

MISPERCEPTIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND POLICY SUPPORT: EVIDENCE FROM A LARGE-SCALE SURVEY EXPERIMENT

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Ongoing project

- Nationally representative survey of U.S. adults ($N > 10,000$; Nov–Dec 2025)
- The study and experimental design allows us to:
 - Elicit beliefs about scientific (IPCC) projections on long-term economic, demographic, and climate impacts
 - Compare these beliefs to IPCC projections; assess misperceptions and their relation to policy attitudes, private behavior, and emotions
 - Provide causal evidence on whether correcting misperceptions affects beliefs and attitudes (*preregistered 2 × 2 between-subjects information experiment*)
- Today: Very preliminary insights from a subsample ($\sim 6,000$ respondents)

What started this project

- Internal discussions about policy attitudes of “doomers”: if societal collapse is seen as inevitable, people may endorse extreme policy responses or disengage entirely (*why would policy matter if it is already too late?*)
- Little is known about this group (more focus has been on climate deniers). But what does it mean to be a “doomer”?
- Dechezleprêtre et al. (2025) AER: ~60% of respondents in high-income countries (and ~40% in middle-income countries) believe it is likely that climate change will cause *the extinction of humankind if nothing is done to limit climate change*

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Climate Environment Weather Climate Solutions Climate Lab Green Living Business of Climate

Why climate ‘doomers’ are replacing climate ‘deniers’

How U.N. reports and confusing headlines created a generation of people who believe climate change can't be stopped

The Uninhabitable Earth

Famine, economic collapse, a sun that cooks us: What climate change could break — sooner than you think.

By David Wallace-Wells



Pew Research Center

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OUR METHODS

SHORT READS

BY ANNA BROWN

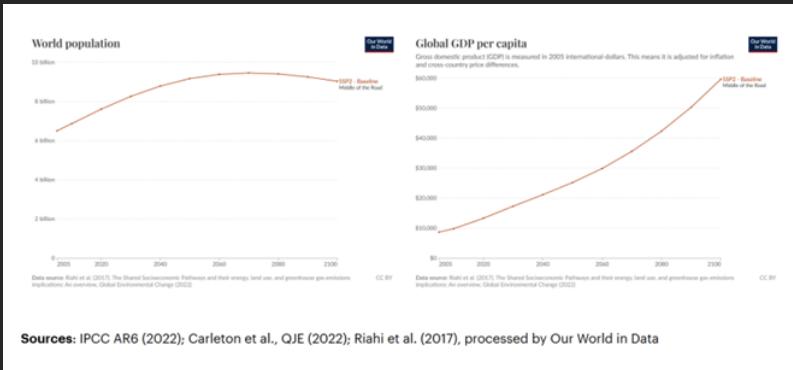
Add Us On Google

Growing share of childless adults in U.S. don't expect to ever have children

Preliminary insights – belief types

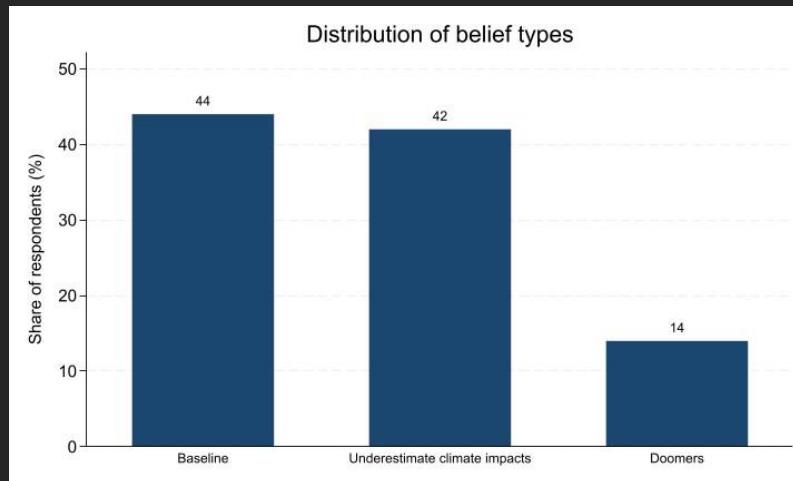
Classification of respondents:

- Based on beliefs about what IPCC projections imply for 2100 (vs. today):
 - Climate impacts: projected to increase
 - Global development (SSP2 “middle-of-the-road”): larger population and higher GDP per capita

