



Climate Change Denial and the Conservative Movement

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Outline

- Quick History of the Conservative Movement and Its Opposition to Environmentalism
- Examine “Environmental Skepticism”
- Focus on “Climate Change Denial” Per Se
- Report Results of a Study of Denial Books Focusing on their Connections to Conservative Think Tanks
- Review Impacts of Climate Change Denial

Historical Background

In the 1970s major capitalists in the USA banded together and formed foundations and think tanks (e.g. Heritage Foundation) to counteract what they saw as the threats posed by the progressive social movements of the 1960s and initiatives launched by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Conservative think-tanks (CTTs) like Heritage, CATO, AEI, CEI have become key components of the conservative movement, functioning as social movement organizations.

Conservative Think Tanks

- CTTs pursue activist agendas, including:
- Generating and promoting ideas and ideologies
- Providing resources and networking opportunities for conservative intellectuals and activists.
- Publishing and diffusing information to policy-makers and the media.
- Enabling the circulation of elites across administrations
- They constitute an “alternative academia” with enormous visibility and credibility.
- CTTs have had considerable influence on economic, social and foreign policies.

The Conservative Focus on Environmentalism

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of *global* environmentalism with the 1992 Earth Summit, the U.S. Conservative Movement began to focus on the perceived threat posed by environmental regulations. It's fear was heightened by the Clinton-Gore Administration's receptivity to environmental concerns. Basically it substituted a "Green Scare" for the declining "Red Scare."

Anti-Environmental Counter-Movement

- The Conservative Movement mounted a major anti-environmental counter-movement designed specifically to undermine environmentalism, which it sees as a threat to its politico-economic agenda (laissez-faire economies, privatization of resources, free trade, etc.) domestically and internationally, and CTTs have led the counter-movement.

Change in Strategy

Conservatives had learned during the Reagan Administration that direct attacks on environmental regulations can produce a backlash, and that it is more effective to question the seriousness of environmental problems. Because those promoting the need for environmental regulations typically employ scientific evidence to make their case, the Conservative Movement began to challenge such evidence as a key strategy. It did so by promoting “environmental skepticism.”

“Environmental Skepticism”

The fundamental characteristic of “environmental skepticism” is that it challenges the authenticity of environmental problems and thus the necessity of environmental protection policies.

Manufacturing Uncertainty

- The most effective way to challenge evidence of environmental problems and thus the need for policies to ameliorate them is to “manufacture uncertainty,” a technique long employed by industry to fight government regulations and perfected by the tobacco industry. The conservative movement adopted this time-tested method in its battle against environmental regulations.

Study of Books Espousing Environmental Skepticism

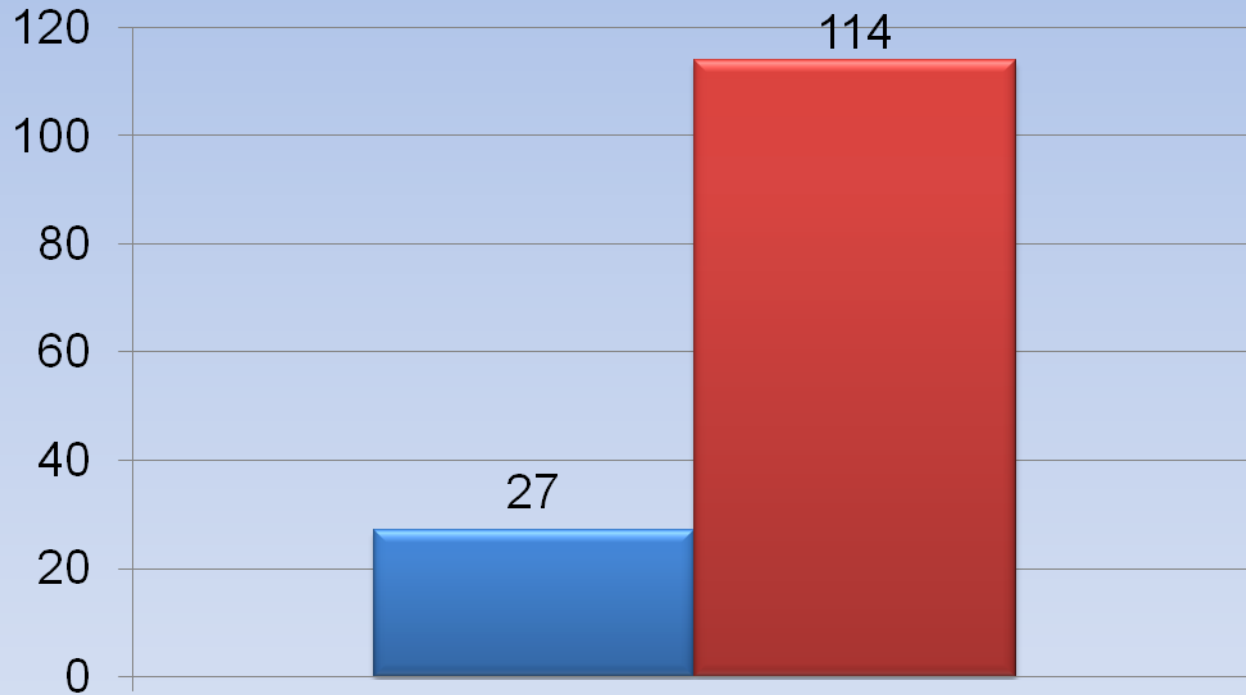
To shed light on the increasing use of environmental skepticism and its link to conservative think tanks (funded by industry and conservative foundations) colleagues and I examined the growing spate of books espousing such skepticism.

