

Industries, politicians, and interest groups often cast doubt on scientific or policy evidence in order to defend their causes. This strategy, called “doubt mongering”, is to insist that science is unsettled and we cannot be certain about an issue yet. Hence, it is premature and not wise to act, either on policy-level or by individual actions. Independent research confirmed that, indeed, even small dissent among scientists leads to a significant decrease in public support for the policy. Given a common assumption in psychology, philosophy, or economy, that people strive for certainty, the effectiveness of “doubt mongering” strategies poses interesting questions: Why even mentioning uncertainty undermines otherwise overwhelming evidence and leads to a decrease in policy support? Why negligible minority can effectively cast doubt on the public’s beliefs and attitudes? Relatedly, what information processing strategies do people use when confronted with evidence that contradicts their beliefs or values? What strategies are useful and when? Furthermore, given that political Right, as compared to Left, has a lower tolerance for uncertainty, is there an ideological asymmetry in preferences for *not knowing*?

In contrast to existing theorizing, I propose that people not always seek certainty. Instead, I posit that uncertainty can be comforting. I also propose to investigate whether these tendencies are symmetric across the ideological spectrum. Furthermore, I question the assumption that biased beliefs are the outcome of superficial information processing, while unbiased outcomes are due to effortful information processing. I propose that people might undertake a wide range of strategies to reach the conclusions they want: these strategies might include information gathering or avoidance, careful or effortless information processing.

I propose to study these questions under two comprehensive work packages. Both packages employ a variety of methods, samples, and contexts. In Work Package 1, consisting of textual analysis, correlational, longitudinal, and experimental studies, I propose to examine the prevalence of certainty avoidance related to science and politics as well as its psychological antecedents and consequences. In Work Package 2, consisting of correlational studies, experiments, psychophysiological studies, I propose to examine the strategies people use when they update their beliefs about science and politics.

The proposed research is relevant to understanding public beliefs about important social issues such as vaccine hesitancy, climate change scepticism, economic or gender inequalities, attitudes toward immigration, to name but a few. Understanding these issues seem to be especially important given the uncertainties of everyday life and the future of the world. This project can help in understanding why people and societies polarize, extending existing theorizing and empirical analyzes. It can also provide knowledge for designing interventions aimed at bridging ideological gaps. It could also provide guidelines on how to communicate science and policies that enhance particular motivations and strategies of information processing. Thus, encouraging engagement and understanding instead of confusion and chaos.