

Climate Change in the American Mind



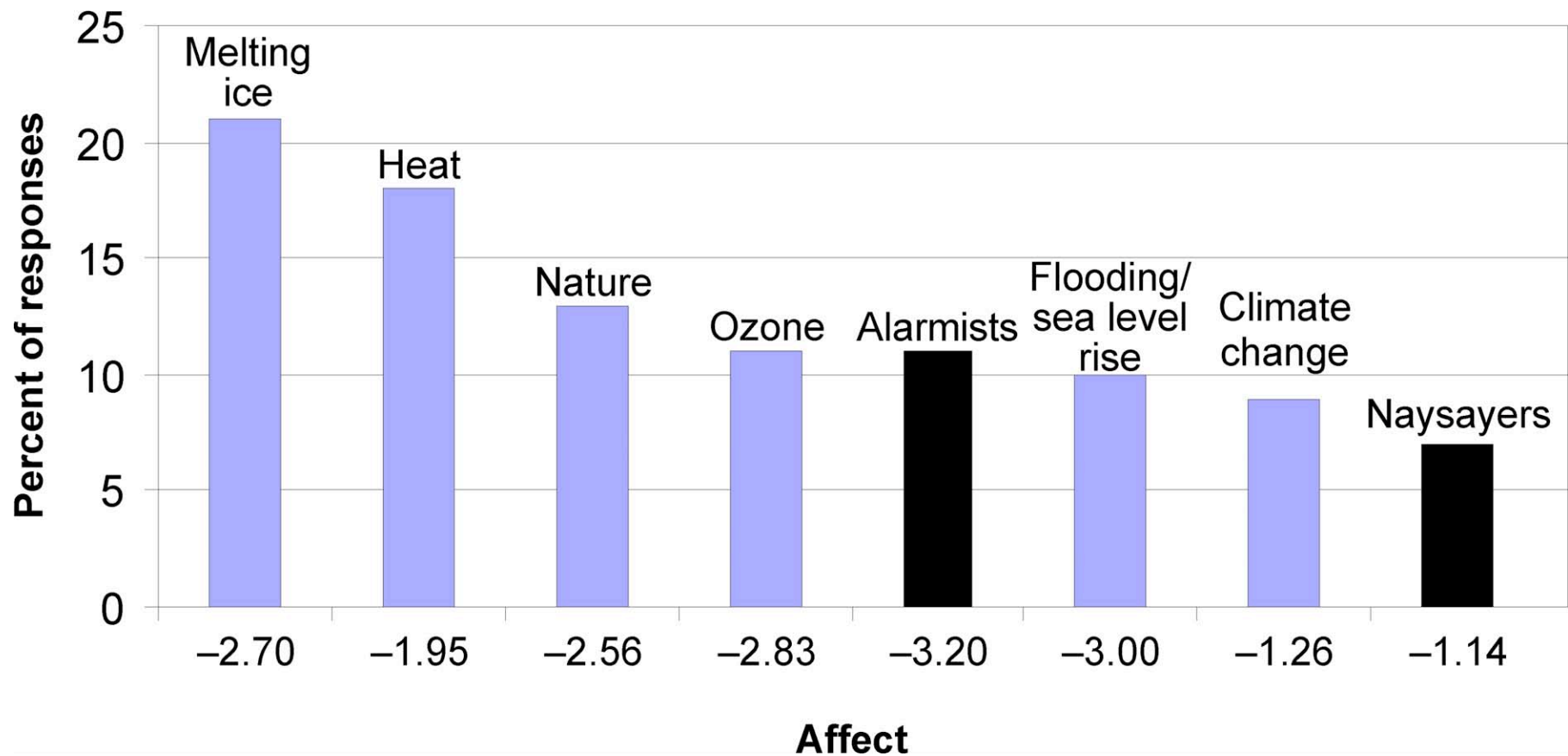
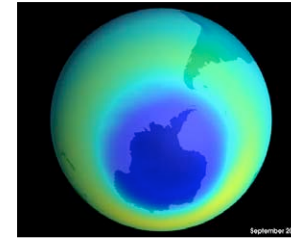
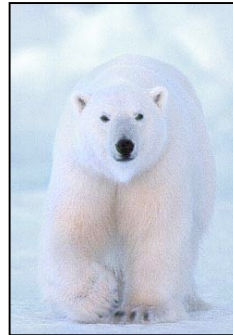
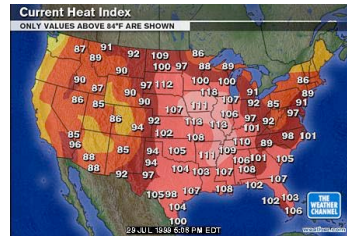
Anthony Leiserowitz

Decision Research

Support from The National Science Foundation

“Of all the imps that inhabit the nervous system, that little black box in psychological theorizing – the one we call meaning – is held by common consent to be the most elusive. Yet again by common consent of social scientists, this variable is one of the most important determinants of human behavior” (Osgood, et al. 1957).

