

The Polarization of Climate and Energy Politics

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Program for Society and the Environment
at the University of Maryland - a Graduate Field Committee



Contextualizing my comments...

- Early work comparing domestic politics of US, Japan, and the Netherlands (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)
- More recent research on US climate politics at the federal and sub-national levels, focusing on:
 - Low Carbon Energy Policies
 - Climate and Clean Energy Policy Networks

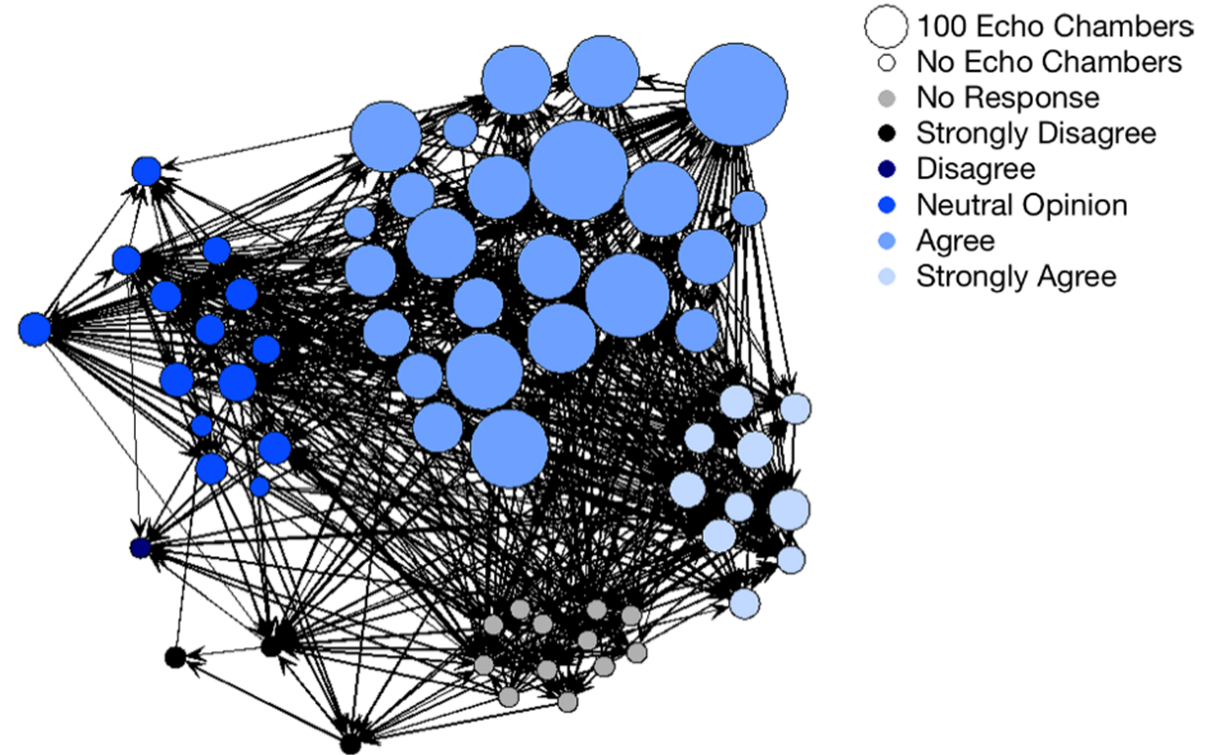
National Governance
and the Global Climate
Change Regime



Dana R. Fisher

Echo Chambers In American Climate Politics (2010)

- Single information sources are amplified, distorting views of the state of the field
- Echo chambers amplify divergence from the consensus
- Science is cherry picked and minority positions can get caught in an echo chamber that can then affect policy outcomes.