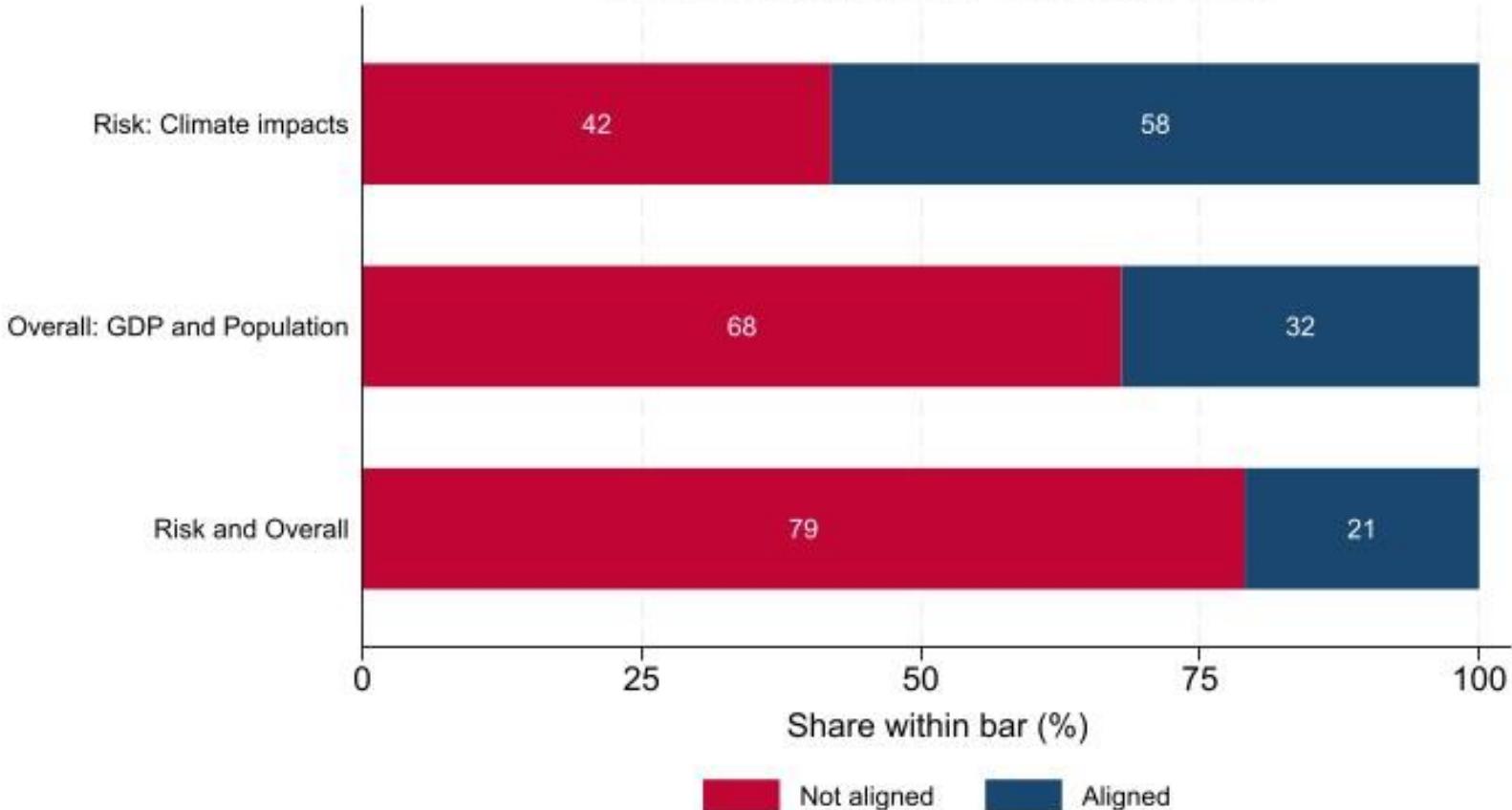


Three groups:

