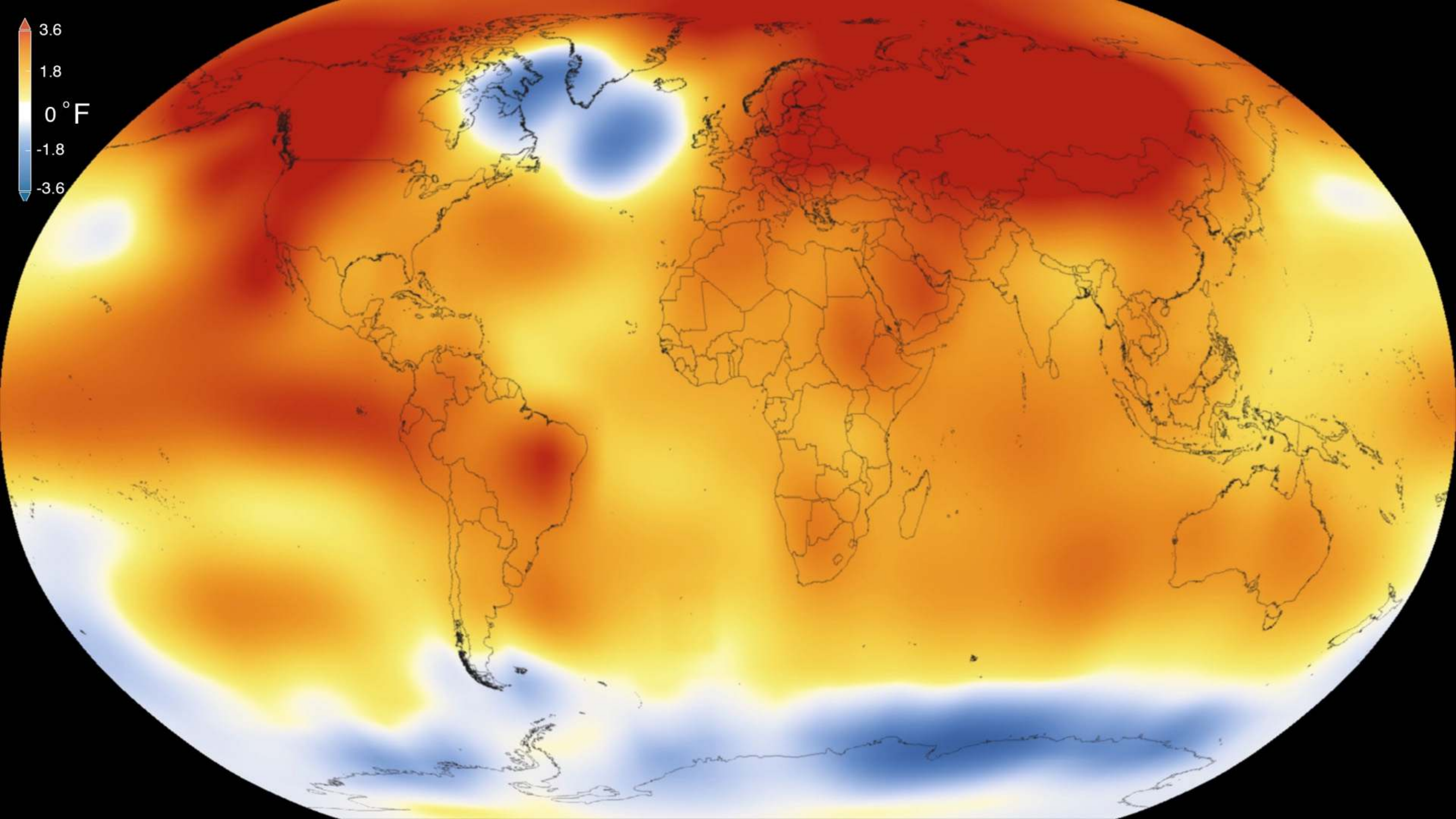


# Psychological Barriers to Bipartisan Climate Policy in the United States

Leaf Van Boven  
University of Colorado Boulder

Phil Ehret  
David Sherman  
University of California, Santa Barbara





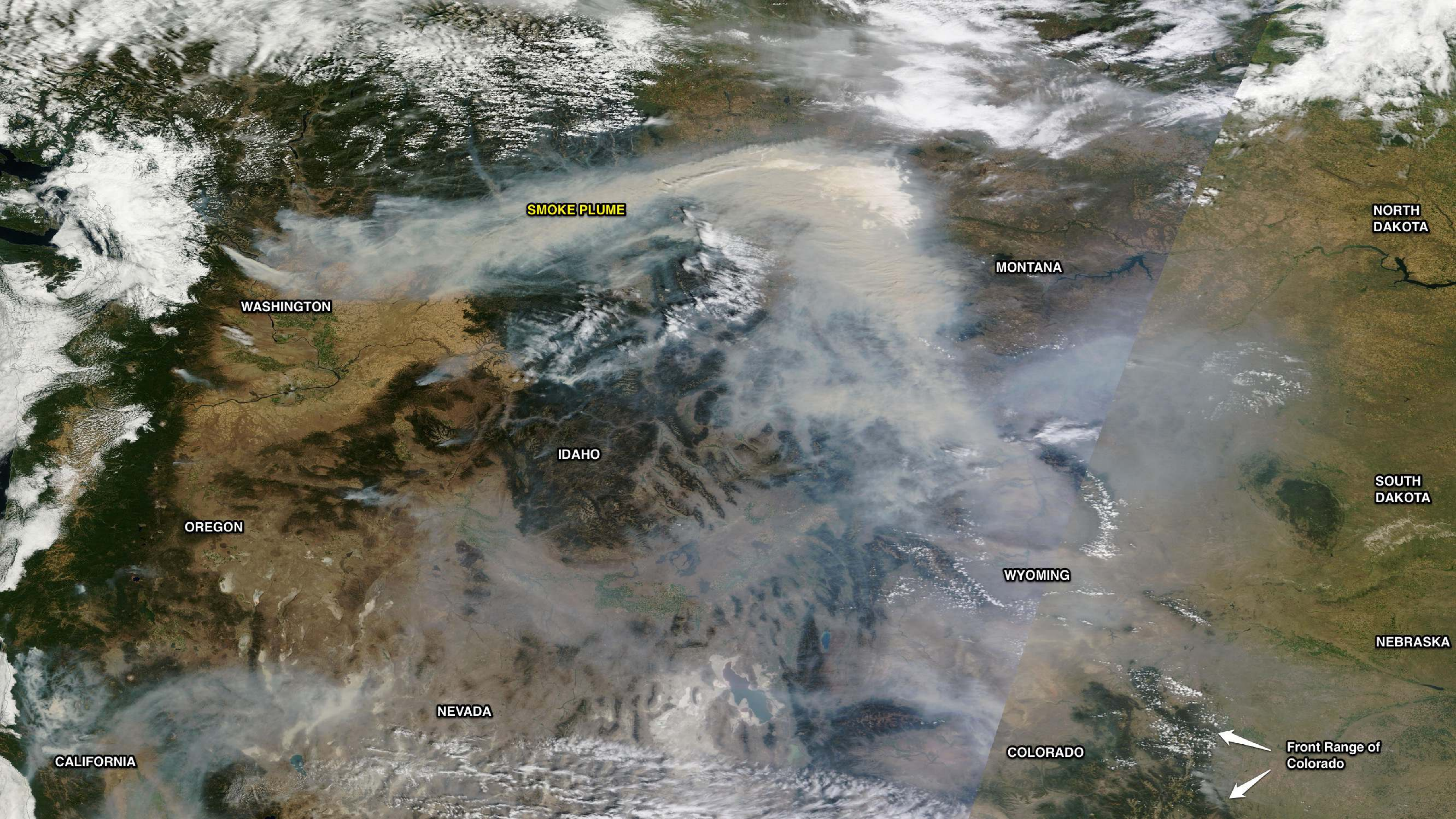












**SMOKE PLUME**

**WASHINGTON**

**MONTANA**

**NORTH DAKOTA**

**IDAHO**

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

**OREGON**

**WYOMING**

**NEBRASKA**

**CALIFORNIA**

**NEVADA**

**COLORADO**

**Front Range of Colorado**



Although the causes of suicide are complex, one study found a couple degrees of warming on hot days in India was associated with an average of 67 more suicides per day.





# *Death Toll From Heat Wave in Karachi, Pakistan, Hits 1,000*

By SABA IMTIAZ and ZIA ur-REHMAN JUNE 25, 2015





# More Than 1,000 Died in South Asia Floods This Summer

[查看简体中文版](#) | [查看繁體中文版](#)

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN AUG. 29, 2017














A woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue top, is speaking. She is positioned in front of a large window that looks out onto a bright, overcast day with a view of the ocean and a green landscape. The text is overlaid on the lower portion of the image.

The most powerful move that a government can make in the fight against climate change is to put a price on carbon.

**Rachel Kyte** vice president and special envoy for climate change, The World Bank



**Why has the United States failed  
to enact climate policy?**





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AVTH

GLOBAL WARMING? I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT.