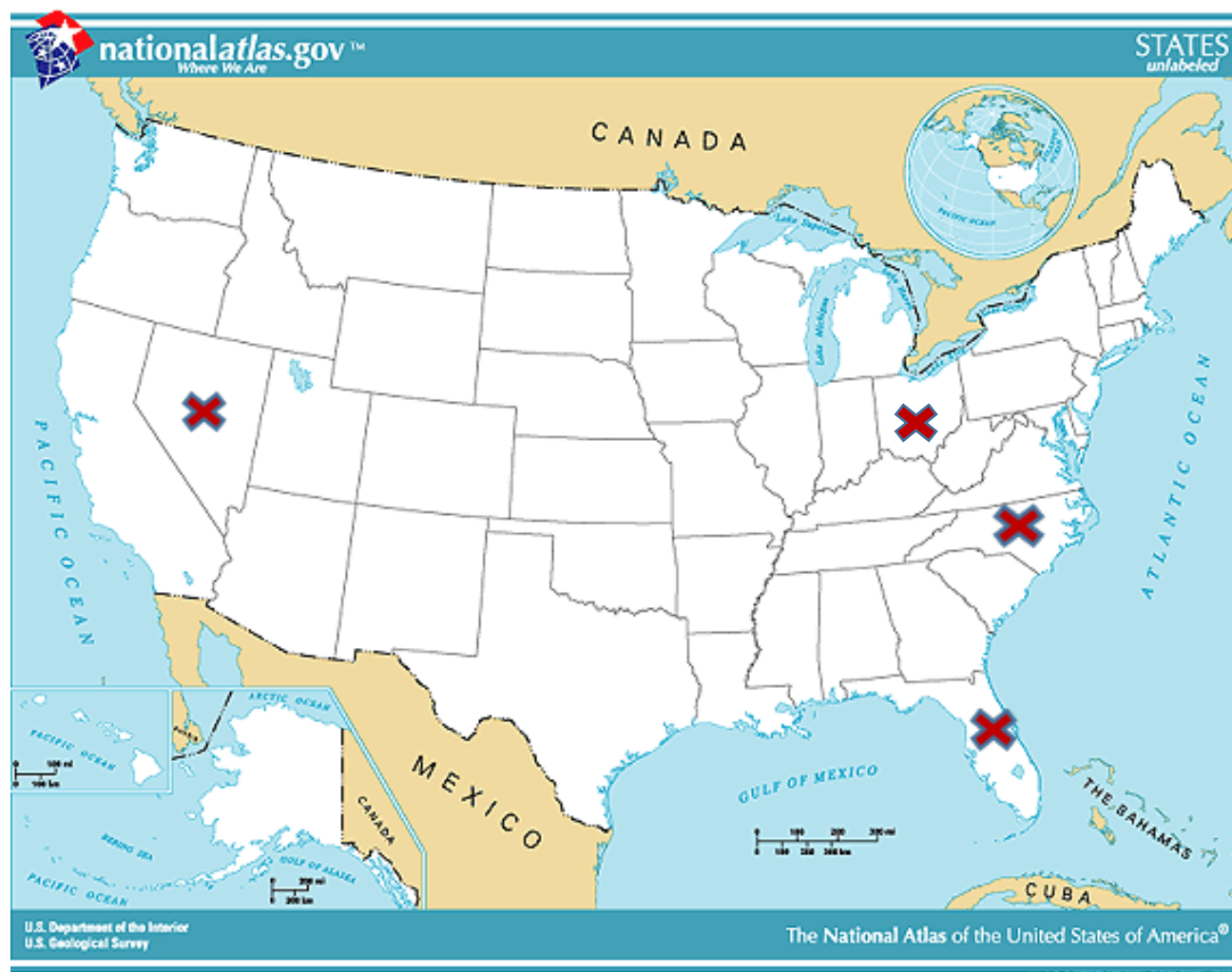
Source: Fisher, Waggle, and Jasny, *Contexts* 2015; Jasny, Waggle, and Fisher, *Nature Climate Change* 2015.

