

BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Interest Groups Behind Climate Change Skepticism in United States

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature is attributed and cited in references.

Bratislava, February 15, 2020

Oliver Bakoš

Signature:

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Interest Groups Behind Climate Change Skepticism in United States

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Abstract

Throughout the recent history of last 30 years, United States has been infamous for generally not taking part in global efforts to mitigate the man-made climate change. This research focuses on how the different interest groups influence the skeptical decisions of the United States government when it comes to international agreements as well as general efforts to mitigate the man-made climate change. It explores the ways in which those powerful groups have influenced both the elected representative and the general public responsible for electing them. It analyzes the situation from the chronological perspective and answers the question of whether the influence of the interest groups in question will diminish, increase, or remain the same in the future. This is necessary to know, as the scientific consensus is that environmental situation related to the climate change is getting worse with each year of inaction. Predicting the situation in near future can be helpful for global political elite, environmentally conscious public, and also the public in general. From the preliminary analysis it seems that the influence of the interest groups will slowly fade in the future, however recent unpredictable election results may hint at growing countermovement to the environmental efforts poses a challenge to this hypothesis. Examining this hypothesis will consist of looking at the types of the interest groups, how they are connected, their influence on elections, the demographic trends and analysis of gathered data.

Záujmové skupiny v pozadí skepticizmu v otázke klimatických zmien v Spojených štátoch amerických

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Abstrakt

V nedávnej minulosti sa Spojené Štáty stali neslávne kvôli tomu, že sa nezúčastňovali celosvetových pokusov zmierniť účinky klimatickej zmeny spôsobenej človekom. Tento výskum je zameraný na to, ako záujmové skupiny ovplyvňujú skeptické rozhodnutia vlády Spojených štátov, hlavne ak ide o medzinárodné dohody ale aj celkovú snahu o zmiernenie klimatickej zmeny spôsobenej človekom. Výskum sa sústreďí na metódy, ktorými silné záujmové skupiny ovplyvňovali nielen politikov ale aj verejnú mienku, ktorá je zodpovedná za ich zvolenie. Výskum sa snaží analyzovať situáciu z chronologickej perspektívy a odpovedať na otázku či sa vplyv týchto záujmových skupín bude v budúcnosti znižovať, zväčšovať alebo či zostane rovnaký. Je to nutné vedieť pretože vedecký konsenzus naznačuje, že klimatická zmena sa zhoršuje každým rokom nečinnosťou. Odhad vývoja situácie do blízkej budúcnosti môže pomôcť tak svetovej politickej elite, ako aj verejnosti. Z analýzy vyplýva, že vplyv záujmových skupín sa bude znižovať, avšak nedávne neočakávané výsledky volieb v Spojených štátoch môžu poukazovať na narastajúce akcie hnutia ktoré je skeptické voči klimatickej zmene, čo spochybňuje hypotézu tohto výskumu.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2018 Global CO₂ emissions have hit all time high, with more than 37 billion tons being released into Earth's atmosphere. Scientific consensus on this matter is that the increased presence of CO₂ along with other greenhouse gasses in Earth's atmosphere causes warming of the planet and a global climate change. The trend of continuous annual increase in release of the greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere has been present for more than one hundred years. In this timespan, global temperatures have increased by 1.2 degrees. United States is currently the second largest polluter, as far as greenhouse gasses are concerned only after recently being overtaken by China. (Sun et al., 2018)

Scientists have been warning about the negative effects of greenhouse gasses on Earth's climate for nearly 40 years. There have been multiple attempts at curbing the global greenhouse gas emissions throughout the recent history, including latest Paris climate agreement. United States has been reluctant in joining those efforts to mitigate the climate change, with politicians citing economic concerns and using securitization in general to excuse their inaction on the global problem. The powerful climate change skeptic lobby often contributes to these isolationist decisions.

The goal of this research is to find out why United States has taken this stance on global efforts to mitigate climate change and how this stance may evolve in the future. The research will focus on the role of different interest groups, which promote climate change skepticism for various reasons in shaping the policy, how their influence has been evolving over time, in order to answer the question of how will their influence evolve in the future and whether United States will finally take part in global efforts to mitigate climate change as a result or whether it will continue in its isolationist policy.

This area of research was chosen, since despite there being enough literature on the topic in general and underlying concepts, the literature analyzing future prospects is virtually non-existent. Finding out how the policy will likely be oriented in the future is important from both academic standpoint and the political standpoint. Having an idea of this could prove itself to be helpful to international negotiators, politicians wanting to take action on mitigating climate change and scientific

community trying to communicate their message to the governing bodies. In the methodology section of this research it is outlined how based on analyzing data from the past and present, models describing general trends in the influence of interest groups can be drawn and those can then be applied to making future predictions.

As specified in the literature review section, the theoretical concepts this research will be working it include formation of foreign policy of the United States, politics of fear, populism and securitization. For years it was assumed that as the effects of climate change become more apparent and the evidence linking them to activities of mankind becomes stronger, the influence of interest groups desiring inaction on the issue of man-made climate change will diminish. This research started out with this hypothesis, however the hypothesis may ultimately prove not to be correct, since there have been anomalies suggesting that the trend is not clear in recent years. Whether it is the recent election of the administration, which is skeptical towards the scientific consensus of man-made climate change being reality or actions of these administration, the clarity of the hypothesis becomes lesser.

A situation where generally held belief becomes questionable, warrants a deeper research into the topic with the goal of either confirming the hypothesis thereof or refuting it. This is precisely what the goal of this research is.

Literature Review

There has been a lot of research done on underlying theoretical processes surrounding climate change skepticism in the United States, allowing decent analysis of these sources and formulation of research question. The most important variables assumed to influence this discourse are populism, functioning of United States foreign policy formation, politics of fear, and securitization.

It is also necessary to look at the topic from different angles, before deciding the direction of the research. As far as interest groups themselves, it is safe to assume that there will be sufficient information available on their composition. For the research sake, it will be also be necessary to make connection between theoretical concepts and practical policies and decisions, observed throughout the recent history.

Existing literature does a good job when describing the underlying concepts, however there is an evident lack of research, which makes connections and allows reader to understand the big picture. Not understanding the phenomena and ways they are interconnected surrounding activity of interest groups behind climate change skepticism could prove itself problematic and would have potential to make findings of the research less reliable.

The fragmented nature of the literature and the scientific articles on different not being interconnected enough, will be a hurdle this literature review will need to overcome. Furthermore, the preliminary review has shown that sources show a political bias of lesser or greater extent, however this should be expected since the subject of climate change is controversial. From the literature surveyed for this research political bias found is usually to the left, which can be explained by academics on the subject taking stance in accordance to science, where scientific consensus clearly shows man made climate change to be a reality and left-wing parties generally being more accepting of this consensus as well as willing to participate in mitigation of the man-made climate change.

Despite the fact that political bias is generally present, several peer-reviewed articles are merely descriptive and few even contain right-wing political bias on the topic. The goal of this research is to be impartial, when analyzing phenomena and therefore the bias will always have to be filtered out. Accomplishing this feat will likely not prove itself problematic, as the bias within the literature is not of great extent and commonly real data is provided, making job of filtering it out relatively easy task. Literature looks at theoretical concepts from multiple angles and it will thus be beneficial to analyze those and pick out the ones important for the research.

The topic of climate change is a subject to society-wide discussion. Interest groups on both sides of the isle are trying to influence political decisions and the public opinion. The goal of this research is neither to take a side on the issue, nor debate climate change from the point of view of a climate scientist. The literature concerning these topics will be thus excluded from this review in its entirety. It is possible that references to some scientific facts will be mentioned in literature dealing with the topic from a socio-political perspective and the perspective of international relations, which are two perspectives the research is looking to approach the topic from, but from preliminary review it has been found that those are few and far in-between.

Bakoš: Interest Groups Behind Climate Change Skepticism in United States

In order to understand the skepticism towards climate change on socio-political scale, it is necessary to analyze literature on four key theories connected to the topic and then the practical literature dealing with concrete decisions and what was behind them will be used to connect those theories to the concept.

The first theory is formation of foreign policy agenda in the United States, where literature review will analyze works of Graham Allison, Nicholas J. Spykman, , Gilford John Ikenberry, and Vendulka Kubálková. The understanding of inner workings involved in shaping foreign policy of United States of America is throughout the research in order to explain political decisions and how they were made, resulting from workings of interest groups behind climate change skepticism. Apart from practical application in the research process the process of decision making can be connected to other three theories that will be analyzed. The decisions are often stemming from securitization desires of a presidential administration and promises laid down as part of populist campaigns. Literature from authors outlined above allows reader to gain the understanding of the basic principles of foreign policy formation.

The second important underlying theory is theory of populism where there will be works analyzed from Nadia Urbinati, Yannis Stavrakakis, Michael Kazin,, Michael D .Brewer, and Wendy Brown. Populism and climate change skepticism go hand in hand. The fear of possibility of living standards or the personal comfort being lowered as a result of efforts to mitigate the man made climate change in the future present within the target demographic of populist politicians, stemming from initiatives to mitigate effects of climate change on the planet allows those politicians to use skepticism to appeal to this fear. As the preceding sentence may suggest, this connects populism to both the politics of fear and the securitization. Interest groups behind the climate change skepticism often prop up and stand behind politicians with populist agenda, making understanding this theory crucial whenever research needs to explain inner workings of these groups in relation to political campaigns and administrations resulting from their success.

The third theory to be analyzed will be the theory of politics of fear with works and articles from Ruth Wodak., Michael W, Spicer, & William M. Bowen, John T. Jost,, et. al. and Rachel Pain, & Susan J. Smith. When trying to persuade their voters and general public on validity of their decisions on continued inaction on climate change, politicians often use fear as a tool at their disposal. Acknowledging reality of climate change usually requires an effort to mitigate its effects

in coming years. This often poses a threat for certain segments of economy, where powerful business interest groups step in and together with politicians they support engage in fear campaigns citing possible employee layoffs, slowed economic growth and other negative effects on the citizenry. Practice of politics of fear can be tied to populist campaign promises, foreign policy decisions justified by these fears as well as securitization. The literature from the authors mentioned above offers a theoretical insight into how politics of fear are used, provides concrete examples and looks at different approaches at the topic.

Forth theory, the securitization will consist of analysis of works from Eric Van Rythoven, Thierry Balzacq et.al., Jonna Nyman, and Stefano Guzzini,. The securitization and cited threats to national security associated therewith are oftentimes used by American politicians in making foreign policy related decisions of inaction on climate change. Threats to economic stability, the infrastructure and electric grid, energy security and to competitiveness on the international markets are often cited, whenever American climate change skeptics in positions of power justify their decisions not to partake in the international efforts to mitigate the climate change. Interest groups behind the climate change skepticism, mainly conservative think tanks, lend and communicate these strategies to the political class their influence. Securitization is closely tied to politics of fear and in practical sense to foreign policy decisions of government of United States, making comprehension of it valuable to the literature review and later the research in general

From the practical literature there has been chosen selection of peer reviewed articles from four authors or groups of authors. The authors are Aaron M. McCright & Riley E. Dunlap, Anita Engels et. al, Riley E. Dunlap and Joanna Depledge.. The addition of practical literature on the subject is necessary in order to apply the four concepts and theories onto real world historical and current examples on current American climate change policy decisions and the background behind those.