**Are Republicans skeptical of  
climate change?**



# National Panel Surveys

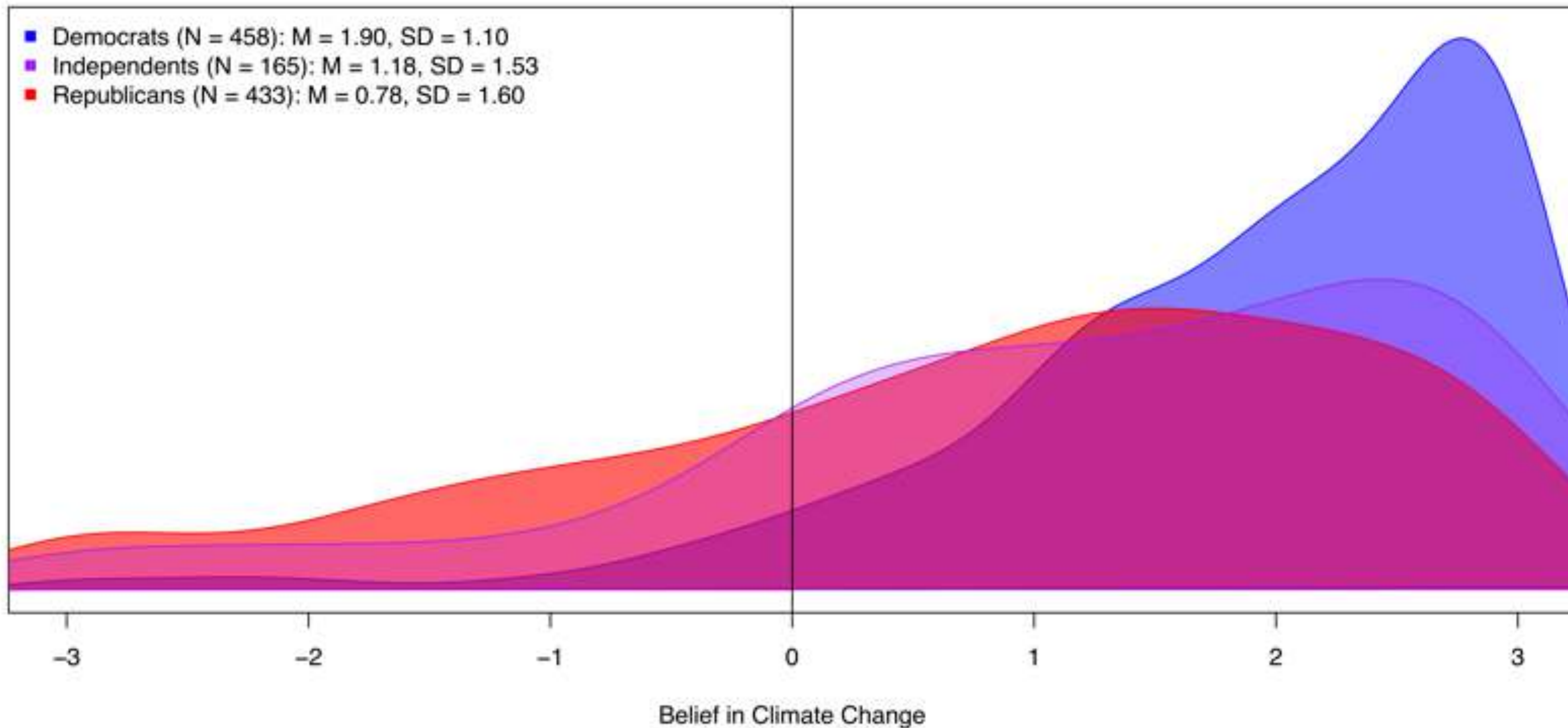
- Climate change is happening
- Climate change poses a risk to human health, safety, and prosperity
- Human activity is largely responsible for recent climate change
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will reduce global warming

