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George Mason University  
Center for Climate Change Communication

## **Consumerism & Consumer Activism Among Global Warming's Six Americas**

Environmental Protection Agency  
Forum on Climate Change and Materials Management

Dec. 11, 2012

Connie Roser-Renouf, PhD

# Americans differ in their beliefs & concern about global warming.

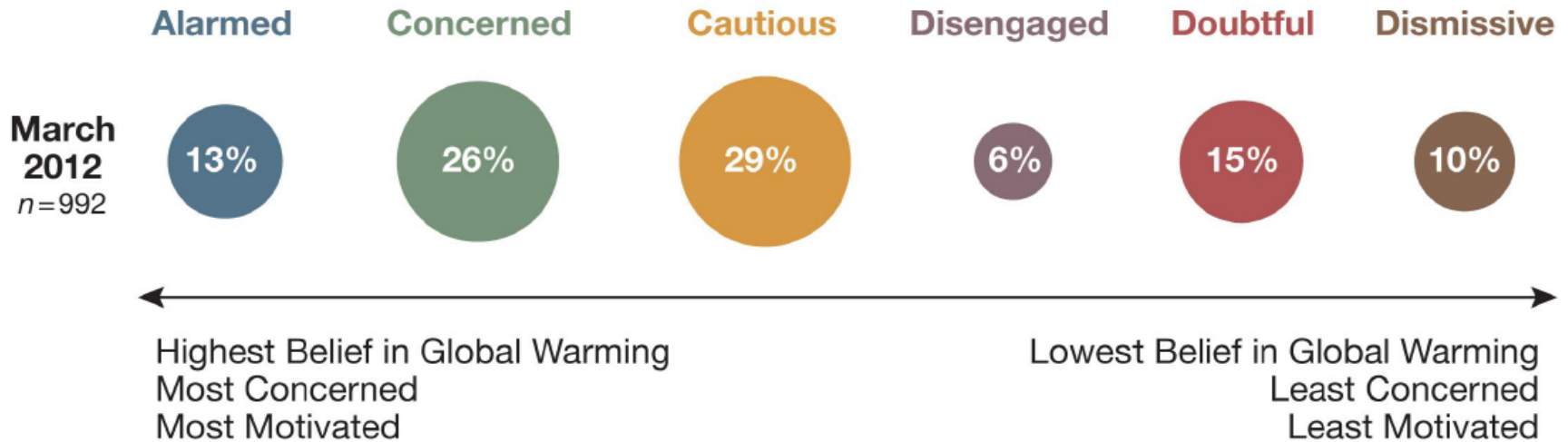


- They fall into six distinct groups.
- Each group has a unique set of beliefs, values, opinions and actions.
- Understanding the differences is vital to effective engagement.
- When we know what our audiences think & how they feel, we can speak to their concerns more directly.



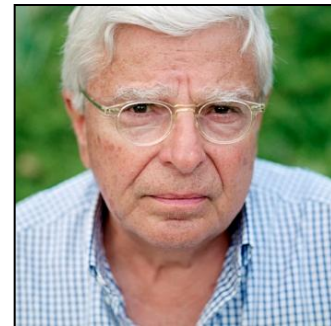
# Global Warming's "Six Americas"

Figure 1: Proportion of the U.S. Adult Population in the Six Americas, March 2012