American Images of Global Warming

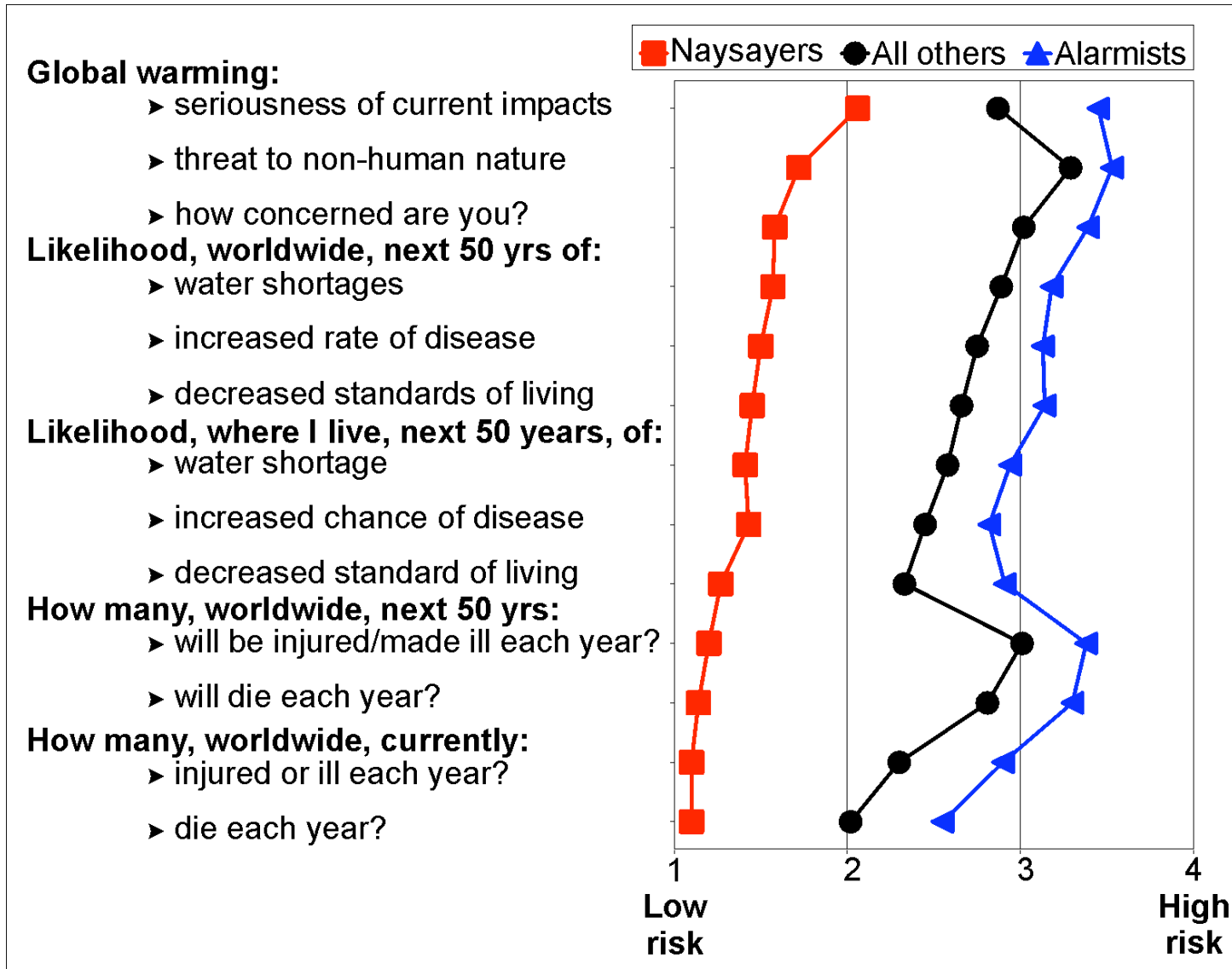


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Interpretive Community: Naysayers

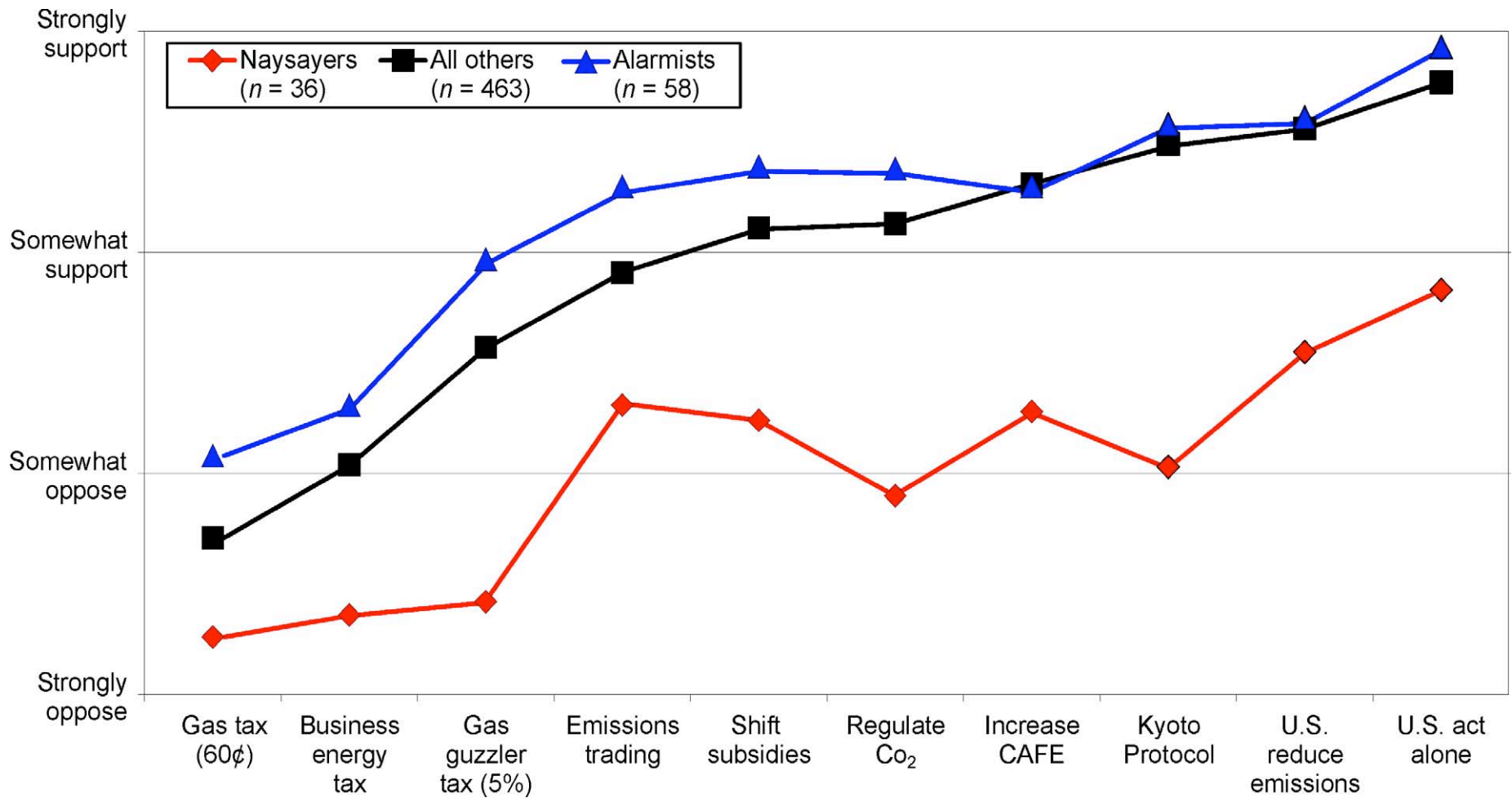
- Flat Denials: “There is no global warming.”
- It’s Natural: “A natural phenomenon that has been going on for years.”
- Doubting the Science: “Bad science, I don’t believe the data can support the hypothesis that the environment is warming.”
- Doubt Based on Personal Experience: “I think it’s a myth. Summers are getting shorter and winters seem to be getting damper and cooler. It seems to be going the other way.”
- Media Hype: “It is not as bad as the media portrays.”
- Conspiracy Theory: “Fraud. Scientists making up some statistics for their job security.”

