



The Six Americas of Climate Change: Perceptions of Southeast Extension Professionals



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Introduction

Perceptions on climate change vary dramatically in the United States, with the general public forming six coherent categories from alarmed through dismissive (Leiserowitz et al. 2010, Maibach et al. 2009). The categories help communicators create messages that are more likely to resonate with the audiences' values and ideas about the world.

Since Extension agents are in the business of conveying science-based research findings to adult learners, one might expect them to fall on the "concerned" side of the perception spectrum. However, if they represent their audiences, they might reflect the full range of six categories. By better understanding the Agents' perceptions of climate, regionally-developed Extension programs will be better able to attract, motivate, inform, and support agents.



Perceptions vary from fearful and concerned to skeptical and denial.



Research Questions

- ❖ How do Extension professionals in the Southeast perceive the issue of climate change?
- ❖ Do their perceptions vary by state, position, or program area?

Methods

A 56-item, web-based survey was administered with the help of Extension administrators from eight participating states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Additional questions were added to facilitate understanding of extension responses. A response rate of 68% was obtained by using personalized requests from Administrators and reminders. No nonresponse bias was detected after contacting a random sample of nonrespondents in four states. Items from the Six Americas survey retained original wording (including global warming); the reason for this was explained in the survey.

Demographic Results

Respondents mirror the national pattern of Six Americas with a slight skew to the right (figure 1).

Demographic factors are strongly associated with these perceptions, such as:

State: Florida, Virginia and North Carolina respondents are more likely to be more concerned and alarmed than the Gulf states respondents (figure 2).

Political Leaning: Conservatives are more likely to be dismissive; Liberals are more likely to be concerned (figure 3).

Gender: Women are more likely to be concerned (figure 4).

Coastal Influence: Respondents serving coastal counties (figure 5) are more likely to be alarmed or concerned.

Age: Respondents age 60 or older were most likely to be alarmed or concerned. Respondents age 21-30 and 41-50 were most likely to be dismissive or doubtful.

Education: Those with education beyond a Master's degree are more likely to be more alarmed and less disengaged.

