Polar facts and polarization

Lawrence Hamilton
University of New Hampshire

American Geophysical Union
San Francisco, Dec 16 2015

Research supported by the US National Science Foundation:

- PoLAR Climate Change Education Partnership DUE-1239783
- Sea Ice Prediction Network PLR-1303938
- New Hampshire EPSCoR EPS-1101245
Surveys since 2006 explore public perceptions of polar regions

Findings:
1. High salience
2. Limited knowledge
3. Two kinds of facts

Takeaway:
Science communication matters,
but in the US it is not the main problem
70% know or guess Arctic sea ice declined.

60% think Arctic warming will affect their weather.

30% know Gr/Ant ice sheets most affect sea level.
Responses stable over 2011–2015

New Hampshire results close to US
Partisan divisions are dramatic on change-related questions. Non-change questions find lack of basic knowledge.
Political divisions on polar facts are greatest among those who claim “high understanding”.
Overconfidence:
low knowledge + high “understanding”

Greater among Tea Party supporters & climate-change deniers.
September 2015 poll

Arctic sea ice beliefs of Trump and Clinton supporters

If election held today, would you vote for Trump or Clinton? WMUR/CNN New Hampshire poll 9/2015

- Trump: 42%
- Clinton: 50%
- Other: 3%
- DK/undec: 5%

% NH Trump or Clinton supporters believe summer Arctic sea ice area decreased in recent decades

- Trump: 45%
- Clinton: 85%
- Other: 55%
- DK/undec: 55%

analysis: L Hamilton, Carsey School of Public Policy, UNH 9/29/2015
References