Risk Perceptions



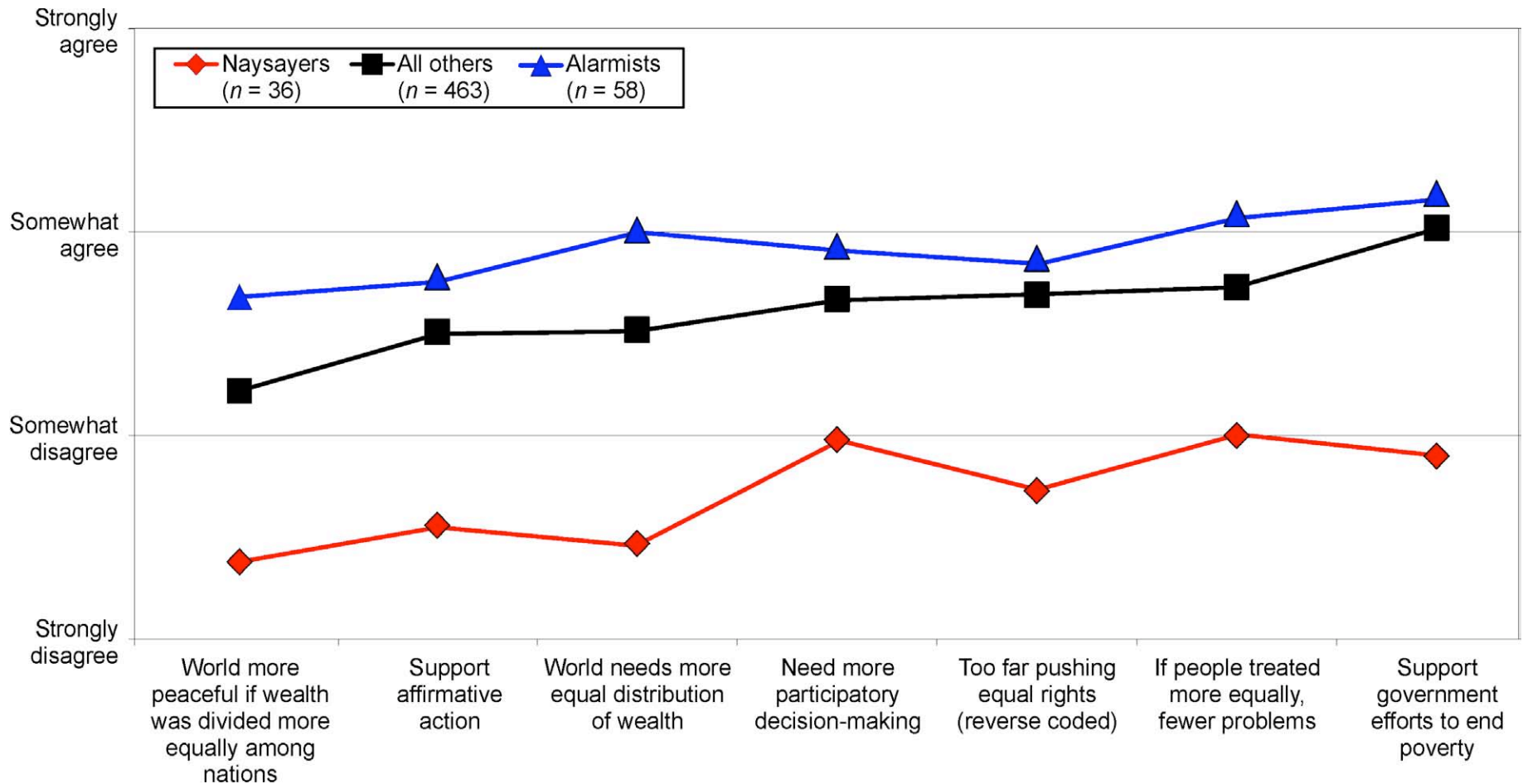
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Policy Support



