

The Historical Roots of Climate Change Denial

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Abstract :

More than a third of U.S. citizens do not believe in human-made climate change, a share that has remained stable over the last two decades. This paper argues that the roots of this denial are, in part, to be found in the economic histories of communities. Using data on 3.6 millions of oil and gas wells drilled between 1859 and 2022, I show that the long-term exposure to fossil fuel extraction negatively impacts present levels of climate change beliefs - more so than present production and employment. These effects are not driven by political bundling, nor by selective migration. In contrast, I document the development of strong fossil fuel identities in communities linked to their extraction, and show how they interacted with the formation of beliefs.