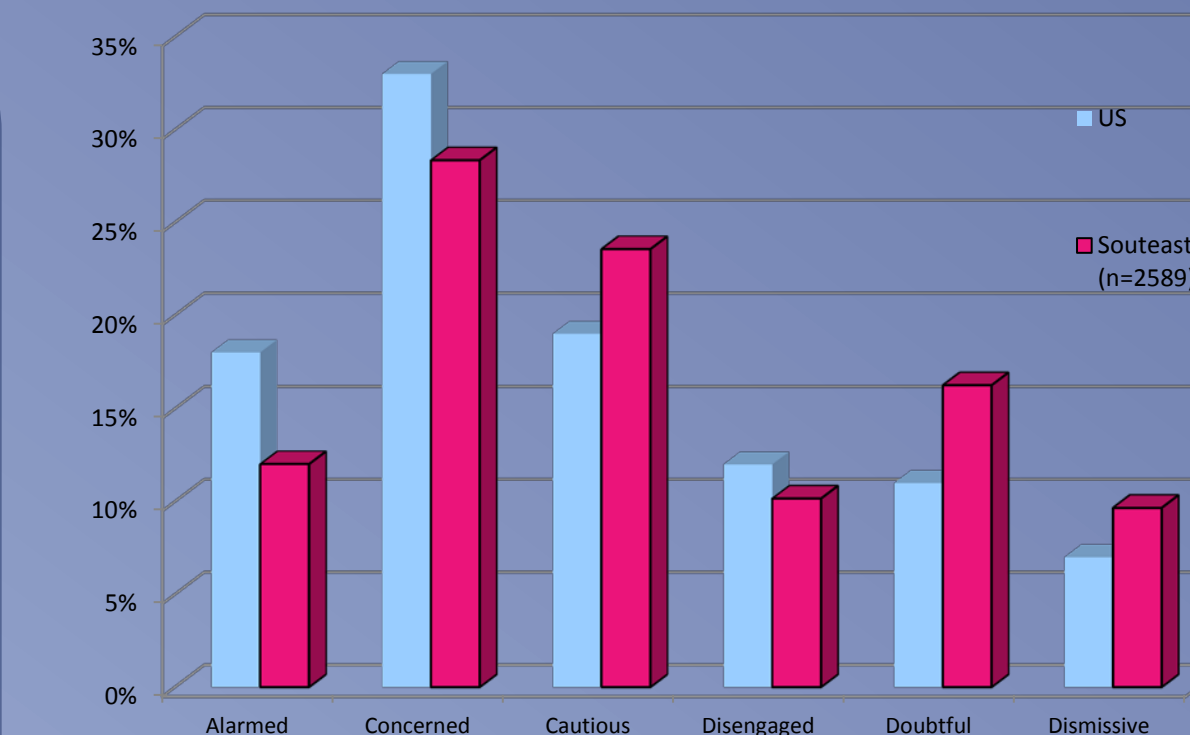


Figure 1: Extension respondents in the SE reflect all six categories, with a skew to the right.