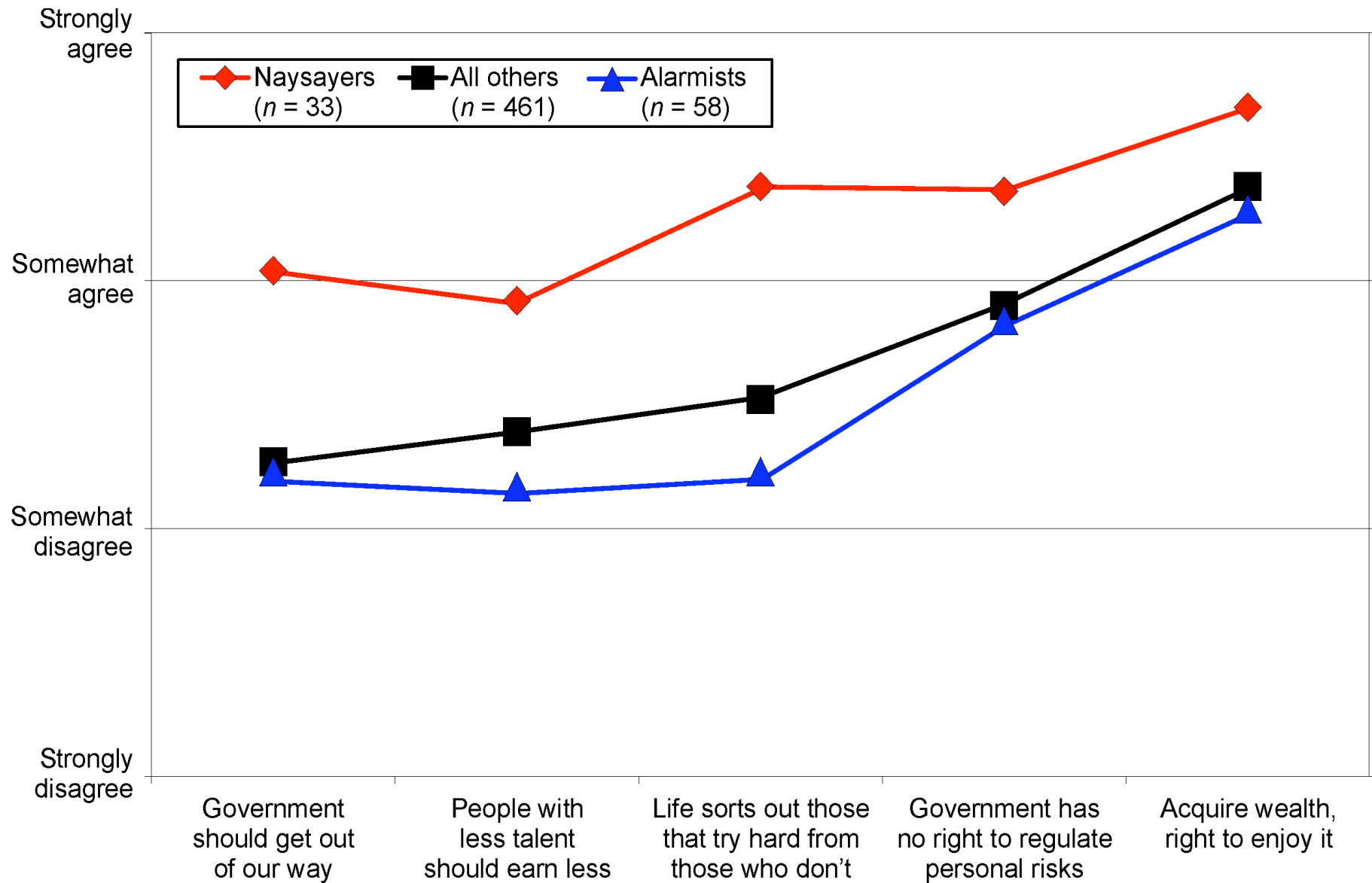
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Egalitarian Values



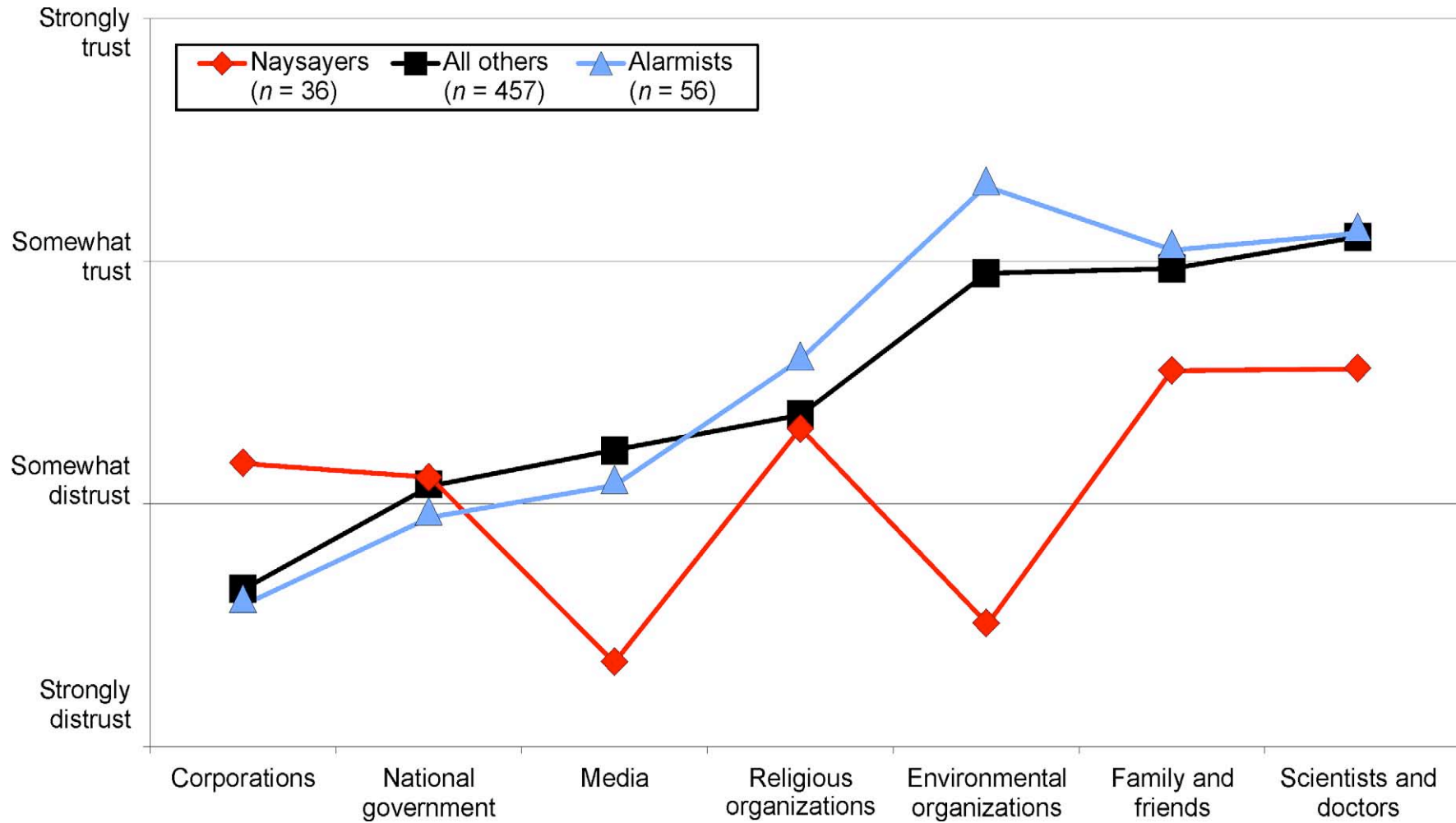
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Individualism Values