The Formation of Foreign Policy Agenda

The formation of foreign policy agenda in the United States is primarily done by the executive branch, as explained on the example of Cuban Missile crisis by Graham Allison. Participation or lack thereof in the international agreements has to be ratified by the president of the United States. (Allison, 2012).

The role of executive branch in the foreign policy formation is described in “The plot against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?” by John Ikenberry. President and his cabinet has the right to make policy decisions on trade, alliances, decisions regarding international law and environmental protections amongst others. United States has been a major player in building international order after the Second World War and the Cold War respectively and to this day has the biggest economy as well as military strength in the world, so its decisions on international front are of high importance. (Ikenberry, 2017). This research focuses exclusively on the international decisions and treaties regarding environment. The legislative branch has the right to propose legislation concerning foreign affairs, however the decisions, such as sanctions against the adversary nations can be vetoed by the president. Nonetheless in some cases, like in 1997, when majority Republican Congress has passed a resolution prohibiting United States to participate in international agreements on the environment that either don't put same requirements on developing countries or posed a threat to national security of United States. (McRight, 2003). The role of the executive branch has thus been limited and only allows President to part in international agreements that are officially non-binding without approval of the congress. This can be however circumvented as it was done by Barrack Obama when signing the Paris Accord. (Aschwanden, 2015) As V. Kubalkova explains, the United States can participate in three types of international treaties- executive treaties which are ratified exclusively by the President, general treaties which require ratification by both president and two thirds of the Congress, and congressional-executive agreements which are ratified by the President and simple majority in the Congress. The congressional-executive agreements are subject to constant constitutional challenges and some scholars regard them as unconstitutional (Kubalkova, 2016). President Obama has avoided the Paris Agreement to be classified as a congressional-executive agreement in 2015 by submitting the pledge of the United States ahead of time (Aschwanden, 2015).

Populism

As Nadia Urbinati describes in her work “Political Theory of Populism”, populism is a trend that manifests itself exclusively in systems with democratic and free elections. She defines populism as a “form of collective action aiming at power”. It is an appeal to the general public, who are feeling disenfranchised by the establishment elite. A candidate, self-describing as anti-establishment bases their agenda on appeal to what majority wants, whilst commonly putting their

own agenda into the mix. What is paradoxical is that oftentimes candidates are part of a rich oligarchical class, as it has been case with Donald Trump in America as well as Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and many others. They often try to get closer to people by using vulgar language and engaging in questionable social behavior and when asked about it they say it is how the “ordinary people” behave (Urbinati,2019). The definition of populism can only be classified as proverbial, since its manifestations and proposed policies vary greatly by country and culture, they are found in. Scholars researching populism can be divided in two camps- ones researching circumstances and social characteristics of populist movement and the other interested in populism itself and its political nature. This research is interested in political nature of populism within American culture (Urbinati, 2019).

This is where article from M. Kazim titled “Trump and American Populism: Old whine, new bottles comes” comes in handy. As the title may suggest, this article contains political bias, mentioned in the hypothesis above. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable insight into evolution of American populism, since the term was coined in late 19th century. It also shows the type of populism this research will focus on- the right-wing nationalist populism. (Kazim, 2016) Trump has exhibited typical populist characteristics both throughout his campaign as well as his presidency. Notably, he appealed to conspiracy theories about a globalist cabal hell-bent on destroying the economy of United States and well-being of ordinary citizens. Since the end of 19th century, American right-wing populism has had an important characteristic, the isolationism. These isolationist tendencies directly interfere with global efforts to mitigate climate change, since climate change is a global issue. It has been seen on Trump’s stance of being self-proclaimed climate change skeptic (Kazim, 2016).

Politics of Fear and Securitization

The politics of fear go hand in hand with populism. Ruth Wodak describes in the first chapter of her book titled *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Although she uses European parties to describe how populists use politics of fear, there are strong similarities to populist politics overseas. Politics of fear can generally be described as using fear to accomplish ones political aims. This tactic is not limited to populist parties, since it has been used in United States since the start of the cold war (Wodak, 2015). Whether it is McCarthyism, which invoked fear of communism to strip certain citizens of constitutional freedoms or reaction to 9/11 which

led to adoption of extensive surveillance measures, public would strongly object to had there not been feeling of threat. According to Wodak, what makes right-wing populists distinctive is finding scapegoats. These can range from an ethnic or religious minority, through international organizations, to unspecified part of either elite or establishment. This research will be narrowed predominantly to international organizations and treaties, since it is largely used by climate change skeptics and interest groups behind this skepticism (Wodak, 2015).

The article from Michael W. Spicer and William M Boven deals with issues of politics of fear and securitization in relation to environment. It is one of few articles exhibiting a slight right-wing bias, since it focuses on use of politics of fear by environmentalists. This is however beneficial, since climate change skepticism often arises as a reactionary movement to catastrophic predictions made by environmentalist groups. First stage of a person reacting to the fact they have a terminal disease, such as cancer is often denial and so it is natural that when people are faced with grim reality describing the state of the planet, they fall for similar denial. The authors put environmental factors together with broad range of public issues under the umbrella of politics of fear. They see idea of sustainability as commonly being at odds with free market and other typically American and constitutional principles. Concept of sustainability is often used in connection to economic growth, as the growth causes more consumption, which means more CO₂, waste and other byproducts. (Spicer M., 2017) Economic concerns are most cited reason, when politicians use securitization to explain their lack of action on mitigating climate change.

Securitization is without a doubt a complex theory. Thierry Balzacq et. al. ask themselves a question what kind of theory the securitization is in their article “what kind of theory-if any-is securitization? The main appeal of the theory is according to them is its usefulness when conducting empirical research. They see two main direction in which scholarly theory of securitization has taken. There is the Copenhagen School which describes securitization as formation of political decisions as a reaction to security problems, whilst the other is more broad including problems that are either completely manufactured or where threat is overestimated. In addressing securitization in relation to climate change, the second approach would likely be a better route to take (Balzacq et. al., 2016). This is because as it was mentioned above, politicians are justifying their inaction on the climate change by citing economic concerns or as it was done

by Congress in 1997, when forging their policy on international agreements concerning environmental matters, more broad national security concerns (McRight, 2003).

Securitization is different from politics of fear in the way that its is not used in elections, but rather by already elected officials to justify their controversial decisions. Those two are closely connected and securitization of an issue is commonly used by politicians, who got elected on promises related to the issue itself. (Balzacq T. et. al., 2016) This was a case with Trump and the climate change. His decision to withdraw from the Paris Accords, was justified by him citing economic concerns as well as concerns about the American competitiveness with developing economies such as China.

Conclusion:

In order for politicians to engage in foreign policy agenda they have to be elected. In a democratic system, which is definitely an accurate way of describing American constitutional republic with more than 200 years of tradition, politicians get elected on promises and agenda. For the sake of research, it is safe to take charisma, scandals, likeability out of the equation. In the most recent American election, we have seen the promises from the Republican party candidate to be of strongly populist character. Whilst president Trump didn't invent the politics of fear when it comes to possible climate change mitigation policies, he has certainly used them both throughout his campaign and transformed them into securitization agenda after being elected as a president. This was probably done to fulfill his populist campaign promises.

Thesis Statement

Looking at this problem this way, it becomes clear that the four theories are interconnected, and they are also interconnected with real world, which was secondary goal of this literature review. Real situations were successfully interconnected with the theories, as the review progressed and generally make a solid ground for the future research. As far as future research is concerned, review of practical literature has shown that whilst it accurately describes connection of interest groups to political decisions, it is lacking any description of future scenarios as far as influence of interest groups is concerned. Will the interest groups behind climate change skepticism remain an

influential driving machine of climate change policy of United States or will their influence diminish? From the review of the literature and observing current political climate, it seems that their role will diminish, however the society will be more divided on the issue than as the time goes on, with people choosing either totally extreme stances of either total denial or believing in the end of the world scenario.

Research Design and Methodology

In order to answer the question of whether the influence of interest groups behind climate change will decrease or increase in the future there are several prerequisites. First thing such task requires is finding out how much political representation in both executive and legislative branches of United States government and their partisan affiliation have influence on the scope of activity of interest groups in question.

Based on the literature review, it is safe to assume that during the governance of right-wing partisan representatives whether it is having control over executive branch or by having the majority representation in the institutions of the legislative branch, the interest groups will have higher influence over the decisions, which have either skeptical or outright denier underlying motives as far as climate change is concerned. To prove this, predominantly qualitative data will be analyzed ever since the scientific consensus on the climate change has been reached back in 1979, with worlds first World Climate Conference taking place in Geneva, where scientists from various fields have provided their input on the climate change. Whilst there has been a discussion on the topic before, there has not been a scientific consensus and neither perception of necessity of addressing the man-made changing climate (White,1979).

Research thus looks at the administrations of Presidents, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barrack Obama and Donald J. Trump and respective composition of bodies of the legislative branch under them. The qualitative data analyzed include picks for EPA candidates, concrete decisions on climate change taken during this era, background behind the decisions undertake, stated reasoning behind each important decision, the activity of interest groups related to concrete decisions, the public-private connections, activity of both lobbying groups and political think tanks. The quantitative data analyzed include donations of respective lobbying groups to political campaigns of both representatives of executive and

legislative branches, the numerical composition within the legislative branches and vote tally whenever vote on an important decision is undertaken and polls on public support of the decisions.

The second important variable that needs to be investigated is the relations of interest groups behind climate change skepticism towards public. In every democratic country, which United States can be classified as, political representatives have to compete for public support in order to be elected. Ideally in order to be elected into the office they have to align their agenda with that of majority of the public. Interest groups with different goals know this and invest considerable funds to sway public into supporting their policy. The goal of this research is both to describe direct and indirect ways interest groups in question have influenced the public and how successful they have been.

The qualitative data needed to accomplish this feat consist of examining connections between the interest groups and the media, analyzing the research they fund to produce arguments against the presence of the climate change, the dissemination of these arguments into the popular discourse and the cycle of cooperation with political entities in the pursuit of persuasion of the public.

The quantitative data needed for this research encompass donations of the interest groups towards advertising their positions, the money flow towards both mainstream and alternative media, the financial flow towards the political campaigns discussing this issue, the social media campaigns and the effects of this effort on general public measured through polls on the public towards the issue.

The third important step is to define inner workings of the interest groups behind the climate change skepticism, their composition and how it has changed over time. It is necessary to differentiate between what constitutes and what doesn't constitute an interest group. After doing this, it will be of interest to this research to see how these groups are connected and whether they cooperate or act alone. The interest groups may be categorized based on both their size and the type, as it will be outlined below.

The data required for this part of research is both quantitative and qualitative. When categorizing the interest groups, the quantitative data will include size and budget of the party, what part of its funding or budget it devotes to the case in question and how large is their vested interest. The

qualitative data consist of classification of the group, its categorization and its position within the greater system.

The next step is to analyze general political support for the political parties on both the right and the left. Changing political climate may lead to either more right-wing candidates being elected to respective offices or the opposite. By finding out what the long term voter trends are, one will be able to predict whether it is more likely that politicians more susceptible to be influenced by the interest groups behind the climate change will be elected to office or whether support for them will fade away, leading to diminishing role of the interest groups behind the climate skepticism in the future. There are plenty of independent variables influencing the general support for the political party apart from the position of its members on man-made climate change, so including this part is vital for the validity of the research.