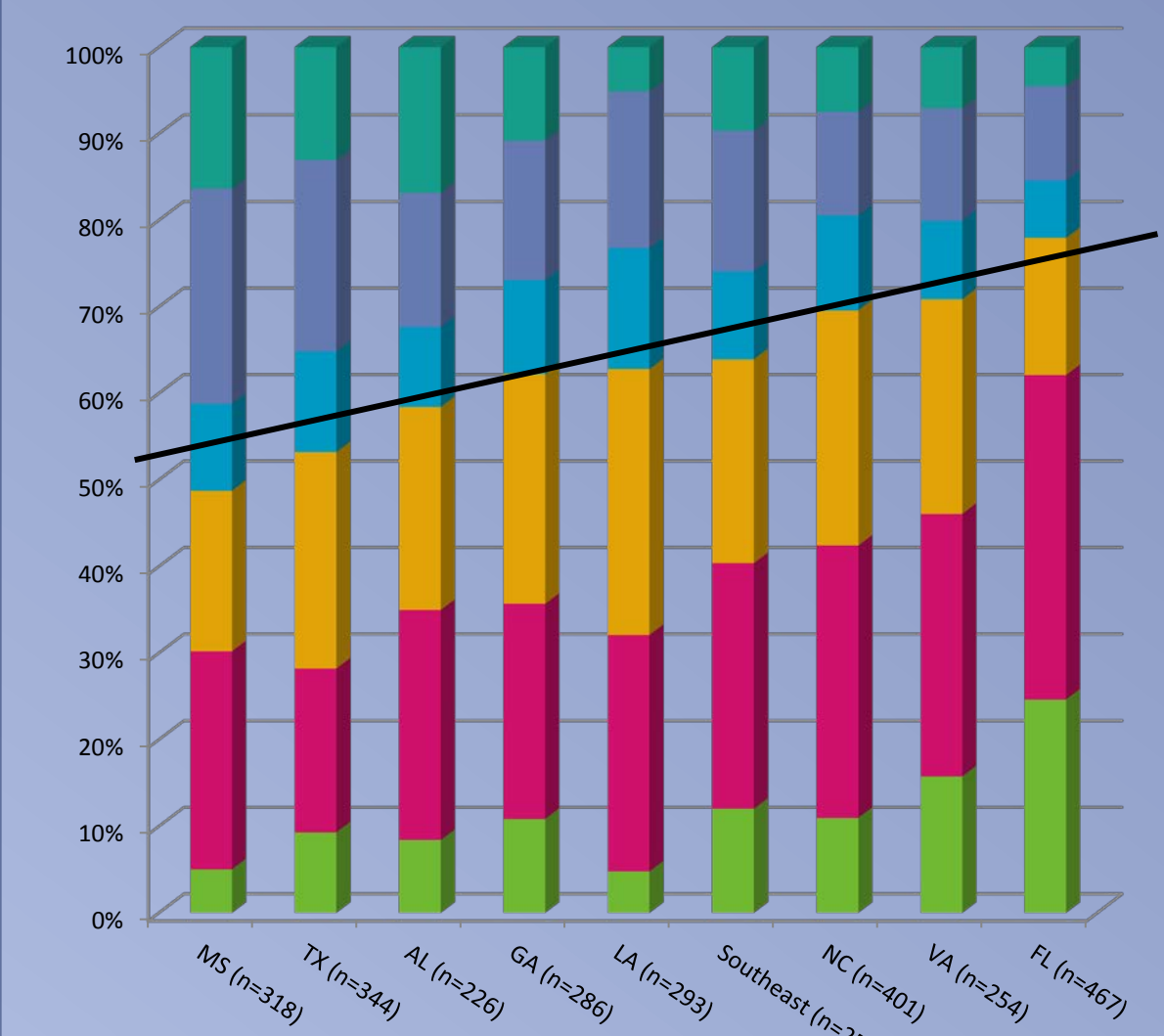


Figure 2: Respondents vary by state.