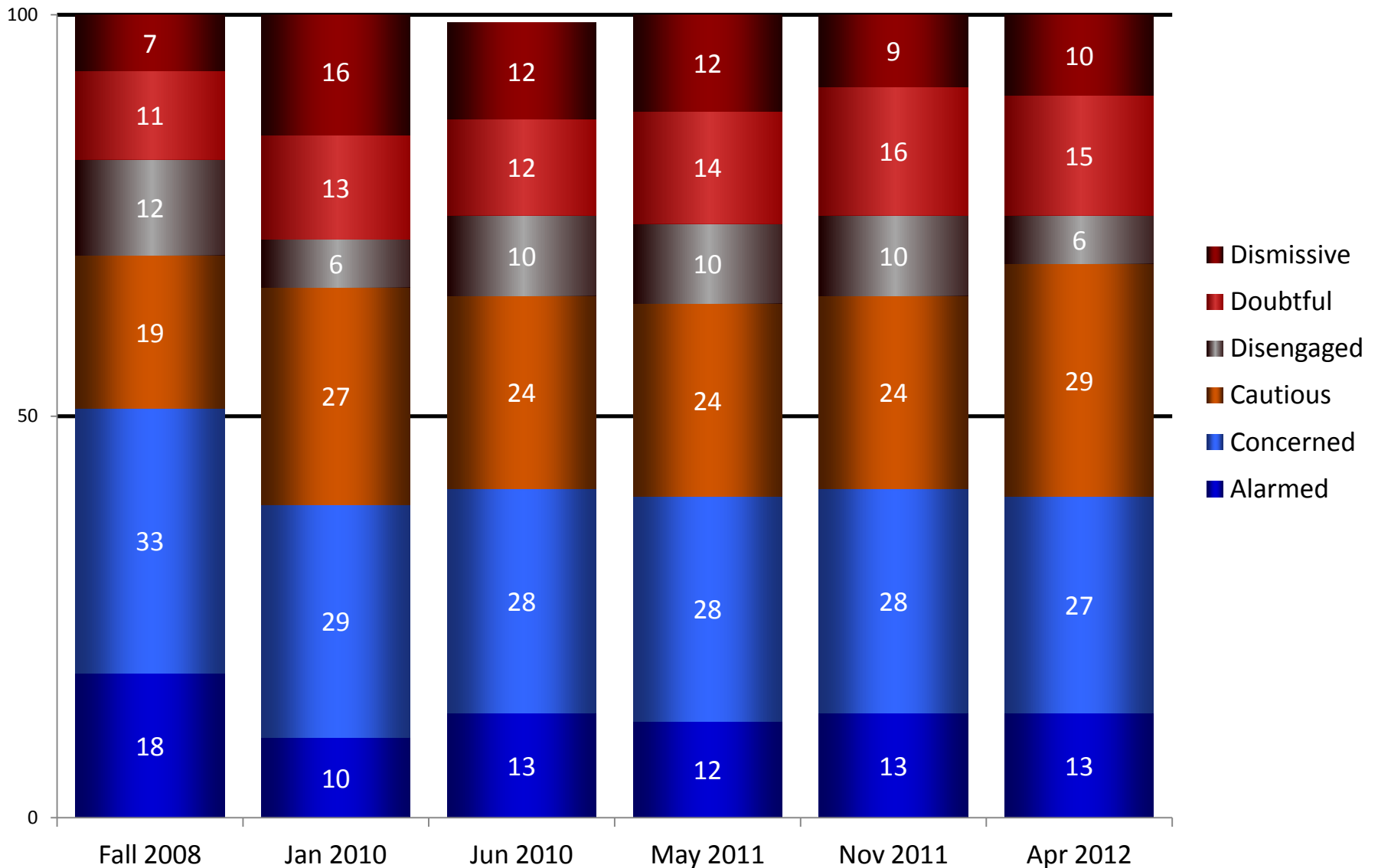


Proportion represented by area

Source: Yale / George Mason University



# Proportion of Americans in the Six Americas, 2008-2012

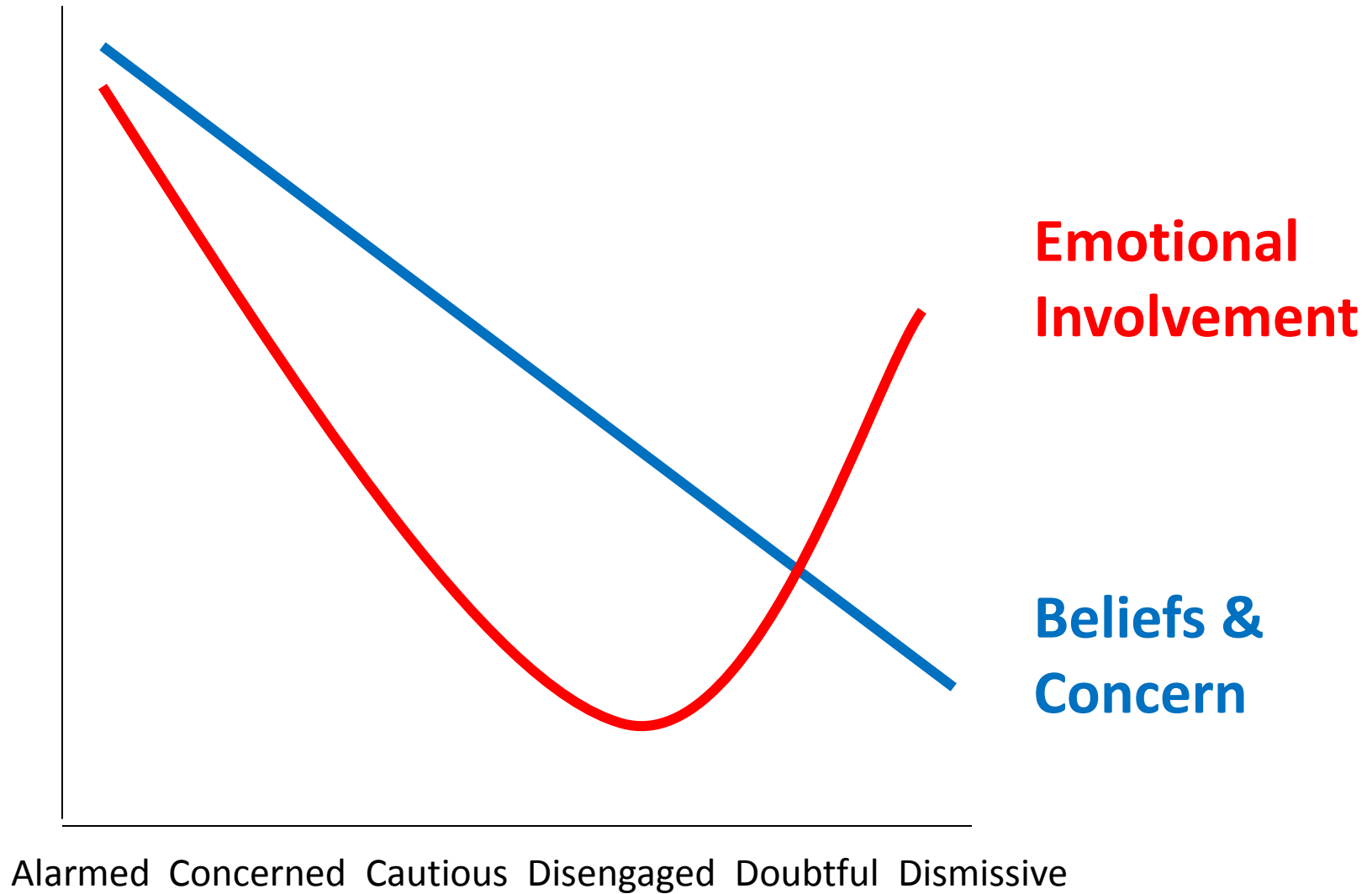