The fourth step in conducting this research is to find the independent variables in the system and isolate them away from the research, since few corporate, political, media or public actors exist with the sole purpose of promotion of skepticism on climate change. narrow down the influence of the groups in question to the promotion of skepticism towards the climate change. Furthermore, since the research focuses on answering question of the chronological nature, it was of great importance to find out how much has the issue been a priority in the historical context and how much is it in current era. Based on this, it was possible to make chronological models of both qualitative and quantitative importance of the subject in both single interest group and in them as a multitude.

Part of this process is also to analyze the now defunct groups, the groups that have dropped the subject of climate change from their agenda, and on the other side of the spectrum to capture the newly founded groups as they emerged throughout the time. This partially quantitative analysis allowed the research to identify trends and put them in the models for the future prospects.

After all the quantitative and qualitative data has been gathered, verified and put into context, they were used to create models ranging from 1979 to present day and based on these models, answer to the research question related to the future role of interest groups behind climate change skepticism was addressed.

Collection of data:

Since this research is oriented towards a chronological perspective, encompassing past, present and future, the data necessary can be obtained from the existing sources. The preliminary analysis of the literature and other sources has found that data is sufficient and accurate enough for the purposes of this research.

If certain quantitative data are not presented in desirable form, they may be put into more suitable graphs for the purposes of this research.

Methods of analysis:

As specified above, two methods of analysis were required for this project. The qualitative method consisted primarily of making connections necessary to understand the bigger picture. It consisted from the analysis of political decisions of the past and putting them in context.

In order to produce models with possible predictive function, it was necessary to combine the qualitative with the quantitative data and make connections. After this combination, models representative of historical evolution could have been be created and future predictions on the topic made. .

Possible problems:

Possible problems include historical inaccuracies in the recorded data, political bias in the existing literature focused on their interpretation, and inadequate representation of figures in the existing sources. The scale of the problems is however small and mostly is possible to eliminate with correct interpretation of research methods described above.

Anticipated Findings

From the preliminary analysis of practical literature, it seems like the chronological models will support the hypothesis. The trend would be clear had there not been recent election of Administration that is skeptical, when it comes to climate change.

It seems as though the election cycles have been cyclical in the last 40 years, with opposing party always capturing the Congress after a lost presidential election and vice versa. Similarly, in the presidential elections , there has been a partisan switching of the administrations every eight years. Opinion on the climate change are split across the partisan lines to a great extent, with Democrats

being generally accepting of the reality of man-made climate change and the Republicans being generally skeptical when it comes to the topic.

The interest groups pushing skepticism towards the climate change have therefore had greater influence during Republican control of both the legislative and executive institutions, whilst they had lesser influence during Democratic control of those institutions.

As far as predicting the outcome of the next election is concerned, it seems like Democrats will be able to retake the presidential seat. The in depth review of why it is so is outlined in the fifth Chapter. The frontrunners in the race are all committed to participate in efforts to mitigate climate change, with this commitment being stronger than ever. The proposed Green New Deal that all Democratic candidates have pledged to support is the most ambitious piece of legislation aimed at reducing emissions in the history of the United States.

The thesis focuses on exploring this proposal before reaching its conclusion. On the other hand, the polarization of opinions on climate change seems stronger than ever. It is therefore questionable whether a compromise will be reached between the parties required for a significant shift in climate policy. The past has shown that the nature of the American political system oftentimes requires compromise whenever a big overhaul of policy is considered.

The public support for the measures focused on mitigating the climate change is also unclear. The interest groups behind climate change skepticism invest a lot into not only persuading politicians, but also public. In a democratic system, getting public on board is of crucial importance. The research focuses on public opinion and how it is influenced to a great detail in one of its chapters.

Scientists, international negotiators, and American politicians can greatly benefit from having an accurate prediction on this topic. This research focuses on relatively narrow part of the greater equations but looking at the problem in this way may help the future research on this topic. It may help the appropriate subjects to adjust their strategy as far as negotiations, campaign and explaining complex matters to the public are concerned.

Chapter 2: American Climate Change Skepticism- The Vicious Circle

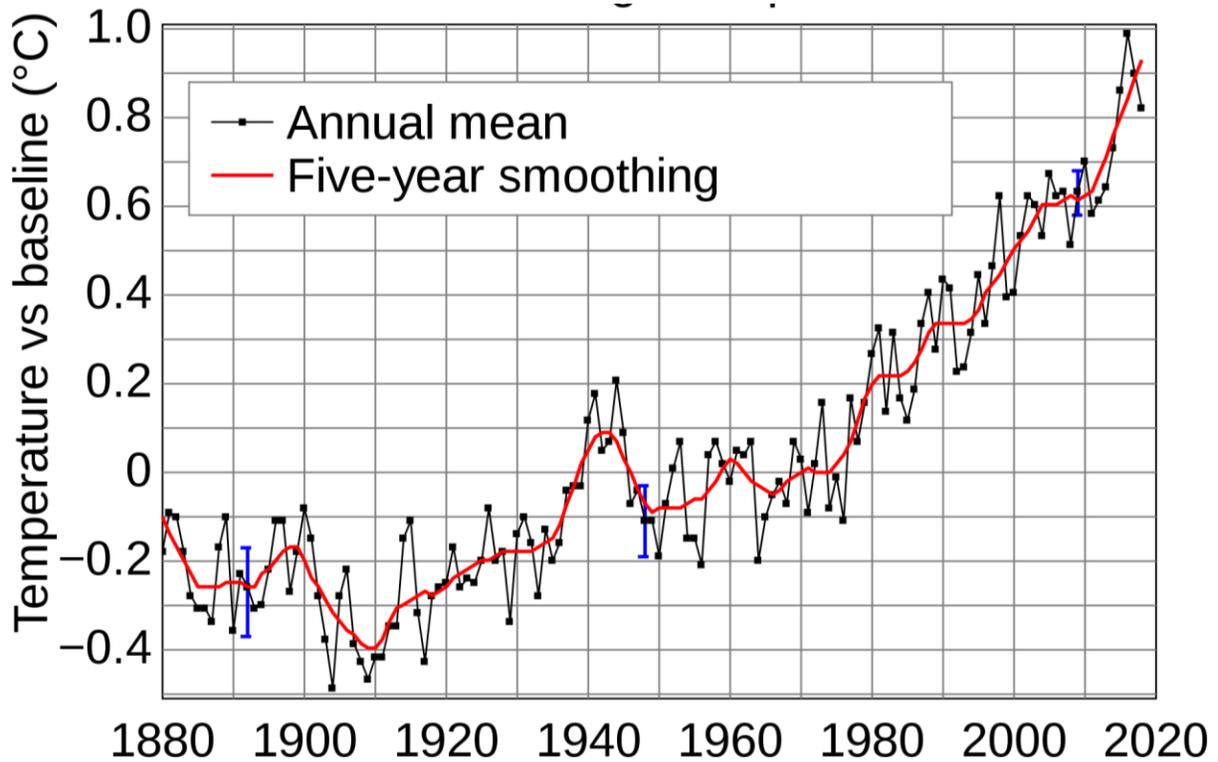
Donald J. Trump is arguably most populist president in office since the grim reality of climate change became known back in 1979. Although his populist stances have not been limited to climate change, evidence shows that he has been on the skeptic side on the issues, long before he decided to run for president of the United States.

In 2012 he claimed that climate change was a hoax invented by Chinese, designed to harm the competitiveness of the economy of United States. This belief of his has continued to manifest itself for years leading up to his presidential campaign. Apart from using terminology describing climate change as hoax, he has commonly pointed to weather in parts of the country at the time, when trying to bolster the strength of his argument as either tool to connect with right-wing voter base or out of his lack of understanding the complexity of the phenomenon (Merica, 2017).

As part of the populist campaign, Trump promised to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate agreement, aimed at keeping warming of the planet below 1.5 degrees warmer compared to its natural temperature. Trump claimed that the withdrawal would help the US economy. About five months after becoming the president of the United States, in June 2017, he has acted on this campaign promise. United States was left as a sole country not signing the agreement, continuing in its legacy as an actor unwilling to participate in efforts to mitigate the climate change (Merica, 2017).

The climate change has global effects on weather. Since the beginning of the temperature measurement, global temperature has risen by approximately one degree Celsius. Whilst it may not seem like much to an observer, not well informed on the subject, the warming has accelerated rapidly in the last forty years. As the graph below shows, in the last 22 years, twenty of them were hottest in recorded history and the last four years have been hottest in recent history (WMO, 2018).

Figure 1: Global Average Temperature



Source: NASA GISS (2018) Reuse allowed for academic purposes with citation.

When confronted with this type of data, skeptics come with various responses and theories, designed to either justify their skeptical viewpoint to themselves in case of individuals or to others in case of politicians and interest groups. Some argue that collected data is inaccurate, some claim that the trend is somehow not caused by human activity and blame natural trends instead, some claim data has been modified on purpose and is part of certain political agenda, whilst others simply dismiss it as not important to them. The most prominent skeptics within academic community include Wallace S. Broecker, James E. Hansen, Phil D. Jones, Syukuro Manabe, Michael E. Mann, John Francis Brake Mitchell, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, William F. Ruddiman and Susan Solomon. They all hold PhD in natural sciences and teach at prestigious universities. (Barham, 2019)

Many American politicians have long been perpetuating those arguments, to justify their inaction on climate change. This includes nearly whole Republican party, including former President

George W. Bush and current President Donald J. Trump. Whether it is a result of ignorance, or purposeful misinformation depends on case by case scenarios. Whatever the case may be, this climate change skeptic agenda comes at a high cost. The effects of inaction on climate change does not simply mean that it will be a few degrees hotter on any given day. Effects include droughts, rise in extreme weather, the melting of polar icecaps and glaciers and rise in sea levels. These then cause socio-political impacts such as negative effects on production of agricultural products, resulting shortages in global food supply and migration caused by changes in local ecosystems in many parts of the world (WMO, 2018).

What is it then that motivates the climate change skepticism? The answer is multiple factors. Efforts designed to mitigate or slow down the climate change will have negative impact on economy in general, but on sectors such as fossil fuel industry, aviation and transport and agriculture in particular. There are many both public and private interests that benefit from the inaction on the climate change. Anyone relying on energy from the fossil fuels may in fact feel threatened by some proposed measures. Those may range from energy company owners, to an average citizen worried that their living standards will decrease. These various interests have a tendency to combine and particularly in the United States to organize into interest groups based on their shared interest.

In United States, the denial of and skepticism towards climate change create a sort of vicious circle. The big private interests lobby politicians and target the citizens with their agenda supporting inaction on the climate change on political scene. Politicians then feel being pushed by both their donors/lobbyists and citizens to the inaction on the issue or even rolling back regulations and other measures in place. The climate change skepticism is the domain of American right-wing in both their populist and moderate camps, as campaign of the Republican Party has been focused on things like shrinking size of the government, striking down regulations and improving the economy. Those agenda items are all incompatible with side-effects of both global and federal efforts to mitigate climate change, resulting in Republican candidates incorporating their skeptic agenda on climate change into both their campaigning and actions in the office.

Voters, normally disinterested in climate change may be inspired by their representatives they vote in for other reasons, to take up their climate skeptic agenda. When this combines with programming directly or indirectly funded by big interest groups, the climate change skepticism

becomes one of their political stances. When the next election it becomes their demand from candidates to take the skeptic stance on the climate change and policies targeted to mitigate it. Politicians have to represent their voters and appease them to win the election, as American political system is democratic. This perpetuates the vicious cycle, leading to continuous inaction on issues of climate.