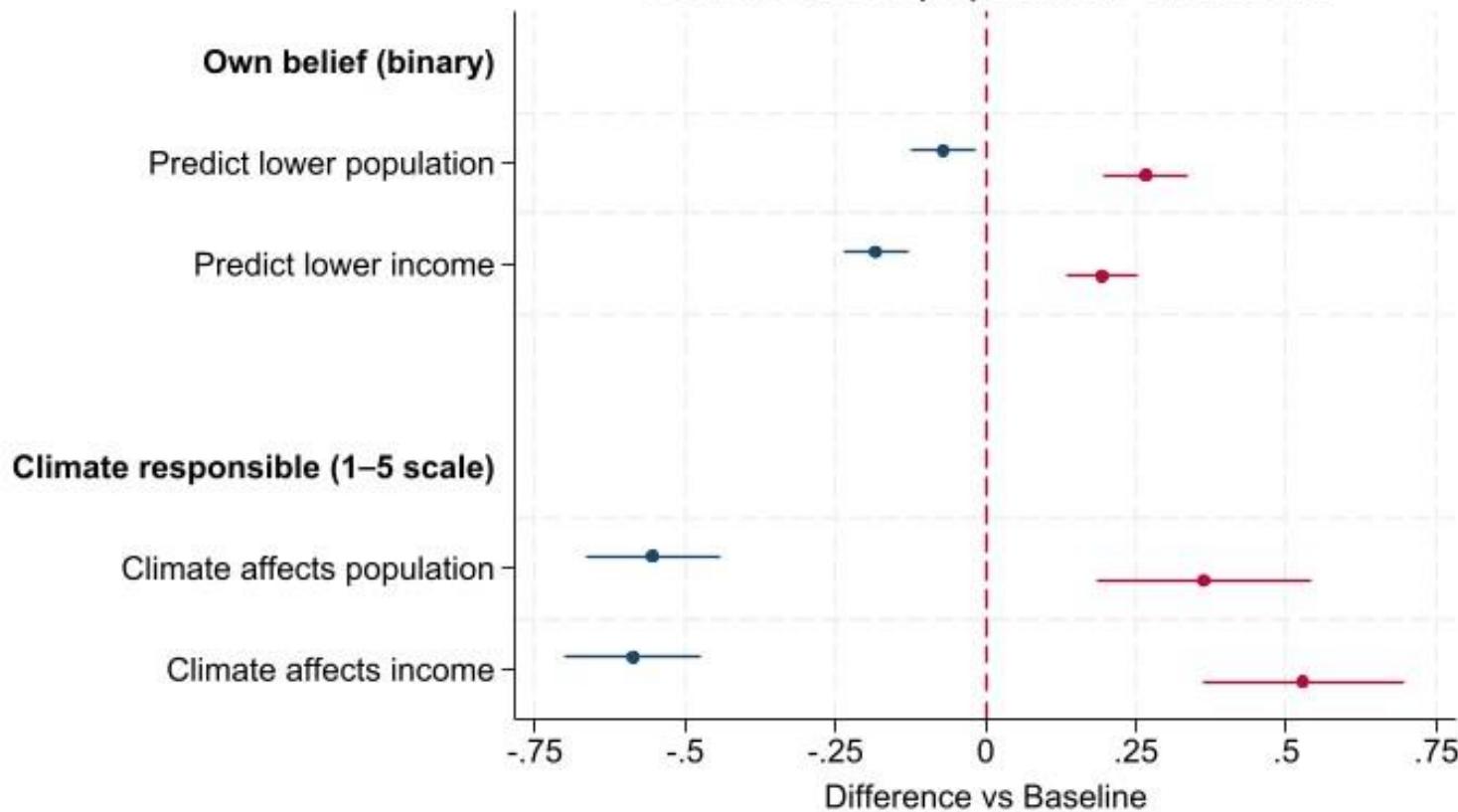
- Baseline group
 - Beliefs broadly consistent with IPCC/SSP2 projections
- Underestimators
 - Underestimate future climate impacts
- Doomers
 - Expect increased climate impacts **and**
 - Believe global GDP per capita and/or global population will *decrease a lot* by 2100