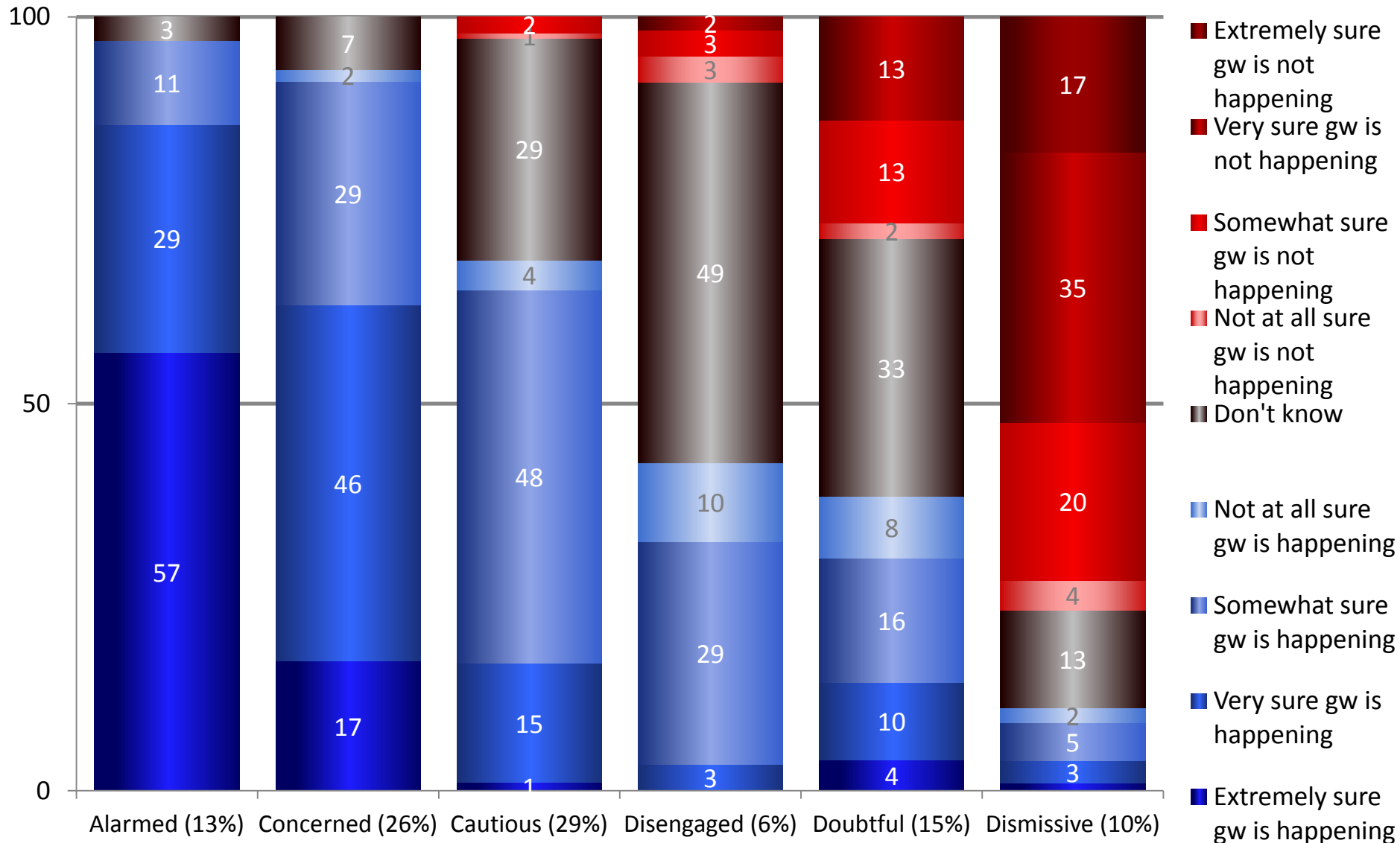


**BELIEFS,  
ATTITUDES,  
& ISSUE  
INVOLVEMENT**

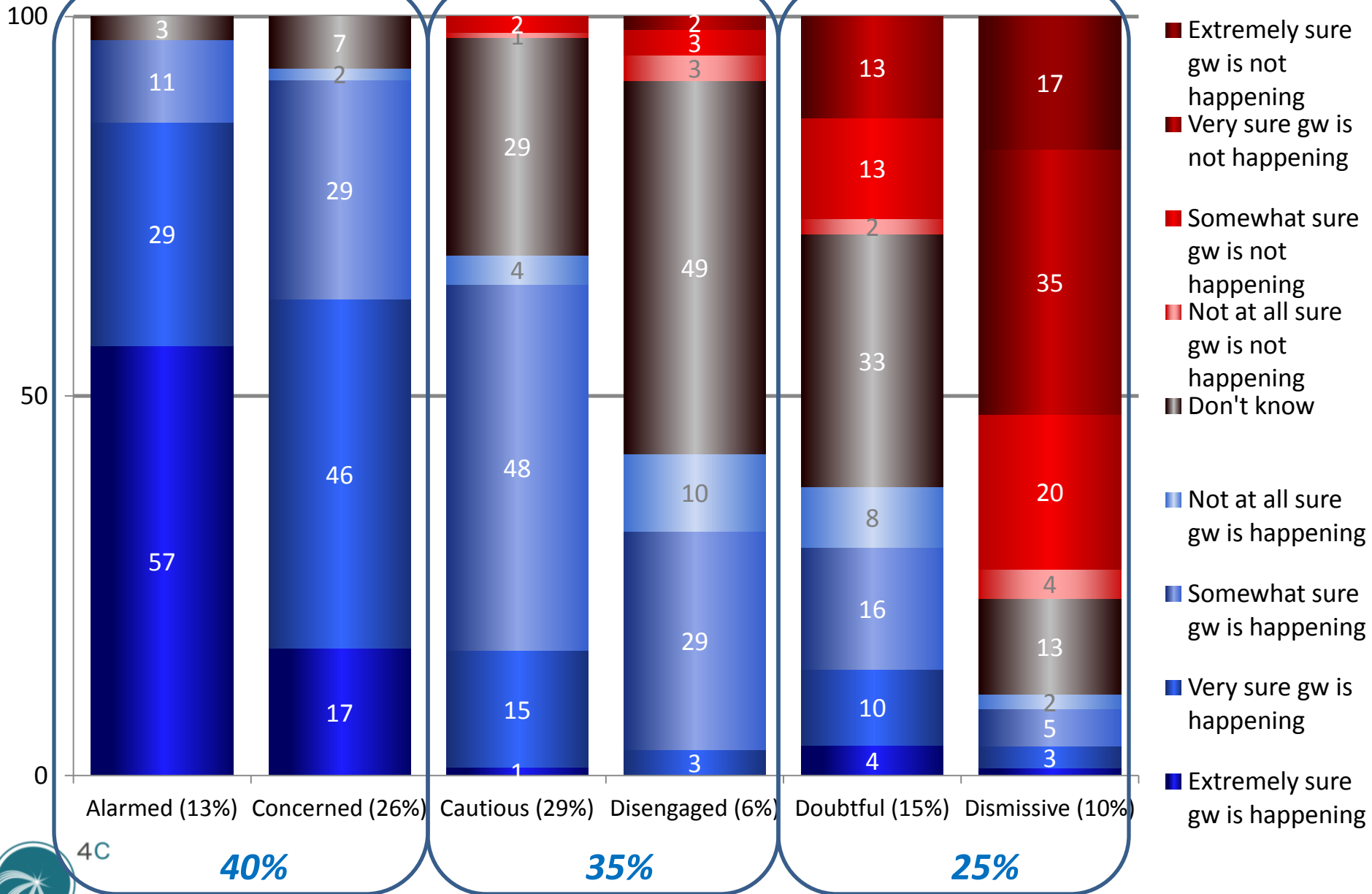
# Primary Differences between the Six Groups



