



Group characteristics of different views about the causes of climate change: An Australian national survey

Climate Adaptation Flagship

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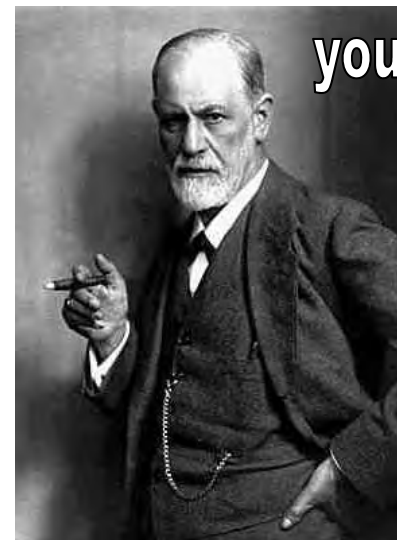
National Research
FLAGSHIPS



Climate change: Beliefs and denials

A new wave of climate change research

- Increased discussion about growing scepticism
- *Who believes what?* is now a dominant discussion topic
- An obsession with climate change 'denial' and 'denialists'?



So...tell me about
your weather

What is denial anyway?

Stanley Cohen: *States of Denial*

Literal Denial

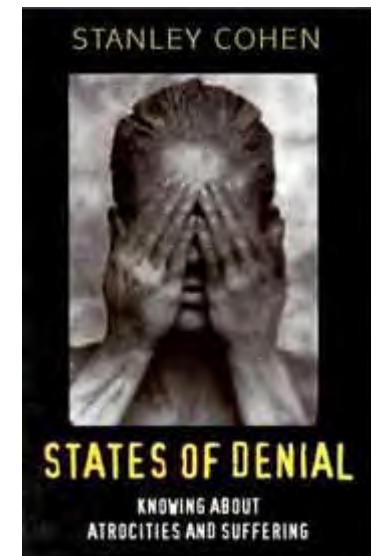
- The facts are refuted

Interpretive Denial

- The facts are not refuted, but reinterpreted

Implicatory Denial

- The facts are not refuted, nor reinterpreted, but the psychological, behavioural and moral implications that necessarily follow are denied



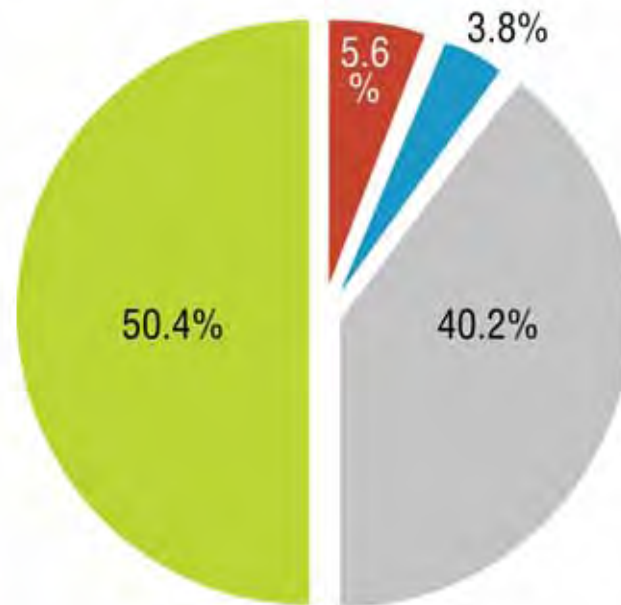
Cohen, S. (2001). *States of denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Polity Press: Cambridge.





National baseline survey

- National survey of 5,036 people in July-August 2010
- Drawn from a research-only internet panel of 300,000+ Australians (The ORU; representative of behavioural, attitudinal and lifestyle criteria)
- Stratified by location, age and gender

Beliefs about the causation of climate change

What best describes thoughts about climate change?



