The Wary also have the lowest levels of broadband and smartphone adoption. They declare little interest in upgrading digital skills.
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** This group is heavily male (59%) and one-third are ages 65 or older.



Implications for Education

- Know your audience
- Think about sources and mechanisms of delivery in addition to content and format
- TRUST is critical and we're experiencing a crisis
- Be sensitive to world views and core values
- Simplify causal claims where appropriate
- Compartmentalize in the presence of skeptical audiences

