Climate change: Extension's role

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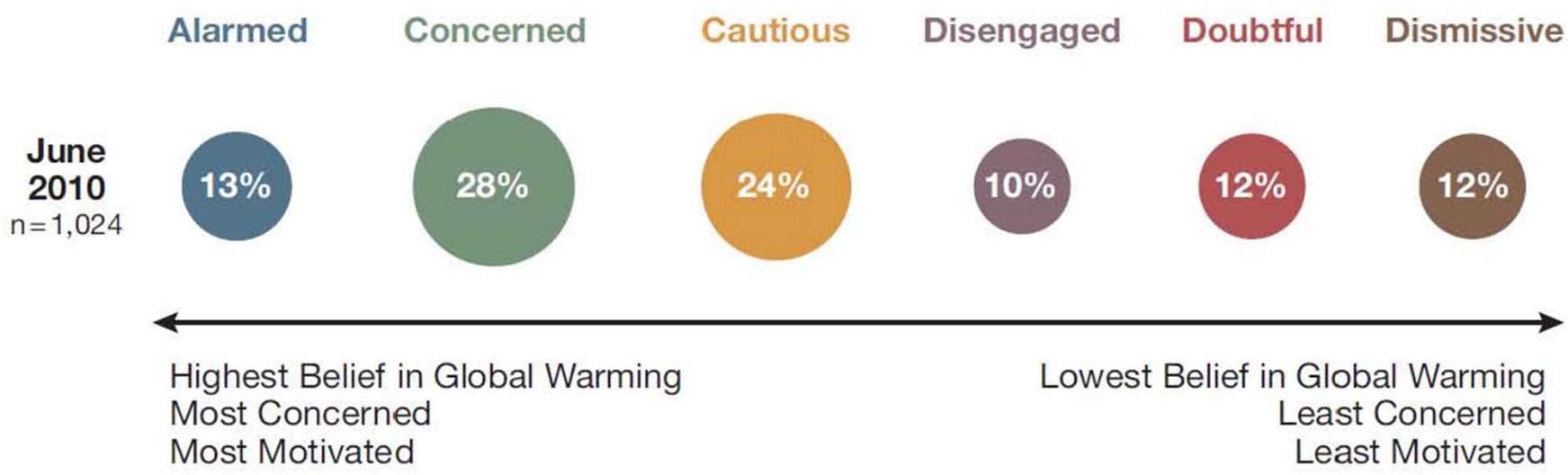
MSUE Fall Conference

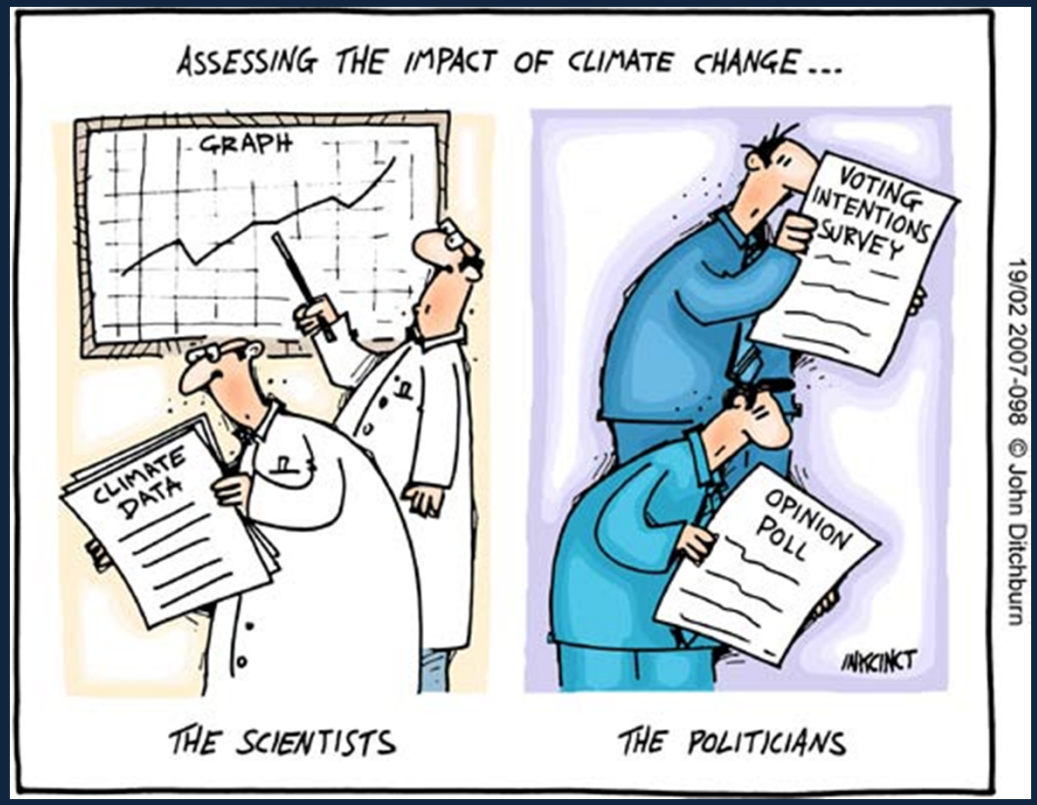
Climate change “discussion”