-  I don't think that climate change is happening
-  I have no idea whether climate change is happening or not
-  I think that climate change is happening, but it's just a natural fluctuation in Earth's temperatures
-  I think that climate change is happening, and I think that humans are largely causing it

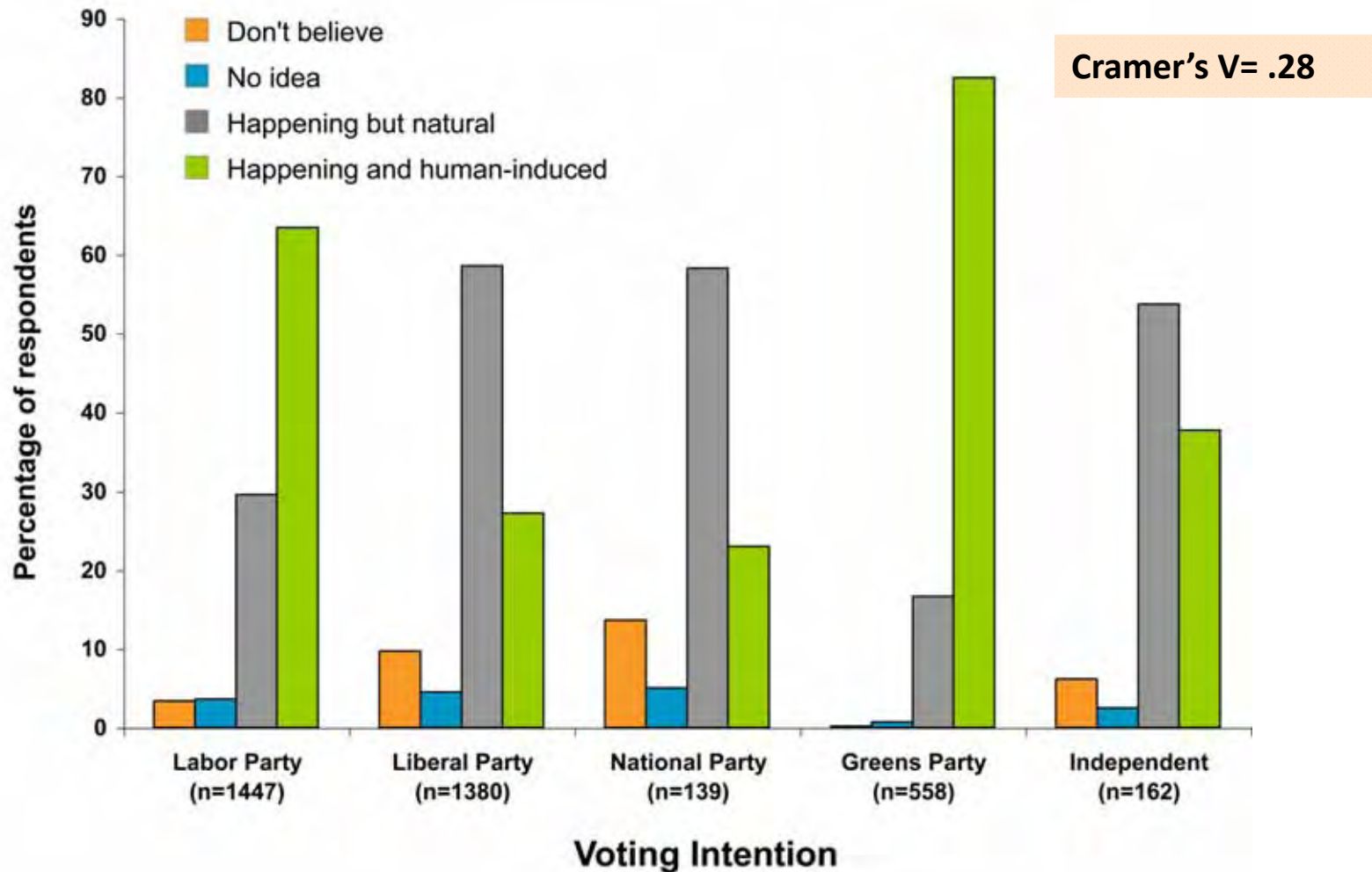
Demographic characteristics of different belief types

- Those who state belief in human-induced climate change are more likely to be...
 - Women
 - From capital cities
 - Have slightly higher levels of education
 - Slightly younger
 - Income appears to be irrelevant
- These results are statistically *significant*, but the effect sizes are small ($<.06$), so they're not particularly *meaningful*

So what is meaningful?

- Who are you most likely to vote for in the upcoming federal election?