-3 = strongly disagree; 0 = neutral; +3 = strongly agree

$\alpha = .92$

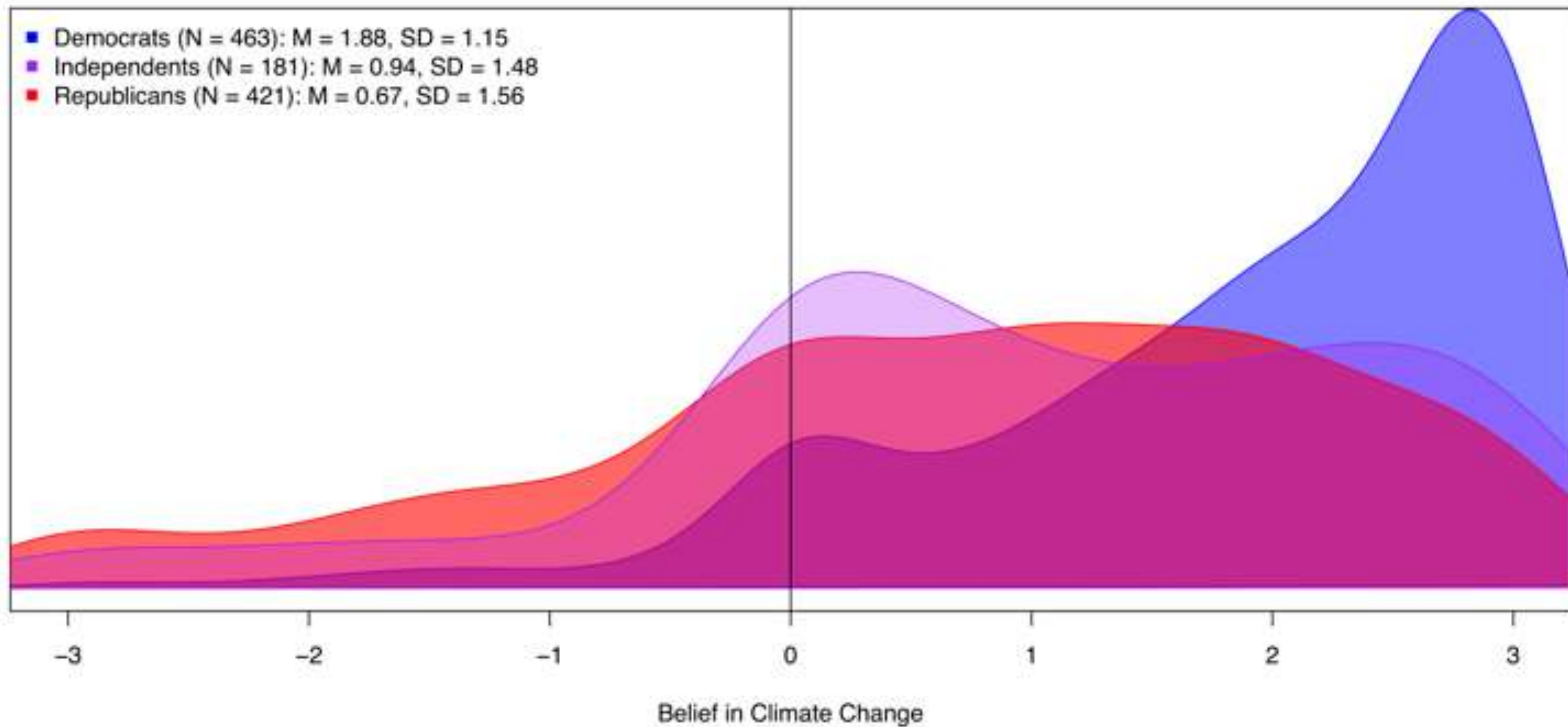


### Most People Believe in Climate Change (October 2014)



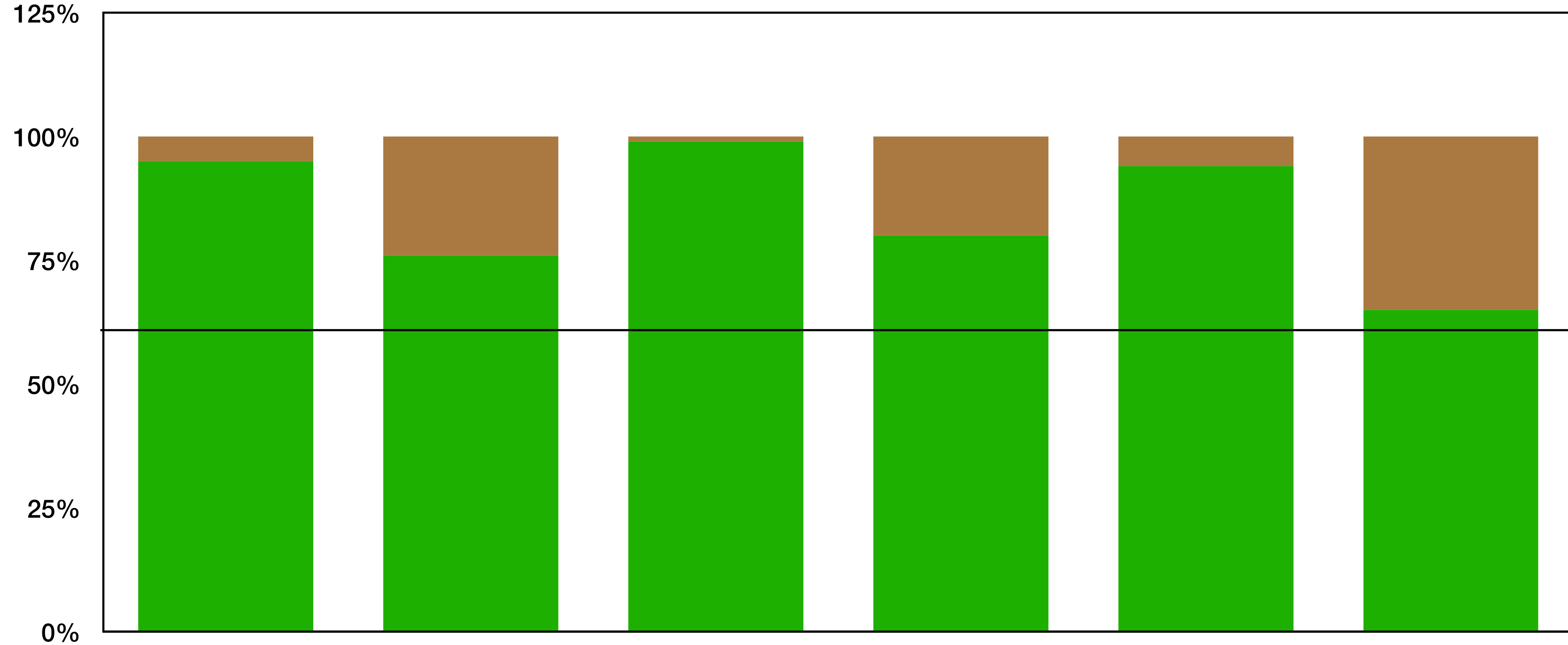


## Most People Believe in Climate Change (October – November 2016)





# ANES 2016: Most People Believe Global Warming is Happening

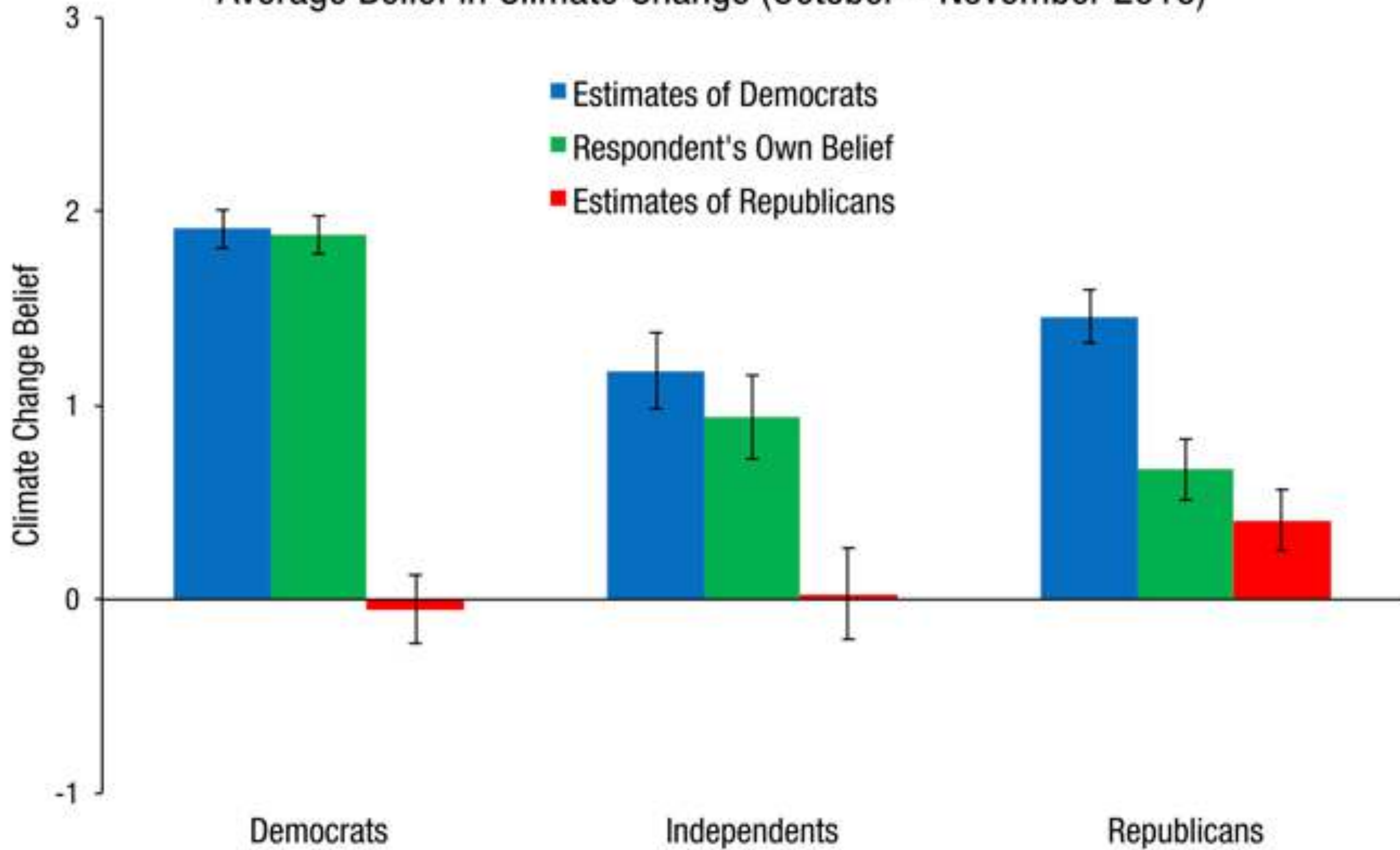


N = 2584 voters

- Yes: global warming has probably been happening
- No: global warming probably has not been happening



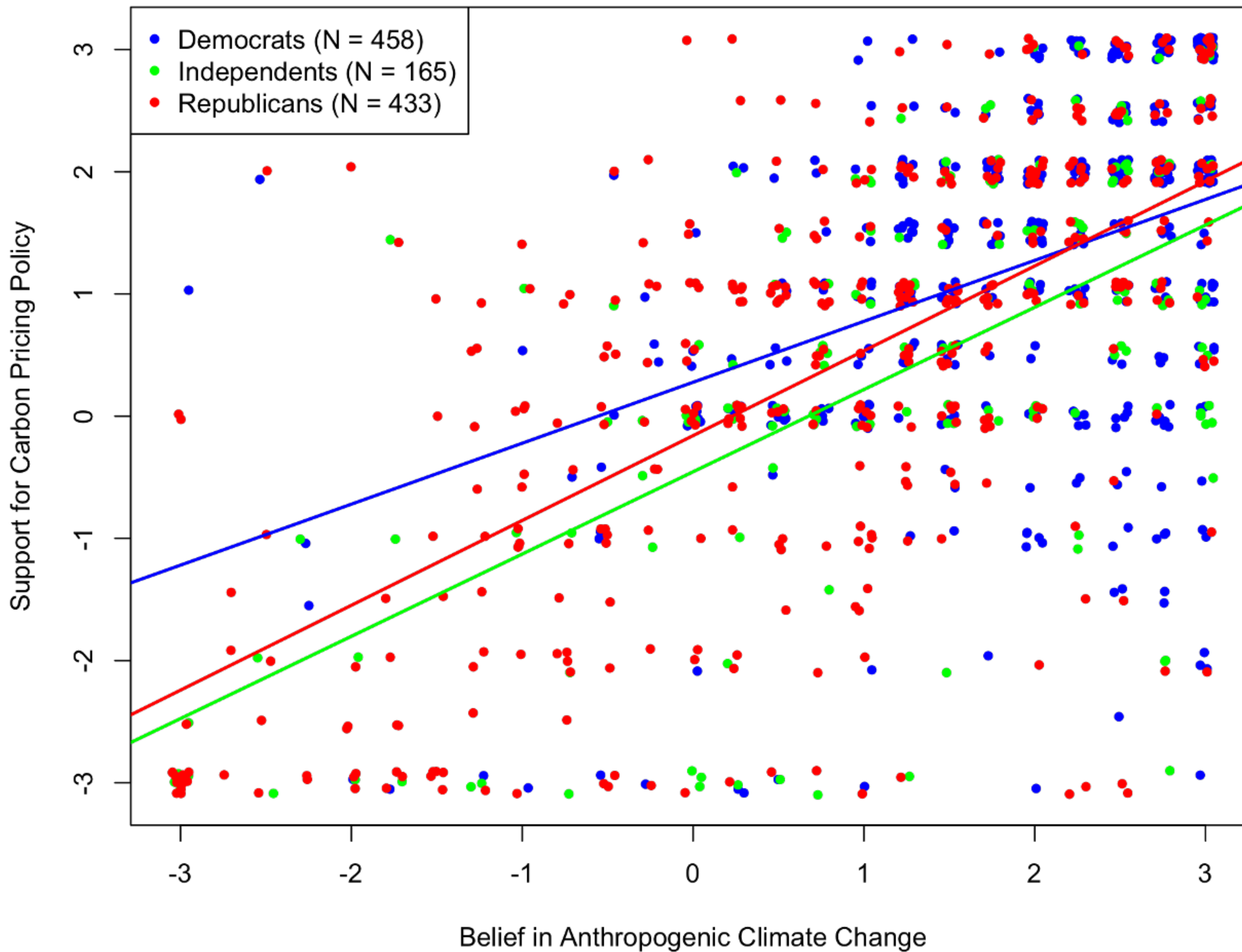
# Average Belief in Climate Change (October – November 2016)



Error bars are 95% C



# Climate Change Belief Moderately Predicts Support for Climate Policy





**Partisans Place Party Over Policy**



**“If I proposed something that was literally word for word in the Republican Party platform, it would be immediately opposed by either to ninety percent of the Republican voters. And the reason is not that they’ve evaluated what I said. It’s that / said it.”**

*–President Barack Obama*



**“In my first six years in Congress from 1993–1999, I had said that climate change was hooey. I hadn’t looked into the science. All I knew was that Al Gore was for it, and therefore I was against it.”**

*–Republican Representative Bob Inglis*



**“Oftentimes when we think we’re engaged in reasoned policy discussion we’re actually engaged in complex efforts to rationalize the direction in which our tribal affiliations are pushing us.”**

*–Ezra Klein, Vox Media, “The Depressing Psychological Theory That Explains Washington”*