The Six Americas



Leiserowitz et al. 2010

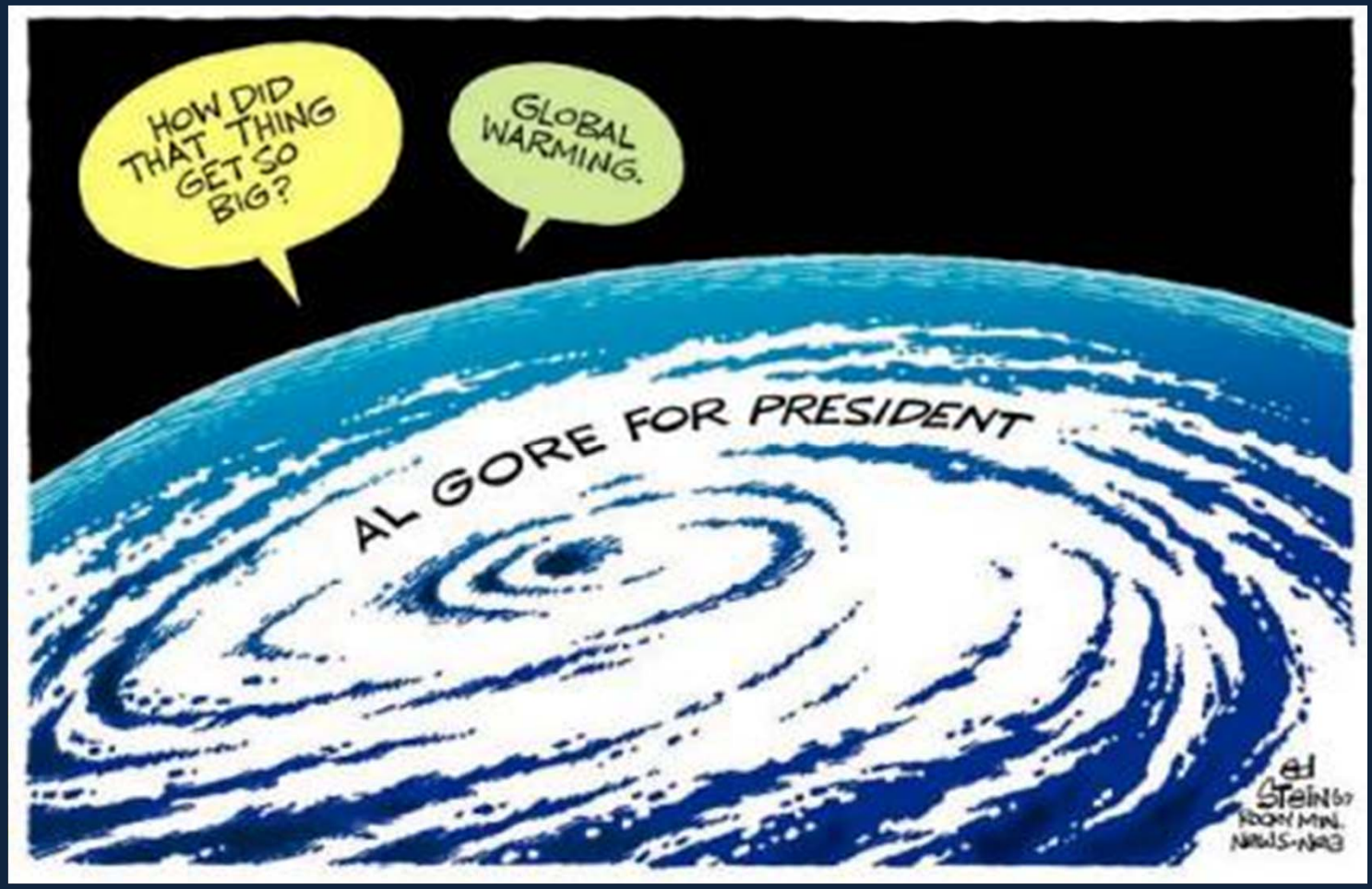
Why is it a public issue, and not just a scientific issue?