P.J. Jacques, R. E. Dunlap and M. Freeman, “The Organization of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Skepticism,” *Environmental Politics* Vol. 17 (June, 2008).

Methods and Results

- We compiled a list of 141 English-language books (as close to the entire population as we could achieve) espousing environmental skepticism that were published through 2005, and examined their links to conservative think tanks (CTTs) via (a) authors' formal affiliations *and/or* (b) publication by a CTT Press.
- We found 130 or 92% of these books to be linked to one or more CTTs.
- Their numbers exploded in 1992, the year of the Rio Earth Summit.

Books Before and After the 1992 Rio Summit



■ Up to 1991 ■ 1992 +

Percentages:

$27/141 = 19\%$

$114/141 = 81\%$

From Environmental Skepticism to Climate Change Denial

The Conservative Attack on Climate Change Science – A Major Example of Skepticism

Beginning with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and escalating with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 the Conservative Movement focused increasing attention on climate change, and climate change is undoubtedly the primary focus of conservative opposition to environmental policy-making at the present time.

The Threat

Efforts to deal with climate change are portrayed as threatening economic growth, free enterprise and the “American way of life,” as well as representing the threat of unprecedented governmental regulations both nationally and internationally. It has therefore become “the” environmental issue for conservatives.

Crucial Strategy

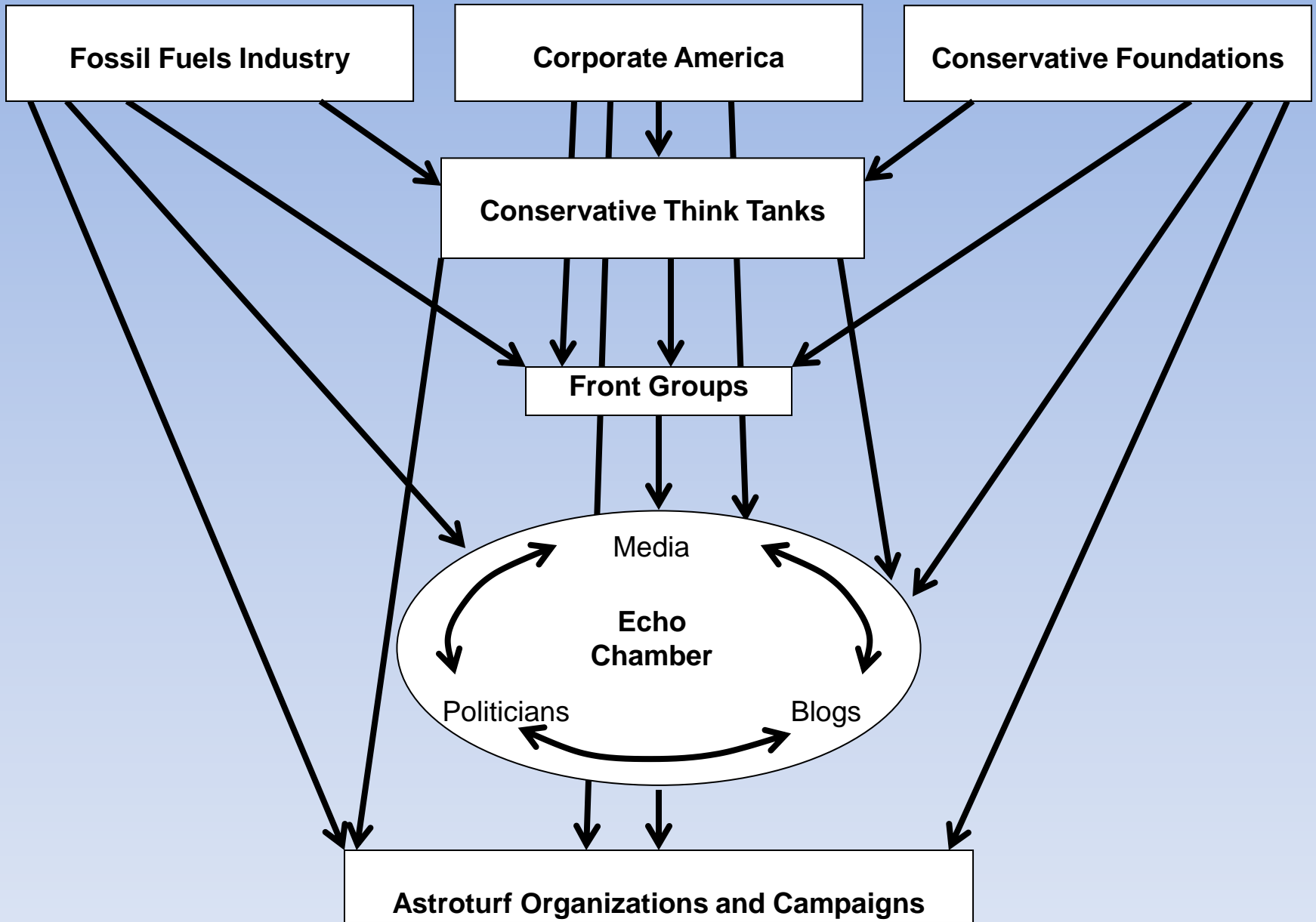
Not surprisingly, manufacturing uncertainty has become the crucial strategy for challenging the evidence for climate change, and in fact early figures involved in climate change denial such as Frederick Seitz of the Marshall Institute and Fred Singer of the Science and Environmental Policy Project were previously heavily involved in challenging evidence concerning the harmful effects of tobacco smoke—as detailed by Oreskes and Conway in *Merchants of Doubt*.