## Cap and Trade

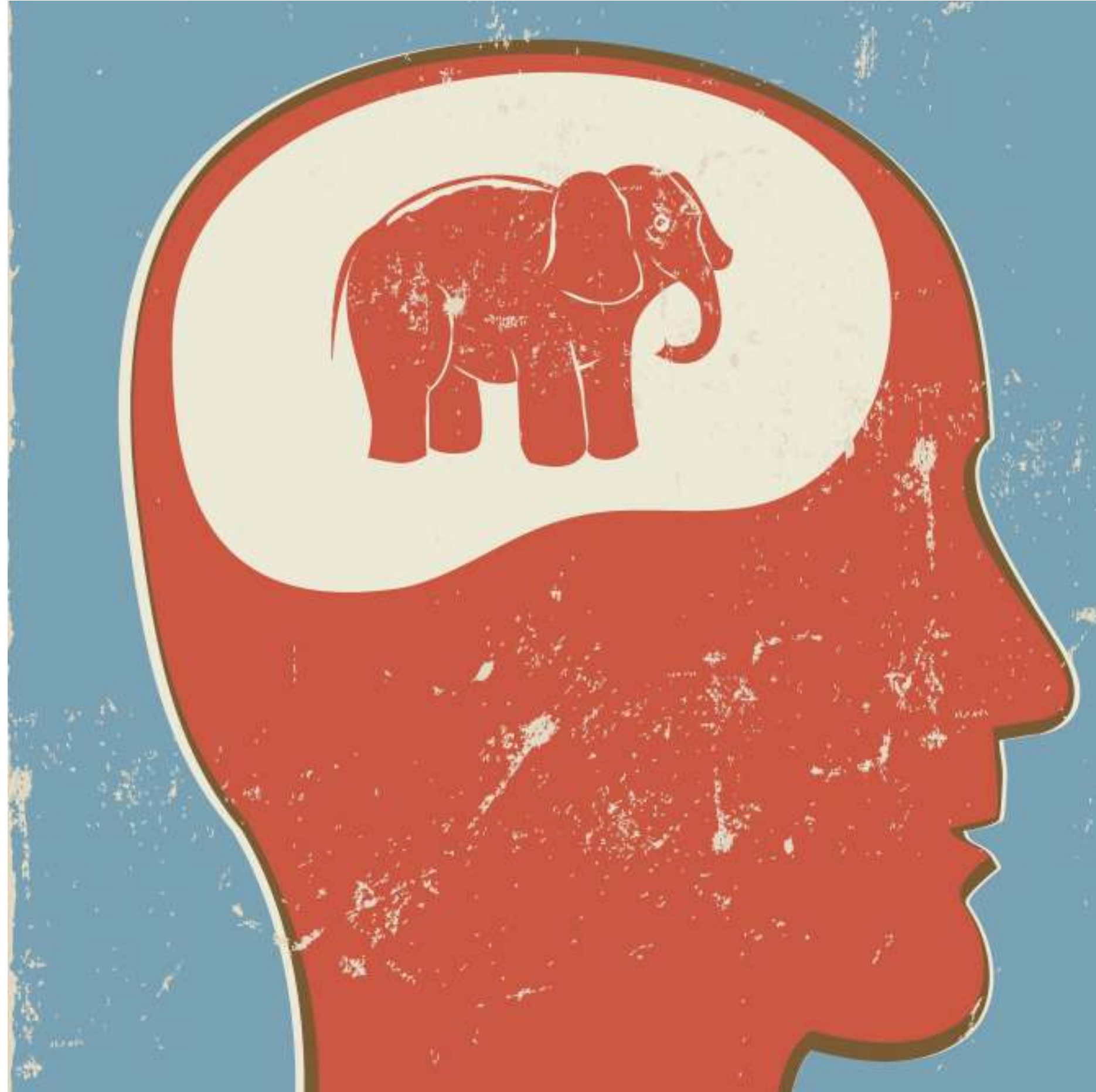


## Revenue Neutral Carbon Tax

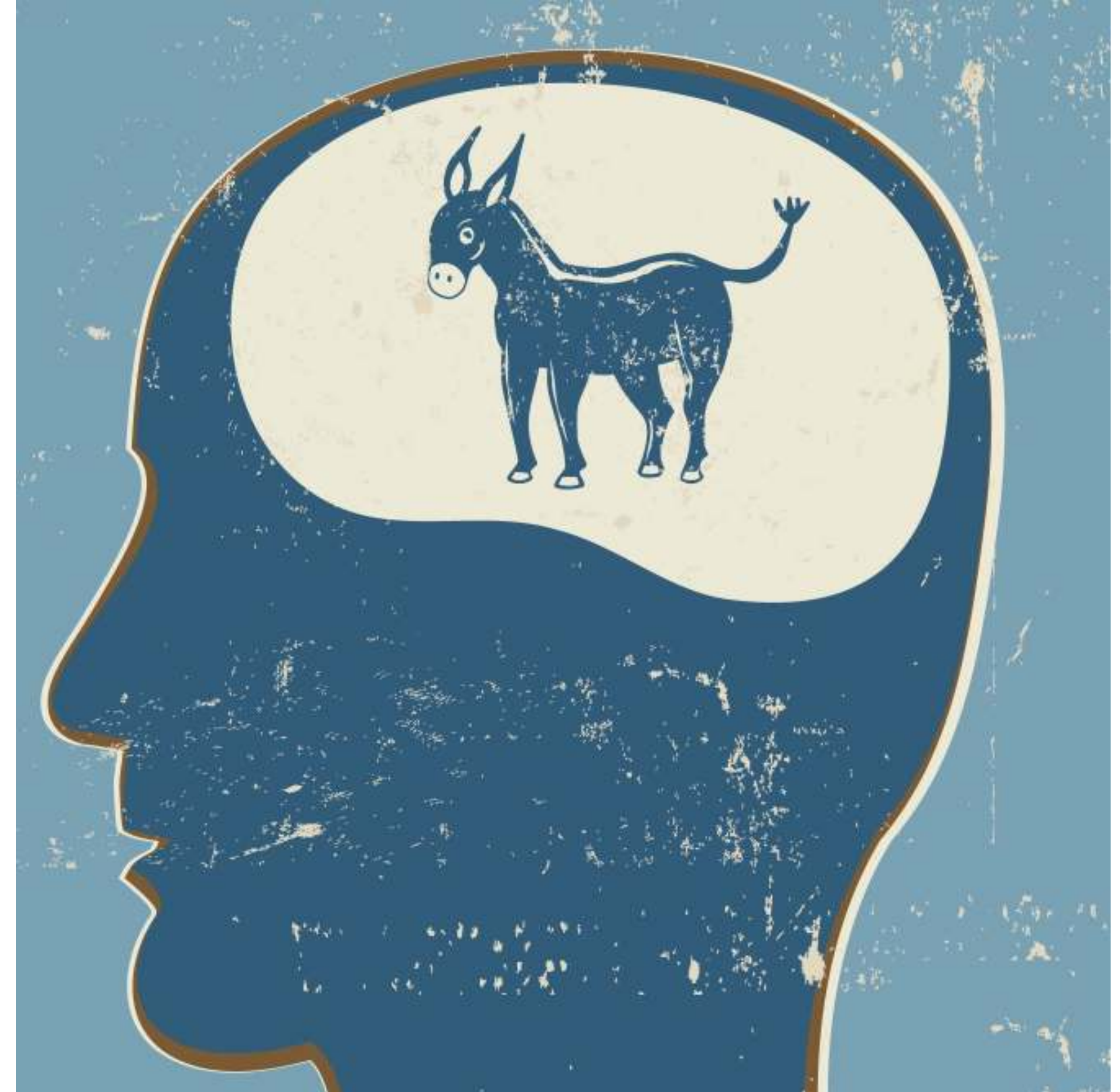




## Republicans Propose Policy (Democrats oppose)

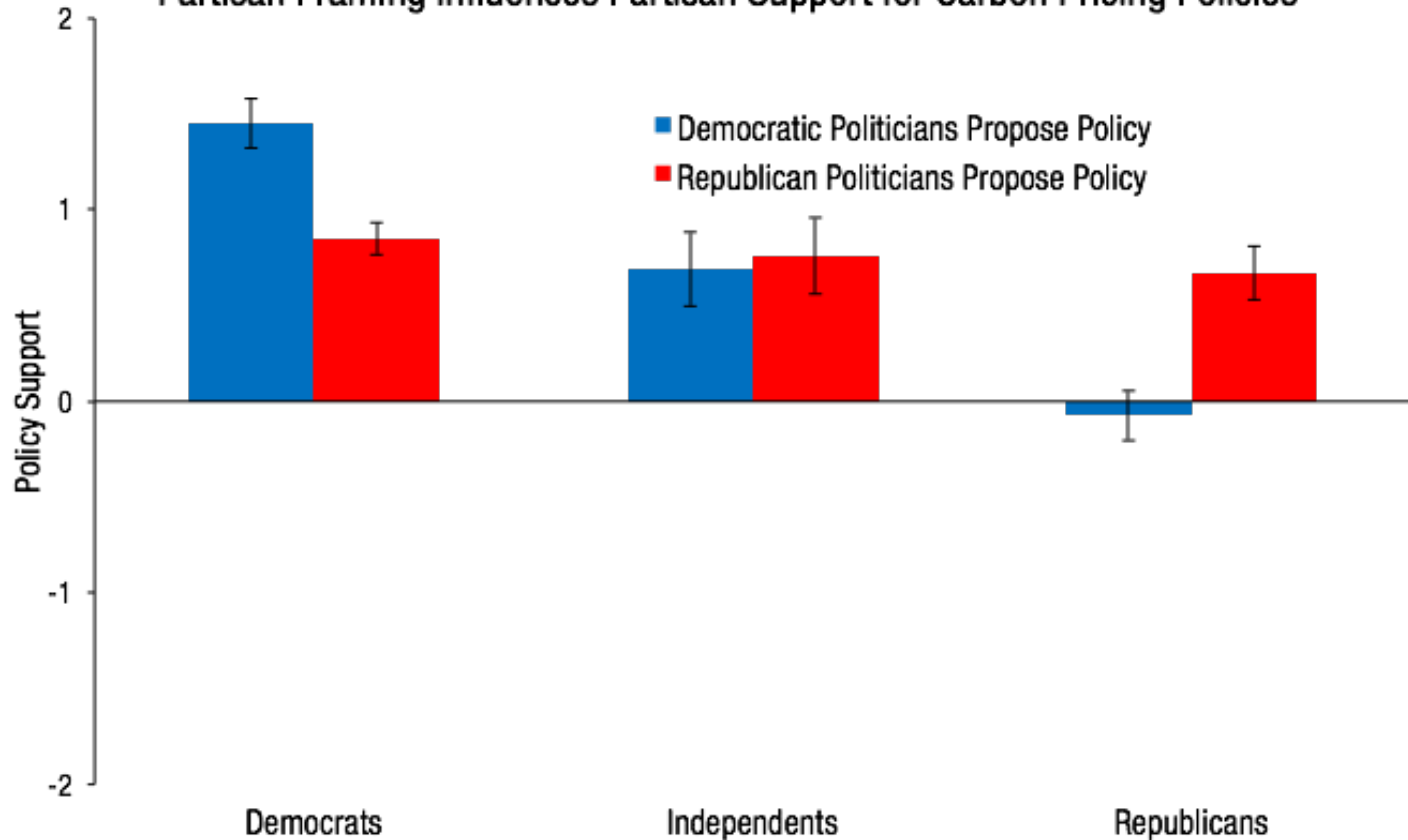


## Democrats Propose Policy (Republicans oppose)





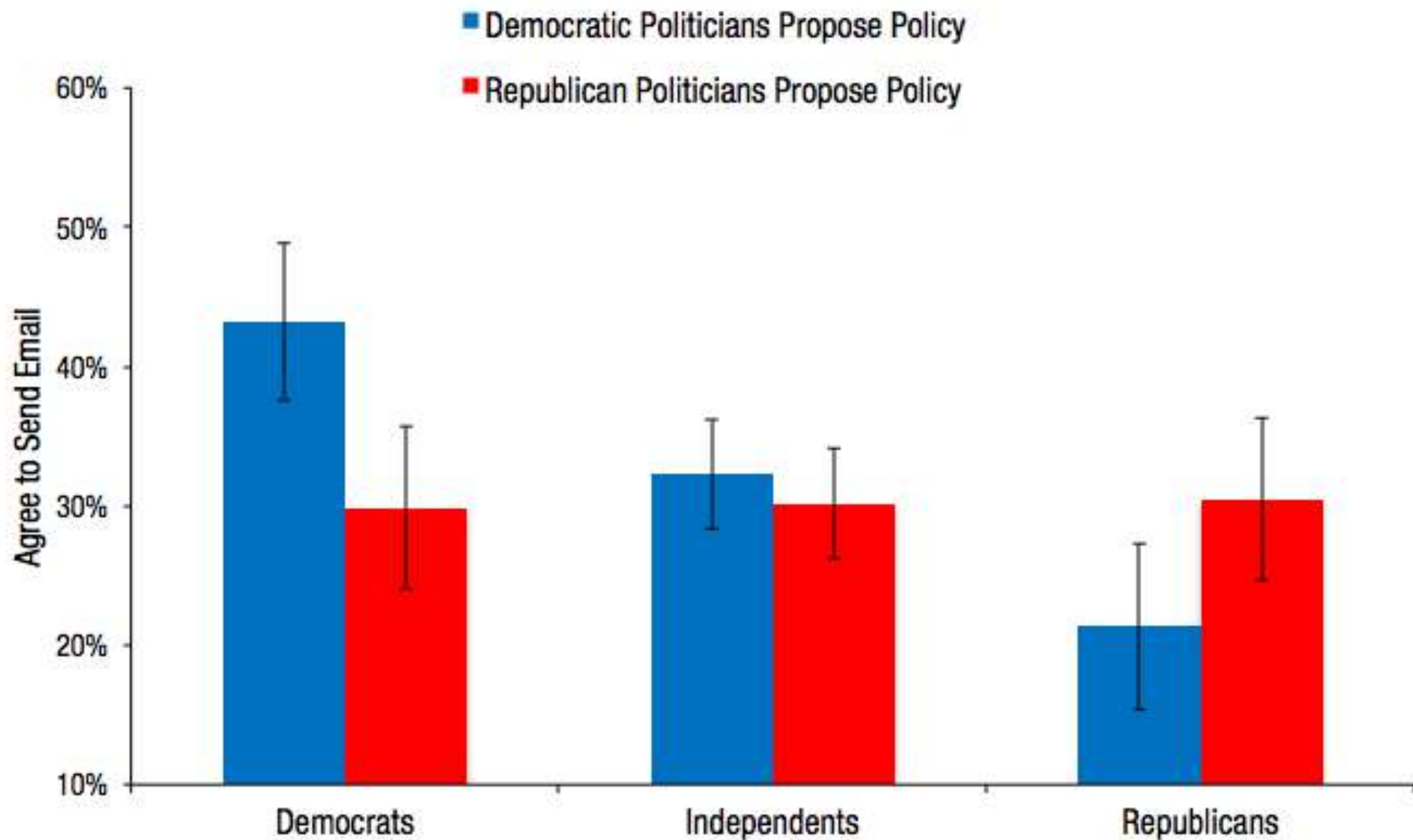