Some drivers of the controversial question: what should we do about cc?

1. Political Identity
2. State of the Economy
3. Values
4. Uncertainty

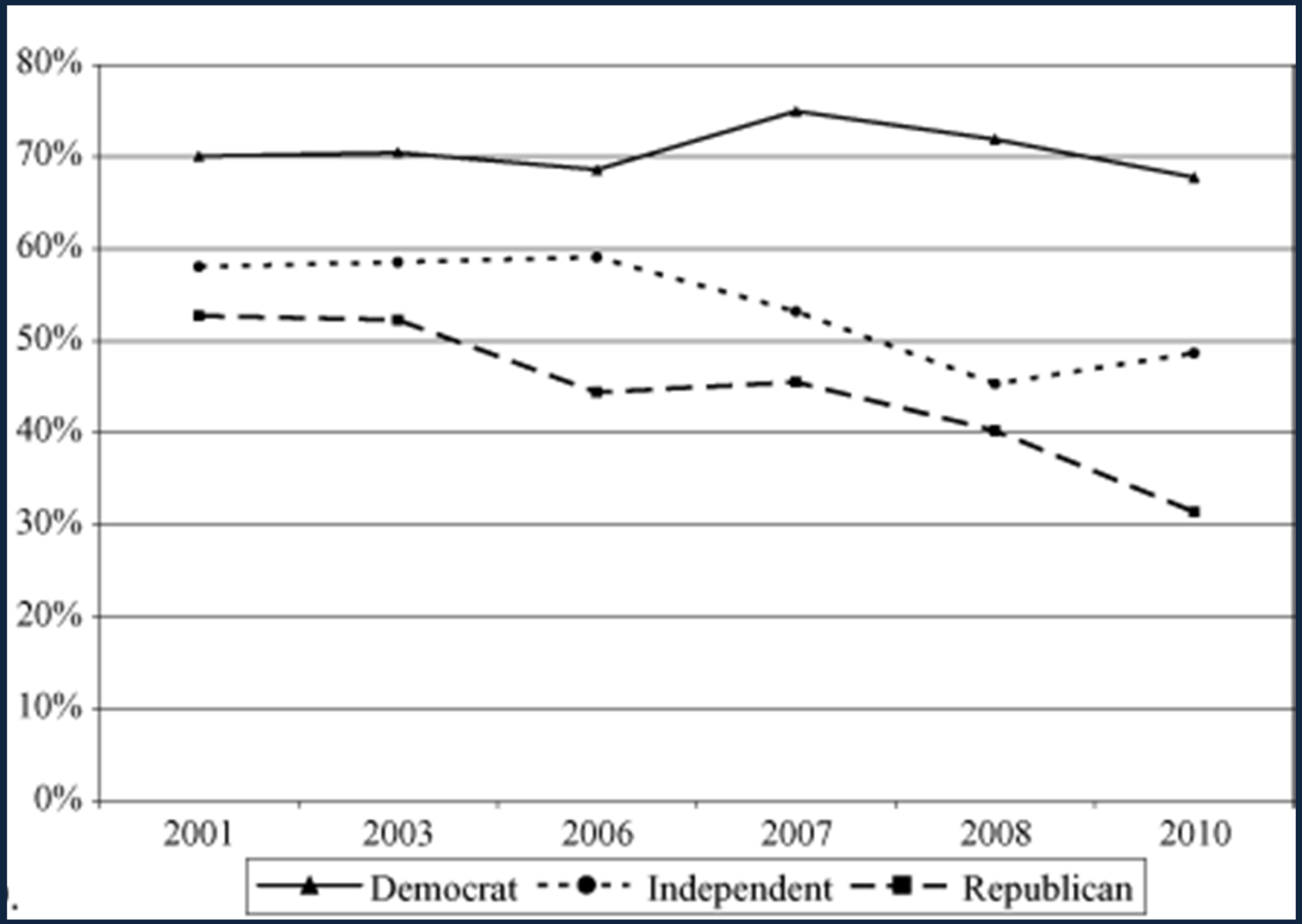