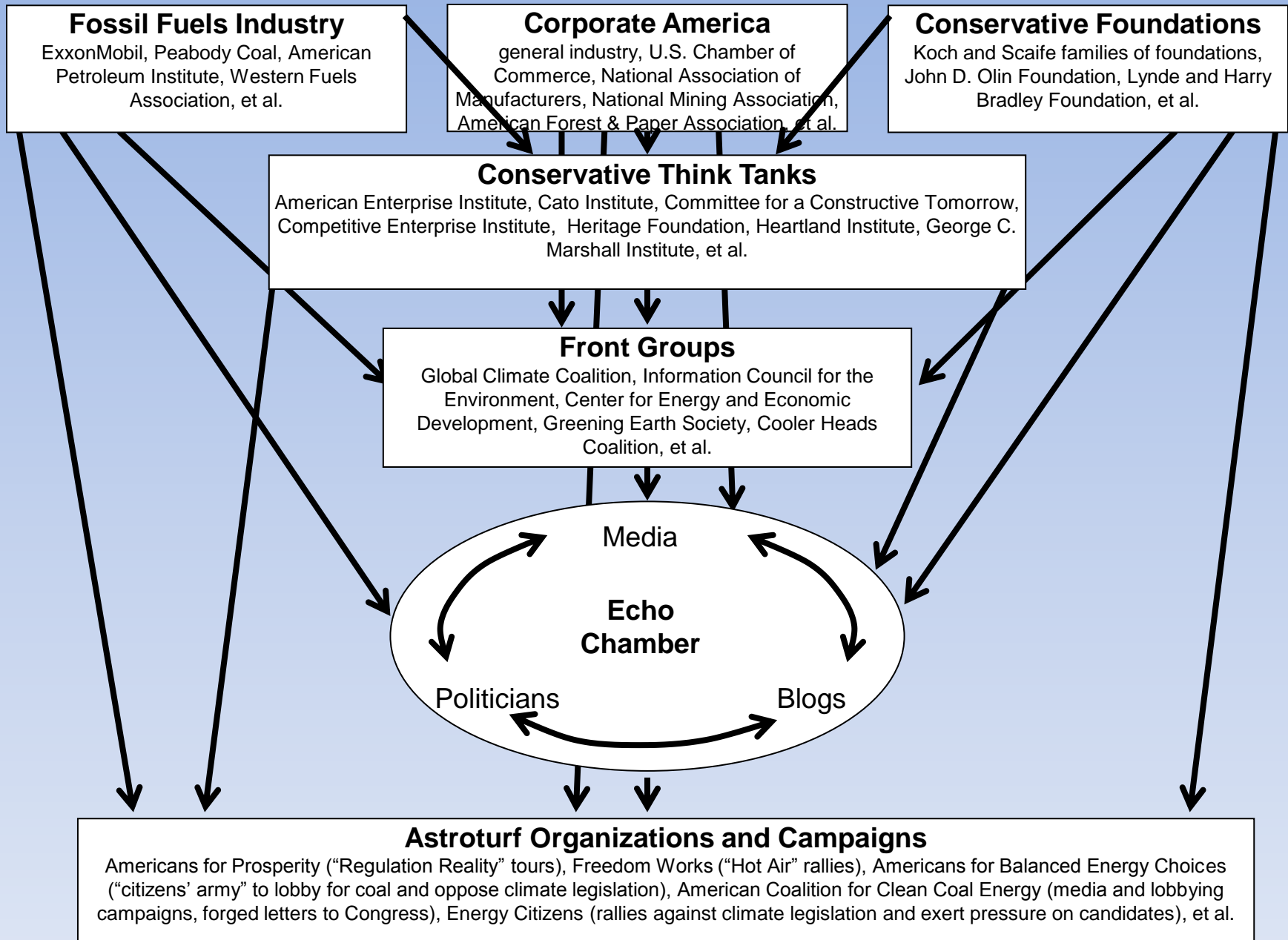
Contrarian Scientists

A relatively small number of “contrarian” scientists have provided critical “ammunition” for challenging mainstream climate science (as represented by the IPCC) since the late 1980s, and their efforts are supported and amplified by a wide array of key actors in the Conservative Movement and corporate America. Their combined efforts went into “overdrive” when enactment of both national and international policies to achieve reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions seemed imminent with the election of the Obama Administration and a Democratic Congress in 2008.

The “Denial Machine”

- In 2007 Sharon Begley of *Newsweek* wrote an insightful analysis of climate change denial that used the term “denial