# Partisan Framing Influences Partisan Support for Carbon Pricing Policies



Error bars are 95% C



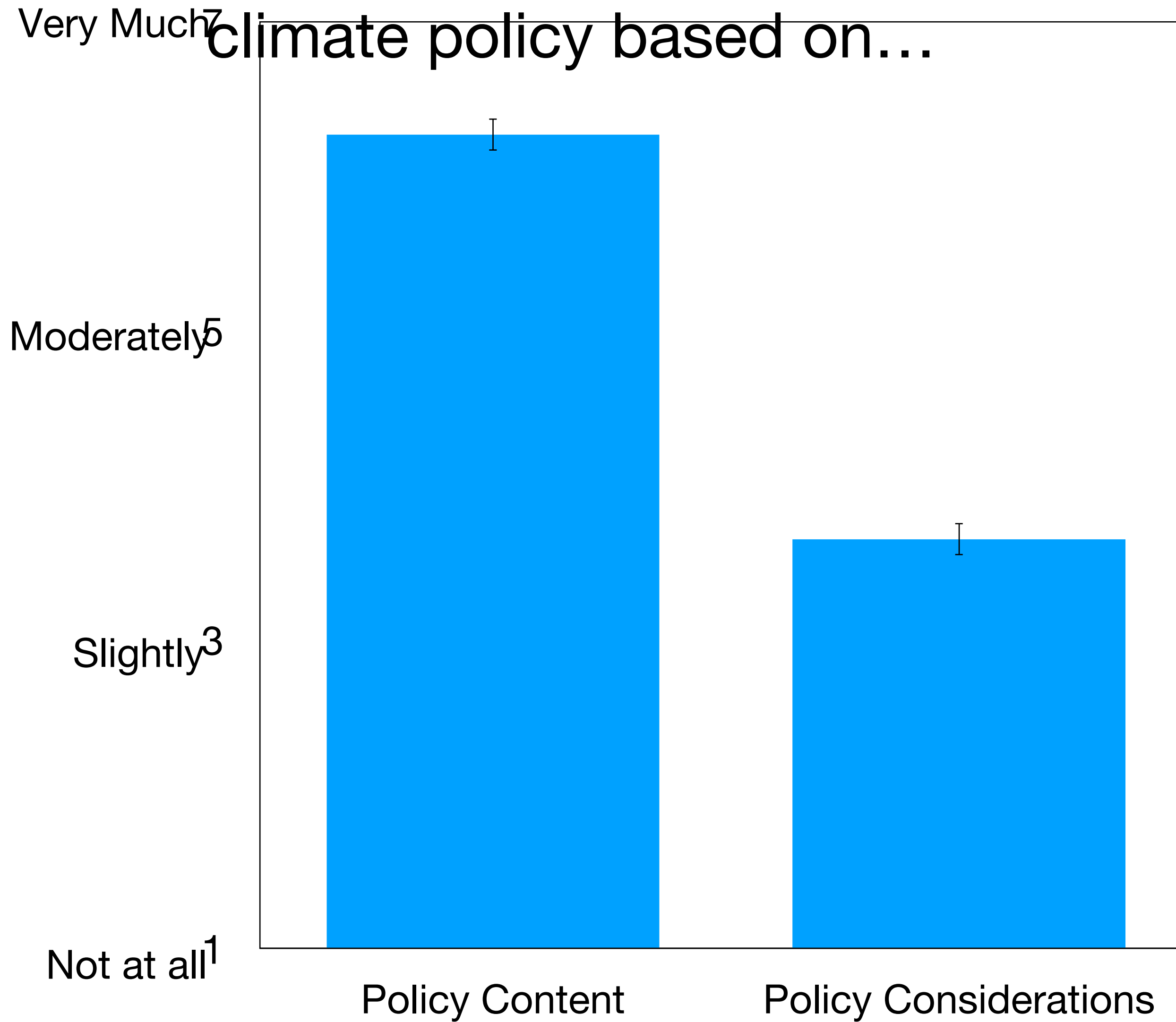
## Partisan Framing Influences Partisans' Willingness to Send an Email Supporting Carbon Pricing Policy