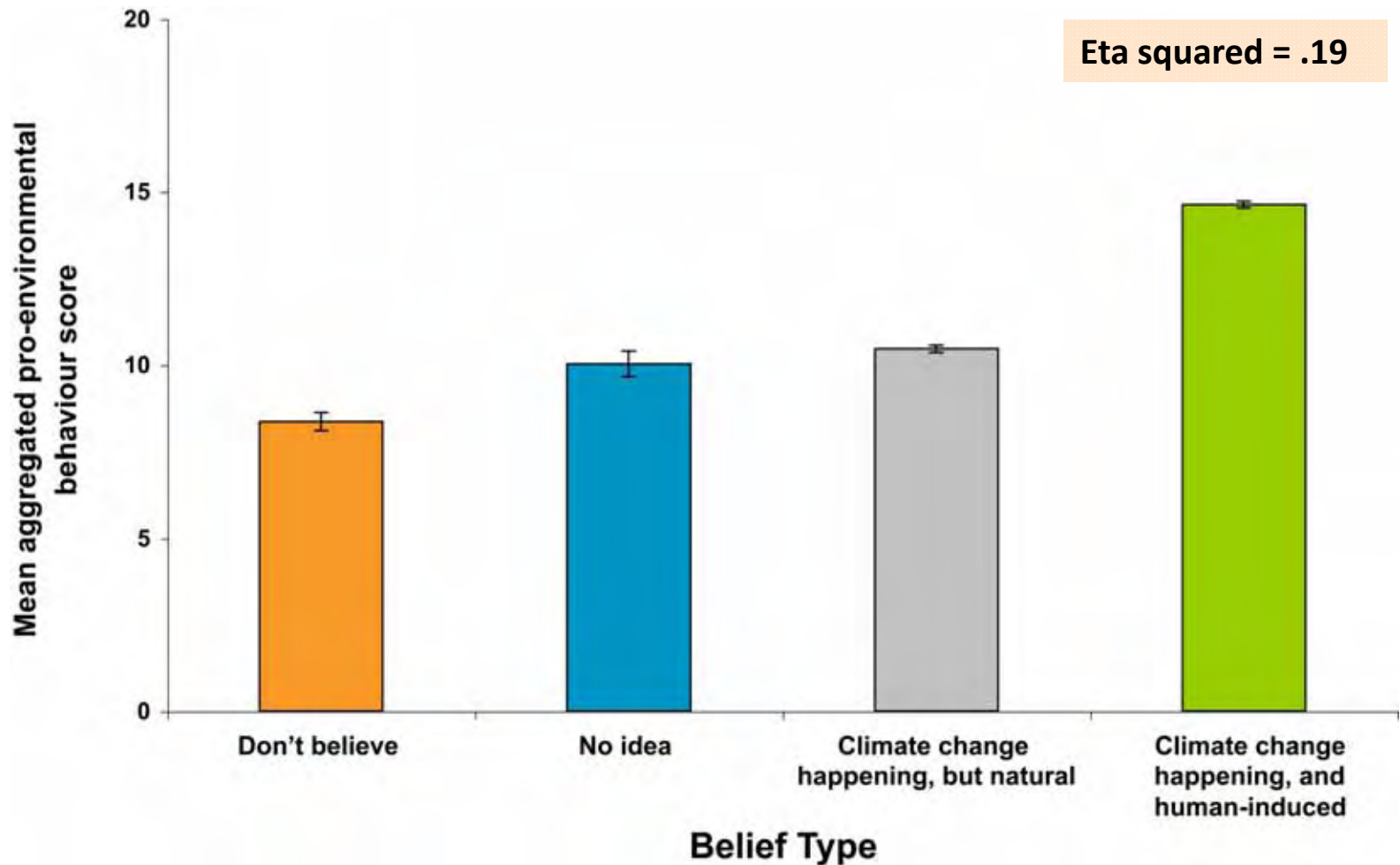
Voting intentions



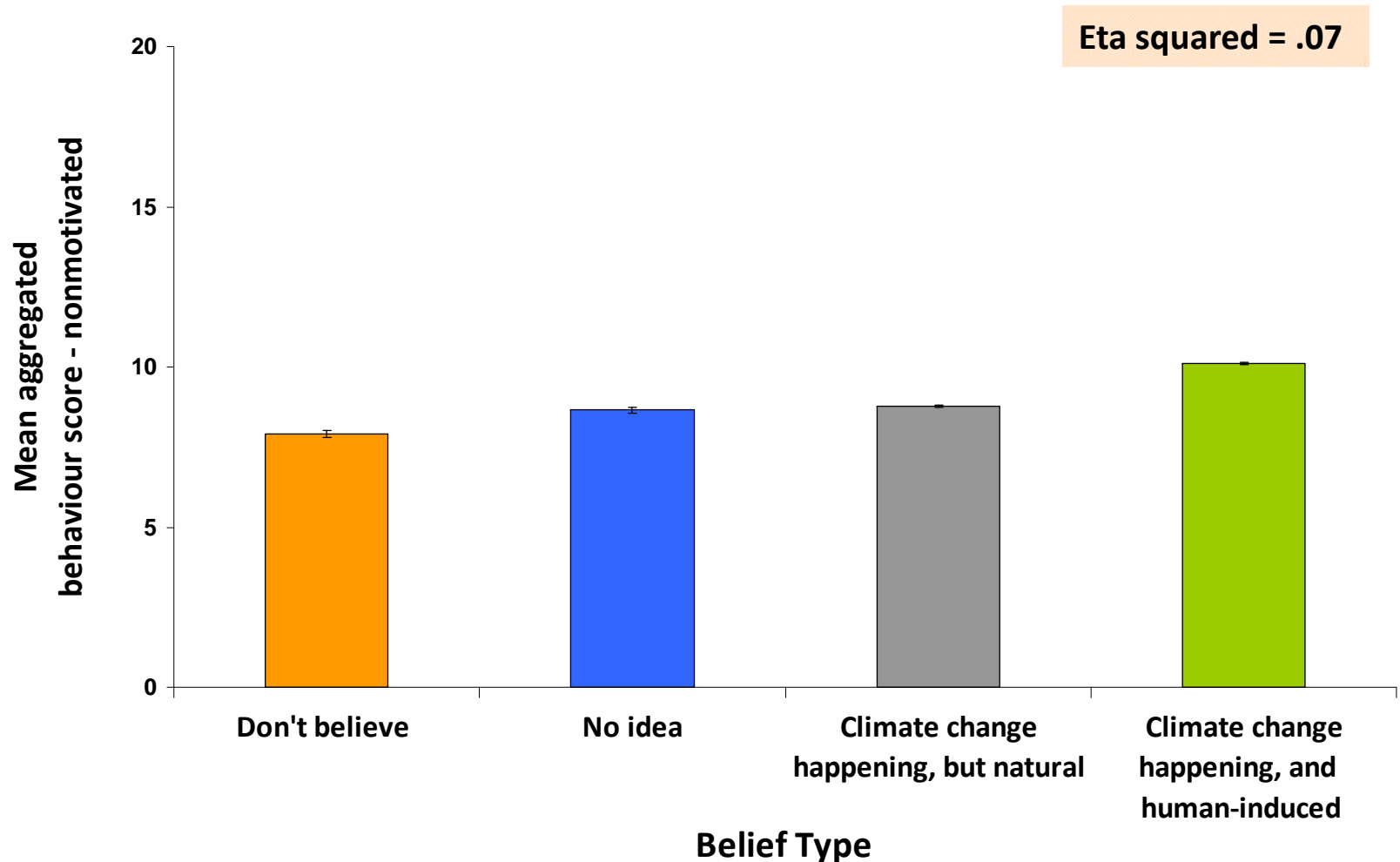
So what?

- Question-framing is important
- Do these groups differ in relation variables that actually matter?
- What about behaviour?
 - 17 items of individual pro-environmental behaviour
 - Pro-environmental behaviour score for each respondent