Connection to Al Gore



And to George Bush

Political divide

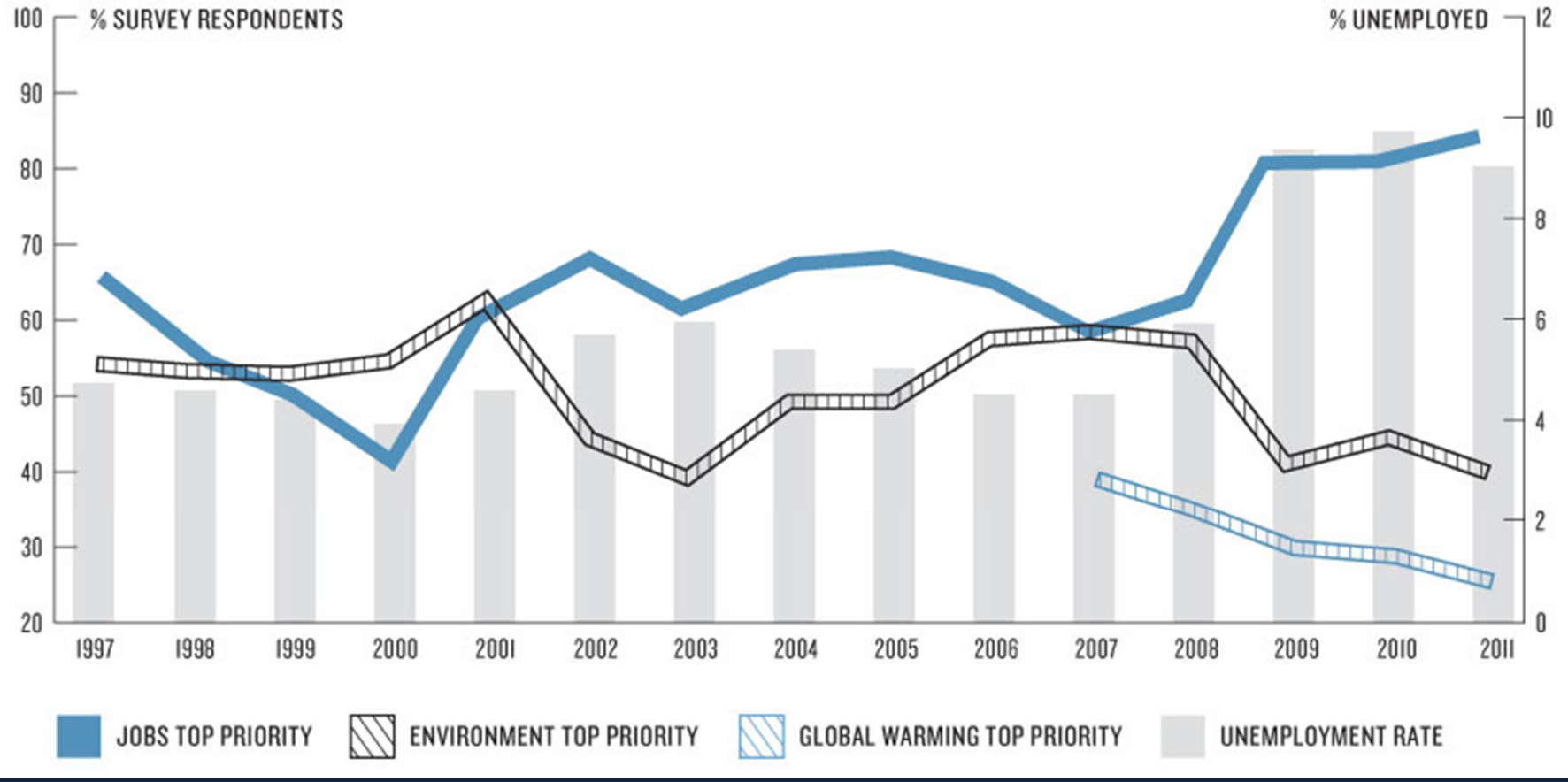
Percent who believe changes in Earth's temperature due more to human activities than to natural changes