Error bars are 95% C



# As a good citizen, how much should you evaluate climate policy based on...



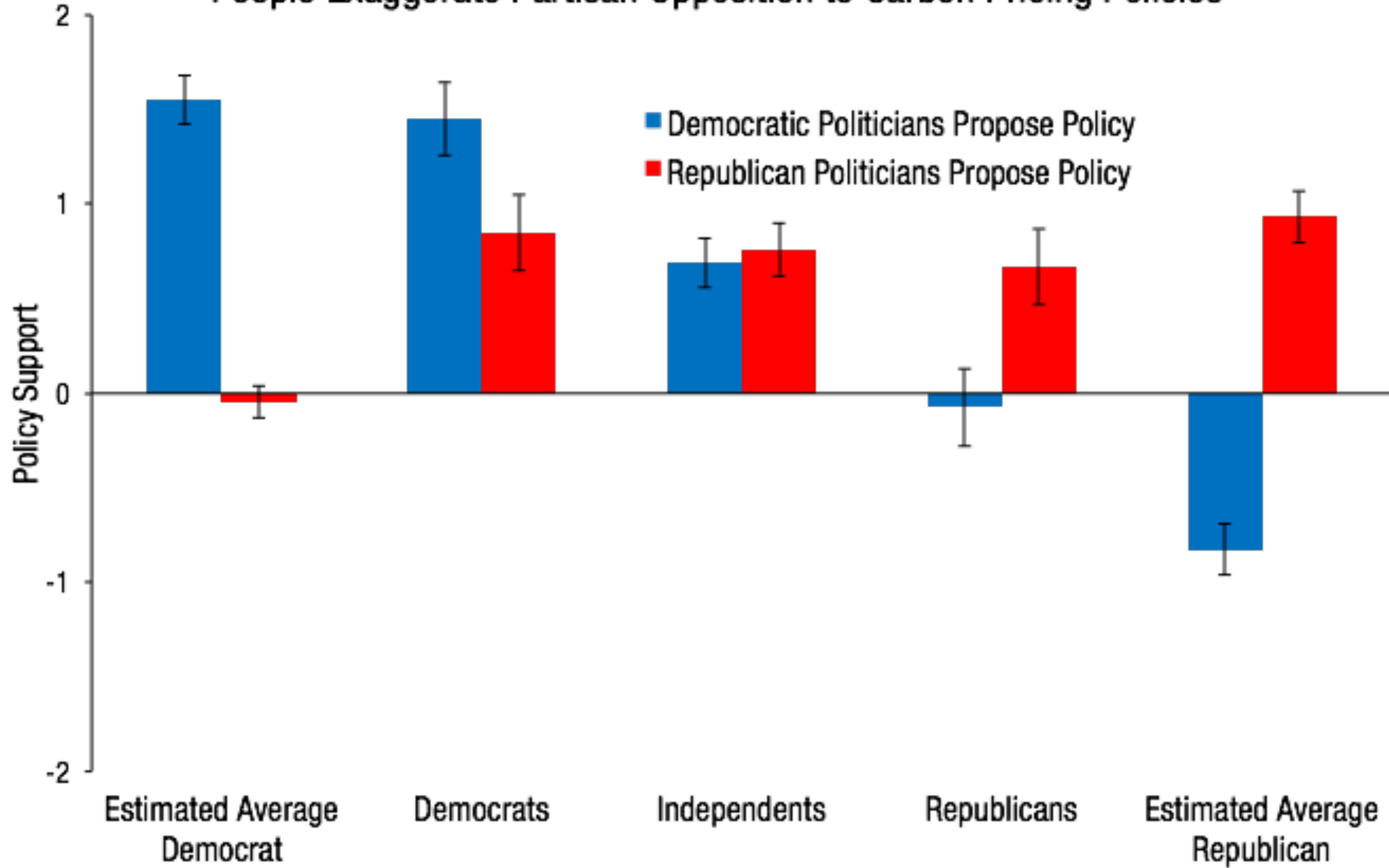
Error bars are 95% C



# **Exaggerated Partisan Opposition**

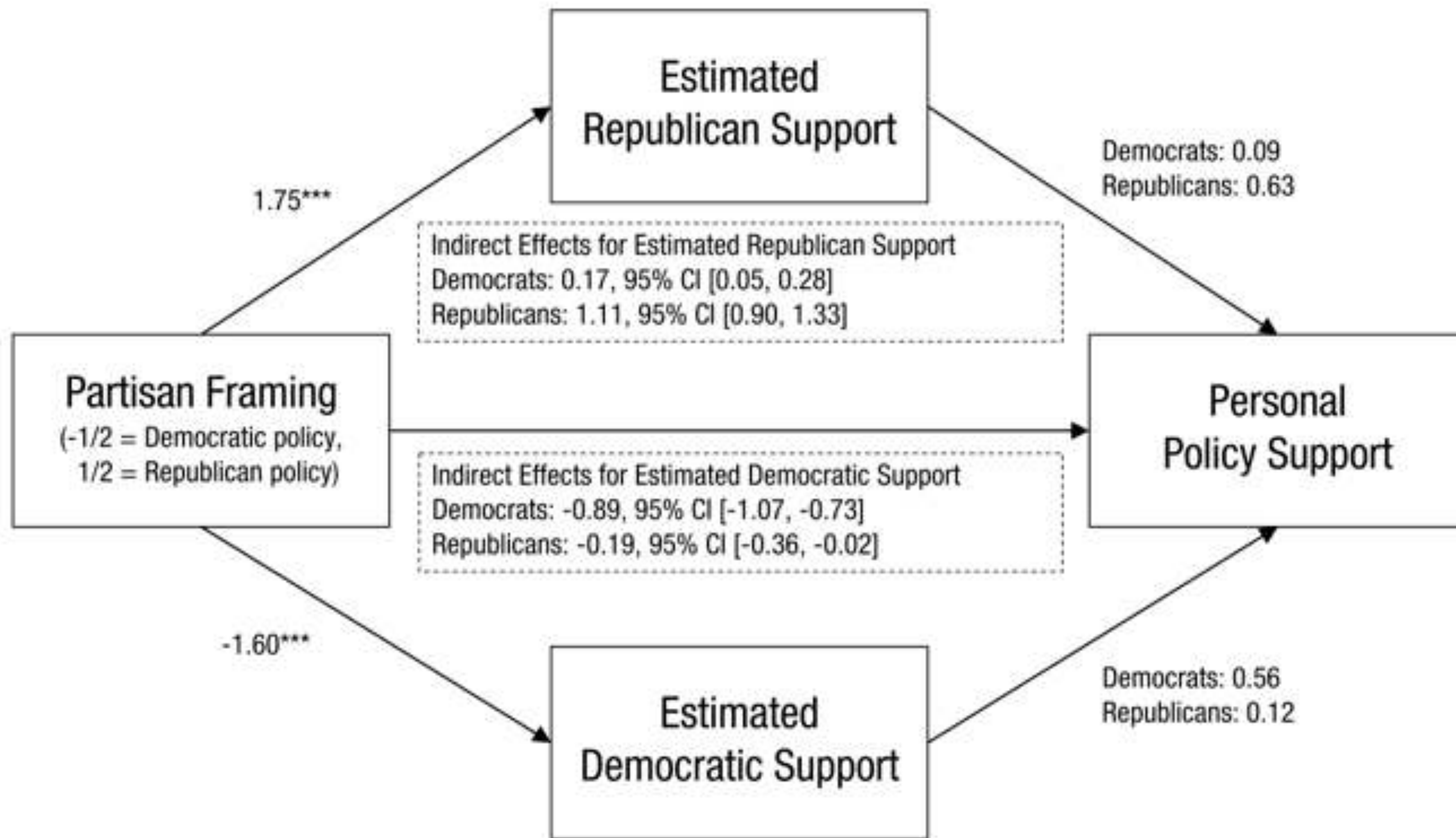


# People Exaggerate Partisan Opposition to Carbon Pricing Policies



Error bars are 95% C







# Policy Maker Psychology



# Senator Timothy Wirth

Democrat, Colorado  
Representative 1975–1987  
Senator 1987–1993

Vice Chairman of the Board,  
United Nations Foundation and  
The Better World Fund





American politics is very messy. American politics is not full of straight lines. It's not full of formulas.... That's not the way [climate policy] is going to happen.

It's not that people believe or don't believe. If you think that members of Congress cast their votes based upon what they believe, first and foremost, that is an incorrect assumption. They cast their votes on where their constituents are...

—Senator Tim Wirth (D)



# Representative Bob Inglis

Republican, South Carolina  
1993–1999, 2005–2011

Executive Director,  
RepublicEN





I spoke. You could see the wheels turning... You know they have a need because in Salt Lake City there's this inversion problem and the air is bad and they want to solve it.... So you call for questions. No questions and the reason is... you know there's gonna be a loudmouth in the crowd who's gonna jump down the throat of anybody who raises his hand and outs themselves as believing... but privately people... say, "Yeah, yeah, we gotta do something about that."... So it's just that the loudmouth norms everybody into compliance with what has become the orthodoxy.

— Representative Bob Inglis (R)



# Representative David Skaggs

Democrat, Colorado  
1987–1999

Independent Consultant, Lawyer





The real eruption of anti-scientific phenomena within the Republican Party [was] the Gingrich emergence as Speaker and the '94 election. Before that point... there were a lot of environmental Republicans, if you will, that I was able to talk with... the action that was taken by the Gingrich administration of the House was to defund the Office of Technology Assessment... because rigorous information typically gets in the way of political objectives.