# Certainty of Belief about the Reality of Global Warming

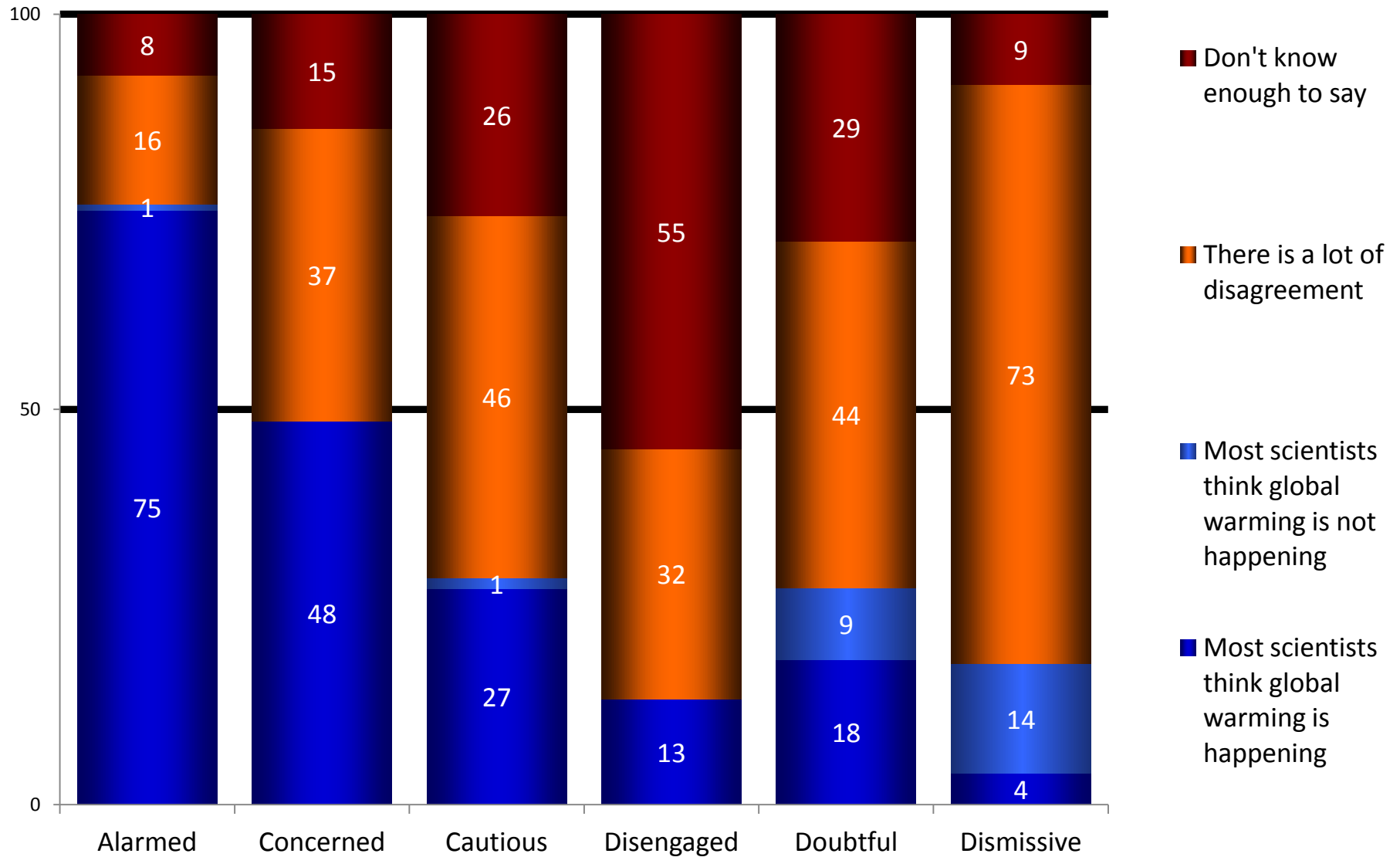


# Certainty of Belief about the Reality of Global Warming



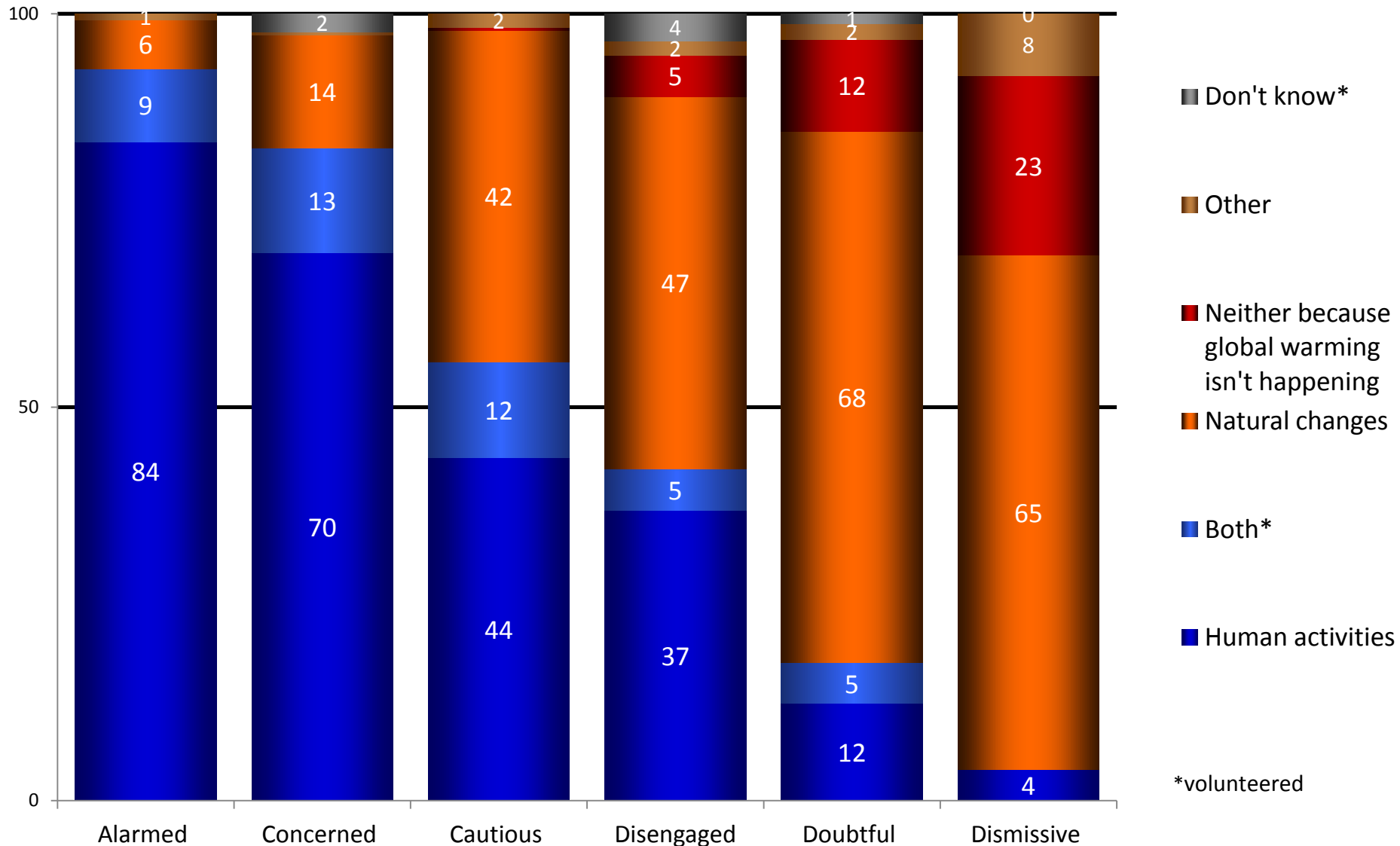


# Perceptions of Scientific Agreement on Global Warming



# Perceived Cause of Global Warming

"Assuming global warming is happening, do you think it is..."