Belief types and pro-environmental behaviours



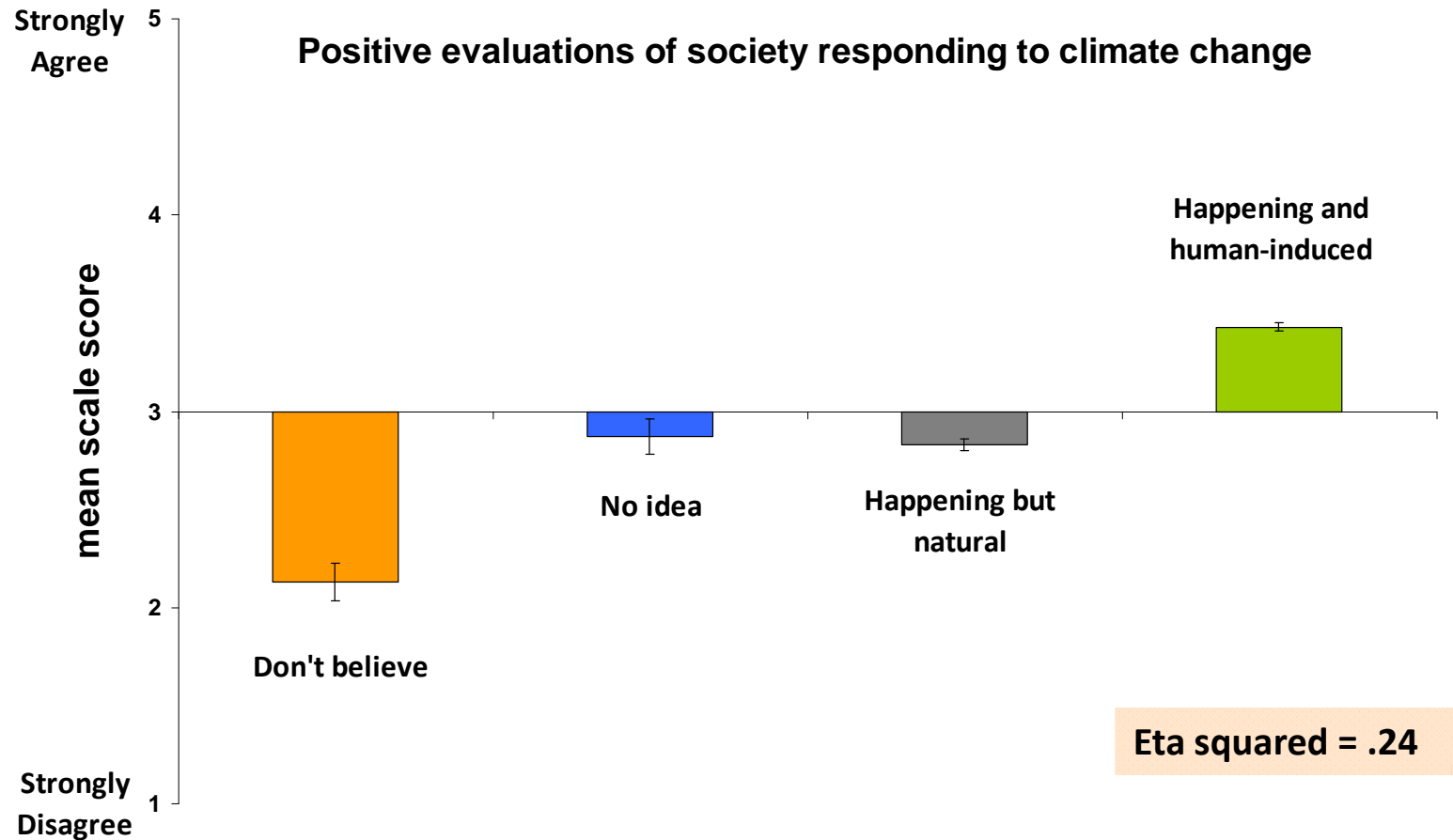
Belief types and pro-environmental behaviours