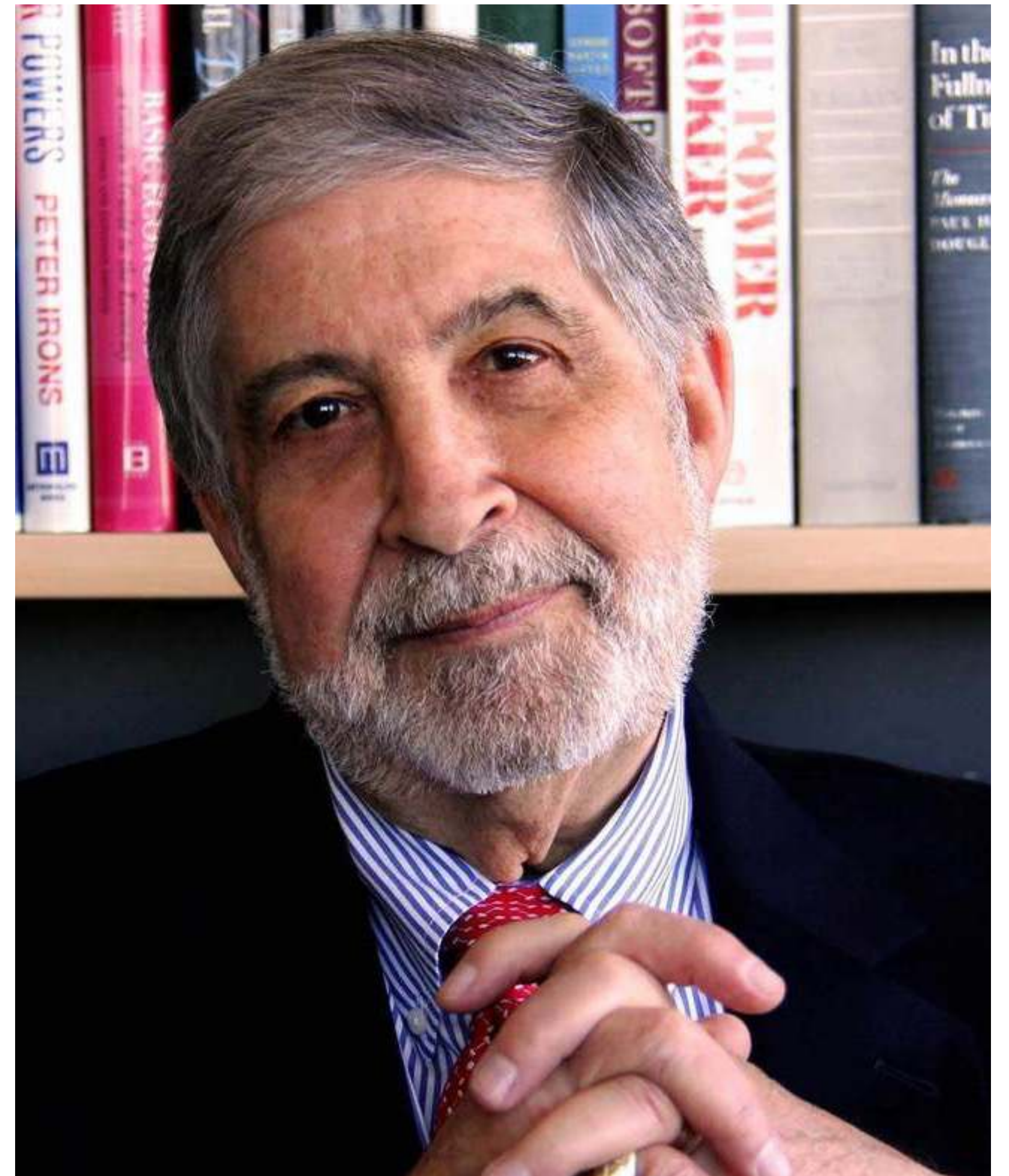
— Representative David Skaggs (D)



# Representative Mickey Edwards

Republican, Oklahoma  
1977–1993

Vice President and Program  
Director, Aspen Institute





Think of Hillary to the coal miners. “We’re gonna shut down the coal mines and put coal miners out of work.” This is what people hear.

—Representative Mickey Edwards (R)

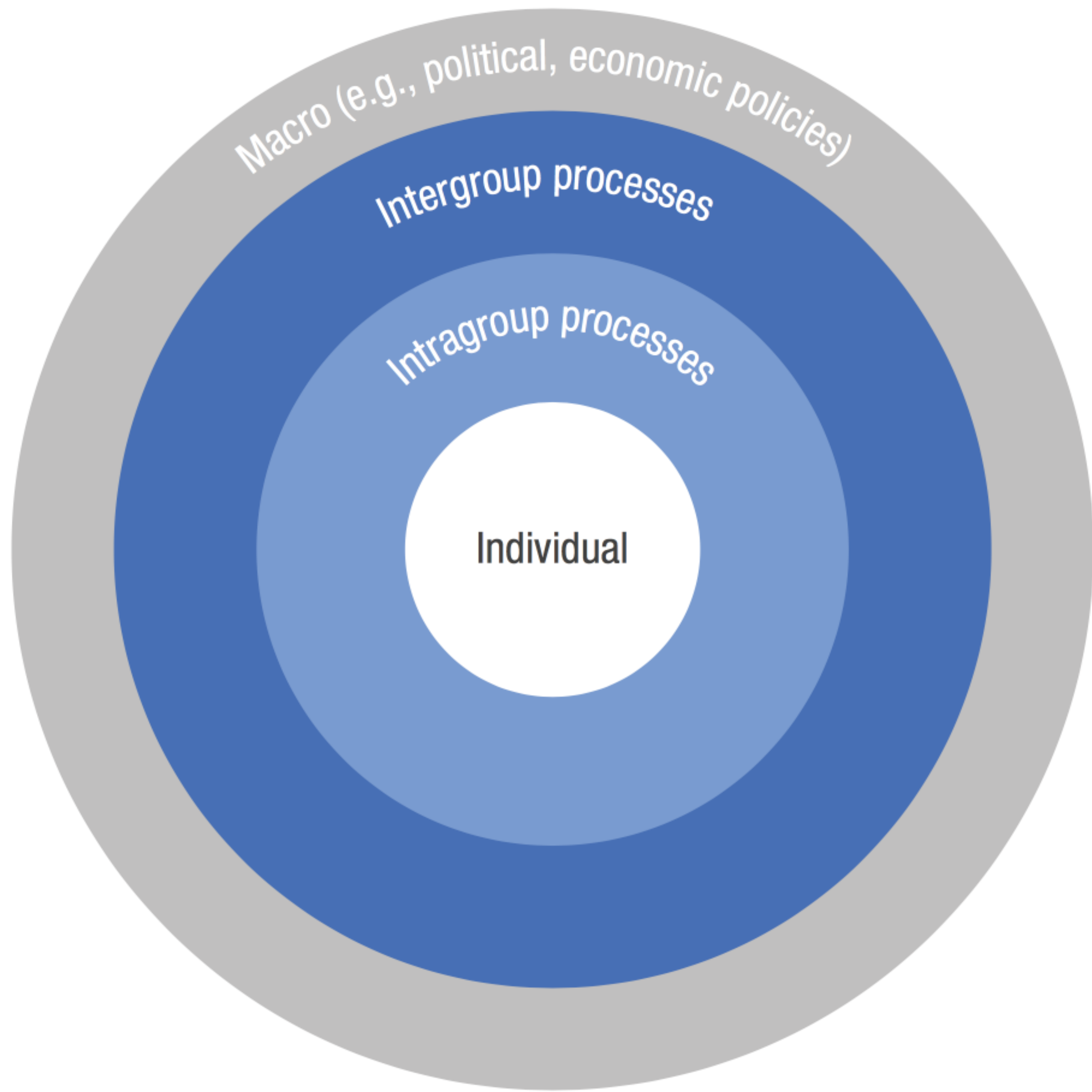
Typically it’s, “Isn’t this great? All of our hunches about how dumb conservatives are confirmed by this guy. See they tossed him out and he seems smart and so we’re all smart and aren’t [Republicans] dumb?”

—Representative Bob Inglis (R)



# **Psychologically Wise Interventions**







1. Accurately communicate social norms



If people became more aware that this is not just a little circle of crazies on the left or on the right ... but if it were more commonly seen that really Republicans and Democrats both kind of feel this way, I think that frees you up to not be worried about being an outlier. Nobody wants to be an outlier—nobody.

—Representative Mickey Edwards (R)



## 2. Decouple identity concerns and climate policy



3. Conflict resolution
  - a. personal contact
  - b. shared values
  - c. multitrack efforts





Business & Society



Communications & Culture



Education



Energy & Environment



Health & Sport



Justice & Civic Identity



Opportunity & Development

You begin to trust the other person to have views that are sincerely held and that this person is an honest, caring person, who doesn't want to see our cities flooded and doesn't want to see calamity...



## Mickey Edwards

VICE PRESIDENT AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR | **RODEL FELLOWSHIPS IN PUBLIC LEADERSHIP**

✉ [mickey.edwards@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:mickey.edwards@aspeninstitute.org)