machine” to capture the complex set of actors involved in denying the reality and significance of anthropogenic climate change. It seems a suitable term, and Aaron McCright and I have tried to capture the key sets of actors in a recent chapter. It is difficult, as new components are being added regularly, but CTTs are clearly a crucial component.





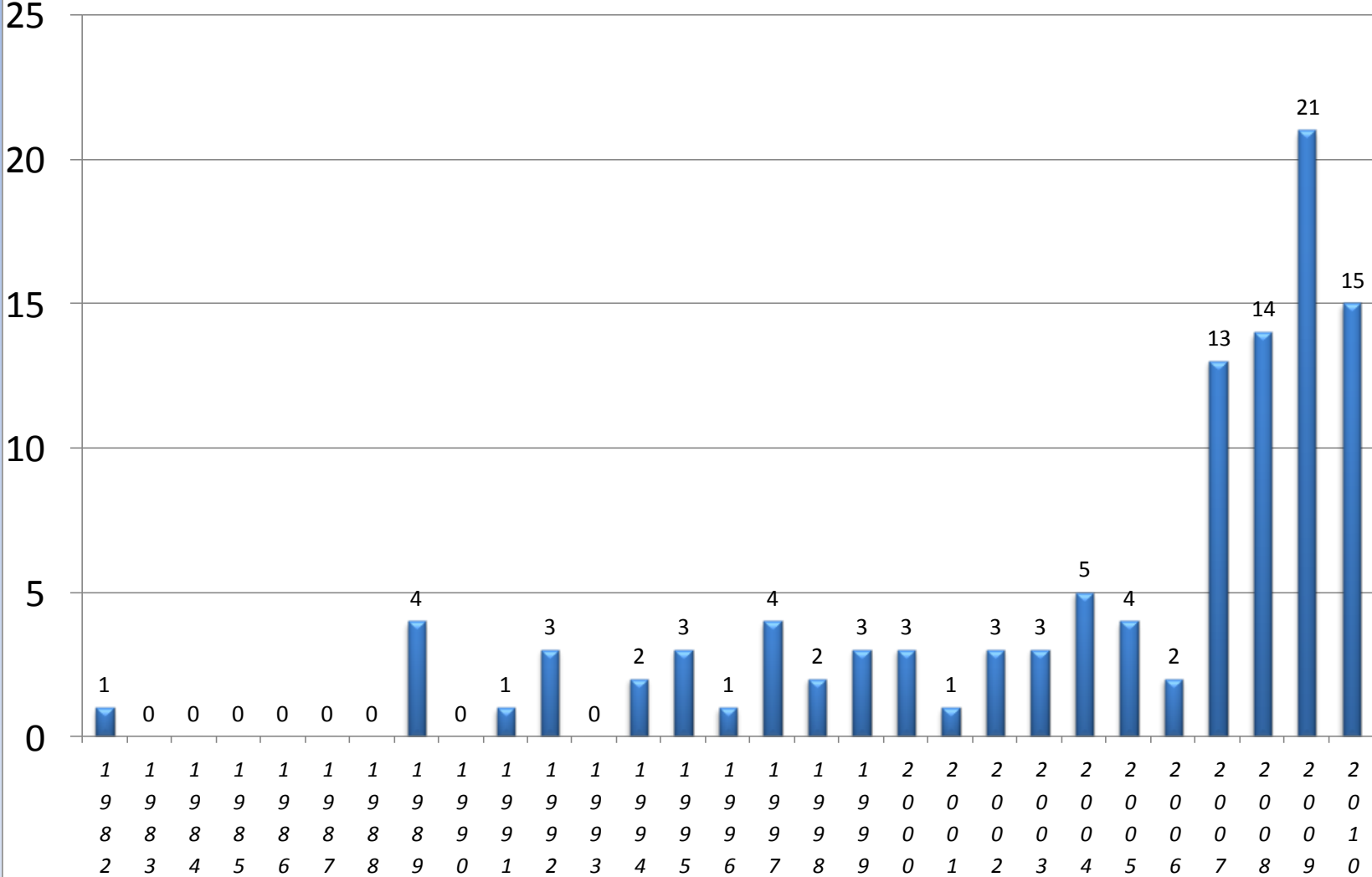
New Study

To examine the growth and diffusion of climate change denial, and the role of the U.S. Conservative Movement in promoting it, Peter Jacques and I have recently analyzed 108 books espousing climate change denial published through 2010. Besides examining their links to CTTs, and the location and academic backgrounds of their authors/editors, we are also analyzing their major themes.