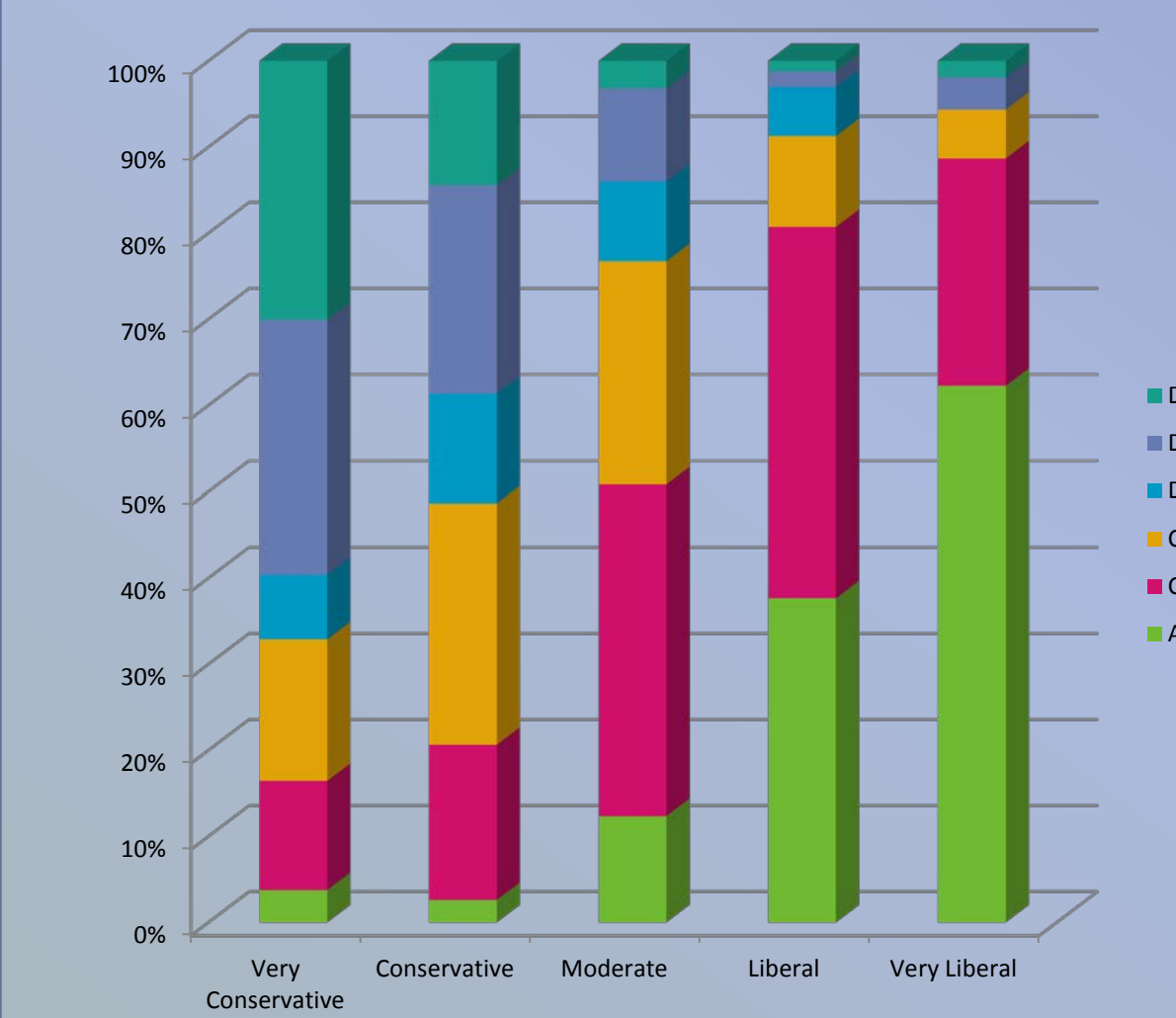


Figure 3: Political Leaning is significantly predictive of perception, with liberal respondents more likely to be alarmed and concerned; conservative respondents more likely to be doubtful and dismissive.