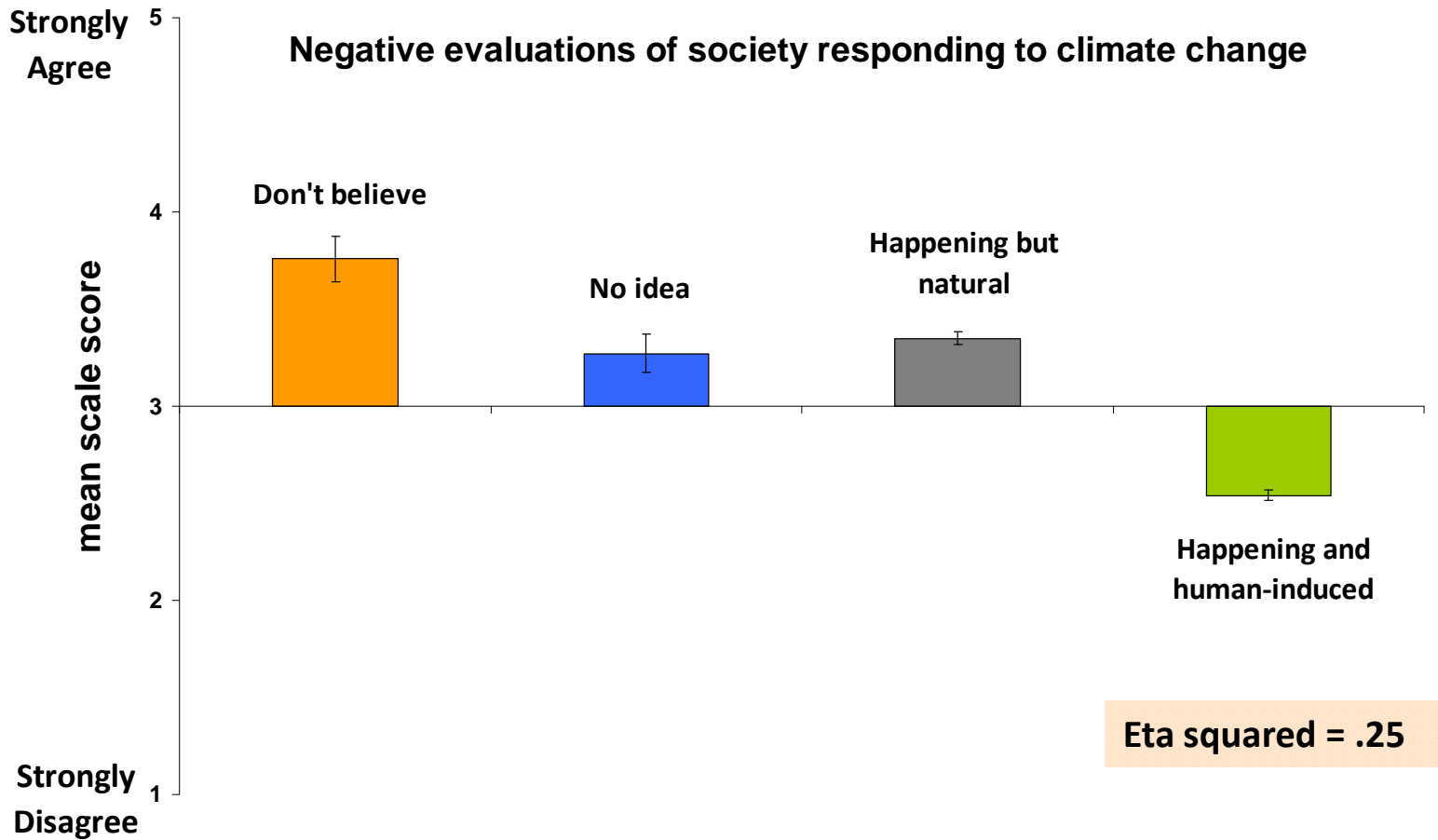
Belief types and collective efficacy

- Evaluations of whether responding to climate change at a societal level would be good or bad
 - Positive evaluations, e.g.
 - an opportunity to be part of something bigger
 - will foster community connectedness and spirit
 - Negative evaluations, e.g.
 - nothing Australia will do that will make a meaningful difference
 - will cost Australia a lot of money / jobs

Positive Evaluations of societal response



Negative Evaluations of societal response

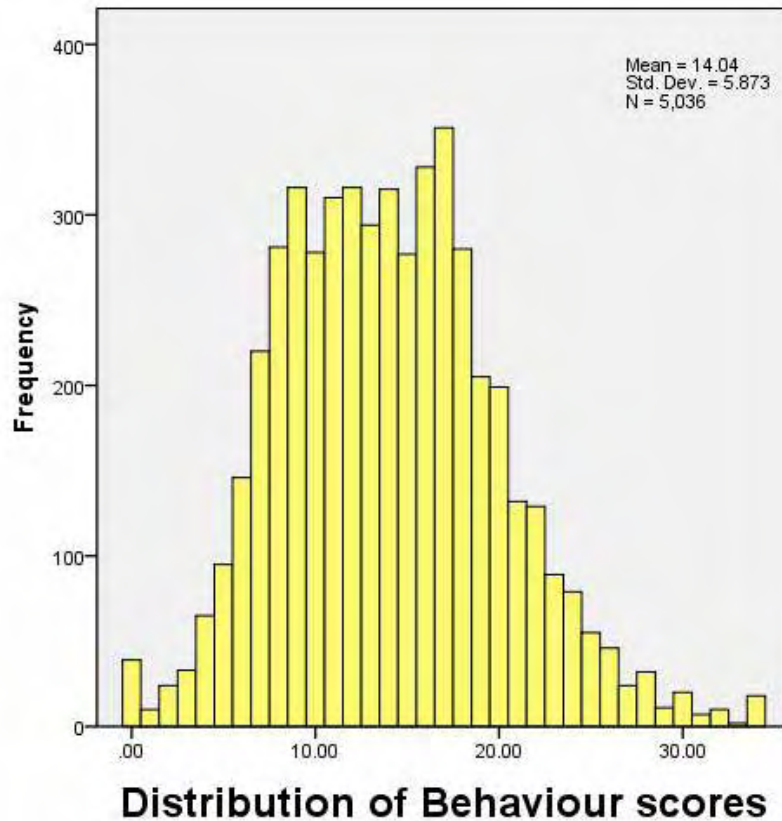


What can we conclude from all this?