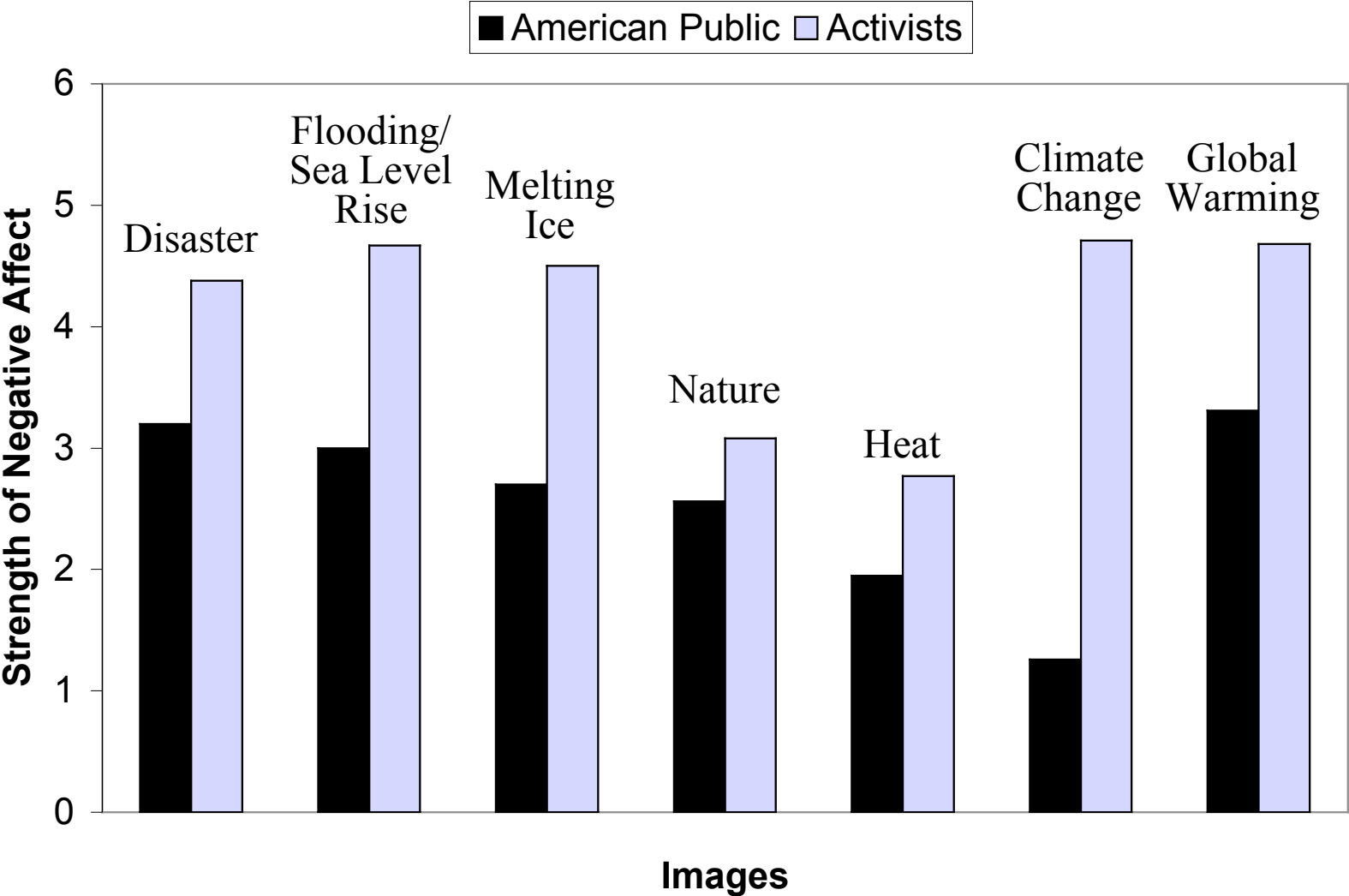
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Trust



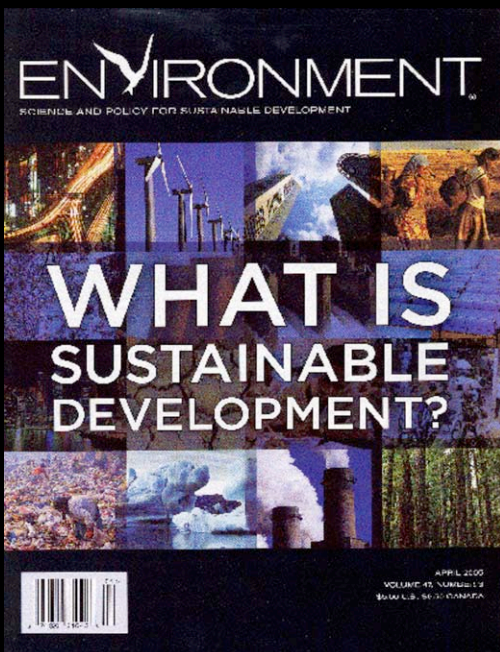
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American vs. Activist Negative Affect



Source: Anthony Leiserowitz, Decision Research, ecotone@uoregon.edu

“It’s time for us to start talking about ‘climate change’ instead of ‘global warming.’ ‘Climate change’ is less frightening than ‘global warming.’ As one focus group participant noted, climate change ‘sounds like you’re going from Pittsburgh to Fort Lauderdale.’ While global warming has catastrophic connotations attached to it, climate change suggests a more controllable and less emotional challenge” (Luntz 2002).



