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## Climate Science Glossary

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All IPCC definitions taken from *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Working Group I Contribution to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Annex I, Glossary, pp. 941-954. Cambridge University Press.*



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### MOST USED Climate Myths

and what the science really says...

- 1 Climate's changed before
  - 2 It's the sun
  - 3 It's not bad
  - 4 There is no consensus
  - 5 It's cooling
  - 6 Models are unreliable
  - 7 Temp record is unreliable
  - 8 Animals and plants can adapt
  - 9 It hasn't warmed since 1998
  - 10 Antarctica is gaining ice
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### Study: On climate change and elsewhere, politicians more conservative than citizens

Posted on 14 July 2017 by [dana1981](#)

Academics have identified a skew in American politics, in which policies that are implemented are much more conservative than average Americans prefer. [A new paper](#) by David Broockman at Stanford University and Christopher Skovron from the University of Michigan suggests a cause for this disparity: American politicians perceive their constituents' positions as more conservative than they are in actuality on a wide range of issues; for example, Republican politicians tend to overestimate support for their conservative health care views by a whopping 20 percentage points. As Broockman and his colleague Christopher Warshaw of MIT put it in an article for the *New York Times*: "Research shows that politicians are surprisingly poor at estimating public opinion in their districts and state, Republicans in particular." This in turn appears to be caused by greater political engagement among conservative constituents, who contact their members of Congress more frequently than liberal voters.

The study's authors looked at data surveying thousands of American politicians' perceptions of their constituents' opinions, and compared those results to actual public opinion. They found that both Democratic and Republican politicians perceive that public opinion is more conservative than it is in actuality, but it's especially true among Republican legislators. That matches patterns in grassroots mobilization—Republican voters are about 40 percent more likely to contact their member of Congress' office than Democratic voters, especially when their member of Congress is a fellow Republican.

The conservative bias in Republican politicians' perceptions of constituent opinion extended to every question in the survey, on issues such as firearms background checks, where GOP politicians perceive 36 percent more support for their conservative positions than there actually is among the general public—something that statisticians call "skew." Similar overestimates occur regarding the depth of support for conservative positions on the banning of assault rifles (overestimated by about 18 percent), granting amnesty to illegal immigrants (9 percent), banning abortion (9 percent), and gay marriage (7 percent). This again matches statistics on grassroots mobilization—conservative constituents are

Winner of the 2011



Eureka Prize  
Advancement of  
climate change  
knowledge





especially well-organized and vocal on the issue of gun control.

The survey didn't include any questions about climate change, but that's another issue on which Republican politicians' perceptions of constituent opinion appear extremely skewed. For example, 75 percent of Americans support regulating carbon as a pollutant, and 62 percent of Trump voters support a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system. But despite the sentiments of an overwhelming number of their constituents, the vast majority of Republican Party politicians oppose all climate policies and the GOP stands alone as the only climate-denying major political party in the world. In fact, Republican politicians' climate policy opposition is so strong that 22 of 52 Republican senators sent a letter to Donald Trump urging withdrawal from the non-binding Paris climate accord. This position was again out of step with Republican voters, a majority of whom supported participation in the Paris agreement, including a strong plurality of Trump voters.

The question then arises—how do Republicans keep winning elections if the policies they implement are more conservative than voters prefer?

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### Comments

Comments 1 to 12:

1. **BBHY** at 06:47 AM on 15 July, 2017

Many liberals don't vote, often because they don't have candidates that represent their values. In many districts, the Dems even allow the R candidate to run unchallenged.

This is wrong. If a football coach said the team was only going to try to win the easiest games, he would be fired immediately.

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2. **BBHY** at 06:50 AM on 15 July, 2017

I saw an article on Grist yesterday about the actions people can take on climate change, but voting wasn't included.

I think voting may be the most important step people can take. Changing your lightbulbs and not bothering to vote against climate denier politicians is a failed strategy.

👍 1 👎 0

3. **nigelj** at 07:22 AM on 15 July, 2017

"American politicians perceive their constituents' positions as more conservative than they are."

This comes as no surprise to me. Perhaps politicians just hear what they want to hear.