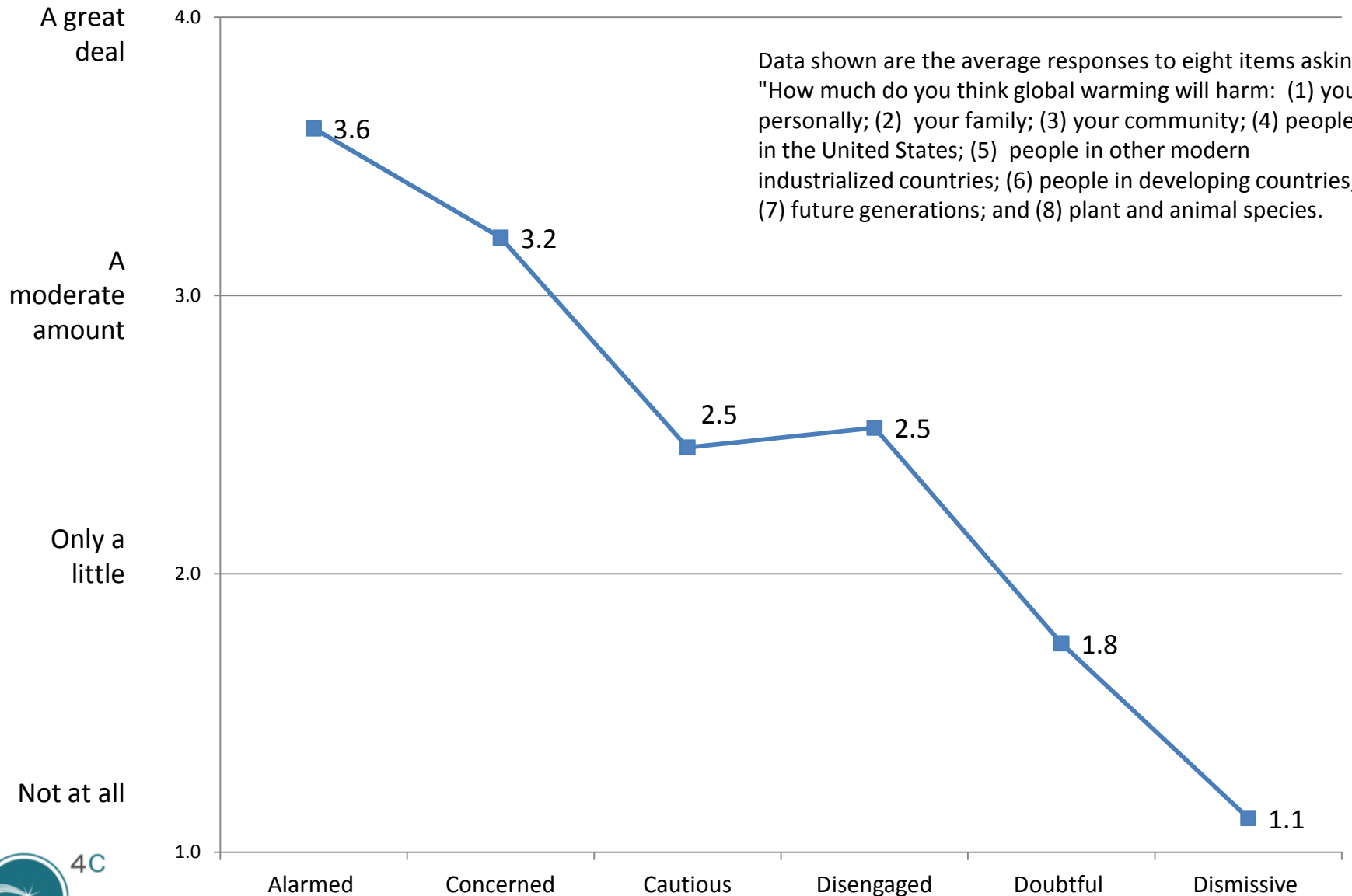


\*volunteered

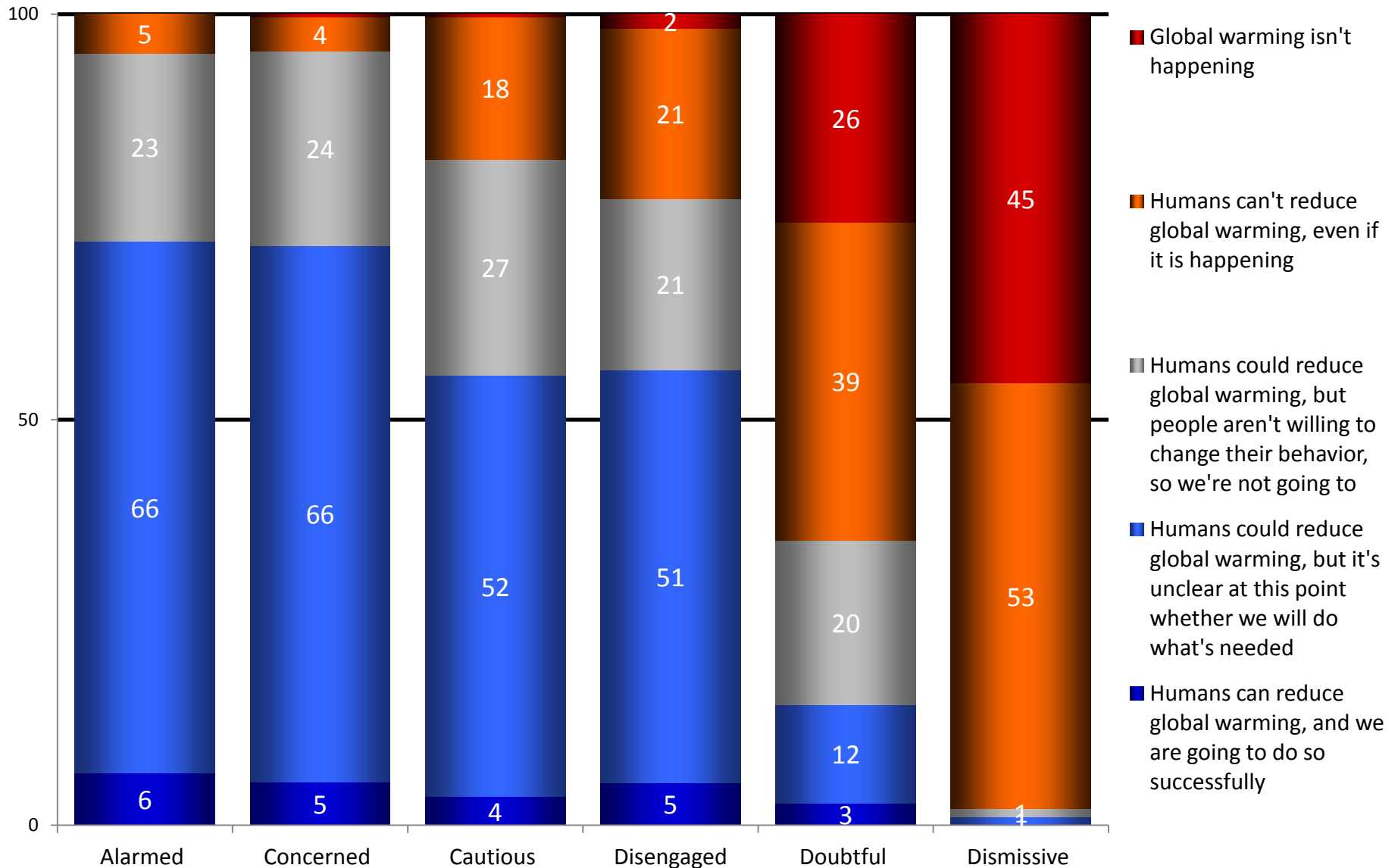


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# Perceived Harm of Global Warming

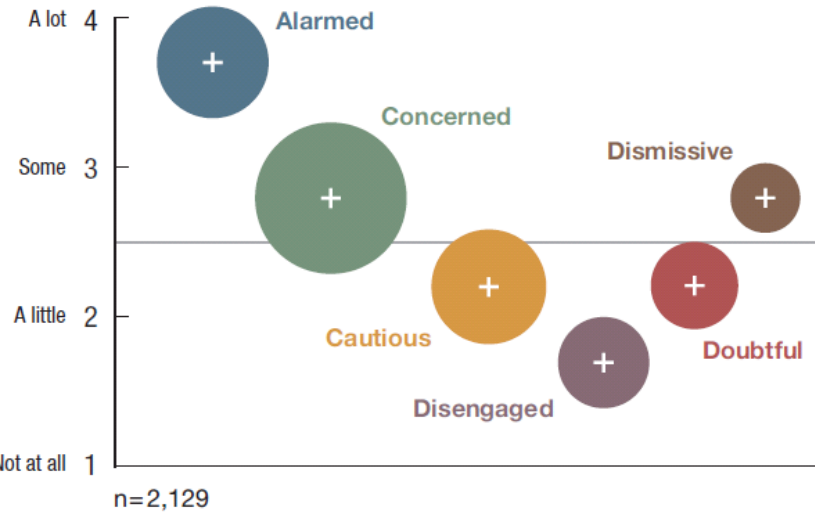


# Perceived Solvability of Global Warming

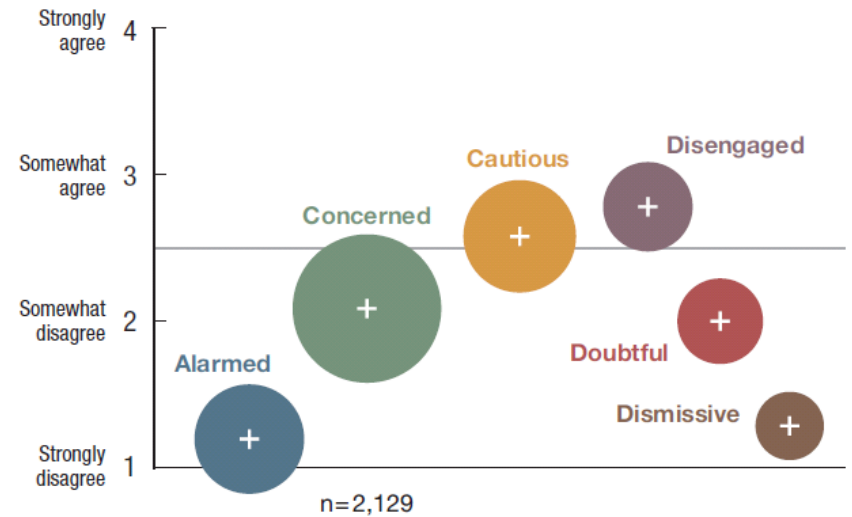


# Issue Involvement

*How much had you thought about global warming before today?*



*“I could easily change my mind about global warming”*



A satellite view of Earth from space, showing the Americas and the Atlantic Ocean. The word "VALUES" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters in the center of the image.