McCright and Dunlap 2011

Economy

Relationship between the economy & perceived priorities



Nisbet 2011

Values

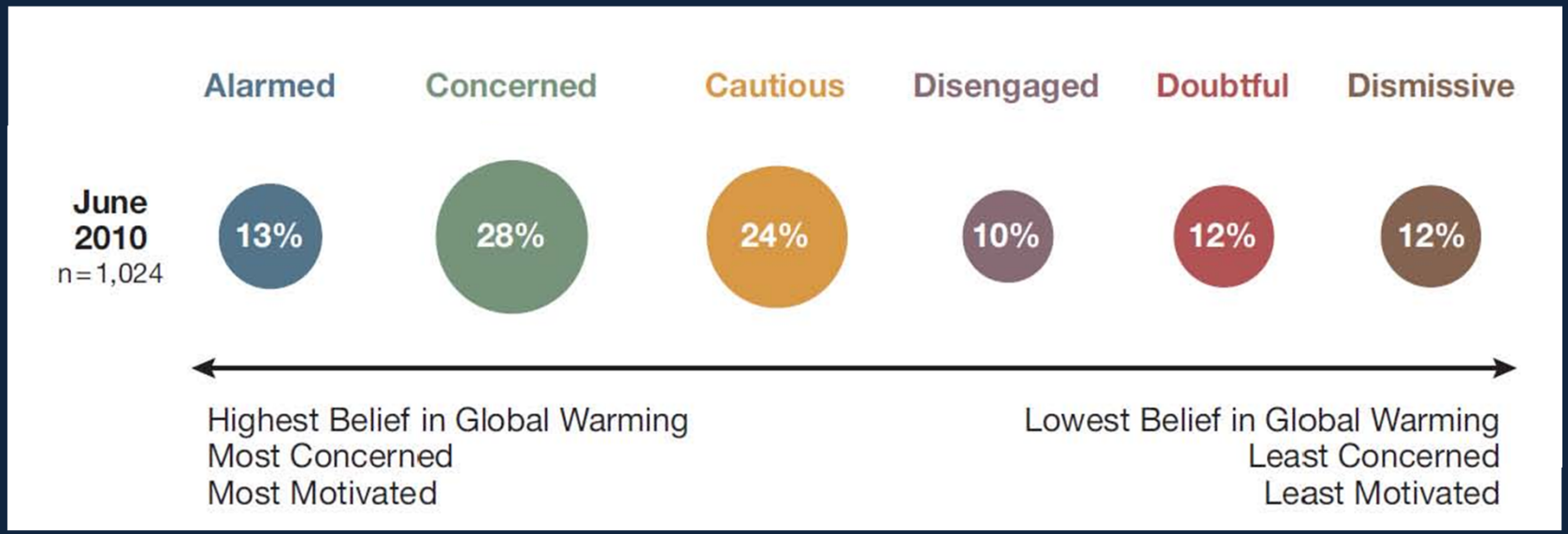
Addressing climate change means assessing the nature of acceptable risks, impacts, costs and tradeoffs.

So sometimes people debate the science rather than openly debate the values.

Nisbet et al. 2011

Scientific consensus

- 95% earth scientists agree humans affect climate
- 40% of Americans: “there is a lot of disagreement among scientists about global warming”