R. E. Dunlap and P. J. Jacques, "Climate Change Denial Books and Conservative Think Tanks: Exploring the Connection," *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 57 (2013): In press.

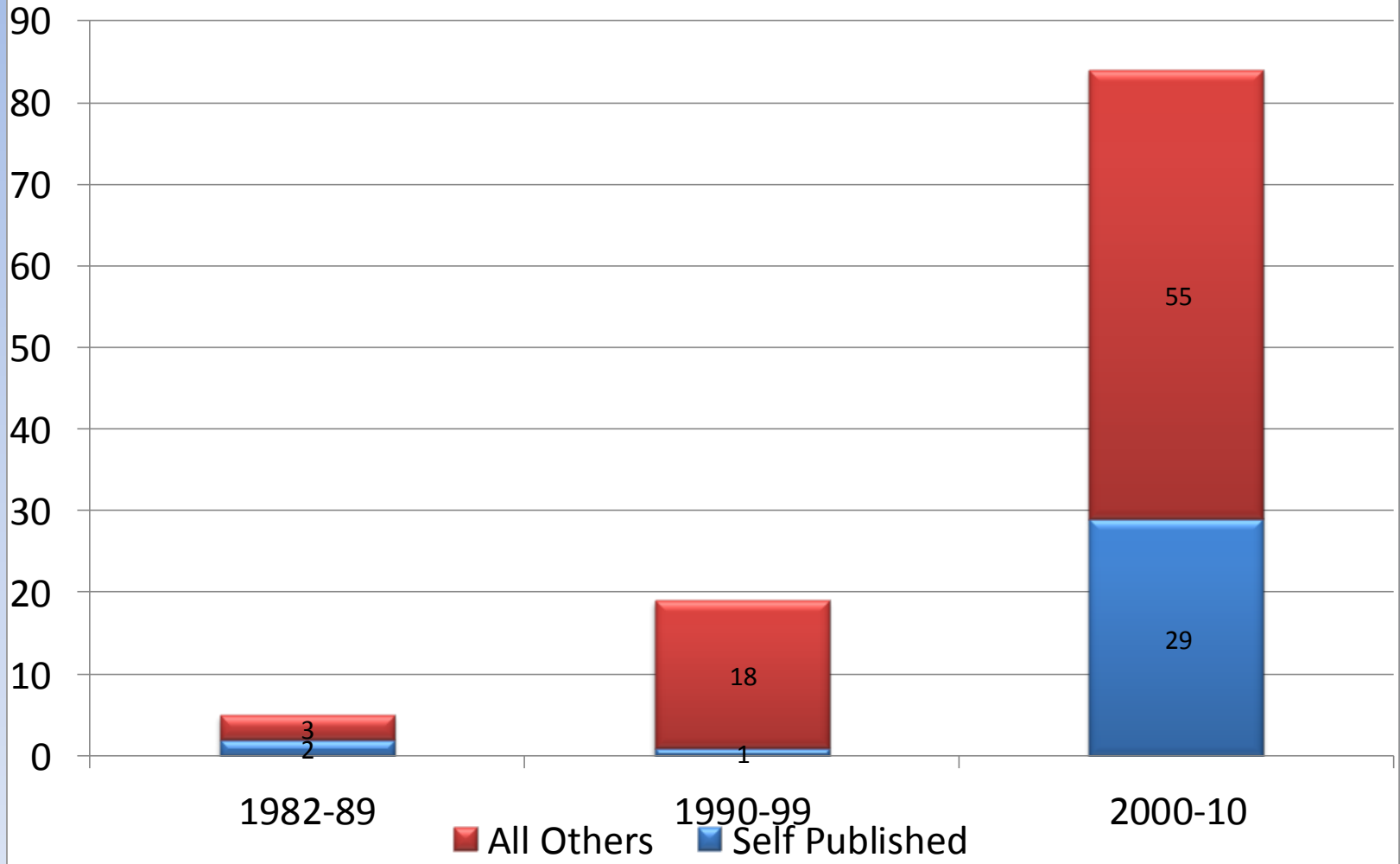
Several of these books are best sellers among climate change books on Amazon.com, and recently 14 appeared among the top 100 sellers for “climatology.” It is common to find them in Barnes and Noble, Hastings and similar major bookstores. Not surprisingly some are carried by the Conservative Book Club. Thus, they reach a large audience.