Chapter 3: Types of interest groups behind climate change skepticism

What can be classified as interest group behind climate change skepticism varies greatly depending on the criteria one chooses when trying to differentiate one from another. There are several that come to mind after conducting research on this topic. As explained in the previous chapters of this work, those interest groups are not standalone, but rather interconnected. To discern various interest groups, best practice is to look at their motivations, by asking question how does each of these groups benefit from the inaction on climate change by the United States in general.

At the root of the issues there will be a corporate vested interest, ranging from manufacturing, through travel to energy companies. The biggest culprits contributing to the inaction are the companies in the energy sector, such as companies working with fossil fuels, such as oil and coal. Abandonment of these fuels such as oil products when it comes to the transportation or coal when it comes to energy in favor of greener alternatives poses a risk to the very livelihood of those companies.

The abovementioned industry uses several secondary interest groups pushing inaction on climate change by manufacturing the skepticism as the tool to perpetuate their existence and fuel the cycle of denial mentioned in the previous chapter. Those secondary interest groups have two targets. The first target is the political class responsible for decisions in regard to actions on climate change or lack thereof. (Dunlap & McCright, 2011) The second target that needs to be targeted concurrently is what gets this political class elected into power, which, in the United States, is the general public. As far as political class is concerned, the primary interests groups finance political think tanks and groups of scientists producing studies that dispute the scientific consensus on climate change. Furthermore, they use their own lobbying branches to target the political class. As far as targeting the general public is concerned, those groups use both mainstream and especially alternative outlets to both present skewed data and perspectives on the issue as well as use tactics of fear generally centered around possibility of losing certain comforts or living standards, when it comes to general population. These outlets, especially the alternative ones, become interest groups themselves, since as the public becomes more convinced, they themselves look for outlets confirming the preconceived notion acquired by public centered around skepticism on climate change. Media outlets need traffic and profits associated with it to perpetuate their existence and

once they start catering to the crowd skeptical towards climate change, they continue to perpetuate the climate skeptic theories in order to retain their audience. (Dunlap & McCright, 2011)

General public skeptical of climate science and the political class with the same affiliation can thus be categorized as tertiary interest groups. Whilst they are the end goal of targeting by the primary and secondary interest groups, they commonly become interest groups themselves, since they feel as if action on climate change would threaten their way of living or went against the convictions they have acquired. Those two groups are mutually intertwined, as the public expects politicians to represent their interests and political class needs to cater to the public to ensure their reelection.

This research starts with an analysis of primary interest groups and their actions over the past three decades and examples thereof, continuing with the same analysis of secondary and tertiary interest groups, which will be followed by concrete examples of their theoretical intertwining.

The study titled *Strategic Framing of Climate Change by Industry Actors* by Inga Schlichting provides a valuable insight on the ways corporations have framed the issue of climate change in the period between 1990 and 2010. Since the late 1980s, corporations have spent tens of millions of dollars on the framing of the issue of climate change and the strategic communication of their stances on the issue. The study divides the behavior of companies into three consecutive phases. From the late 1980s to 1997, United States fossil fuel industry focused on concealing the idea of climate change being a threat with a blanket of manufactured scientific uncertainty. As the negotiations regarding the Kyoto agreement started in 1997, industry in the US has shifted its focus to warn government institutions and public of negative socioeconomic consequences of quotas targeted at emission reduction (Schlichting, 2013).

To relay their message to the public and governing institutions, many national and international industry associations have allied with political think tanks, that received funding from the corporate sector of great significance. Their focus throughout the years has been to shift the discourse on climate related issues in order to protect their business from regulation. Industry has tried to portray issue from a certain angle to frame issue to public and governmental institutions in a way that benefits them. Over the years, some companies have sophisticated their PR strategy to acknowledge the need for change in their ways and focus on entering the sectors, commonly perceived as green. This includes willingness of companies in the car industry to create electric or

hybrid models of their cars or energy companies claiming to be focused on green energy initiatives. (Schlichting I, 2013).

The aforementioned study by Schlichting suggests that framing of the issues of climate change by the industry has changed over the years, with three major phases being distinguished between 1990s and early 2010s. These however do not apply to all companies on the outlined timeframe, but rather describe a general trend, with some companies and corporations still using strategies from the 90s and others not fitting into the outlined time frame at all. In the early to mid-nineties, the discourse pushed by the companies was focused on pseudo-scientific debate of whether climate change is happening and whether the CO₂ emissions are the cause of this change. (Schlichting I, 2013). Disproving the theory of man-made climate change would render the political efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as obsolete. This corporate strategy has emerged concurrently with first evidence pointing at the factual nature of man-made climate change in the 1980s. The efforts at establishing mandatory regulation on emissions of greenhouse gasses, have started becoming a potential issue for the industry after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was founded in 1988 by United Nations. United States fossil fuel and coal industry along with other corporate partners have founded the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) a year later to fundraise resources against the threat of potential action targeted at regulation of greenhouse emissions by the governments. (Gelbspan, 2004) This lobbying group remained one of main players, pushing the theory of scientific uncertainty on the issue (Schlichting, 2013).

To frame climate change as a matter of scientific uncertainty, the industry representatives have used quotes from skeptical scientists in order to establish a point that man-made climate change was scientifically unproven and thus any political efforts of mitigating it were illegitimate. They have not only quoted existing scientists, but much like the tobacco industry in 1960s in reaction to studies pointing to dangerous effects of smoking tobacco, the corporations have recruited and funded scientists of their own (Brownell & Warner, 2009) The studies produced by these authors often contained statements centered around impossibility of establishing what qualifies as dangerous level of greenhouse gas atmospheric concentrations, questioned what constitutes a greenhouse gas and their behavior or outright questioned the rising presence of these in the atmosphere. (Cushman, 1998) The industry lobbying groups have also portrayed mainstream scientists as being part of a network of political conspiracy, by pointing to these scientists and

academia receiving funding from the federal government. They tried to cast a shadow of a doubt on the integrity of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change at United Nations (IPCC) and oftentimes described their findings as unscientific (Schlichting I, 2013).

In the United States, the corporate actors have even tried to link what they referred to as “radical environmentalism” (The National Center for Policy analysis (sponsored by Exxon corporation), 2000) to communist agenda promoting bigger and more intrusive government (Schlichting, 2013). Skeptics have labeled mainstream scientists as alarmists, due to what they perceived as over exaggeration of risks of man-made climate change. To get this point across, they often referenced older studies from the 1970s, which discussed a potential for impending global cooling. This included fallacious studies, showing weather in certain regions of United States getting cooler over time. Those studies were faulty as they focused on a narrow specific region rather than global temperatures. Furthermore, they have focused on establishing agenda describing potential positives or advantages of the climate change for the mankind. Those included claims about higher presence of CO₂ in the atmosphere being beneficial for plant life and agriculture (Gelbspan, 1997).

The main sponsors for these studies were the fossil fuel and coal industries, accompanied by the energy companies and automotive industry. One of the most profound skeptics on the issue of man-made climate change was the American fuel and energy company Exxon. They have hired a renowned astrophysicist, Brian Flannery, to represent their views. Despite the GCC being an international organization, it was headed by personnel from the United States such as William O’Keefe, who served as an executive officer for the American Petroleum Institute. (Nevell, 2000) United States being a leader in Climate Change skepticism was not surprising, since science in United States was often used for advocacy purposes, with a notion being pushed that such use of science was beneficial for encouraging scientific debate. Global climate change was only one of many topics where science was used by the corporations in this way. Other issues, where the industry along with Republican Party pushed skepticism and uncertainty throughout the history were topics of acid rain, the asbestos risks, the connection of smoking and cancer and the ozone hole (Nevell, 2000)

Another strategy used by industry actors, designed to undermine efforts to combat man-made climate change was using politics of fear, by warning of socio-economic consequences of the efforts to mitigate the climate change and lower greenhouse gas emissions. This strategy has

emerged after the international ratification of Kyoto Protocols in December of 1997. The corporate actors started lobbying government and manipulating public, with the main premise that actions on climate change by developed countries such as United States will be responsible for harming the local economy and transferring the national wealth to the developing world. The fear the industry actors tried to instill was that of dramatic social and economic decline on national and individual levels (Levy, 2005). This adjustment of strategy in the late 1990s continuing to 2000s was caused by the growing consensus within scientific community that man-made climate change was actually taking place. In some cases, there was a subtle acknowledgment that climate change might pose a risk after all, leading to focus of the industrial players shifting to potential socio-economic impact of regulations. The industry has argued that changes stemming from the Kyoto Treaty would cause significant harm to the economy and it would outweigh the potential benefits stemming from the slowing down the man-made climate change. As the main frame of argument, the industry players have pointed towards the negative impact on both macroeconomic (economy in general) and microeconomic (individual) scales. (Levy, 2005)

To illustrate how devastating the ramifications of regulations of the Kyoto agreements, industry players have used words like disease or crippling of the economy. The GCC predicted that cutting emissions by 20% would lead to the economy of United States shrinking by 4 % in the short term and that the long-term damage of regulations would be economic growth being half of what it would be by 2050. They also predicted that Americans would lose 1.1 million of jobs. (GCC and The Heartland Institute, 2005). Oftentimes, companies have borrowed catchphrases from social and environmental movements, but instead of applying them to environment, they applied them to economy and the living standards of the individuals. Kyoto Treaty was portrayed as unfair, since developing countries like China and India were excluded from the target. This has helped the industry to spread a theory that abiding by the treaty and reducing emissions would aid the transfer of American wealth to the developing nations (Levy, 2005).

On the individual scale, industry actors pointed towards the regulations negatively impacting wealth of individual subjects. GCC started a campaign titled “It Is Not Global and It Won’t Work” in 1998, which focused on effects on individuals such as rising price of gasoline, the endangerment of traditional American way of life associated with consumerism and unwanted lifestyle changes in lives of individuals associated with cutting of energy consumption. This campaign was

sponsored by the US fossil fuel, coal, energy and automotive industries. This was in contrast to the European companies, which adopted more supportive stance on efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The United States industry players have employed mass media to get their argument across to the general public, under what they called strategic climate change communication. They used both macroeconomic and microeconomic fears as the integral parts of their medial strategy (Greensberg, 2011)

The third strategy, which is employed by industrial players to this day is that of industrial leadership. Whilst the corporate players using this strategy acknowledge that they are also responsible for protecting climate, they try to shift focus to technological innovations they can produce to help society becoming greener from the idea that they need to reduce greenhouse emissions and have to be regulated. This strategy does not have strong presence amongst US industrial players, but in recent years some companies, especially multinational corporations have adopted it. This strategy comes with recognition that industry is one of the major contributors to climate change and makes their decisions stemming from this reasoning. The companies acknowledge that they are part of the problem, but also present themselves as part of the solution. (Schlichting, 2013). With this recognition in mind, however, comes passing the responsibility onto the consumers. The companies publicly encourage consumers to be more mindful of the environment, at the cost of making individual compromises. A good example of this is the recent rise in production of hybrid and electric vehicles by automotive industry. Companies encourage customers to purchase environmentally friendlier vehicles, at the cost of those being more expensive and less convenient. This strategy not only helps companies in terms of PR and also makes them integral part of conquering domains for profits from new technologies. Whilst many companies subscribe to this effort, they also continue to rely on the old fossil fuels and are often criticized for slow progress. (Schlichting I, 2013).