The Climate Constituencies Project

Studying Clean Energy and Climate Policy Networks and how they Evolve at the Federal Level and in 4 Swing States

Data Collected and Analyzed Include:

- Testimony at Federal Congressional Hearings
- Filings at State Legislatures and PUCs
- Local Media Coverage
- Debates over Social Media (focus on mention and retweet networks)
- Surveys of policy actors at federal and state levels
- Open-Ended Semi-Structured interviews with policy actors at federal and state levels



Even with the media focus on climate denialism, respondents had accepted the science of climate change

Statement	FEDERAL Average		FL	NV	NC	OH
	2010	2016				
<i>Global climate change is currently occurring</i>	4.5	4.7	4.4	4.8	4.8	4.5
<i>Human activities are an important driver of current global climate change</i>	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.7	4.6	4.4

*Responses are scored on a scale of 1-5 ranging from strongly disagree – strongly agree, mean score is reported

There is less consensus about policy instruments

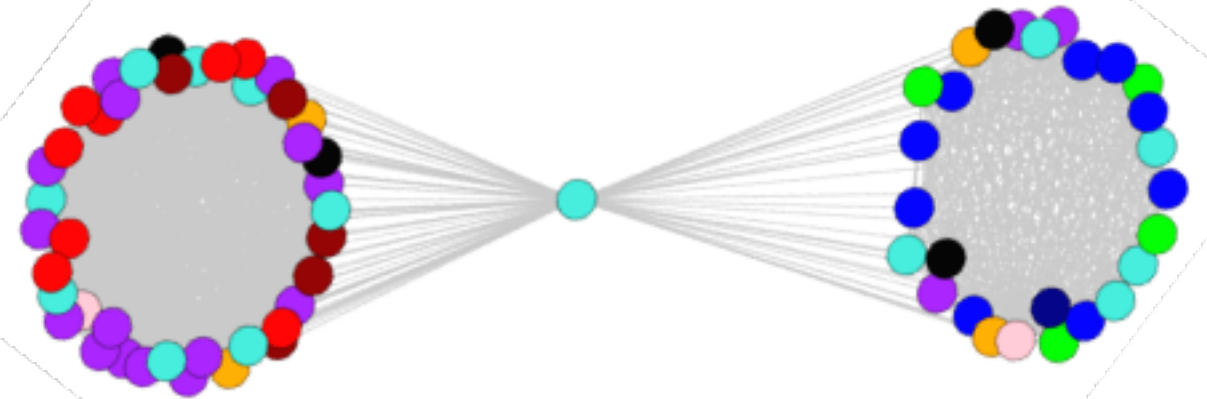
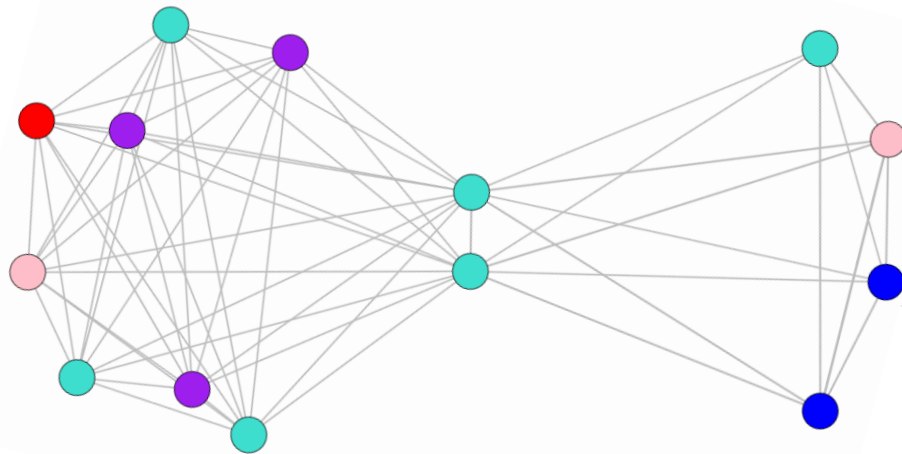
Statement	FEDERAL	FL	NC	NV	OH
<i>The Clean Power Plan should be implemented in every state</i>	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.4	3.8
<i>Emissions trading is the best option for reducing US GHG emissions</i>	2.8	2.4	3.1	3.3	3.2

*Responses are scored on a scale of 1-5 ranging from strongly disagree – strongly agree, mean score is reported

Congressional Responses to the Clean Power Plan

113th Congress (2013-2015)

114th Congress (2015-2017)



Disagreement with this statement is on the left side of each diagram

Moderate position (113): Maryland Public Service Commission and Texas Public Utility