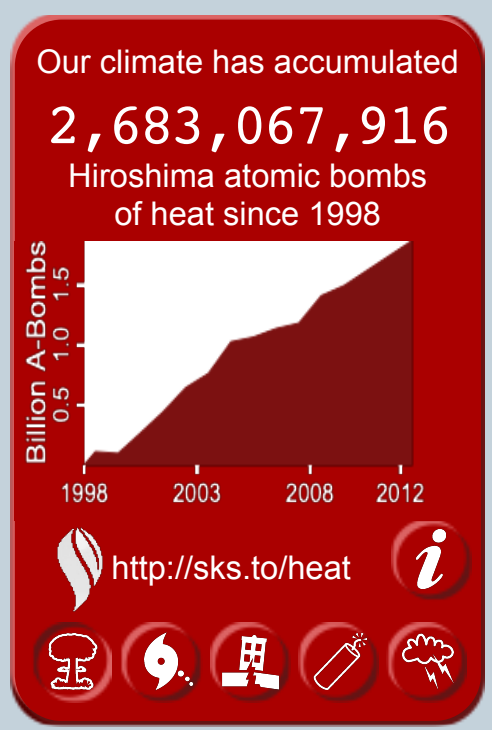
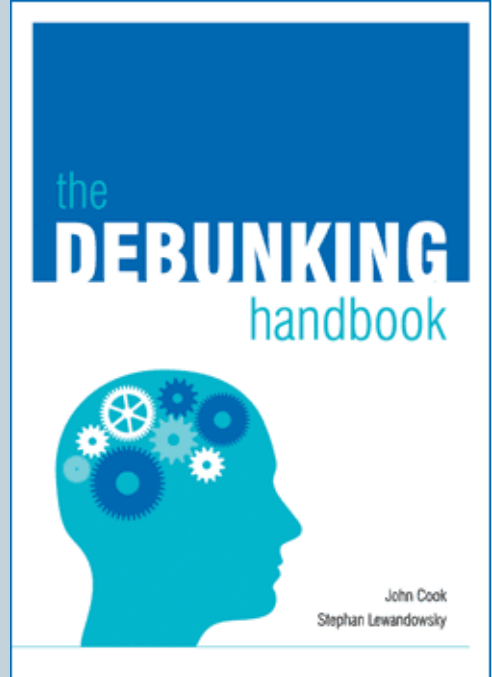
Polls by organisations like Pew consistently show the majority of Americans want action on climate change, in stark contrast to the views of Congress.

As you say perhaps conservatives lobby more. Here is another possibility that may explain part of this issues. I listen to talkback radio sometimes (not hugely, it can get a bit mind numbing at times, the ignorance is astounding) but one thing comes across clearly. It's the conservative leaning callers that dominate, and are the loudest and most direct and blunt in their views. Liberal leaning callers are fewer in number, and tend to be more laid back, nuanced and complex in their views. It creates an impression that conservative views are more numerous, when they clearly actually aren't.

This conservative dominance is possibly because liberals promote tolerance as a key value, so dont want to be too blunt. They end up holding back just a little too much at times.

I find both conservative and liberal views interesting and am not saying one side is always right, because that's just not the case in my view. But the way views are put has a difference.

However for some reason liberals and conservatives seem equally loud in internet forums, but politicians still probably look a lot at traditional media like radio, given their age group.



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Archives

The views of people are complex and confused as well and this is what politicians are listening to. The Economist.com July edition did an interesting, excellent and relevant article called America Divided. It would be on their website if you are a subscriber and you can get a few articles for free. Briefly they interviewed people living in small town america and discussed political views, occupations, and voting habits etc.

They identified some partisan divisions between conservative / liberal and occupational groups particularly. They identified partisan divisions between republican and democrat, but not as large as anticipated. They found many people were not too clear on what the parties even stood for, and voting was often out of habit, peer group leanings, and personalities rather than policies.

Some voted for Trump because he "spoke like them" or said he cared, even although they admitted his policies didn't make a lot of sense. However democrat and liberal leaning people tended to look a little more at policies than personality. Personally I think its policies that count for most.

You therefore have a very complex, confused voter base feeding information back to elected representatives. With so much poor quality understanding of policies the end result is not going to be good. In such an environment it will also be the loud groups with vested business interests that dominate, and get through to politicians and articulate views most cogently, for good or bad.

The other obvious dynamic is politicians are funded by various groups including fossil fuel lobbies, and are therefore probably susceptible to the wishes of those groups. But that's another separate issue.

I agree if people want Congress to reflect their views they need to engage politicians directly. This overcomes many issues. People also need to state their views more firmly. Being tolerant and open minded should not have to mean being too reticent or wooly thinking or holding back.

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4. **bjchip** at 08:19 AM on 15 July, 2017

So maybe liberals vote but their votes aren't counted?

Maybe they don't pay attention in the local elections that ultimately determine the lines drawn for the larger issues?

<http://athensforeveryone.com/gerrymandering-fairness-and-you/>

Maybe there is a reason we are governed by a minority?

👍 0 🗳️ 0

5. **bjchip** at 08:20 AM on 15 July, 2017

Darn it... I keep forgetting the link thing.

**The fearsome Gerrymander**

👍 0 🗳️ 0

6. **chriskoz** at 17:24 PM on 15 July, 2017

I don't think increased lobbying by voters will change politician's mind.

Just like they deny science, they also deny reality in broader sense, the same mechanism of cognitive bias apply here. T-man is a prime example.

Rather than increased citizen's lobbying, other measures, that would remove the incentives for cognitive bias, will be more effective: e.g. to start with, ban all political donations by industries (FF industry in particular) and over small limit. Then they would not be as encumbered by e.g. Koch bros as they are right now.

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7. **BBHY** at 18:05 PM on 15 July, 2017

I would like to see 10% of congress be ordinary people, chosen by random lottery. They would only serve one term, then go back to their regular lives.

IMHO, that would be enough to break up the hold of career politicians, beholden to the rich, on our government.