Conservative think tanks are a tool the industry uses to accomplish their goal when it comes to influencing both the political class and the public. A study that demonstrates their power when it comes to shaping the decisions on the American political scene is greatly illustrated in an article by Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, titled “Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative Movement’s Impact on U.S: Climate Change Policy”. Not implementing and later abandoning the Kyoto protocol was one of the biggest policy statements, setting the United States as a leading

nation when it comes to skepticism towards a man-made climate change. (McCright & Dunlap, 2003).

The Kyoto Protocol was developed amid the rising levels of confidence in data related to the harsh reality of man-made climate change and establishment of scientific consensus on the matter. Paradoxically, many of the scientific findings and groundworks that served as a backbone for the protocol were developed by the environmental scientific community from within the United States. This eventually led to the delegations from more than 160 nations to meet in Kyoto, Japan in December of 1997 with the intention to draft a protocol aimed at reducing of carbon dioxide emissions. Despite the polls indicating strong support for the measures in the protocol from the American public, US Senate has unanimously voted for a resolution which informed the Clinton administration that it would only ratify a resolution if it meets two requirements (Harris, 1999) first requirement was that the treaty should equally distribute the mandatory emission reductions between developed and developing countries. The second prerequisite for ratification was that it should not result in serious harm to US economy. This has forced the international agreement to be shelved by the end of Clinton administration, since Senate would be unlikely to ratify it. In the end the protocol was abandoned completely by Bush administration in 2003. The answers to the question why this ended up happening vary, with some attributing it to anti-environmental forces in general, some to industry lobbying and others to mobilization of different segments of the American conservative movement. (McCright & Dunlap, 2003).

The study by A. McCright and R. Dunlap describes the role activity of conservative think tanks played leading up to the decision and provides great insight into their inner workings as an interest group. The powerful interest groups including conservative think tanks have various strategies and tactics, they employ to sway opinion of lawmakers and public in their favor. These range from outright manipulation of information through subtle reframing of the issue to defining certain facts related to climate change as either no problematic or inconsequential in the long term. Arguably political think tanks can be defined as the most efficient and influential counter-environmentalist organization at national level in United States. Prior to starting to advocate for skepticism towards climate change, they have already achieved several victories when it came to influencing stance of lawmakers on certain issues. Those include but are not limited to immigration reform, limits on affirmative action and welfare revisionism. The reason for their discontent with the environmental

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measures is that those often include intervention of government into the private sector, which comes against the libertarian values on economic matters, closely tied to the core conservative doctrine of small government. (McCright & Dunlap, 2003).

The core agenda of the conservative movement and political think tanks when it comes to climate change matters can be summed up in three points. First, talking point of these groups points at the weakness of evidence of man-made climate change or complete lack thereof. Second argument is that climate change could prove itself to be beneficial for the planet should it occur. Finally, these groups argue that outcome policies focused on mitigating the alleged climate change is net negative. McCright and Dunlap examined 14 political think tanks, with most influence when it comes to climate change policy, which are listed in table below (McCright & Dunlap, 2003).

Figure 2: Political think-tanks with most influence on climate change policies

<i>Conservative Think Tank</i>	<i>Official Web Site</i>
American Enterprise Institute (AEI)	www.aei.org
Cato Institute	www.cato.org
Citizens for a Sound Economy Foundation (CSEF)	www.csef.org
Claremont Institute	www.claremont.org
Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI)	www.cei.org
Foundation for Research on Economics and the Environment (FREE)	www.free-eco.org
Heartland Institute	www.heartland.org
Heritage Foundation	www.heritage.org
Hoover Institution	www-hoover.stanford.edu
Marshall Institute	www.marshall.org
National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA)	www.ncpa.org
National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPPR)	www.nationalcenter.org
Pacific Research Institute (PRI)	www.pacificresearch.org
Reason Public Policy Institute (RPPI)	www.reason.org

Source: (McCright & Dunlap, 2003). Reuse allowed for academic purposes, with citation.

McCright and Dunlap argue that conservative think tanks can be defined as social movement organizations that have considerable influence within the conservative movement, due to constant flow of money from corporate organization as well as rich and powerful families. Many of these have publishing capabilities, which makes them appear legitimate to the general public and allows paid research with agenda to infiltrate academic community as well. Within a decade preceding the decisions on Kyoto agreement they have produced hundreds of documents on the subject of

climate change, which include books, press releases, policy studies and Op-ed articles. (McCright A, Dunlap R, 2003). They have ramped up their effort in the light of impending decisions on Kyoto protocol and oftentimes promoted their views through means of television and radio. Today, they increasingly use internet as a medium to get their message across. Conservative think tanks also sponsored countless press conferences, public speeches and policy forums in the months leading to international ratification of Kyoto protocol. Elected lawmakers were often invited to these events, helping the conservative think tanks to get their messages across. (Dunlap & Jacques, 2013).

The closest they have got to directly influencing the policies on the climate change was undoubtedly when they had a chance to influence policy makers through their presence at Congressional hearings, where matters related to man-made climate change were discussed. In the 1990s alone, fellows from conservative think tanks have delivered testimony at twelve major congressional hearings on the subject of climate change and on many more minor occasions. The sharp increase in testimonies and presence in general happened after the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994. They have created organizations designed to cast doubt onto legitimacy of claims about man-made climate change. The main three of these were Global Climate Change Project created by NCPA, Campaign for Sound Science on Global Warming created by CSEF and Global Warming Information Center created by NCPPR (Fisher et al., 2013).

The conservative think tanks funded scientists skeptical of climate change to give credibility to their ideas on environmental issues. Those scientists with respectable credentials were given tasks of attending press conferences, writing policy studies and presenting Congressional testimonies on behalf of the think tanks. Some of the scientists recruited for the environmental projects in the 1990s were previously working for ambitious space defense program introduced by President Reagan's administration towards the end of Cold War. They have also enlisted five leading scientists skeptical of the man-made climate change. Those were cited in about 30 % of the aforementioned documents (Gleick et al., 2013)

Altogether, one can see that the campaign of political think tanks was successful in shaping policy of the United States on climate change. The tactics from the 1990s, which led to the abandonment of Kyoto protocol are employed to this day and the impact on decisions of United States government addressing climate change have become significant once again after the election of

Donald J. Trump as the president of United States in 2016, together with races for both Congress and Senate won by Republicans in the same year (McCright & Dunlap, 2003). This has led to United States abandoning the Paris Accord in June of 2017, by the administration. The only significant change in strategy from the 90s is greater focus on the realm of the internet, when it comes to spreading their narrative as opposed to largely employing traditional media in the 1990s and 2000s. The role of online alternative outlets as an interest group when it comes to climate change skepticism will be analyzed in paragraphs below.

Internet has been a growing medium since its inception in the late 1980s. Internet users search for, discuss, produce content and share their opinions on a variety of topics including those concerning science and politics. The man-made climate change is no exception. Internet has an inherent disadvantage when it comes to the veracity of the facts published on various platforms, as it has relatively low barrier for entry. Since not all users are aware of this characteristic of the online realm, it often allows for conspiracy theories, fake news, misinformation and views with no scientific backing to go unchecked and as a result those gain more believers, who themselves contribute to the spreading of the misinformation. The conspiracy theories range from a belief in aliens, mis-intentions of governments and various elites in general, through conspiracy and alternative theories about certain notable historical events, to outright absurd ones like belief in a flat Earth. The relative ease with which one can both publish or be exposed to these misinformation makes them more popular and widespread than ever in the history of mankind. With millions of monthly viewers, alternative outlets, often created with intention of profit are allowed to thrive. Many of these outlets do not only deny the climate change, but they often go further and connect it to the outlandish theories like that of United Nations takeover and very popular ambiguous term “New World Order”. (Grant, 2019) Since the misinformation attracts clicks and thus provides chance to earn advertising revenue, it makes spreading misinformation a lucrative business for both tech savvy individuals and larger outlets.

In their article Internet Blogs, Polar Bears and Climate Denial by Proxy Jeffrey A. Harvey et al. describe how internet outlets and blogs spread misinformation about climate change on the example of iconic symbol thereof, the species endangered by melting of polar ice caps of polar bears. They focus on blogs, which are the require lowest barrier of entry and thus allow even people with little to no knowledge about technology to propagate their views. (Harvey et. al.,

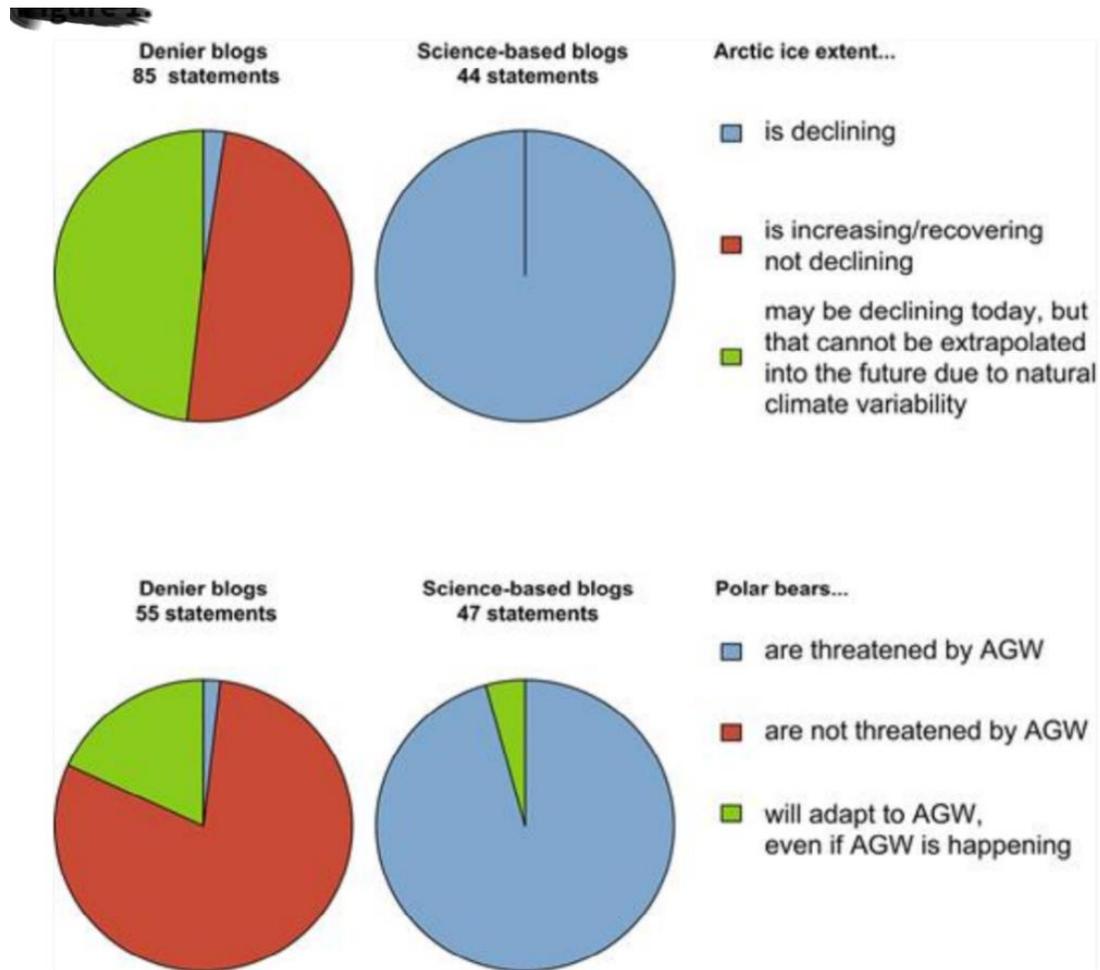
2017). Those largest blog *Watts Up With That* based entirely on man-made climate change denial attracts staggering more than two million unique visitors per month, bringing its owners a considerable advertising revenue. Two likewise oriented blogs, such as *Climate Depot* and *Junk Science* are not far behind as far as views are concerned. Thousands of blogs, made by climate change deniers, are interconnected through cross referencing and cross linking. The blogs have tendency to misinterpret examples and remove context from content related to climate change, manipulating it to their liking (Harvey et. al., 2017).