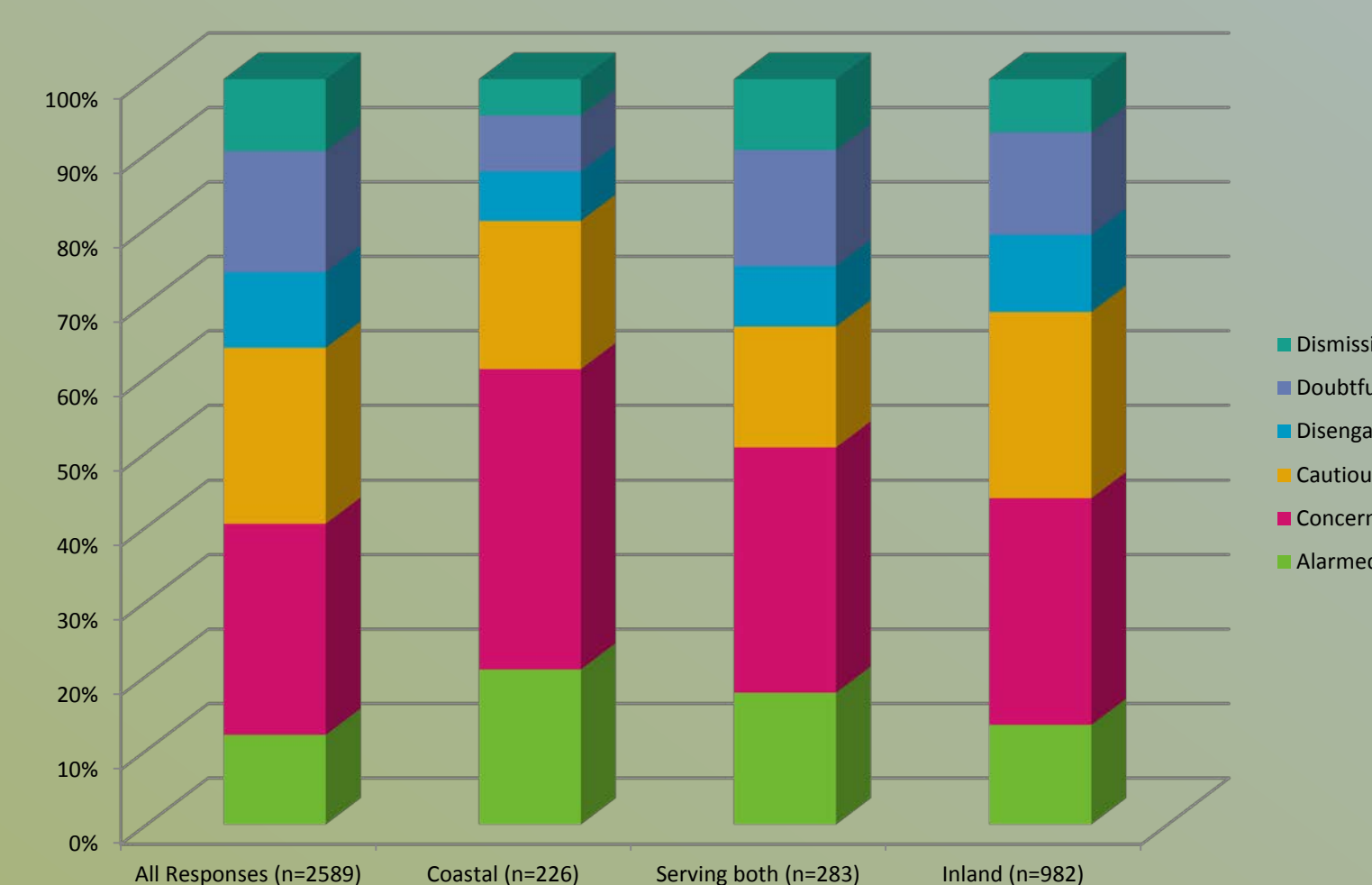


Figure 5: Coastal respondents are more likely to be alarmed and concerned than their inland counterparts.

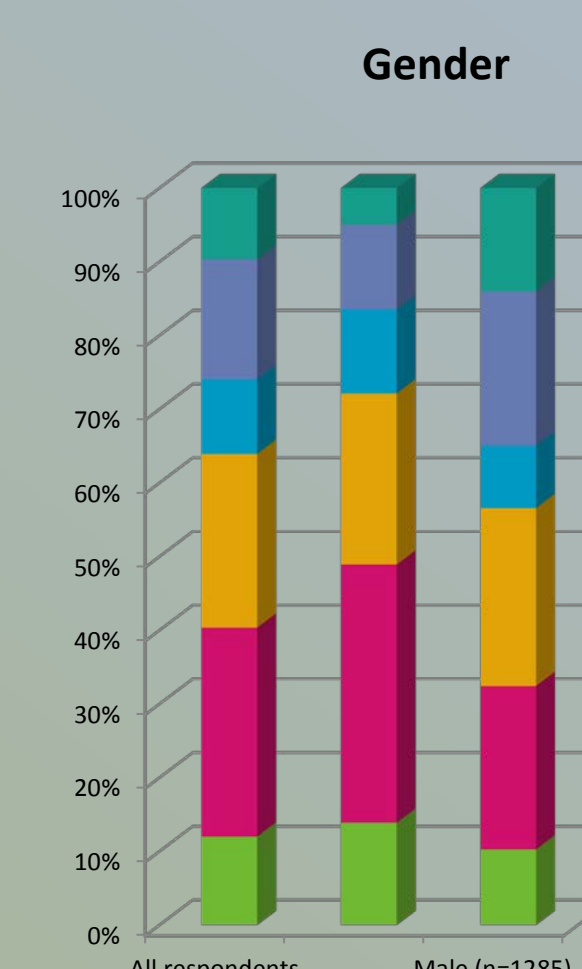


Figure 4: Women are more likely to be concerned; less likely to be doubtful, than men.