Leiserowitz et al. 2010 & 2011

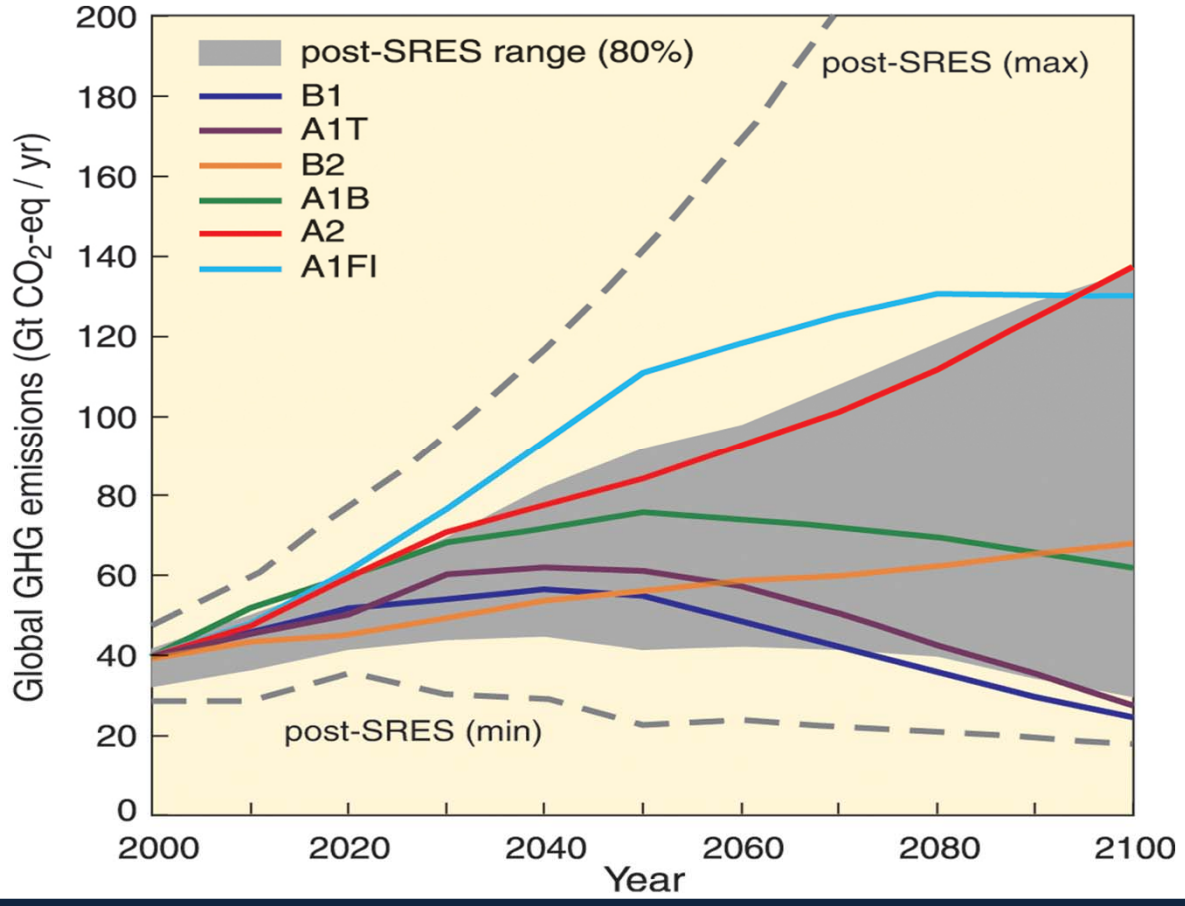
Sources of uncertainty in climate projections

1. Lack of complete knowledge of how the climate works
2. Natural variability in the climate system

Sources of uncertainty in climate projections

3. Inability to predict human behavior

Scenarios for GHG emissions in the absence of additional climate policies



Communicating uncertainty

- Biological and social uncertainties are facts of life
- "Uncertainty language" - barrier to public understanding
  - Scientists: "how well something is known"
  - Public: "not knowing"
  - Less than complete certainty ≠ not knowing anything

(UCS www.ucs.org; Ekwurzel 2011)

Climate science information is best:

1. actively communicated with appropriate language, metaphor, and analogy;
2. combined with narrative storytelling;
3. made vivid through visual imagery and experiential scenarios;
4. balanced with scientific information;
5. and delivered by trusted messengers in group settings.

