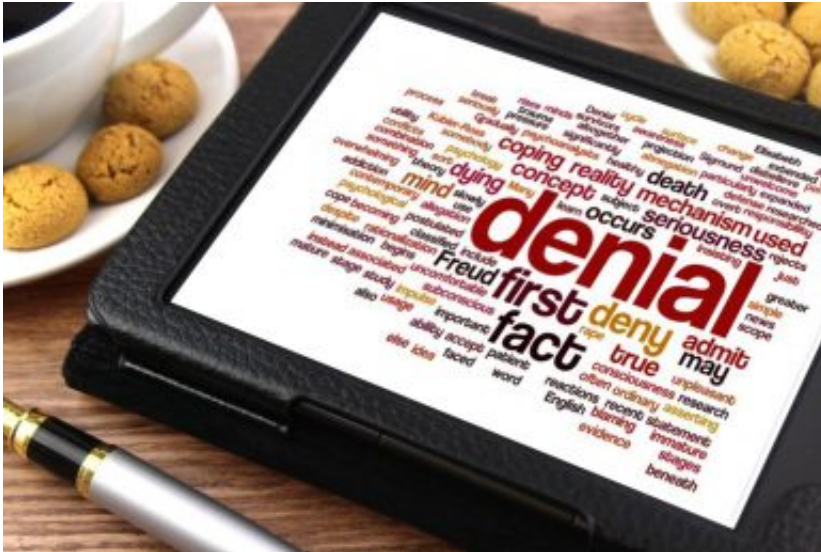


Science denial not limited to political right

September 19 2017



Credit: University of Illinois at Chicago

In the wake of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, many claims have been made that science denial, particularly as it relates to climate change, is primarily a problem of the political right.

But what happens when scientific conclusions challenge liberals' attitudes on [public policy issues](#), such as gun control, nuclear power or immigration?

A new study from [social psychologists](#) at the University of Illinois at Chicago and published online in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* suggests people of all political backgrounds can be motivated to

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)

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

Citation: Science denial not limited to political right (2017, September 19) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-science-denial-limited-political.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--