Science alignment on projections

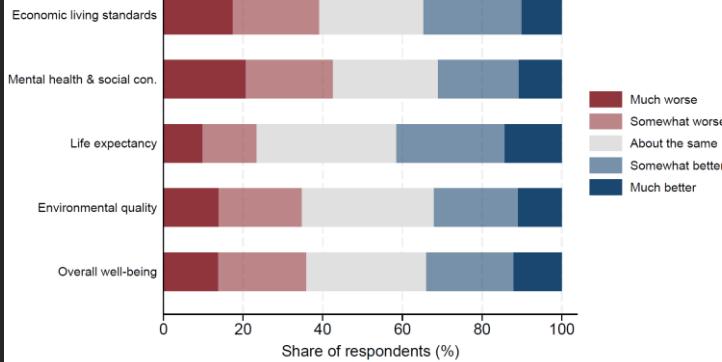


Beliefs about population & income



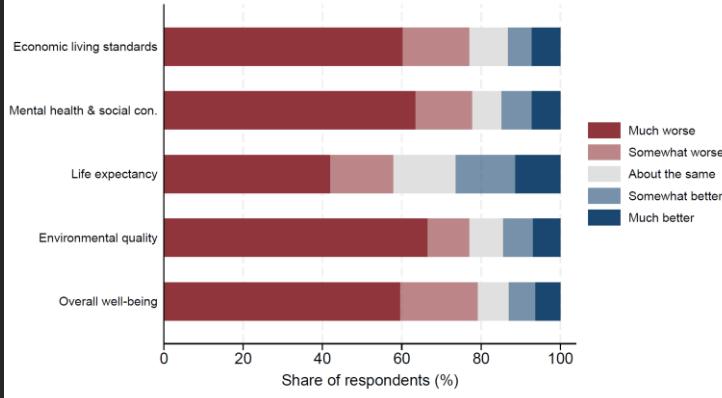
Underestimators

Envisioned Quality of Life in the U.S. by 2100

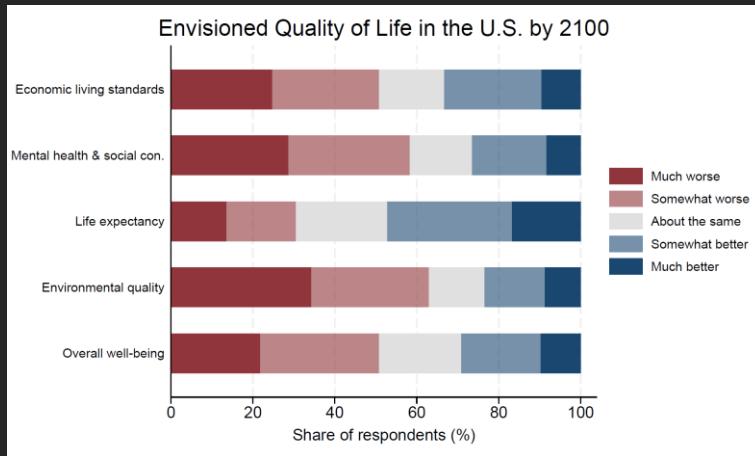


Doomers

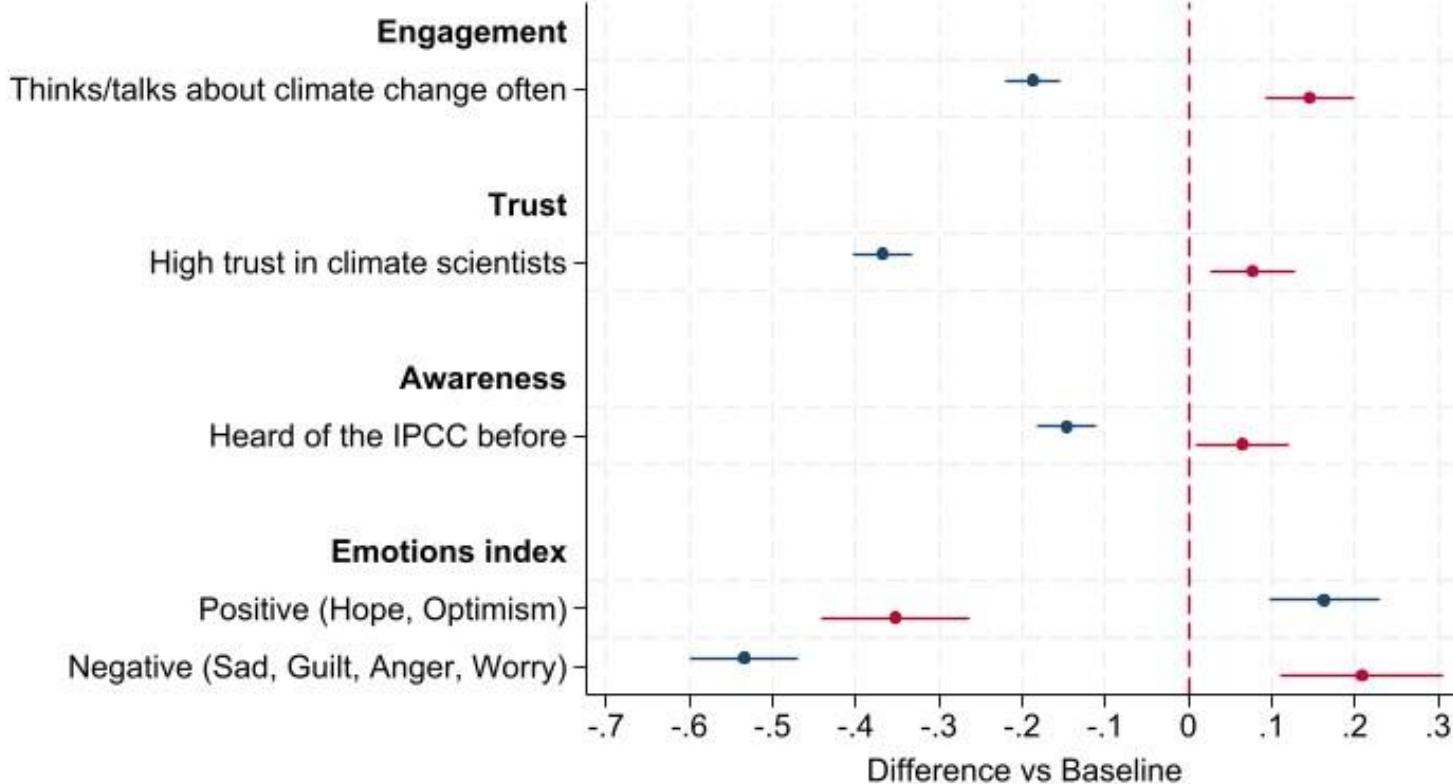
Envisioned Quality of Life in the U.S. by 2100