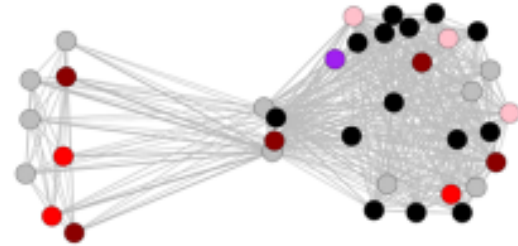
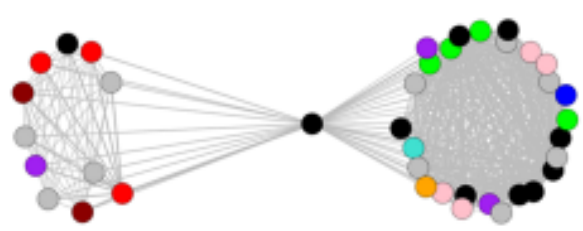
Moderate position (114): Public Service Commission of WI

Similar Polarization at the State Level around Related Issues

Florida: “Climate Change is Real and Anthropogenic” North Carolina: “States Should accept the CPP”

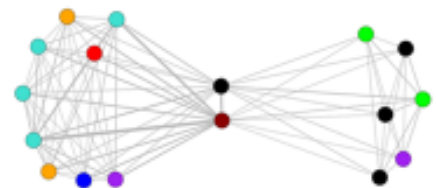
Baseline (6/13-8/15)

Pre-Election (8/15-11/16)



Baseline (6/13-8/15)

Pre-Election (8/15-11/16)



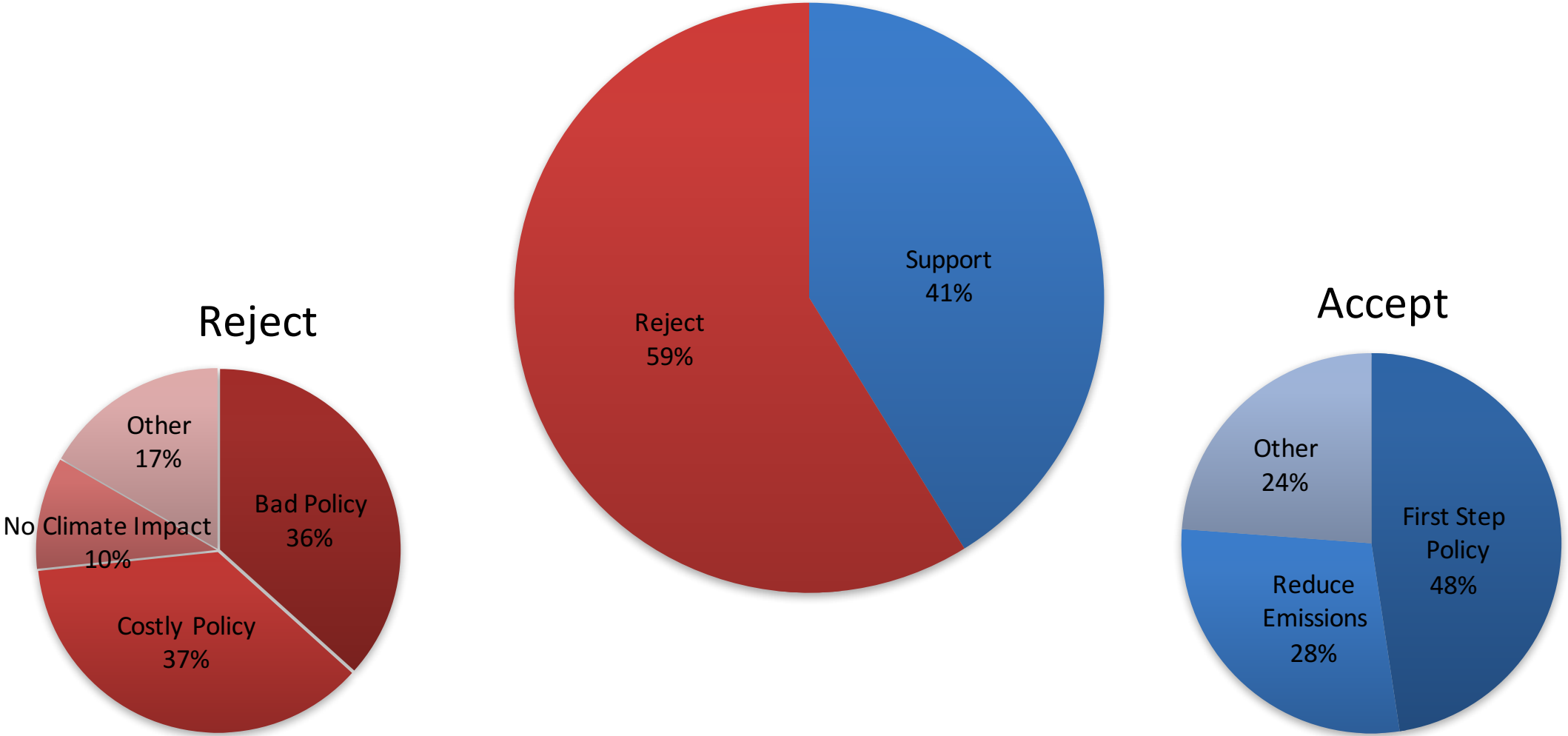
Disagreement with this statement is on the left side of each diagram
 Moderate position (Baseline): Florida Tribune
 Moderate position (Pre-Election): Campaign of Donald Trump, Campaign of Jeb Bush, Office of Mike Pence, and Tampa Bay Times