Despite a growing number of scientific reports documenting negative effects of man-made climate change, deniers find articles which, when taken out of context, can frame issue in a way that either downplays its severity or provides what appears as evidence contradicting it. An example can be a graph that shows growing of the polar ice caps in the winter months being presented out of context and framed as pointing towards annual net growth of the ice caps, when in fact other months of a year are taken into account it shows the exact opposite. Many of the blogs do not even address the overwhelming evidence contradicting their narrative but rather cherry pick what suits them from the large pool of resources on the topic (Harvey et. al., 2017).

Harvey J. et. al. refer to topics of arctic ice extent as “proxies for man-made climate change denial”. Polar bears are classified as threatened species under the US Endangered Species Act. They can catch their prey, which are either fish or seals from the surface of sea ice, which means that as ice cover area declines so does their population. Studies suggest that entire Arctic area may be without ice cover within several decades, which would lead to rapid decline of the population of polar bears and possibly even their extinction. The authors of the study have composed a sample of 90 blogs, from which 45 are scientific and 45 are denying climate change. Their findings were that the climate change denialist blogs and scientific blogs were in “diametrically opposite position” when it came to the interpretation of the data as shown in the graphs below (Harvey et. al., 2017).

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Figure 3: Blogs related to the topic of climate change



Source: (Harvey et al., 2017) Reuse allowed for academic purposes, with citation.

The results from the abovementioned study shows how easy it is to make an internet outlet without any scientific backing. Some more tech savvy users choose to produce videos instead of blogs and upload them to popular video sharing sites like YouTube or other social media sites. Other alternative outlets take a form of a news website, as is evident on the example of the most popular alternative news media outlet *Infowars.com*. With a quick look at the website, one can find hundreds of articles denying man-made climate change or misrepresenting data other in other ways. The website and company associated therewith has a profit margin in excess of 10 million USD per year (Cruchbase, 2019). This goes to show how lucrative the online conspiracy theory

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business can be and why alternative internet outlets represent a powerful interest group when it comes to climate change denial.

Chapter 4: Historical Comparison and Finding Trends

Over the last 30 years, position of presidential administrations in the United States as well as candidates on the issue of man-made climate change and policies designed to mitigate its effects has been changing. In this chapter, the research intends to conduct a historical analysis of the stances and actions on the issue of man-made climate change from various administrations and at key election points, with an intention of finding trends that will lay a groundwork for establishing the historical framework needed to predict the future trends, which is a necessary prerequisite to answer the research question. Analyzing actions of last four administrations, starting with the election of president Clinton in 1992 and ending with the state of affairs under Trump administration today, will prove itself most beneficial for the sake of the research as before the issue was not really being pressing enough for an immediate action of it being considered in United States political arena and was only sporadically mentioned.

In 1992, just a few years after end of cold war there was an United States presidential election looming. The contenders for the two major parties were the incumbent president George H. W. Bush and the Vice President Don Quayle as his running mate, who ran for the Republican party. For the Democrats, a contemporary governor of the state of Arkansas Bill Clinton emerged as the victor from the Democratic party primaries and chose Al Gore as his running mate. Despite the partisan differences, stances of the two candidates on many issues were remarkably close, since Bill Clinton was on the more conservative side of the Democratic Party, whilst Bush was fiscally and socially moderate. On the environmental issues however, they held differing position as will be elaborated on further in the upcoming paragraphs. What has helped the election to be swayed in Clintons favor, was a presence of an independent hardline fiscal conservative Ross Perot, who has earned 18.9 % of the vote in the general election. This has resulted in Bill Clinton winning in 32 states out of 50, including some of the southern states, traditionally leaning Republican (Levy, 1992).

Both Bill Clinton and President Bush have publicly declared economic growth to be equally important to protecting environment. The candidates held different stances on how the governments should accomplish this. The past record of both presidential candidates on the issues of environment was filled with contradictory actions, hence why they have relegated some campaigning on the issue to their vice-presidential candidates. During his tenure as president, Bush

has given a priority to saving jobs over environmental protections. He has been rolling back environmental regulations on environment for 2 years leading up to the election, as he was encouraged to by the vice-president Quayle, who had somewhat libertarian stance on the governmental regulations (Schneider, 1992).

Bush promoted development in the nations protected wetlands and proposed oil drilling in some protected areas in Alaska. He has promoted changes to the law to allow mining coal in national forests and lowered effectiveness of the 1990 Clean Air Act by holding back the implementation of the provisions of the bill. His campaign promises included removing legal restriction on cutting down trees in virgin forests located in Pacific Northwest of the country and issued strong statements against the Endangered Species Act, stating that the legislation is slowing down job creation (Schneider, 1992).

Clinton has been critical of these policies, calling the sacrifice of the environment in favor of jobs creation a false choice. He has advocated for a stronger presence of the Government on the environmental and energy issues, including addressing the climate change. His choice of the vice president affirmed his strong commitment to the environmental protection. Al Gore has been one of the most environmentally conscious congressmen, which became even more evident later when he ran against George Bush, Jr. in the year 2000. Clinton stated that upon his election, environmental rules would be strictly followed, instead of being undermined. He has promoted lowering the mandatory cap on car fuel consumption and promoted modernized power plants, producing less greenhouse emissions. Clinton has been hesitant when it came to endorsing NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) due to environmental concerns, although he has eventually spoken in favor of the measure (Schneider, 1992).

After being elected in 1992, Clinton could count on the Democrat controlled Congress up until it was lost to Republicans in the 1994 mid-term election. President Clinton announced his plans to tax energy consumption, designed to curb CO₂ emissions and create program with the same intention following the UN recommendations. Despite Democrats controlling Congress, both of these initiatives were rejected there. In the aftermath, Clinton's administration came up with the Climate Change Action Plan, which has put forward a goal targeted at reducing emissions to 1990 levels and not increasing them by the year 2000. Despite the implementation of the plan being forced by executive order, Congress had control over appropriation of funds needed by the federal

agencies to help achieve its goals. This has become problematic once Republicans have taken over the Congress in 1994 and funding of the program had become point of contention between the executive and legislative branch (Ferreira et al., 2012).

Since the legislative branch of the government was controlled by the Republicans from 1994 onwards, they have been able to place 50 sub-programs of the CCAP under a financial embargo. Their reasoning for the withdrawal of funds for the projects, was that the interference in the free market by government caused by CCAP. The failure of the plan was attributed to it not having adequate funding by the Clinton administration, when emissions in 1997 were already up by 13% from 1990 levels (Ferreira et al., 2012).

The actions on the national level have also been translated into the American policy abroad, especially when it came to international negotiations. US delegates questioned targets focused on reducing emissions proposed by EU, with the argument that developing countries would not share enough responsibility under the proposed plan (Ferreira et al., 2012) US negotiators pointed out that the double standards for the developed and the developing world would hamper competitiveness of countries like United States. These international delegates were however unconvinced by US pressure and stated that developing countries could participate on a voluntary basis. This discrepancy in participation in the global efforts to mitigate effects of climate change is often quoted today by the climate change skeptics as a reason for United States not to join the global efforts of mitigating the effects of man-made climate change (Royden, 2002).

Despite the disagreement on issues such as unequal participation, Clinton administration did not abandon the international negotiations on the matter, unlike the Bush administration which decided to later do so. During the Climate negotiations in Geneva in 1996 (Conference of Parties 2-COP 2), United States secretary for Global affairs stated that United States would consider accepting a legally binding resolution, had the reduction goals been realistic. He declined participation of United States in such resolution, had the figures been inconsistent with economic reality or would not be market oriented. (UN, 1996)

Prior to COP 3 in Kyoto, where an international agreement was expected, Clinton administration has created group consisting of officials of federal agencies, which goal was to clarify the consequence of the treaty for industry, political class, environmental groups and the public. Clinton tried to contribute to treaty being eventually ratified himself. In several speeches he referred to

climate change as a global problem, particularly concerning the industrialized developed countries. He declared that scientific consensus on the issue was solid enough to persuade public and the political class. (UN, 1997) These efforts were however unsuccessful as the Senate eventually passed a resolution, which has made Kyoto protocol to lay dormant and never to be ratified by United States, with efforts being completely abandoned in 2003. President Clinton has signed the protocol after the conference and was harshly criticized for that by the Senate. The protocol would have to be ratified by Senate in order to be legally binding and it was never submitted for ratification there, as the chance of Senate ratifying it would be next to none, considering the resolution it contradicted (Royden, 2002)

Clinton continued to advocate for an action on climate change for the rest of his term. In the 1999 State of Union speech he stated that global warming was the greatest challenge for the country. That year government included 4.1 billion dollars in funding for climate related programs as part of budget for year 2000 (Ferreira S. et al., 2012). President Clinton has been at odds with interest groups behind climate change skepticism during his entire tenure. They have been at forefront of sabotaging environmental efforts of the administration as well as influencing Congress and Senate to stop administration in its most ambitious plans, as it was described in detail in the previous chapter.

In the year 2000, Clinton's second term as a president was coming to an end. Election was near and the Democratic Party has chosen the contemporary Vice President Al Gore as a candidate for the President of the United States. In the Republican primary, George W. Bush, the eldest son of former president George H. W. Bush has emerged as a winner. Presidential candidate Al Gore has chosen Joe Lieberman as his running mate, whilst Bush has chosen Dick Cheney. Al Gore has faced two problems when it came to the election. The previous administration was stained by the impeachment and there was a green party candidate Ralph Nader running, with potential to take some more progressive votes from the Democratic party candidate (Jehl , 2000).