Baseline

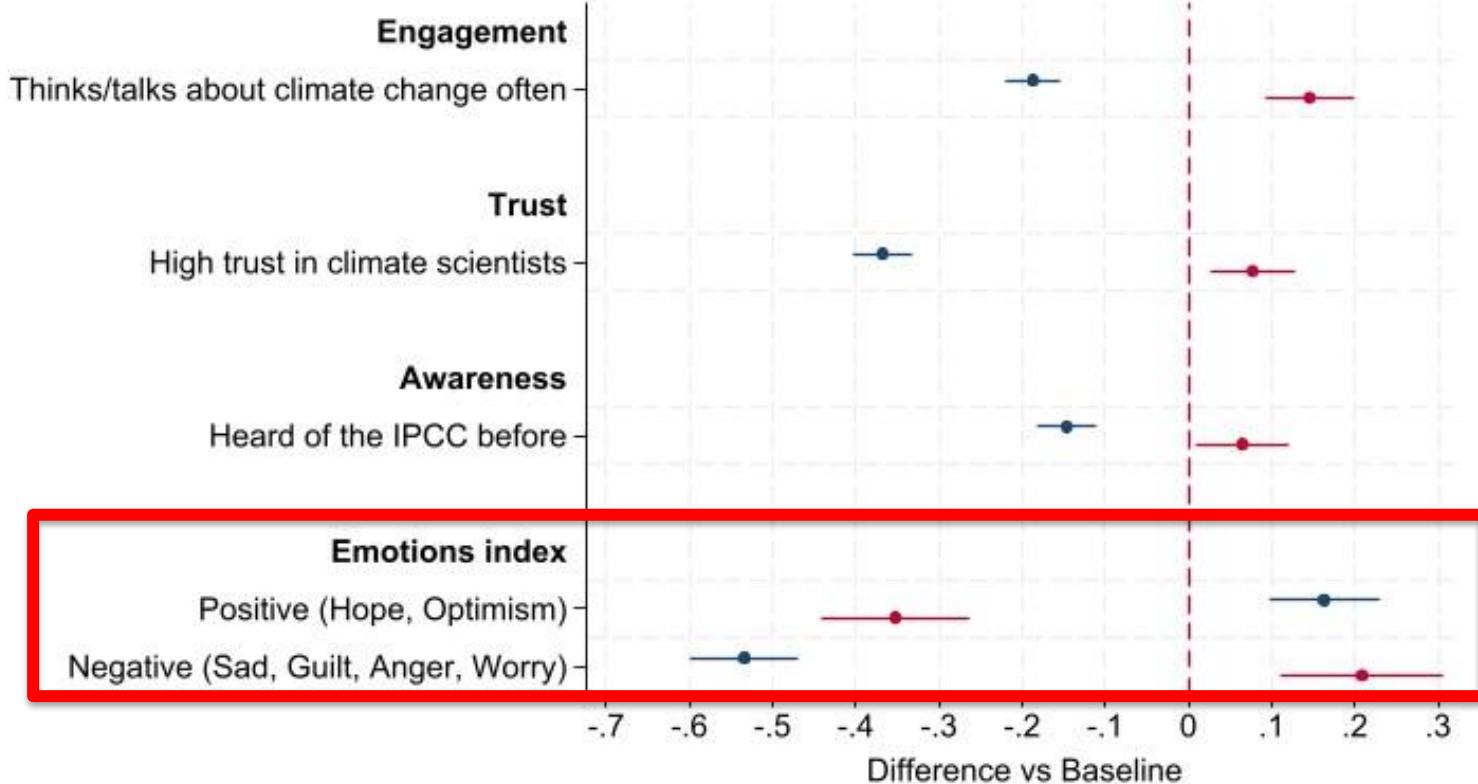


Engagement, trust, awareness, and emotions



