

The Historical Roots of Climate Change Denial

Edgard DEWITTE

Abstract :

More than a third of US citizens do not believe in human-made Climate Change, and this share seems to remain stable over the years. This paper asks whether historical factors could explain these patterns of denial. Using data on oil & gas exploration over the XXth century, I start by showing evidence that long-term exposure to fossil fuel extraction negatively impacts current levels of climate change beliefs - more so than present production and employment. I use the natural experiment of the so-called "fracking revolution" to confirm that short term variations seem to have little effect on beliefs. On the contrary, historical exposure to other forms of "resource abundance", as understood by historians of the Frontier, could have participated in shaping individual environmental attitudes.