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8. **JWRebel** at 20:06 PM on 15 July, 2017



(free to republish)

## Smartphone Apps

iPhone



Android



Nokia



Politicians pay only scant notice to polls. They assume other people (their constituents) are like them, as do most human beings. Americans go to Iraq, Afghanistan, or Bosnia and think well-meaning people there, being like them, will welcome efforts to bring democracy and to be able to act more like Americans.

Rich people (in Congress) also think that they are acting benevolently for the others in society, noblesse oblige, and often assume they know better what the interest of other people are than do those people themselves. Many are not actually cynical, just other-worldly. It is a smugness that only wears off when events conspire against them and they land up swapping their social position. One of the flaws in human beings are that they are naturally poor in putting themselves in others' shoes; only suffering breaks down people's "character" enough to be susceptible to "truth" [compassion].

An example: During the Great Financial Crisis in '08, millions of messages came to Congress members, skewed more than 99% against bailing out the banks. They did it anyway, not only because they are whores to money interests and campaign finance, but because they thought they knew better what was at stake.

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9. **ralbin** at 01:20 AM on 16 July, 2017

This piece and this research is based on a misunderstanding. The key constituency for Republican politicians isn't voters, it's their wealthy conservative donors. The fact that American politicians, Republican politicians in particular, don't reflect the views and interests of voters is well established in the political science literature. As for the final question of this piece, there is no single answer but a large part of the explanation is that the Republican Party apparatus is largely under the control of the clients of wealthy conservatives.

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10. **One Planet Only Forever** at 01:27 AM on 16 July, 2017

JWRebel@8,

The 'Good Intentions to Improve the future for all of humanity driven by rational consideration of all available information' that you have so generously offered as an explanation of the behaviour of rich and powerful people only applies to 'Some of the rich and powerful people'.

It is possible to test whether a rich and powerful person is deserving of that respect, or deserves ridicule. One of the most comprehensive tests is to:

- compare the claims made by them against all available information
- Seeing how they respond to skeptical questioning about whether their claims are supportable based on all available information
- validating that their actions support the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals**
- Seeing how they respond to skeptical questioning regarding the likely result of their actions, do they deliver Good Reason or Poor Excuses (or try to distract).

The SDGs were only published in 2015, but the **1972 Stockholm Conference** included the understanding that fossil fuel burning had to end before the freedom of people to believe what they wished and do as they please (the marketplace) would end it. Climate impacts and all of the other SDGs have been developed since 1972 through coordinated cooperative international effort by 'people who actually do understand what is required, do know better'.

Based on that evaluation there is no doubt that many wealthy powerful people do not deserve to have Won Leadership positions (in business or government) and actually understand that they only have Poor Excuses for their chosen claim-making and desired action plans. And one of the poorest excuses is the claims that they 'pursue a broad support base' when what they really do is try to encourage people to be Greedier and Less Tolerant and gang up to Win undeservingly (undeserving if Winners are supposed to have proven by Good Reason that they help lead humanity to a sustainable better future - deserving in their minds if the measure of Winning is Winning whatever game has been made-up by getting away with behaving less acceptably/less justifiably than their competition).

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11. **nigelj** at 06:04 AM on 16 July, 2017

Chrisko @6

Yes political donations from industry should be banned or capped. But ironically this will probably only happen if the voting public "lobby politicians" more effectively to try to get them to amend the relevant law. So we are back to what I was saying. Politicians wont do it willingly, they will have to be pushed hard by the public.

There's another problem in America. The Democrats already tried to limit / cap election donations, but it was struck down by the courts as "unconstitutional" as below.

[www.washingtonpost.com/politics/supreme-court-strikes-down-limits-on-federal-campaign-donations/2014/04/02/54e16c30-ba74-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.08cd0906c9c0](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/supreme-court-strikes-down-limits-on-federal-campaign-donations/2014/04/02/54e16c30-ba74-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08_story.html?utm_term=.08cd0906c9c0)

Regarding other countries, I would ideally like to see election campaigns funded out of taxation. That way private money and influence is removed. It won't be easy of course, because people react negatively to taxes spent on politicians in any way, but I think we would all be better off for it.

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12. **factotum** at 10:20 AM on 16 July, 2017

Skeptical Science asks that you review the [comments policy](#). Thank you.

It occurs to me that given the degree to which our current political system is messed up / disconnected from "reality"

1.) the degree to which our current political system is messed up / disconnected from "reality"

2. That scientists are still among the most prestigious / respected groups in the country,

3. Many, if not most of our founding fathers had a scientific mind set. This objective mindset in dealing with the real physical world being necessary to be successful when you are in intimate contact with the physical world

then I would like to propose that a new political party be created. Viz. the party of science. One of its first goals would be a constitutional amendment that any candidate for public office be required to take and pass an upper division science course, and a year of calculus.

And that science course would be hard science as in biology, physics, or chemistry. Maybe a few others. But not psychology, or other "soft" sciences that have little, if any, mathematical foundations.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard\\_and\\_soft\\_science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_and_soft_science)

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