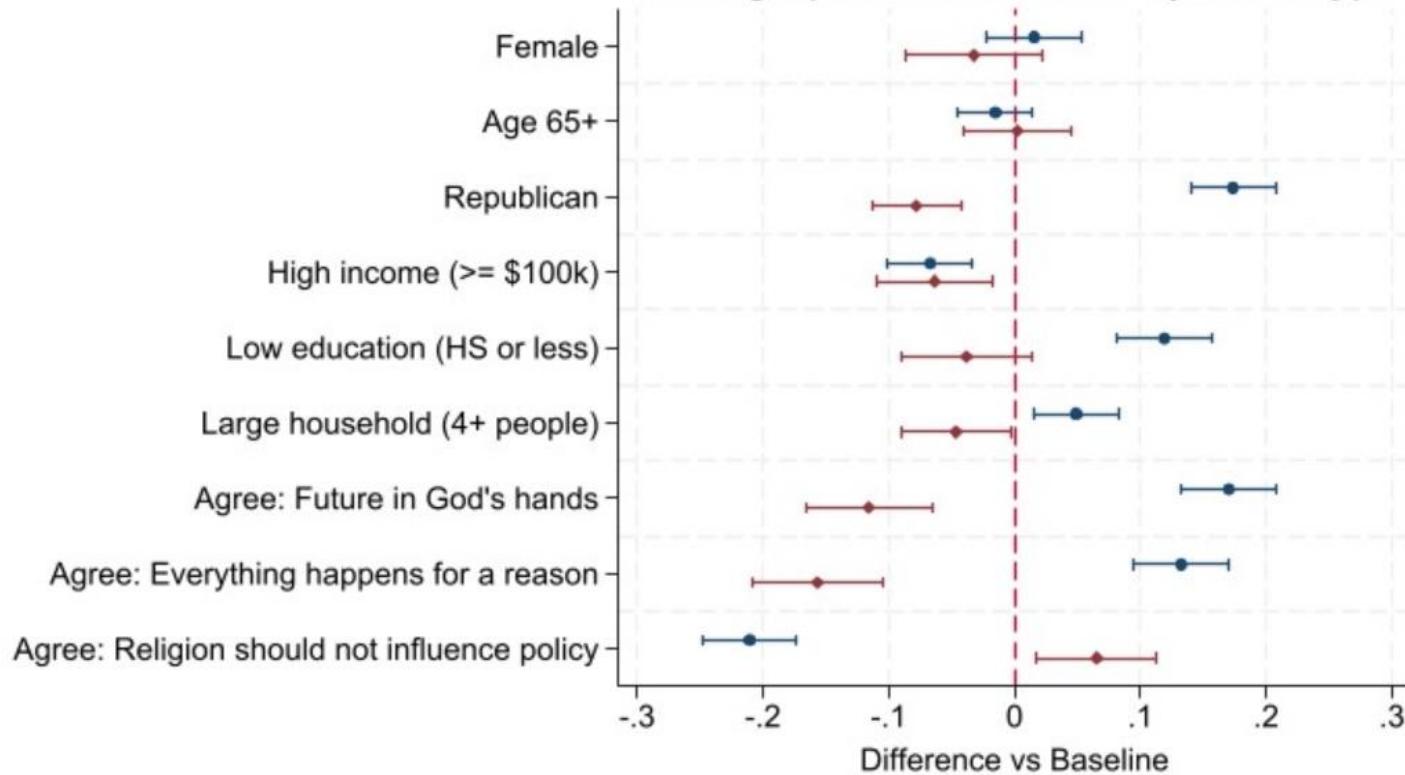
Blue markers denote respondents underestimators, while red markers denote doomers.