Disagreement with this statement is on the left side of each diagram
 Moderate position (Baseline): Gov. Pat McCrory and News and Record (Media)
 Moderate position (Pre-Election): None.

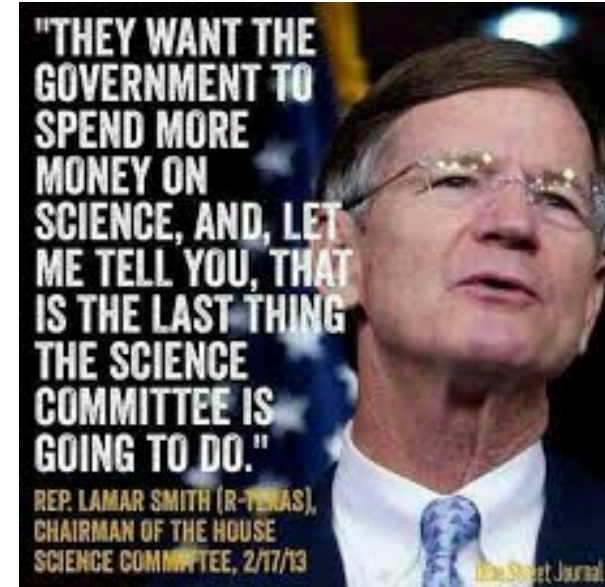
Summary of Interviews (summer 2016)

	Supports Climate Science	Rejects Climate Science
Supports Climate Action	62%	8%
Rejects Climate Action	14%	16%

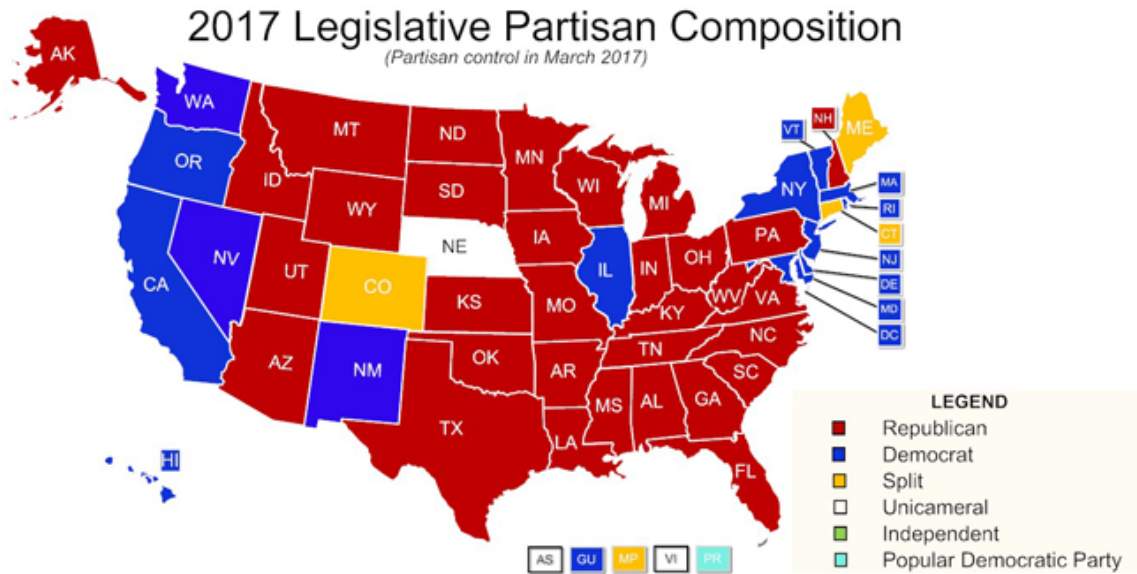
Talking about the Clean Power Plan (summer 2016)