SUSTAINABILITY VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIORS: A Review of Multinational and Global Trends

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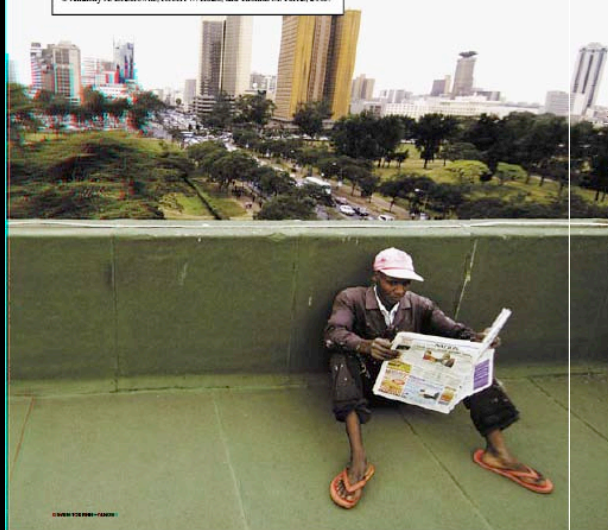
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Key Words environment, public opinion, sustainability transition, sustainable development

Abstract This review surveys five major efforts to identify and declare values essential to global sustainability; describes empirical trends (as measured by multinational and global-scale surveys) in values, attitudes, and behaviors related to human and economic development, the environment, and driving forces (population, affluence, technology, and entitlements); and describes empirical trends in attitudes toward contextual values that condition sustainable development (e.g., freedom and democracy, capitalism, globalization, and equality). Finally, the review identifies important barriers between attitudes and behavior; draws several conclusions regarding the value, attitudinal and behavioral change needed to achieve global sustainability; and suggests future research directions.

This article was published in the November 2005 issue of *Environment*, Volume 47, Number 9, pages 22–36. <http://www.heldref.org/env.php>
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Do Global Attitudes and Behaviors Support Sustainable Development?

By ANTHONY A. LEISEROWITZ, ROBERT W. KATES, AND THOMAS M. PARRIS

Many advocates of sustainable development recognize that a transition to global sustainability—meeting human needs and reducing hunger and poverty while maintaining the life-support systems of the planet—will require changes in human values, attitudes, and behaviors. A previous article in *Environment* described some of the values used to define or support sustainable development as well as key goals, indicators, and practices.¹ Drawing on the few multinational and quasi-global-scale surveys that have been conducted, this article synthesizes and reviews what is currently known about global attitudes and behavior that will either support or discourage a global sustainability transition.² (Table 1 on page 24 provides details about these surveys.)

None of these surveys measured public attitudes toward “sustainable development” as a holistic concept. There is, however, a diverse range of empirical data related to many of the subcomponents of sustainable development: development and environment, the driving forces of population, affluence/poverty/consumerism, technology, and entitlement programs; and the gap between attitudes and behavior.

Development

Concepts for environment and development merged in the early concept of sustainable development, but the meaning of these terms has evolved over time. For example, global economic development is widely viewed as a central priority of sustainable development, but development has come to mean human and social development as well.

Economic Development

The desire for economic development is often assumed to be universal, transcending all cultural and national contexts. Although the surveys in Table 1 have no global-scale data on public attitudes toward economic development per se, this assumption appears to be supported by 91 percent of respondents from 35 developing countries, the United States, and Germany, who said that it is very important (75 percent) or somewhat important (16 percent) to live in a country where there is economic prosperity.³ What level of affluence is desired, how that economic prosperity is to be achieved, and how economic wealth should ideally be

distributed within and between nations, however, are much more contentious questions. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any global-scale survey research that has tried to identify public attitudes or preferences for particular levels or end-states of economic development (for example, infinite growth versus steady-state economies) and only limited or tangential data on the ideal distribution of wealth (see the section on affluence below).

Data from the World Values Survey suggest that economic development leads to greater perceived happiness in countries that transition from subsistence to advanced industrial economies. But above a certain level of gross national product (GNP) per capita—approximately \$14,000—the relationship between income level and subjective well-being disappears (see Figure 1 on page 25). This implies that infinite economic growth does not lead to greater human happiness. Additionally, many of the under-poor countries had, at the time of these surveys, recently experienced significant declines in living standards with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet GNP per capita remained higher in these ex-Soviet countries than in developing countries like India and Nigeria.⁴ This suggests that relative trends in living standards influence happiness more than absolute levels of affluence, but the relationship between economic development and subjective well-being deserves more research attention.

Human Development

Very limited data is available on public attitudes toward issues of human development, although it can be assumed that there is nonuniversal support for increased child survival rates, adult life expectancies, and educational opportunities. However, despite the remarkable increases in these indicators of human well-being since World War II,⁵ there appears to be a globally pervasive sense that human well-being has been deteriorating in recent years. In 2002, large majorities worldwide said that a variety of conditions had worsened over the previous five years, including the availability of well-paying jobs (58 percent), working conditions (50 percent), the spread of diseases (66 percent), the affordability of health care (60 percent), and the ability of old people to care for themselves in old age (59