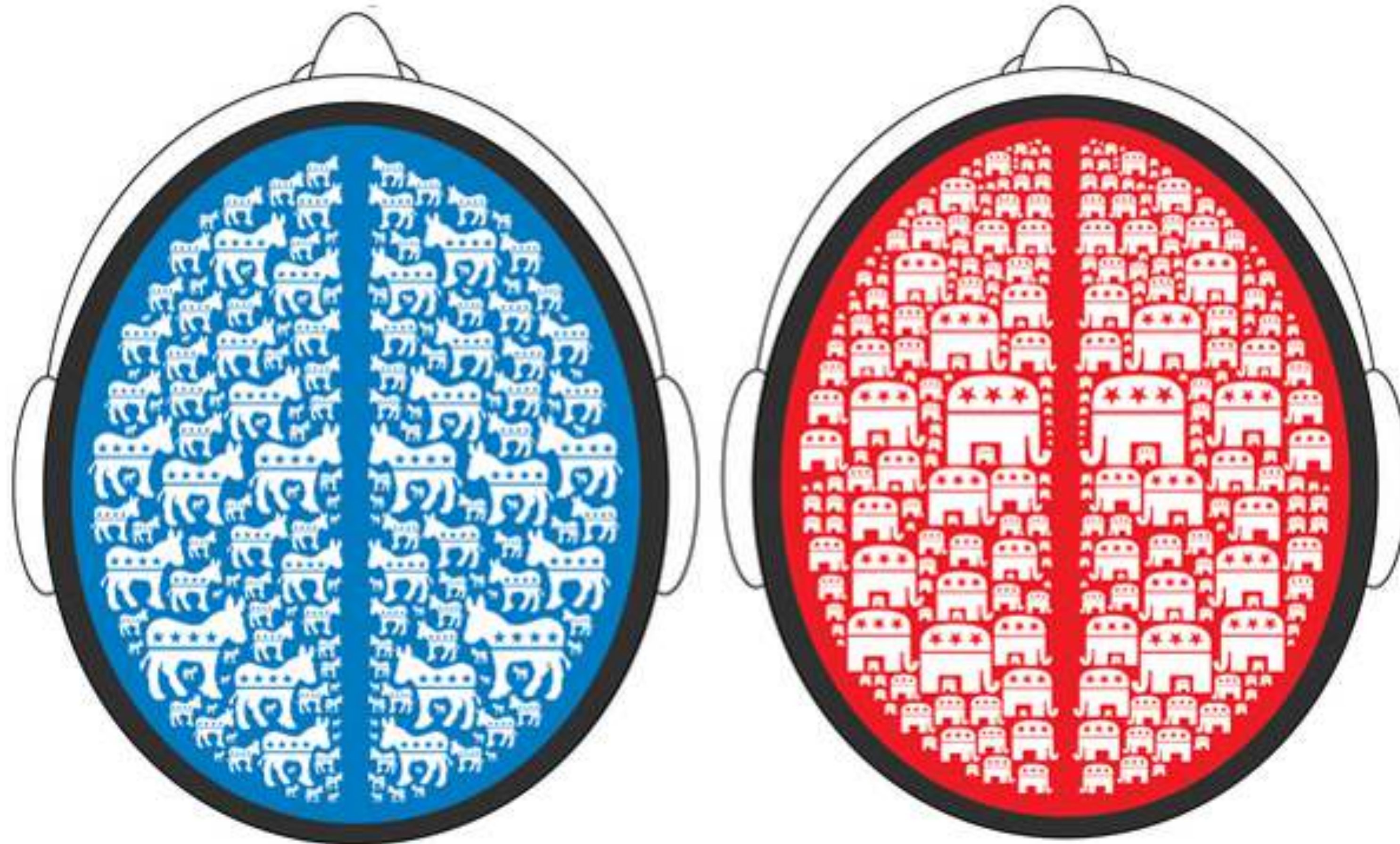
**Citizens' Climate Lobby**



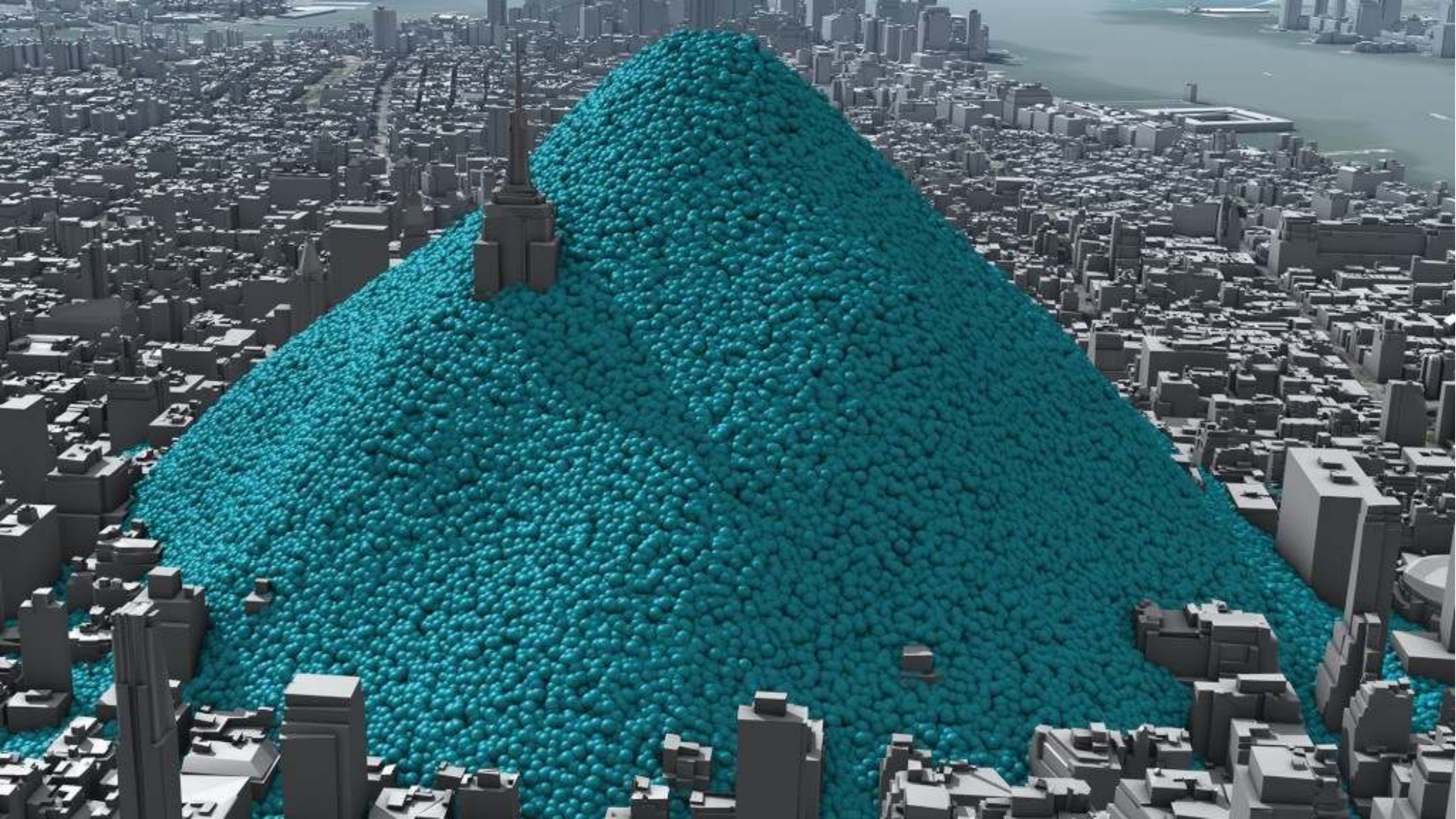
# Conclusion



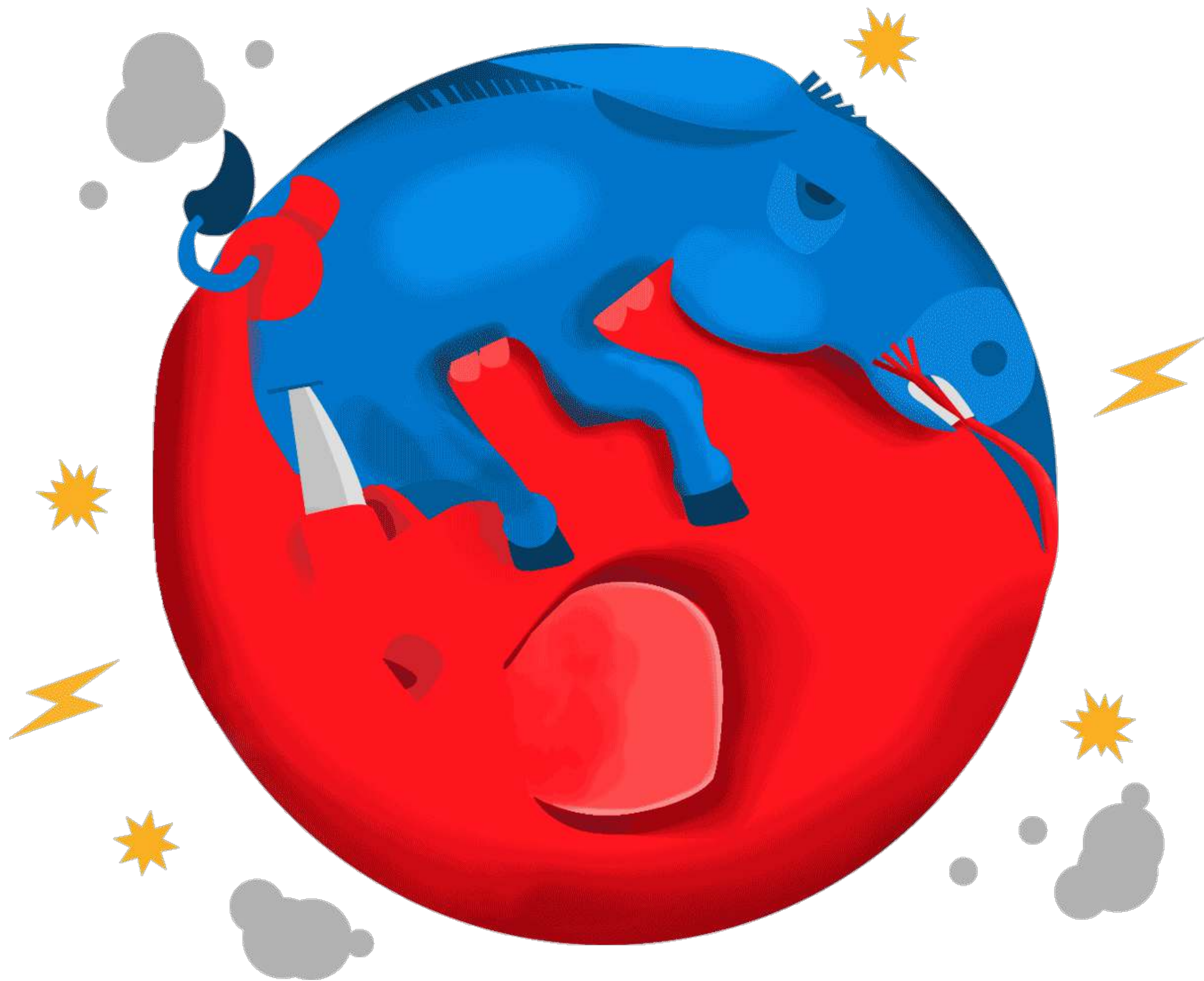
A large part of the climate challenge is not out in the world, but inside the human mind.  
—Andrew Revkin, “An Inconvenient Mind”













**End**