Climate Change Denial Books By Year



■ Total Books By Year

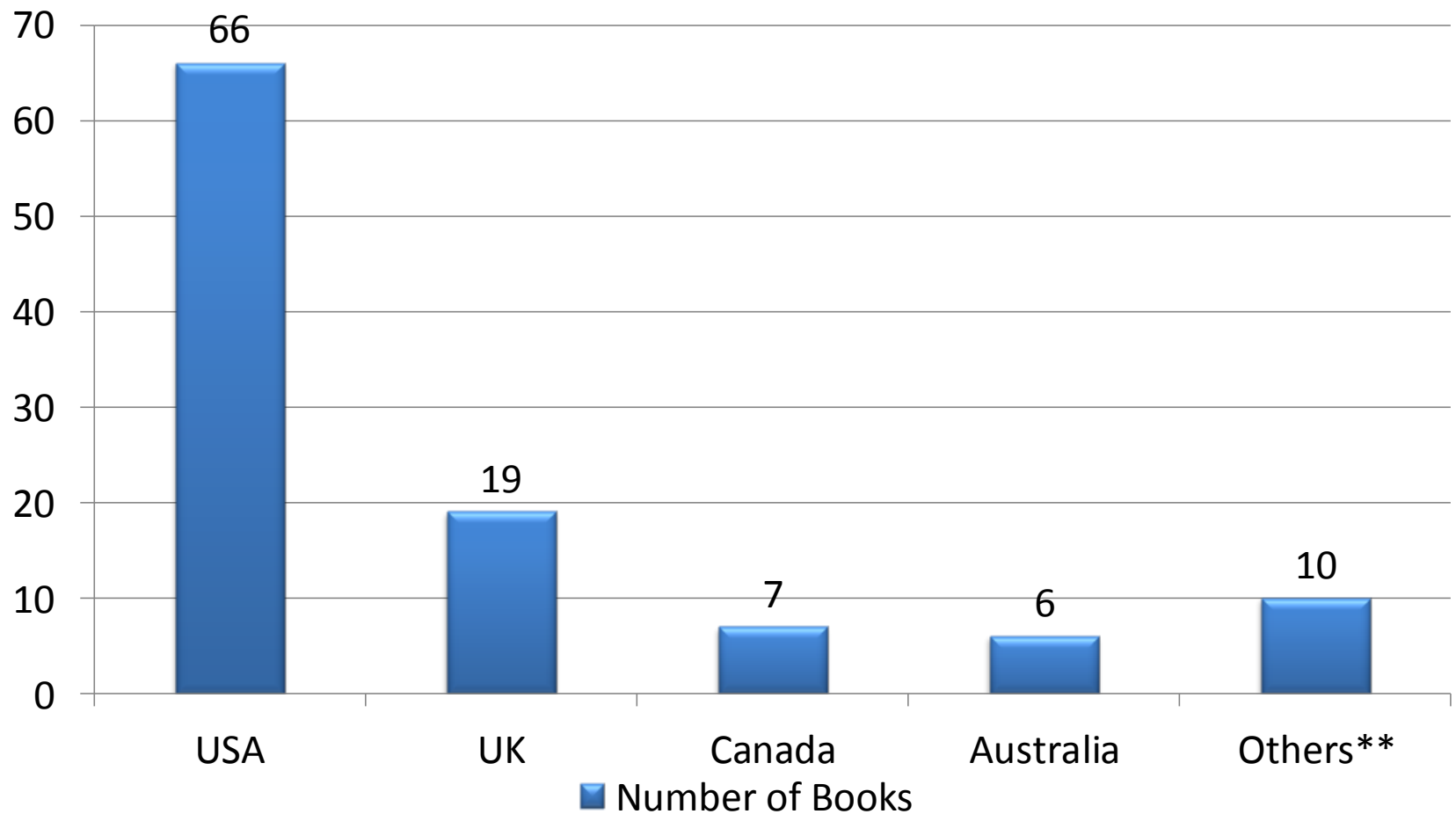
Climate Change Denial Books by Decade, Self-Published vs. Others



Books With Conservative Think Tank (CTT) Connections by Decade

	Self Published	Publishing House	CTT Connected	Total Books
1980's	100% (2/2)	100% (3/3)	100% (5/5)	5
1990's	100% (1/1)	94% (17/18)	95% (18/19)	19
Since 2000	33% (10/30)	83% (45/54)	65% (55/84)	84
Total	39% (13/33)	87% (65/75)	72% (78/108)	108

Books by Nation of Author/Editor*



*Based on first author/editor for multi-authored/edited books.

