

What motivates rejection of (climate) science?

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(Medical Xpress)—Researchers from The University of Western Australia have examined what motivates people who are greatly involved in the climate debate to reject scientific evidence.

The study *Motivated Rejection of Science*, to be published in [Psychological Science](#), was designed to investigate what motivates the rejection of science in visitors to climate blogs who choose to participate in the ongoing public debate about [climate change](#).

More than 1000 visitors to blogs dedicated to discussions of climate science completed a questionnaire that queried people's belief in a number of scientific questions and [conspiracy theories](#), including: Princess Diana's death was not an accident; the Apollo moon landings never happened; HIV causes AIDS; and smoking causes lung cancer. The study also considered the interplay of these responses with the acceptance of climate science, free market ideology and the belief that previous [environmental problems](#) have been resolved.

The results showed that those who subscribed to one or more conspiracy theories or who strongly supported a [free market economy](#) were more likely to reject the findings from climate science as well as other sciences.

The researchers, led by UWA School of [Psychology Professor](#) Stephan Lewandowsky, found that free-market ideology was an overwhelmingly strong determinant of the rejection of climate science. It also predicted

the rejection of the link between tobacco and lung cancer and between HIV and AIDS. Conspiratorial thinking was a lesser but still significant determinant of the rejection of all scientific propositions examined, from climate to [lung cancer](#).

"Blogs have a huge impact on society and so it's important that we understand the motivations and the reasoning of those who visit blogs to contribute to the discussion. There has been much research pointing to the role of free-market ideology in rejecting [climate science](#), but this is the first time it's been shown that other scientific facts, such as the link between HIV and AIDS, are also subject to ideological rejection," Professor Lewandowsky said.

By contrast, a major determinant of the acceptance of science was the perceived consensus among scientists. The more agreement among scientists, the more people were likely to accept the scientific findings.

"It is important to understand the role of perceived consensus because it highlights how damaging the media's handling of climate issues can be when they create the appearance of a scientific debate where there is none: More than 90 in 100 climate researchers agree on the basic fact that the globe is warming due to human greenhouse gas emissions," Professor Lewandowsky said.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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