Sustainability Values, Attitudes and Behaviors

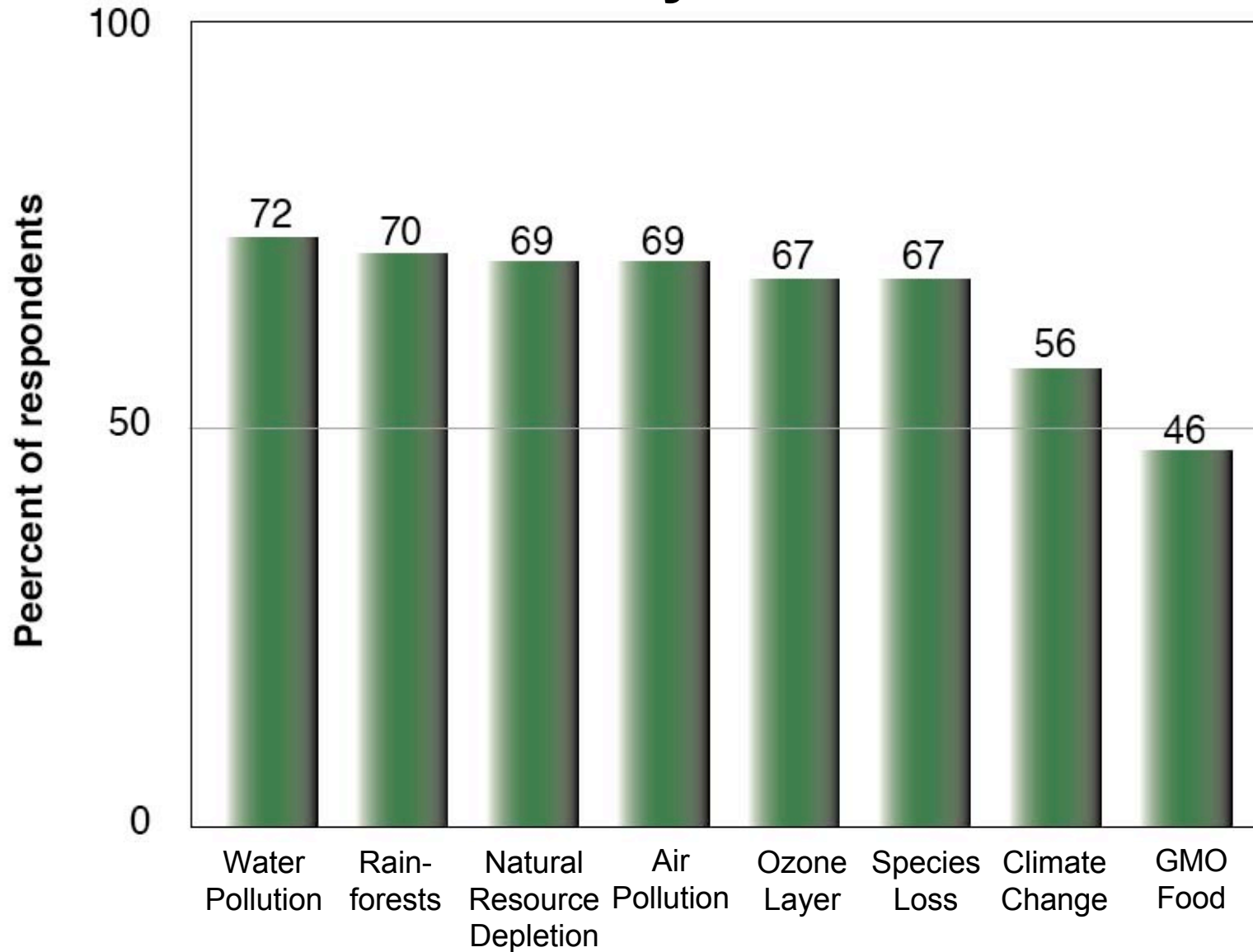
Declaratory Statements of Values

- U.S. National Academy of Sciences
- UN Millennium Declaration
- Earth Charter
- Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development
- Global Scenario Group

Public Values and Attitudes

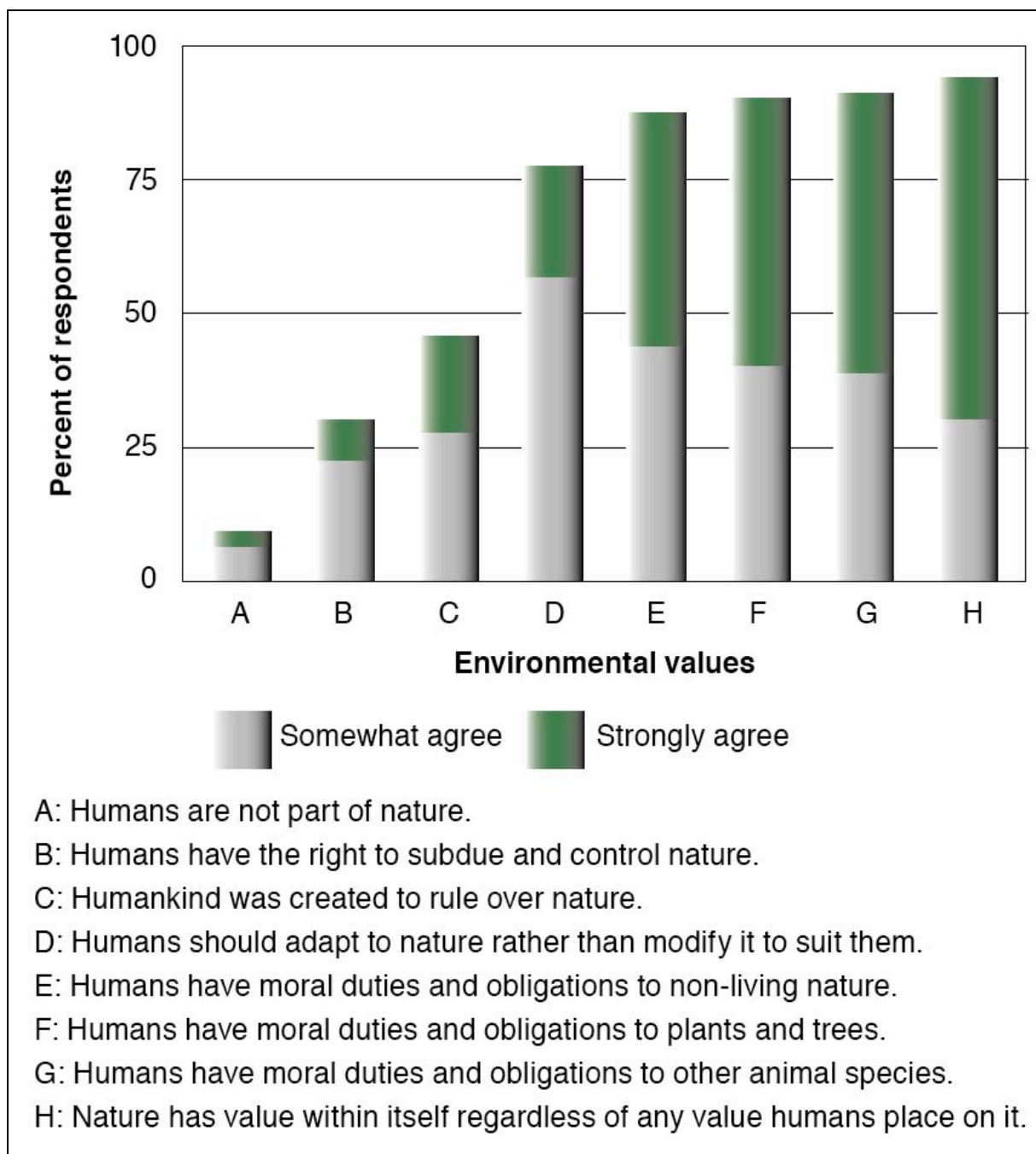
- Economic Development
- Development Assistance
- Human-Nature Relationship
- Environmental Concern
- Environment vs. Economy
- Environmental Policies
- Environmental Behavior
- Population
- Affluence
- Poverty
- Consumption
- Science and Technology
- Equity and Entitlements
- Freedom
- Democracy
- Capitalism
- Globalization
- Shared Responsibility
- Social Change