This candidate running has put Al Gore in a strange position. Despite Al Gore being a strong environmental advocate, the green party candidate has made a contest out of who is best for the environment. Al Gore had to be careful not to alienate some more moderate voters, had he chosen to go into competition mode with Ralph Nadler. This has, however, not stopped him from standing strongly for the environmental cause. The differences between the republican candidate Bush and

Al Gore were deep (Jehl, 2000). They strongly disagreed on climate change policies, oil drilling policies, pollution control and timber wood policy. Bush was a proponent of cutting federal environmental regulations and replacing them with more voluntary guidelines and regulations on a state level. Gore on the other hand pushed for more involvement of federal government on environmental matters and advocated for mandatory guidelines as far as emissions and air pollution were concerned. Gore was backed by most major environmental groups, but his strong statements on importance of environmental protection were used by opposing party to portray him as extremist on the issue. Bush has focused on the importance of economy over the environment, stating that American economy runs on oil and gas. Al Gore has been a strong supporter of getting the Kyoto protocol ratified by the Senate, whilst Bush was very critical of the protocol (Jehl, 2000). Bush campaign has received 78% of the 34 million USD, fossil fuel lobby has spent on the on the election campaign donations. He has also received 250 thousand USD from the coal industry, which was battling series of regulatory efforts. (The Center for Public Integrity, 2018)

In the end, Bush has narrowly won the 2000 election and became the 43rd president of the United States. One of his first actions on the environment was his statement critical of the Kyoto Protocol, which he sent to several senators. By writing and publishing this letter he announced his intention to abandon any further Kyoto climate negotiations. (Ferreira et al., 2012) The letter reads as follows:

“As you know, I oppose the Kyoto Protocol because it exempts 80% of the world, including major population centers, such as China and India, from compliance, and would cause serious harm to the US economy. [...] At a time when California has already experienced energy shortages, and other Western states are worried about price and availability of energy this summer, we must be very careful not to take actions that could harm consumers. This is especially true given the incomplete state of scientific knowledge of the causes of, and solutions to, global climate change and the lack of commercially available technologies for removing and storing carbon dioxide.” (Bush, 2001)

Since the published letter has provoked a public outcry from the environmentalists and certain members of scientific community, Bush has tasked National Academy of Sciences with creating a study on probable causes of climate change. The result has mostly confirmed findings of IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), mentioned in the previous chapter, pointing to the human activity and CO₂ emissions being cause of the changing climate. In the light of the results of the study President Bush proclaimed his intention to create the Climate Change Research Initiative, with the goal of studying uncertain areas and determining future investments. The

industry had similar intentions and tried to use their own research institute GCC (Global Climate Coalition) to counter the arguments and findings of the IPCC. This effort has been largely unsuccessful and GCC was dissolved after its own scientist pointed to a possibility of climate change being tied to human activity in 2002 (Eckersley, 2007).

Shortly before abandoning the Kyoto protocol, White House created the National Energy Policy Development Group, under the leadership of Vice President Chaney. Its focus however eventually changed from addressing man-made climate change to that of energy, securitization of the energy sector and stabilizing energy prices. Bush administration dismantled some programs created by Clinton, such as the ones focused at engineering more efficient cars, in favor of investing into hydrogen car research. Bush was opposed to any regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, but created some tax incentives for renewable energy projects, cars with alternative fuels and technologies designed at reducing greenhouse emissions such as clean coal technology. His administration also invested into efforts to reduce intensity of greenhouse gasses, rather than its volume under the aforementioned Climate Change Initiative (Eckersley, 2007). The little that remained of the United States climate negotiation team has focused on bilateral and regional negotiations rather than on global efforts. Throughout his tenure as president, Bush has remained adamant in his defense of the oil sector. When faced with criticism, he pointed to free market as the only realistic solution for the climate crisis (Ferreira et al., 2012). In retrospective, it is pretty evident that the decisions of President Bush on climate policy were mostly consistent with the goals of interest groups behind climate change skepticism. Unlike Trump however, he has not been well received by alternative media outlets. At the time those did not have as much influence as in latter years, as it has been outlined in previous chapter.

By the end of his tenure as President, Bush and his administration had very low approval ratings due to prolonged war and economy sliding into recession after the house market crash of 2006, giving Democrats a great opportunity to take the White House. Barack Obama has eventually emerged as victorious in the Democratic primary and has chosen Joe Biden as his running mate. On the republican side, John McCain running with Sarah Palin have taken the nomination. The 2008 election was the first one, where environmental issues have played a major role when it came to gaining support from independent and undecided voters, with nearly two thirds of these indicating that position on global warming of the candidate will affect their vote (Yale Program

on Climate Change Communication, 2008; Revkin et al., 2008) For the first time in history, both candidates expressed that the climate change is real and caused by humans. John McCain, however, stated that the United States not joining the Kyoto Protocol was the right thing, but seen the potential in the United States joining the global effort had China and India joined the discussions. In the months leading to the election, however, John McCain has slightly altered his stance and followed the line of technological development being the driving force in reducing the carbon emissions, despite his support for hard cap on emissions. (Revkin et al., 2008). Barack Obama was much more ambitious when it came to policy proposals aimed at mitigating effects of man-made climate change. His aim was cutting emissions by 80% by 2050, supported implementation of emission permit system and wanted government to spend 15 billion a year on programs designed to promote non-polluting energy sources. Unlike McCain, Obama stated that United States should take a leading role in global effort to mitigate effects of man-made climate change. His plans included putting a hard cap on greenhouse gas emissions and to lower it every year, forcing the industries to adopt (Revkin et al., 2008). Leading up to 2008 election fossil fuel lobbying companies have spent 41 million USD in campaign donations, with 82 % of that sum being put towards campaign of John McCain and Republican candidates for both Senate and Congress. It was sizeable increase from the previous election cycle. (OpenSecrets, 2020)

Upon taking the office in 2009, Obama personally attended the COP-15, where he pledged to reduce the greenhouse gases emissions by 17% from 2005 levels by 2020. COP-15 ended in victory for the United States, since major developing countries indicated willingness to join the developed nations in the global effort to cut greenhouse emission. A year later at COP-16 an agreement was reached for developed countries to contribute 100 billion USD a year to projects in developing countries aimed at reducing the greenhouse gas emissions. On the domestic grounds, the realization of Obama's ambitious plans was less successful in the first years of his administration, due to the present economic crisis. There was some success, however. (Ferreira et al., 2012) In 2009, a bill (American Clean Energy and Security Act) proposed by the administration was approved by Congress. It introduced certain emission caps and allowed trade thereof, which was a strategy with a decent level of success in European Union. If followed it proposed to fulfil the promise to cut emissions by 17% from 2005 levels by 2020, which was given by President Obama the same year. It has several ambitious goals, such as creation of jobs related to renewable energy production, reducing pollution, developing ecological transportation and promote transition to an

economy based on renewable energy. Later, when Congress has been taken over by the Republicans in 2010, the further domestic legislation and funding for green initiatives were mostly halted for the rest of President Obama's first term in his office (Ferreira et al., 2012).

Republicans retained control of the Congress up until 2018 mid-term elections, however this did not stop Obama in making a substantial progress when it came to addressing the man-made climate change during his second term, especially on international grounds. He resorted to creative politics in order to do what he could to address the climate crisis, despite not having support of the Congress. He used the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to pursue measures designed to tackle truck emissions, forcing industry to adopt measures to stop methane leaks and created mandatory energy efficiency standards for home electronics (Lavelle, 2016). Through EPA, he also established 23 protected areas (national monuments) within the United States, including an ocean reserve near Hawaii where oil drilling was prohibited as a result of the policy. A delegation has been established to support international efforts to support global reduction of hydrofluorocarbon use, an extremely potent greenhouse gas used in refrigeration and air conditioning. Obama rejected the plans to build Keystone XL pipeline, to the dismay of the oil industry. The biggest accomplishment by far was the negotiation of the Paris Agreement, signed by 194 countries around the world. Obama's efforts can be considered an overall success. U.S. carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by 11% from 2008 to 2016 to the lowest level in 25 years (Lavelle, 2016). This good progress on the issue however did not last, due to the presidential election in 2016. President Obama has been a thorn in the eye of interest groups behind climate change skepticism. Despite their best efforts and funding for Republican campaigns and other venues from fossil fuel lobby increasing every year since 2008, he has been successful in reshaping economy and in the efforts of his administration to mitigate effects of the man-made climate change (OpenSecrets, 2020).

In 2016, first female candidate for the post of the president of the United States, Hillary Clinton, has emerged as the winner of Democratic primaries. She has chosen a moderate Tim Kayne as her running mate. On the Republican side, populist candidate Donald Trump has secured the nomination and chosen a traditional conservative Mike Pence to run alongside him. Hillary Clinton has expectedly tried to follow climate change policies of the Obama administration in addition to some of her own proposals. She referred to the man-made climate change as an urgent threat and defining challenge of our times. Clinton has proclaimed that she will continue to follow the trend

of reducing greenhouse emissions, that has been going on for 7th straight year at the time. She has developed strategy to bypass Congress on the issue, similar to what Obama has been doing for six years prior to that, had Democrats not taken control of it. Clinton campaign had very ambitious plan of reducing emissions by 30% from 2005 levels by 2025. Her plan included helping communities that may be disadvantaged by the change, with incentives such as finding new a good jobs for the coal miners that would be most affected by gradual abandonment of coal in energy production. She had a goal of building institutional, political and technical foundations for the coming decade. (Roberts , 2016) Her opponent in the election Donald Trump had polar opposite views on man-made climate change, being an outright denier. His campaign promises included dismantling the Paris Climate Accord, deregulation of American economy and lessening the powers of EPA. Trump stated that programs aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions are waste of financial resources. He also supported the coal-based energy production, vowing to maintain the coal mining, arguing that people keeping jobs in the field is more important than the focus on clean energy. He argued that the coal energy facilities use clean coal technology, which was a project developed by Bush administration and thus are environmentally safe. Trump also stated that presence of man-made climate change is not an established fact and needs further investigation (Harrington, 2016). Interest groups behind climate change skepticism have spent a record sum on the 2016 election. Totally they have pledged more than 103 million towards campaigns of candidates for the presidency as well as Senate and Congress, with a record 88% of the sum going towards Republican campaign. (Opensecrets,2020).

Upon his takeover as the U.S. President, Donald Trump spared no time in starting to pursue his policy on environment. He has appointed Scott Pruitt as the administrator of EPA. Pruitt was a former lobbyist for the oil industry and his views on climate change were that whilst man-made climate change is real, it is likely beneficial for the planet. He has enacted the America First Energy Plan focused at the deregulation of the energy sector. As far as EPA is concerned, Trump announced he wanted it to only focus on preserving clean air and clean water. (Greshko et al., 2019) The America First Energy Plan stresses the importance of fossil fuels in American economy and totally omits renewable energy sources. President Trump approved building of the Keystone XL and Dakota pipelines by an executive order in January of 2017. His other executive order made EPA rewrite its standards and abandon its focus on regulation and curbing of carbon emissions. One of the biggest rollbacks of climate change policies from the previous administration was

Trump's decision to leave the Paris Climate Agreement in June of 2017. He also reversed the Clean Power Plan on March 2017 with the intention to renew coal mining and coal power plant energy production. In September of 2018, Trump's administration scrapped aforementioned rule from Obama administration targeted at reducing gas and methane leaks. In September of 2019, Trump has announced that he would reverse a regulation that would prohibit sale of energy inefficient incandescent light bulbs, by January 2020. The overall list of regulations scrapped by Trumps administration is long and will be further addressed in the next chapter (Greshko et al., 2019). Donald Trump had his decisions on the climate change in a direct alignment with stances of interest groups behind climate change skepticism. He has named several of the former lobbyists for positions in his administration. Likewise, he has enjoyed a support from alternative media outlets, which have played a significant role in deciding 2016 election. The aforementioned platform *Infowars.com*, has been running pro-Trump coverage around the clock not only during his campaign, but also after him being elected.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Trends and Future Predictions

When trying to establish and analyze long term trends regarding the man-made climate change and establish future predictions, it is important to analyze how public opinion on the issue has shifted over the years. As it was specified in second chapter, part of public can be considered a tertiary interest group behind climate change skepticism, due to decisions made on the matter having possible influence on their daily lives and livelihoods. A study by Patrick J. Egan and Megan Mullin, titled *Climate Change: US Public Opinion* looks at historical analysis of opinions on climate change and provides valuable insight into the topic, such as how demographics and party affiliation have influenced views of Americans on the topic over the past 30 years.