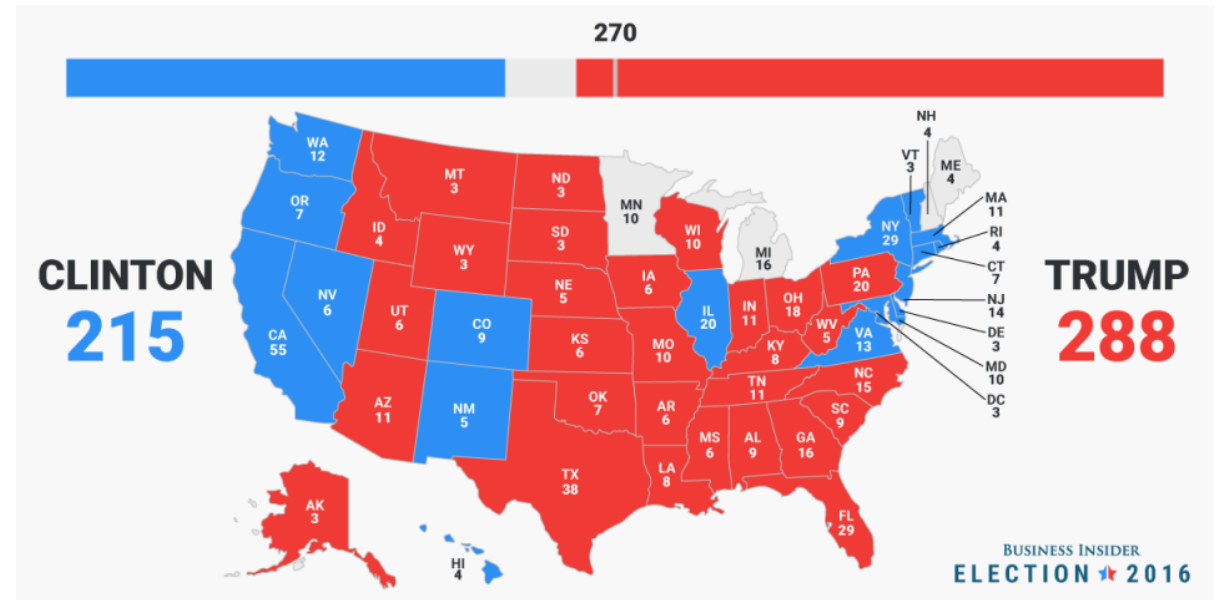
Political Polarization Today







Polarization is not specific to the Federal Level



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures



Preliminary Results from Interviews (spring 2017)

	Supports Climate Science	Rejects Climate Science
Supports Climate Action		
Rejects Climate Action		

Polarization in International Context

- US position within the climate regime
 - Participation as a Party
 - Funding—the Omnibus bill that just was signed and funded the government through September eliminated funding for the Green Climate Fund, the UNFCCC, and the UN Population Fund. It will almost definitely get worse with the 2018 budget
- Brexit and its implications
- Outcome of the French election

Selected Resources

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