**VALUES**



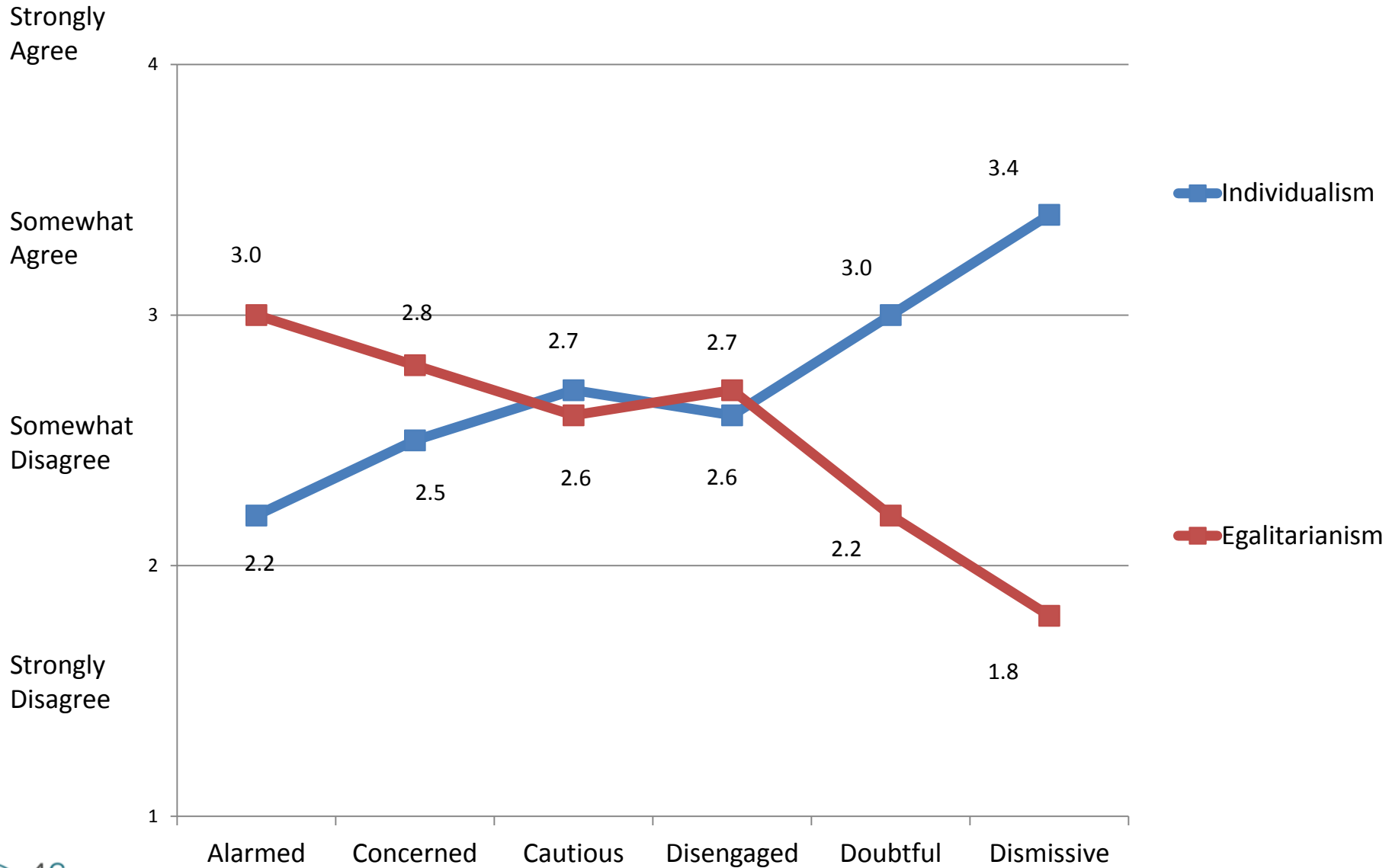
## Individualism

- If the government spent less time trying to fix everyone's problems, we'd all be a lot better off.
- Our government tries to do too many things for too many people. We should just let people take care of themselves.
- The government interferes too much in our everyday lives.
- Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.