**Includes 2 each for Denmark, France and Sweden and 1 each for Czech Republic, Germany, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Books by Decade by Nation

	USA	UK	Other	Total
1980s	80% (4)	20% (1)	---	100% (5)
1990s	63% (12)	21% (4)	16% (3)	100% (19)
2000+	60% (50)	17% (14)	24% (20)	101%* (84)
All years	61% (66)	18% (19)	21% (23)	100% (108)

*Rounding error

Conservative Think Tank Connections by Nation

	USA	UK	Other	All Books
Yes	65% (43)	79% (15)	87% (20)	72% (78)
No	35% (23)	21% (4)	13% (3)	28% (30)
Totals	100% (66)	100% (19)	100% (23)	100% (108)

Percentages of Books by Educational Backgrounds of Authors/ Editors by Decade

	Natural Science PhD	Other PhD	No PhD	Total Books
1980's	80% (4)	0% (0)	20% (1)	100% (5)
1990's	53% (10)	37% (7)	11% (2)	101%* (19)
Since 2000	33% (28)	17% (14)	50% (42)	100% (84)
All years	39% (42)	19% (21)	42% (45)	100% (108)

*Rounding error

Author/Editor Education by Nation

	USA	UK	Other	All Books
Nat Sci PhD	48% (32)	11% (2)	35% (8)	39% (42)
Other PhD	18% (12)	32% (6)	13% (3)	19% (21)
Non PhD	33% (22)	58% (11)	52% (12)	42% (45)
Totals	99%*(66)	101%* (19)	100% (23)	100% (108)

*Rounding error

Scientific
Perspectives
on the

GREENHOUSE PROBLEM

Robert Jastrow
William Nierenberg
Frederick Seitz

♦♦ Should be read by every scientist and layman
who has an interest in the topic. ♦♦

—Franklin S. Cole, Past President
National Academy of Sciences

THE SATANIC GASES

*Clearing the Air
about Global Warming*

BY PATRICK J. MICHAELS AND
ROBERT C. BALLING, JR.

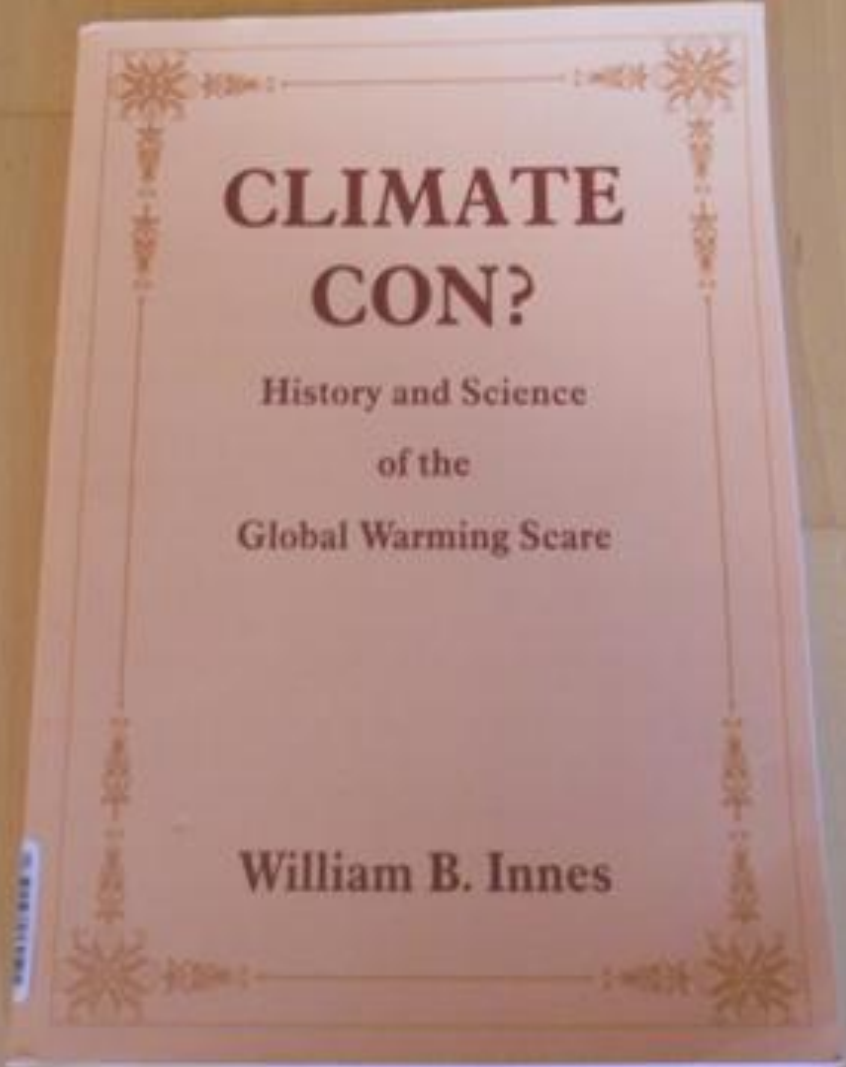
Chris Horner: "Climate rebel" — *GreenSource*

Red Hot Lies

How Global Warming Alarmists
Use Threats, Fraud, and Deception
to Keep You Misinformed

Christopher C. Horner

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

The book cover is light pink with a decorative border of gold-colored floral and geometric patterns. The title is centered in a large, bold, serif font. The subtitle is centered below the title in a smaller, bold, serif font. The author's name is centered at the bottom in a bold, serif font.