Engagement, trust, awareness, and emotions



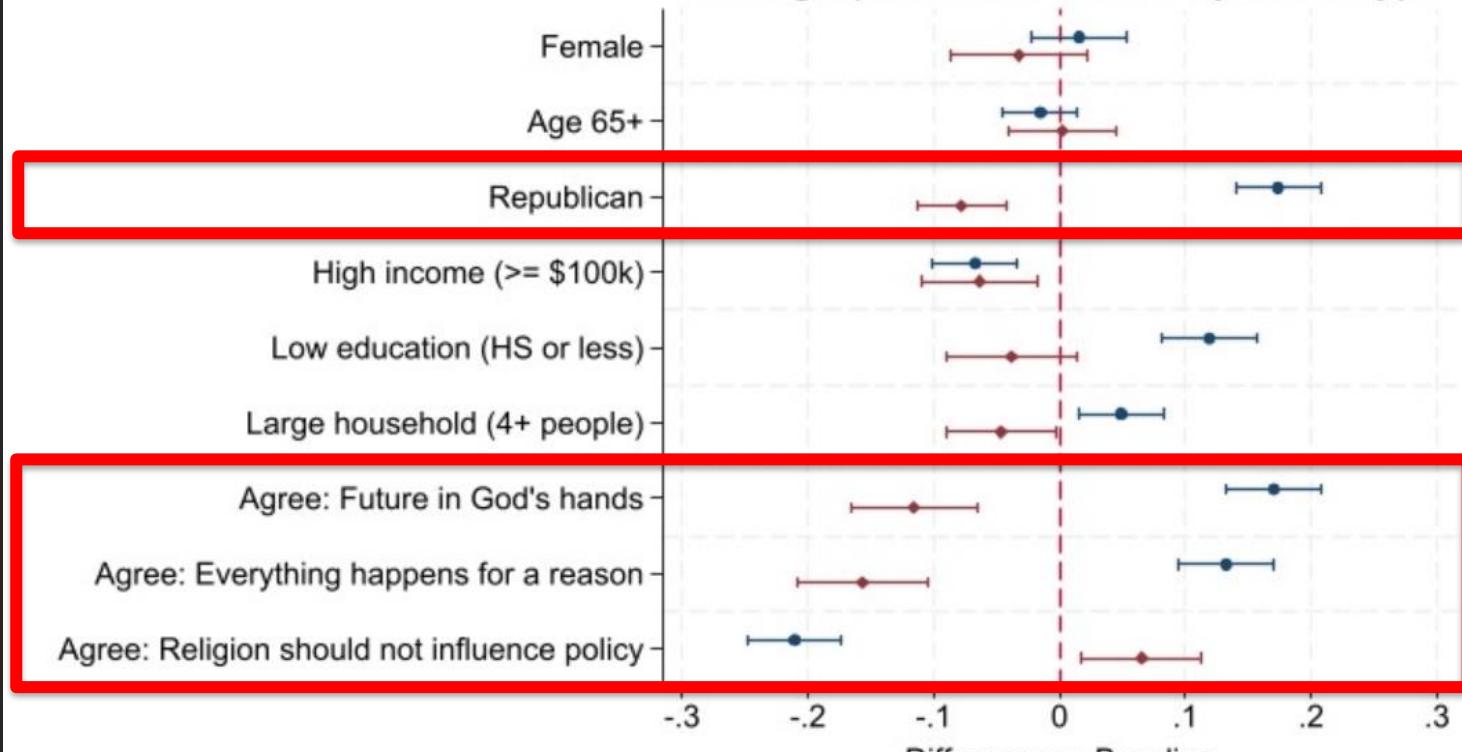
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Demographics and values by belief type



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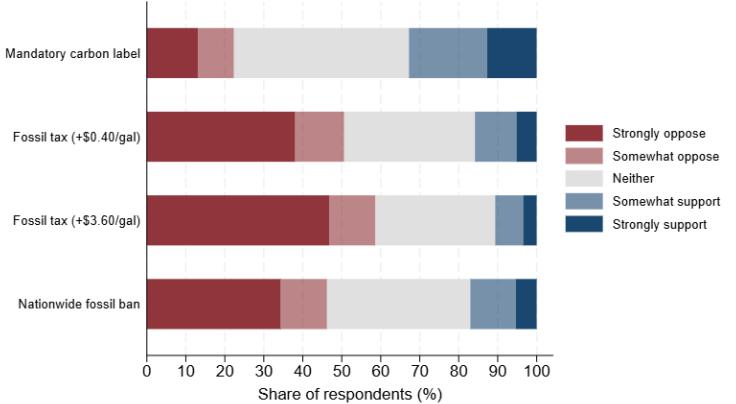
Demographics and values by belief type



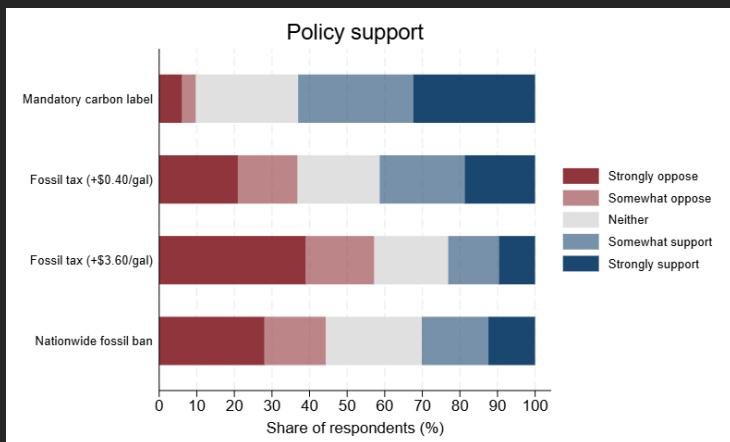
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Underestimators