The first public opinion polls on the topic of climate change have been conducted in the early 1980s. Earliest surveys have shown Americans were largely ignorant on the issue, with first significant poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation showing that only 38 % of Americans have an understanding of climate change and greenhouse effect. At the same time two third of respondents were at least somewhat concerned about the issue. (Egan P. & Mullin M., 2017) The polls conducted after this survey were oftentimes focused on the same themes, probing awareness and concern. The structuring of the polls has changed over the years, with terms such as global warming and later climate change replacing the greenhouse effect at the core of the questions. Most surveys were had goal of finding out public opinion based on four criteria. The first was probing knowledge and awareness about the climate change, second was asking about their beliefs about it being real, third was the level of concern and finally fourth criterium was finding out about the level of support for policy changes. (Egan & Mullin , 2017)

The awareness about the aspects of climate change has been steadily increasing, going from a simple majority in early 1990s to 82 % in 2017. This is undoubtedly due to increased coverage of the issue by media and politicians alike. The awareness however does not correlate with knowledge, with less than half of American citizens being aware of the scientific consensus on the issue. Many people who acknowledge reality of global warming do not attribute it to human activity, likely due to high amount of misinformation on the issue. The level of concern about climate change is lower than about some other issues, however it still remains high at around 60 % being at least slightly concerned. The trend is however that it has declined from the all time high in 2000 from 75 %. The level of Americans regarding action on climate change as one of their top

priorities, when it comes to policy arena, has been increasing to its all time high of 38 % in 2017 (Egan & Mullin., 2017). This points to trend of polarization of the society of the issue outlined in the hypothesis of this research being a reality. When it comes to comparison with rest of the world, the level of concern about climate change in United States has been consistently lower than then the levels in Africa and Latin America. This is probably best explained by the fact that regions of Global South feel the negative effects of climate change on a greater scale than countries in areas with more moderate climate. The level of concern about climate change in United States has historically been lower when compared with European Union, although not by more than 10%. Still this more ignorant attitude may be a part of explanation of stark differences in actions of European governments and United States government on the issue of climate change (Egan & Mullin , 2017).

In regards to demographics, studies have shown that main attributes based on which there is a significant discrepancy in concern about climate change are religiosity, partisan affiliation, gender and age. Many studies have shown that women are more concerned about climate change then men are. Authors of the study attribute it to women being generally more risk averse then men, or in other words more afraid of taking risks (Egan & Mullin , 2017). In regard to religiosity, studies show that less religious people perceive climate change as a greater issue than their more religious counterparts. Similarly, studies and polls have generally shown that older people are less concerned about climate change than they younger generation. Race has not been proven as a factor when it comes to level of belief and concern about climate change, however it is important to note that people of color in United States generally support left wing candidates, whilst American whites generally tend to vote for the right-wing candidates. When it comes to partisan affiliation, the discrepancy between the Republican party voters and the Democratic party voter is the greatest, with Democrats having far stronger belief in and willingness for government to take action on man-made climate change than Republicans (Egan & Mullin , 2017).

These demographic findings seem to support the research hypothesis that with time, level of concern and willingness for government to take action on the climate change will increase over time. This is due to well-known demographic changes of American society. As far as age goes it is an obvious factor. As old people retire or pass away, current younger generation will make a greater part of both economically productive population and the voting bloc in general. (Egan P.

& Mullin M., 2017). The religiosity of American society has been steadily declining for more than a century, so the fact that less religious or non-religious people being more open to action on climate change combined with the fact that they are an increasing part of the voting bloc point to this trend supporting the hypothesis that greater percentage of population will support government action on climate change as time goes by. (Egan P. & Mullin M., 2017). The steady increase of racial diversity of the United States means that higher percentage of general population will vote for left-wing candidates open to action on climate change. (Hajnal & Troustine, 2014) Partisan affiliation is a separate category and will be discussed in paragraphs below, in order to establish short term predictions for the landmark 2020 election, where environment and climate change will be amongst most important issues.

As far as 2020 election is concerned, very few polls predict President Trump to be reelected. Approval rating of either President or a candidate has been one of main decisive factors in past elections. (Strong & Kohli, 2019) According to poll aggregate site FiveThirtyEight, which analyses approval rating of the president Trump by taking all polls on the matter and creating an average, Trump approval rating has consistently been well below 50 % since shortly after his taking office in January 20th of 2017. His disapproval rating was initially below 50 % but for past two and a half years it has been sitting above 50 %. At the time of writing, Trump approval rating sits at 43 % and disapproval rating sits at 52.6 % (FiveThirtyEight, 2020). This numbers make his reelection in November 2020 an unlikely option. If he somehow beats the odds, it will be bad news for the environment and will likely bring 4 more years of either inaction or even counterintuitive actions, as it was shown in last chapter, when it comes to man-made climate change.

His odds of winning depend on who his Democratic party opponent will be, which is yet undecided at the time of the writing. Polls and other indicators show that there are three contestants with a chance of winning the Democratic primaries: a moderate candidate Joe Biden, liberal progressive candidate Elizabeth Warren, or the democratic socialist Bernie Sanders. It is unclear who will eventually win the Democratic party primary nomination, but these three candidates have been dominating the polls since they announced their candidacy. From the three frontrunners, polls have consistently shown that Joe Biden has the highest chance of winning against the incumbent president Donald Trump. Sanders has the second highest odds, and Warren ranks as third. This is

probably because the moderate wing of Democratic party feels alienated by two progressive candidates, nonetheless all three of them are well ahead of Trump in polls (Pramuk , 2019).

Regarding the stances on climate change, all three Democratic frontrunners regard addressing the climate change to be one of their top priorities. The way they want to go about it differ. Warren and Sanders support the very ambitious Green New Deal, while Biden prefers a more traditional approach. With two of three Democratic frontrunners for nomination supporting the Green New Deal, there is a decent chance that it will be adopted after the 2020 election. It is thus important to examine how this deal would affect the United States policy on addressing the man-made climate change, which will be done in following paragraphs. The Green New Deal has been widely attacked by nearly all sorts of interest groups behind climate change skepticism, so it provides a valuable insight to what their fears are.

The Green New Deal is an environmental bill proposed in the Congress by the progressive newcomer congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez. In legislative terms, it goes under the title of House Resolution 109 from 116th Congress, 1st session. The resolution preamble states that it recognizes the duty of the Federal Government to create the Green New Deal, which is why it is known by that name in popular circles. In the preamble it cites IPCC report from October 2018, titled “Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees Celsius”. The report has found that global warming above 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels would cause mass migration from regions most affected by climate change, overall annual loss of 500 billion USD in annual output of US economy by the year 2100, and further catastrophic effects on both the United States economy and the worldwide population. The report states that to keep temperature increase below 1.5 degrees, it is necessary to reduce the global greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 60% from 2010 levels by 2030 and have net zero global emissions by 2050 (H. Res. 109, 2019).

The Green New Deal resolution proceeds to point to the role of United States, when it comes to climate change as well as point to related crises stemming from what is described as unfair and unequal system economy of the United States is based on. It states that climate change poses a direct threat to national security of the United States. It states that a Green New Deal would create millions of good and high income jobs in the United States and provide unprecedented levels of prosperity. The resolution proposes a 10-years long national mobilization that would have several goals (H. Res. 109, 2019). Those would include repairing and upgrading infrastructure in the

United States to eliminate pollution, having 100 % of energy output within the country being produced through renewable sources, building energy efficient power grids, upgrading all buildings within United States to maximum energy efficiency, removing greenhouse gas emissions from manufacturing as much as is technologically feasible, removing gas emissions from agricultural sector, upgrading transportation systems to remove as much greenhouse emissions as technically feasible, restoring ecosystems and promoting international cooperation. Apart from dealing with climate change, the deal also has a social aspect to it (H. Res. 109, 2019).

The Green New Deal is the single most ambitious proposed piece of legislation related to climate change in the United States history. Unsurprisingly, it is an object of criticism and mockery from its opponents. A centre-right political think tank American Action Forum has estimated the cost of the measure to be between 51 trillion and 93 trillion USD over the next 10 years. They also criticized it for proposing government interference in the daily life of Americans and having damaging and lasting impact on the economy. The opinion of cost of such measure being too high and the Green New Deal being an unrealistic proposal are common among its Republican and moderate Democrat opponents (Natter , 2019). The plan is so ambitious that Republicans are trying to make it into a big election issue and it has the potential to dissuade some Democrat voters in 2020 elections. The measure was brought up in the Senate in March of 2019, by the Republican majority leader, which has put it on the voting floor. This vote was called a sham and a publicity stunt by the Senate Democrats and the vote was ignored by 43 Democratic senators. Eventually, it was defeated by 57-0 in a vote. It is speculated that Republicans wanted to bring up the measure to the voting floor to sow division between moderate and progressive Democrats (Green New Deal: Senate defeats proposal as Democrats unite in protest, 2019).

On one side, there is a president, who considers the man-made climate change not to be an issue, and on the other side, there are Democratic Party frontrunners that support an extremely ambitious and potentially expensive piece of legislation on climate change. This points towards polarization being an issue, when it comes to climate change. The hypothesis of this research has predicted the polarization on the issue to deepen, but from deeper analysis it seems that it may be at its peak. This does not mean divisions cannot become deeper, but as far as stances are concerned, they are pretty much at the opposite sides of the spectrum already.

Conclusion

Through the extensive research of the topic, this research was able to accomplish its goal and answer the research question to a great extent. In regard to the interest groups themselves, it was found out that there are three major interest group types. The primary ones include the industry and its lobbying groups, the secondary ones include political think tanks and media and the tertiary ones include political class and the public. As far as those interest groups are concerned, research has been able to establish that primary groups such as industry in the United States have changed their tactics on the chronological scale from absolute denial of man-made climate change in the 1990s, through securitization and politics of fear in the early 2000s to, in some cases, admitting their share of responsibility and investing into new technologies.

Political think tanks that represent the companies on the other hand have not changed their strategy as the time progressed and continue to do the dirty work for the industry players to this day. The only major change was shifting their attention to the new media such as internet to communicate their message to the public. Despite the scientific consensus on the man-made climate change being solid, alternative internet outlets have been complicit in misleading the public on this issue as it was explored in this research. The internet misinformation becoming widespread has served as a fresh wind to the slowing down sail of the interest groups behind climate change skepticism. Likewise, in the political arena the trend of even the top right-wing politicians admitting the man-made climate change being real, despite their proposed solutions to it being slow and inefficient, has experienced a setback by election of populist President Donald Trump in 2016. After a careful analysis it was however established that this is likely a one-off instance and doesn't change the long-term trends.

Changing demographics and the left-wing politicians standing their ground when it comes to man-made climate change seem to support hypothesis of this research of the influence of the interest groups themselves to be slowly fading. This trend is also visible in various interest groups slowly adopting their strategies as the time passes and hinting at the possibility of being part of the solution, rather than only problem. If one disregards Trump's unexpected election in 2016, the general trend seemed to have been even top Republicans admitting the presence of risks associated with climate change. Part of the hypothesis was that climate change denier camp and alarmist camp will drift further apart and take extreme positions on the topic. The research seems not to support

this part of hypothesis, as the camps are currently so far apart with Republican party united behind president who makes steps counterintuitive to mitigating man-made climate change on the one side and the progressive Democrats proposing extreme solutions such as Green New Deal, it is hardly possible for the situation to worsen. One can only hope that consensus will be reached after Trump presidency ends, for the good of United States and the planet itself.

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