CLIMATE CON?

**History and Science
of the
Global Warming Scare**

William B. Innes

Mainstream Climate Science

The 2007 IPCC Assessment concludes that:

- 1. Global warming is occurring and will continue.
- 2. Human activities producing GHG emissions are a significant cause of global warming.
- 3. Global warming produces harmful impacts on human and natural systems.

Many argue that these findings suggest the need for policies designed to reduce (GHG) emissions.

Skeptics' Responses

Climate change contrarians eager to undermine mainstream climate science have taken issue with each of these points (as readily apparent in media and Congressional debates), and we are examining the major themes of climate change denial presented in the books in our study. We combine a scheme McCright and I used to code material on conservative think tank websites in the 90s with one offered by climate scientist Stephan Ramstorf.

Major Denial Themes

- *Trend* denial – the Earth is not getting warmer
- *Attribution* denial – even if it is, humans are not the cause
- *Impact* denial – should warming occur the impacts will be inconsequential or benign
- *Policy* denial – there is no need for carbon emissions reduction policies, and such policies will do far more harm than global warming

Preliminary Results

- We are finishing up coding for the 108 books.
- It appears that trend denial is present in about 60% the books but seems to be declining, impact denial has declined a bit but is present in about 75% of the books, and attribution denial continues to be emphasized and is present in about 90% of the books. However, opposition to policies is a even higher, with very few failing to espouse this theme—basically just those that utterly deny the existence of global warming.

Changing Themes

- Thus, over time the “counter-claims” to the IPCC issued by climate change skeptics, especially contrarian scientists, have changed to some degree in response to growing evidence of global warming--from it's not occurring, to it won't be harmful, to it's naturally caused.
- However, the bottom line has not changed: **NO REGULATIONS!** This reflects the near universal conservative ideology behind all versions of climate change denial.

Freedom from Peer Review

- Individuals promoting climate change denial, including authors of these books, mainly criticize climate science, and only rarely contribute to the scientific literature. They avoid peer-review via blog posts, op-eds, CTT reports and books. A large majority (97 or 108) of the books we examined are self-published or published either by a conservative press or a popular press. Only 11 are issued by publishing houses that specialize in natural science books, and four of these are by Multi-Science Publishing in the UK which also publishes *Energy & Environment*--a marginal journal best known as an outlet for climate change contrarians. *None of them* are published by a university press.
- It therefore seems likely that at most 10 percent of the books have undergone peer review by individuals with expertise in climate science.

Cumulative Non-Science vs. Science

- The absence of peer review allows book authors to make whatever claims they wish, no matter how soundly they have been refuted in the scientific literature. The result is that the denial literature is *cumulative* in the literal sense, as nothing is discarded. Indeed, Spencer Weart refers to “zombie arguments” that continually arise from the grave. Climate change denial books are a perfect vehicle for recycling such debunked arguments.
- In contrast, through testing and then rejecting, modifying and/or verifying hypotheses and theories, scientific knowledge is (admittedly slowly and unevenly at times) cumulative in the sense of that it builds toward increased knowledge of the world. Falsified claims eventually have to be jettisoned in the scientific literature.

CTTs and Denial Books

- We've seen that CTTs have played a key role in producing books espousing climate change denial in the USA and abroad.
- CTTs have also produced a vast range of other material criticizing climate science and attacking climate scientists, from op-eds to blog statements.
- Their spokespersons are frequently featured in the media and sent to COP meetings (e.g., Copenhagen and Durban).
- CTTs have used FOIA requests to harass scientists.
- They have played a crucial role in manufacturing and publicizing the "climategate" controversy.

Impacts of Climate Change Denial

- Evidence that efforts to deny the seriousness of climate change have been successful include:
- Studies have shown that the U.S. media give far more attention to climate change denial and portray climate science as “uncertain” than is the case for media in other developed nations.
- The American public has consistently been found to be less concerned about climate change than are the publics of other developed nations.

- The U.S. has yet to enact meaningful climate change policy and has been an impediment to international policy-making.
- Climate change denial seems to have become a core element of contemporary conservatives' "worldview" and personal "identity."
- This is particularly apparent in politics, where the Republican Party is almost unified in opposition to climate change policy and denial has achieved near hegemonic status—and become a "litmus test" for party candidates.

Implications

The foregoing results suggest that the Conservative Movement has been successful in framing climate change as a “hoax” and a “liberal plot” to promote governmental regulations that will harm economic growth and threaten individual freedom. Climate science is viewed not only as “uncertain,” but as “junk science” pursued by self-serving researchers and liberal politicians eager to expand government control over the lives of Americans.