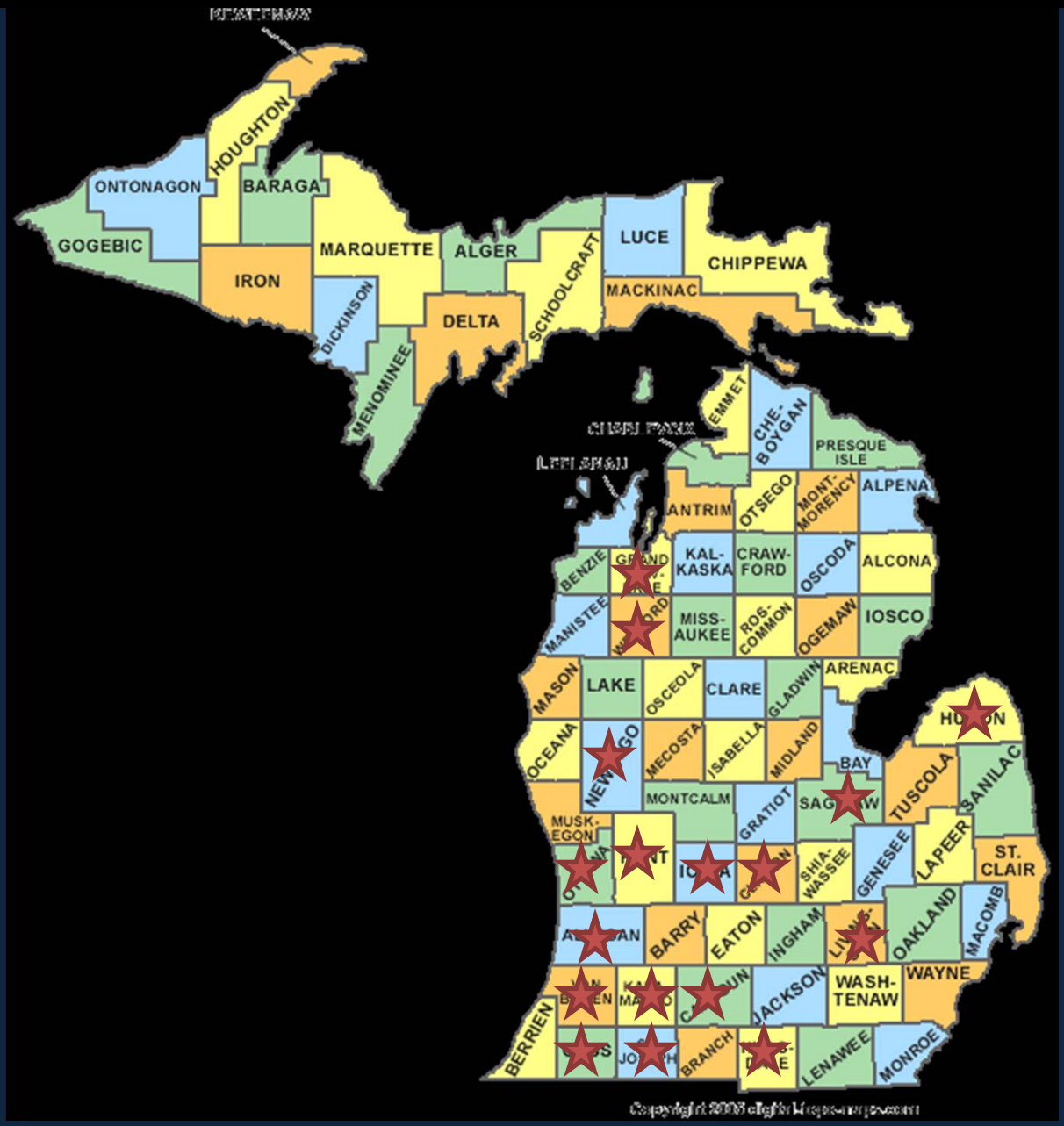
http://www.cred.columbia.edu/guide/guide/intro.html

So what can we do?

1. Weave climate change into existing program topics/activities

2. Directly open up the conversation on climate change

An example of dialogue



“I'll deal with the weather that's there.
Whatever it is, I'll deal with it.”

“It was nice to be asked about an important subject rather than being told what someone else thinks.”

“If MSUE is sponsoring the [climate change] endeavor, there is got to be some basis behind it, and if [my extension educator] thinks it is important, so do I!”

Recap

- While climate change can be a political and value-laden issue, we can engage with stakeholders by
  1. better understanding the climate change controversy,
  2. utilizing climate change communication resources, and
  3. taking a dialogue-based approach

- MSU Extension is trusted and well suited to engage with stakeholders on this topic