Percent of Global Public Calling Environmental Issues “A Very Serious Problem”



Source: Leiserowitz (2005); Data: GlobeScan (2000)

American (U.S.) Environmental Values

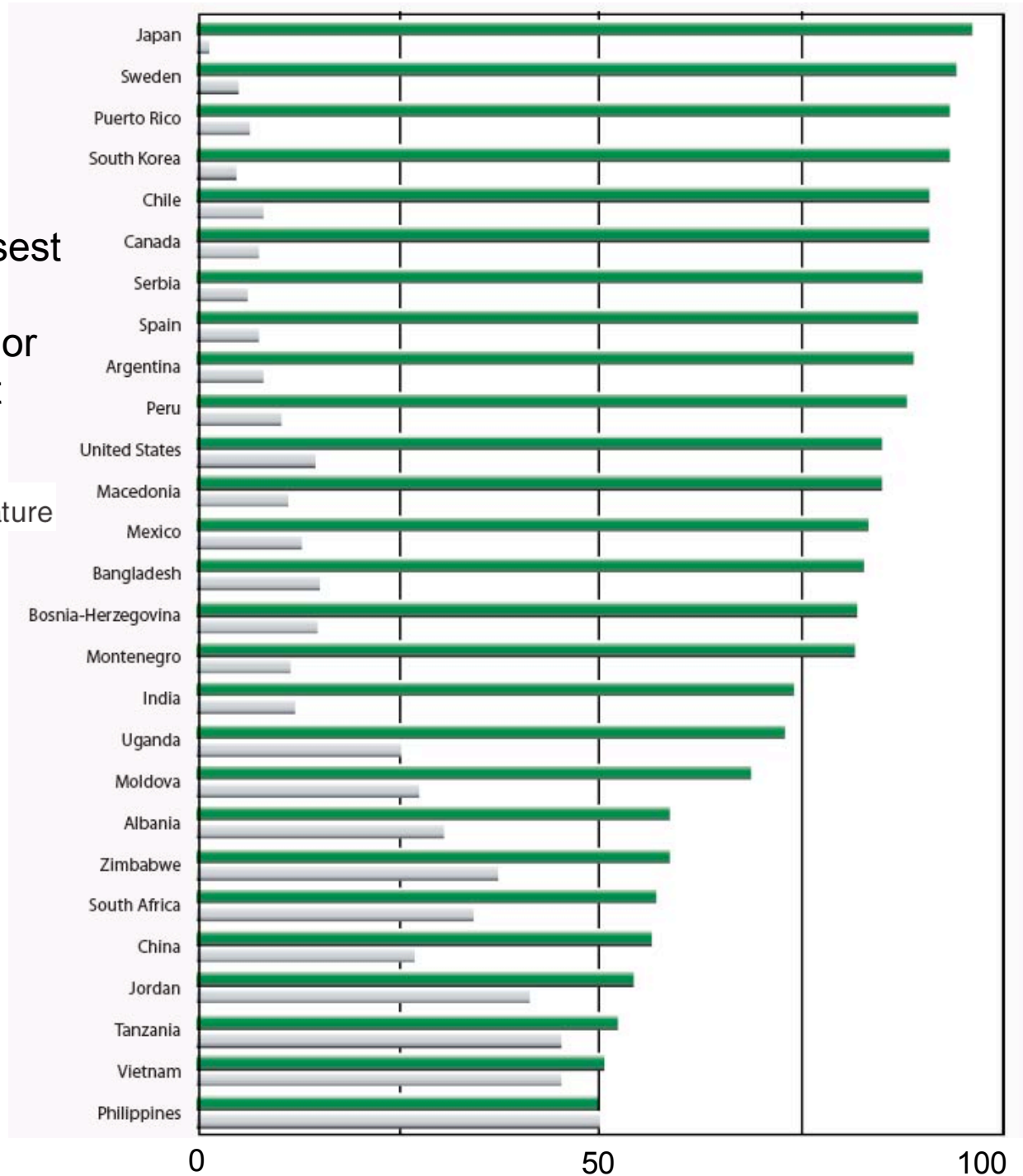


Source: Leiserowitz (2005)

Human-Nature Relationship

“Which statement comes closest to your own views: human beings should master nature or human beings should coexist with nature?”

Coexist with nature
 Master nature



Source: Leiserowitz (2005)
Data: 2000 World Values Survey

The Value - Behavior Gap

- Direction, strength, and priority of values and attitudes
- Individual barriers (time, money, knowledge, power, perceived efficacy, habit)
- Structural barriers (laws, regulations, perverse subsidies, infrastructure, available technology, social norms, economic and political context)

Summary and Conclusions

- The American public perceives climate change as a threat, and supports action, but little sense of urgency or priority.
- Affect and imagery (the unconscious) are critical.
- Different interpretive communities require different values, messages, and messengers.
- The global public perceives environmental issues as very serious and embraces an eco-centric-leaning ethic.
- Individual and structural barriers stand between values and behavior.