Program Area Results

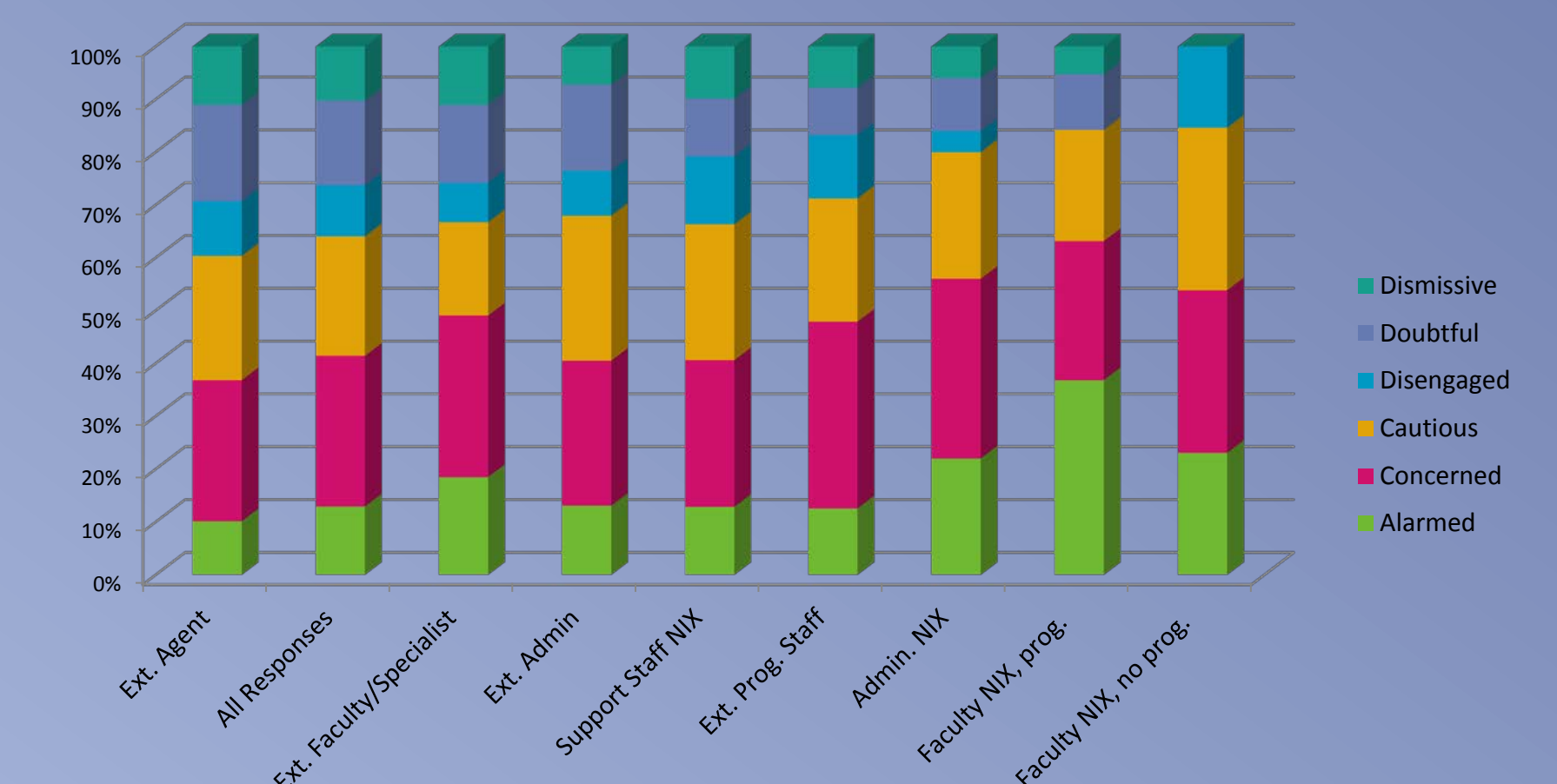
Respondents also vary by their major program area, with agriculture agents being more doubtful and dismissive. Natural resource agents coalesced into two groups, with forestry and wildlife agents less alarmed and concerned than environmental education agents.

Some of these differences probably reflect demographic patterns associated with program areas:

- ❖ Natural resource faculty are less likely to be conservative.
- ❖ Natural resource respondents represent more PhDs.
- ❖ Agriculture faculty are more likely to be men.
- ❖ Agriculture faculty are more likely to be conservative.

In addition, the role respondents have in Extension contributes to perceptions of climate change, with agents being the least concerned (figure 6).

Figure 6: Agents are less alarmed and more doubtful than state specialists or Extension administrators.



Implications

The Extension faculty who we plan to work with to develop and deliver PINEMAP programs represent the full set of perceptions about the existence and urgency of climate change. Beginning with faculty who are concerned or alarmed may be the easiest way to launch activity in a state, particularly if they are well-respected by their colleagues. Administrator and specialist leadership may be helpful to making climate ISTs more acceptable among conservative agents.

References

Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C. & Smith, N. (2010) Global Warming's Six Americas, June 2010. Yale University and George Mason University, New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change. <http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/SixAmericasJune2010.pdf>
Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C. & Leiserowitz, A. (2009). Global Warming's Six Americas 2009: An audience segmentation analysis. Yale University, New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change. Available at: www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/05/6americas.html