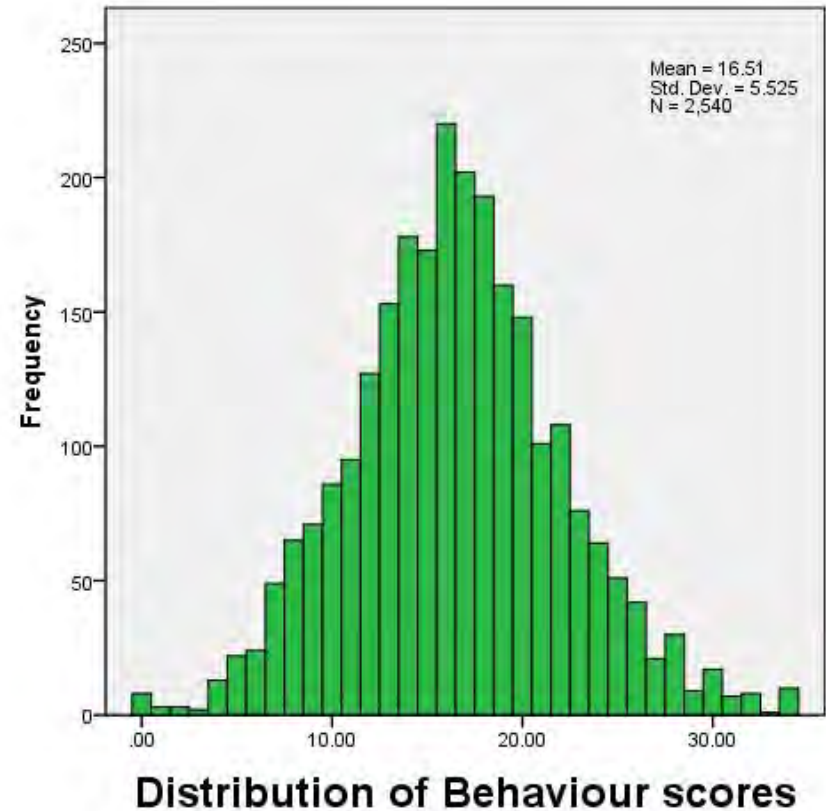
- Beliefs seem tied to political preferences more than other socio-demographic factors
- Does this mean the fixation on denial by some social researchers is redundant? Does politics trump all?
- Beliefs about what causes climate change are important, but perhaps more so for top-down societal responses than for individual behavioural responses

Behaviour and belief type

All respondents



Believe in human-induced climate change



What predicts behaviour in 'believers'?

	Beta Coefficient
Positive evaluations of society responding to climate change	.08 **
Negative evaluations of society responding to climate change	-.12 **
How worried are you about climate change?	.05
How much will climate change harm you?	.02
How important is climate change?	.18 **
How much have you experienced climate change?	.14 **
I feel a moral duty to do something about climate change	.20 **

** $p < .001$

Personal associations with climate change

“Which 3 people first come to mind when you think about climate change?”



then...

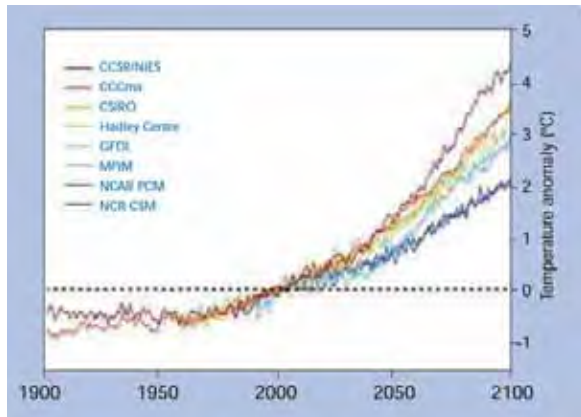


Me / myself



Family / children / pets etc

A communication challenge



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