Policy support

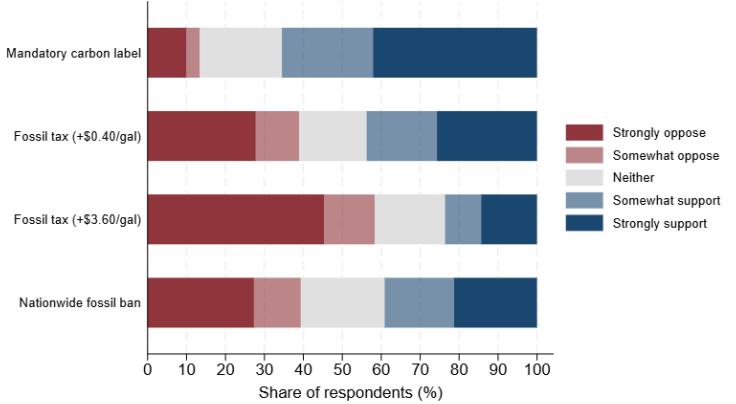


Baseline

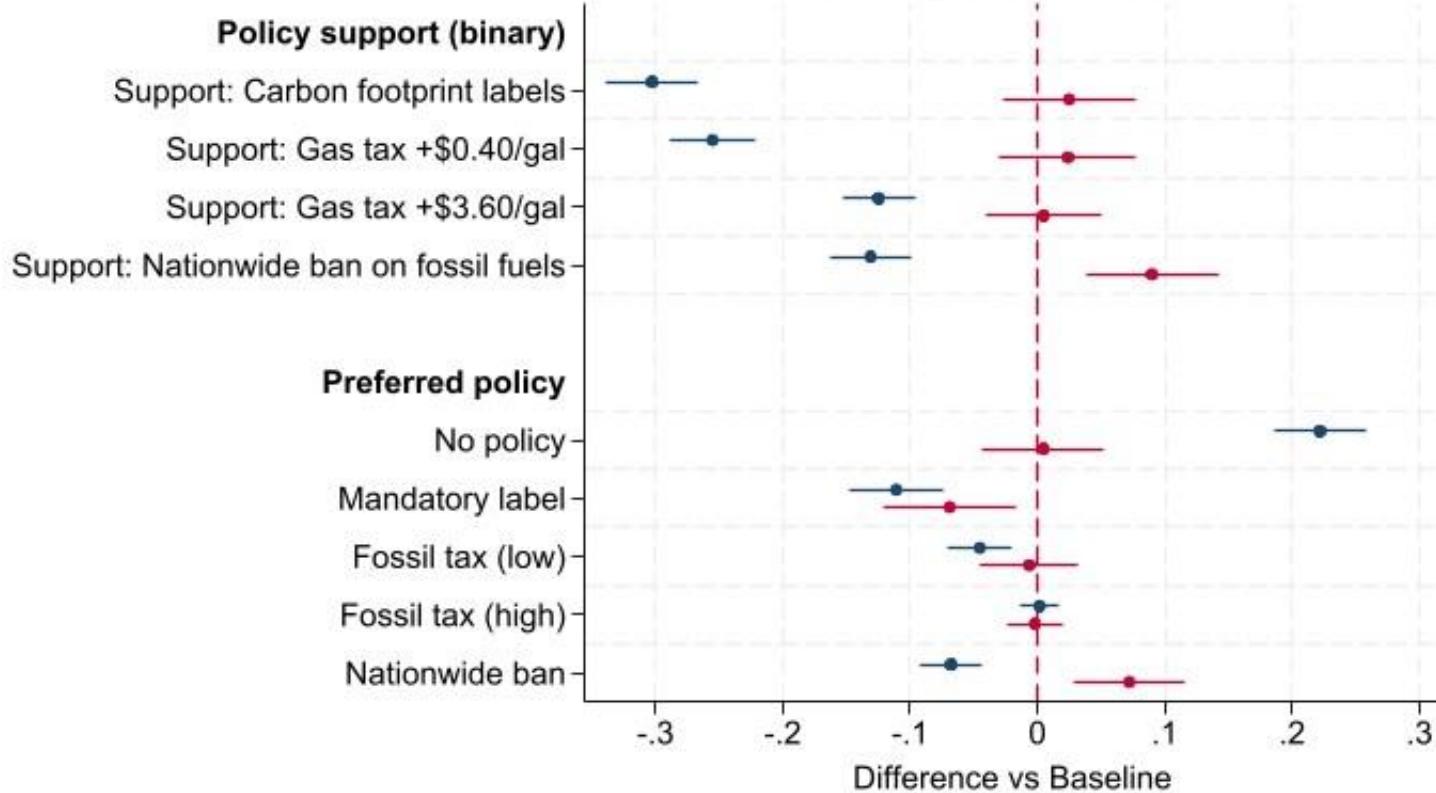


Doomers

Policy support



Policy preferences



Blue markers denote underestimators, while red markers denote doomers.

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Thanks for listening!