

participate in science denial.

UIC researchers Anthony Washburn, a graduate student in psychology, and Linda Skitka, professor of psychology, had participants indicate their political orientation, evaluate fabricated scientific results, and, based on the data, decide what the studies concluded.

Once they were informed of the correct interpretations of the data, participants were then asked to rate how much they agreed with, found knowledgeable, and trusted the researchers' correct interpretation.

"Not only were both sides equally likely to seek out attitude confirming scientific conclusions, both were also willing to work harder and longer when doing so got them to a conclusion that fit with their existing attitudes," says Washburn, the lead author of the study. "And when the correct interpretation of the results did not confirm participants' attitudes, they were more likely to view the researchers involved with the study as less trustworthy, less knowledgeable, and disagreed with their conclusions more."

These effects were constant no matter what issue was under consideration, which included six social issues—immigration, [gun control](#), climate change, [health care reform](#), [nuclear power](#) and same sex marriage—and one control issue—skin rash treatment.

Rather than strictly a conservative phenomenon, science denial may be a result of a more basic desire of people wanting to see the world in ways that fit with their personal preferences, political or otherwise, according to the researchers.

The results also shed light on science denial in public discourse, Skitka added.

"Before assuming that one group of people or another are anti-science because they disagree with one scientific [conclusion](#), we should make an effort to consider different motivations that are likely at play, which might have nothing to do with [science](#) per se," she said.

More information: Anthony N. Washburn et al. Science Denial Across the Political Divide, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550617731500](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617731500)

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