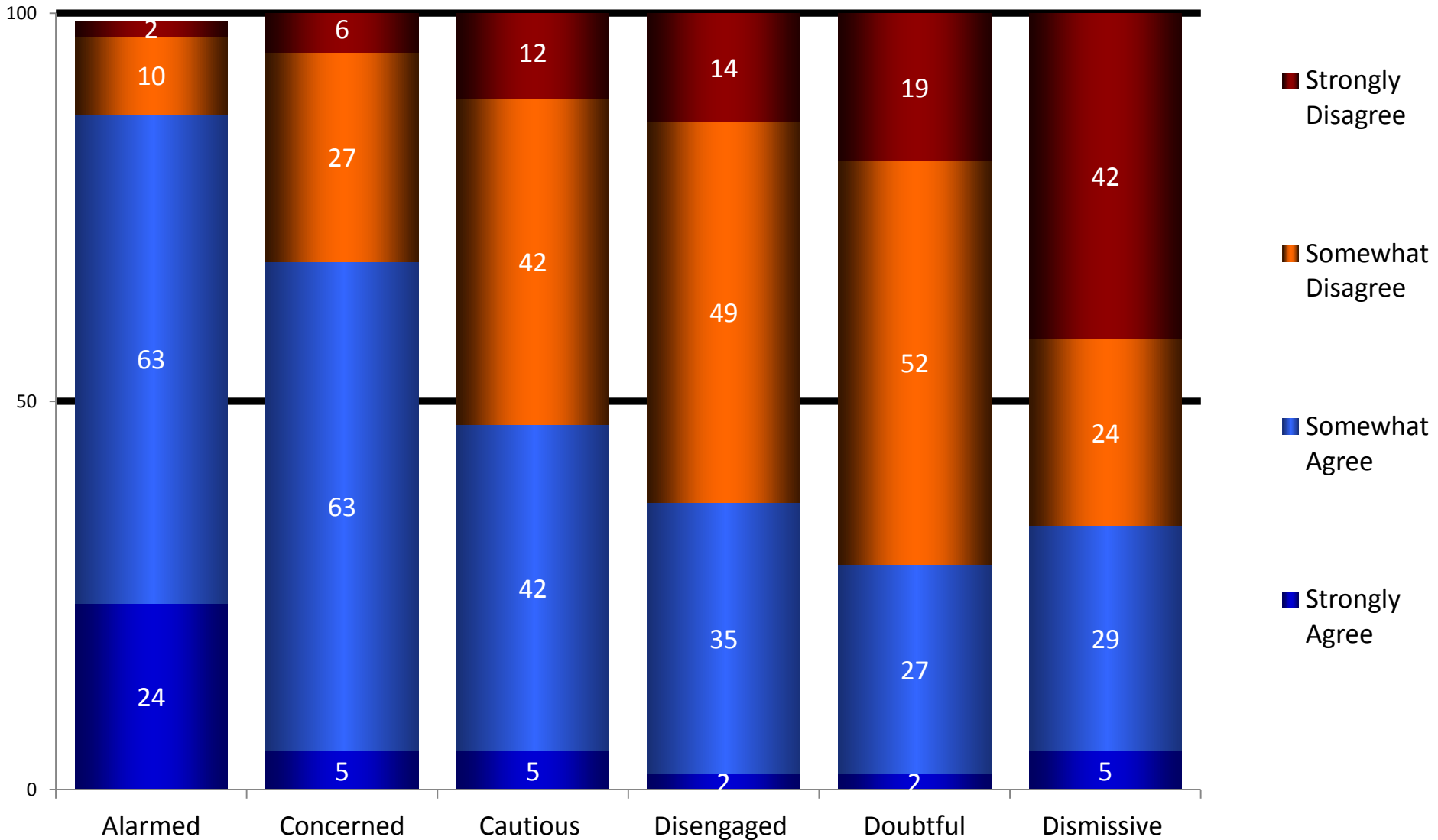
## Egalitarianism

- The world would be a more peaceful place if its wealth were divided more equally among nations.
- In my ideal society, all basic needs (food, housing, health care, education) would be guaranteed by the government for everyone.
- I support government programs to get rid of poverty.
- Discrimination against minorities is still a very serious problem in our society.

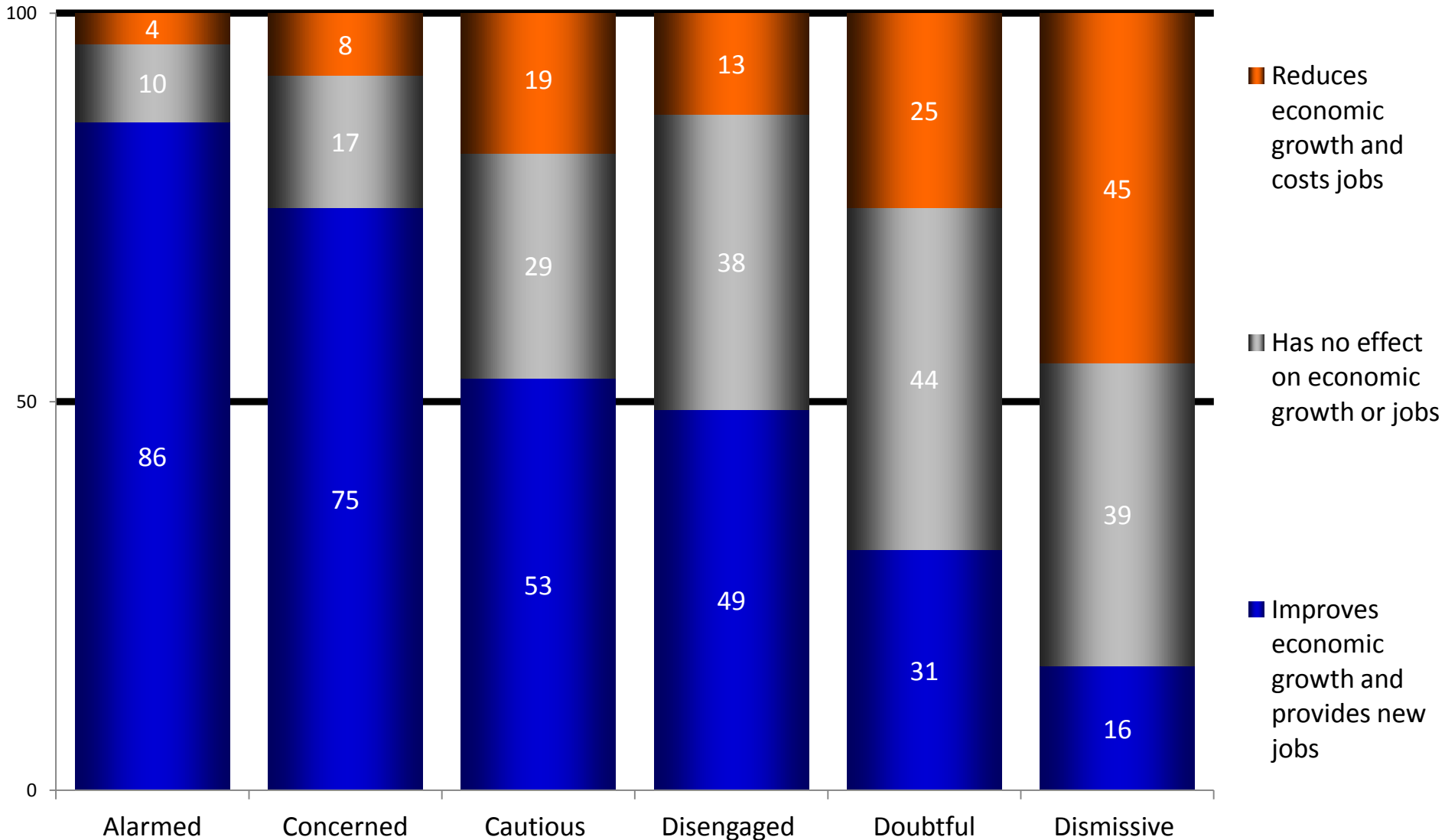
# Cultural Values



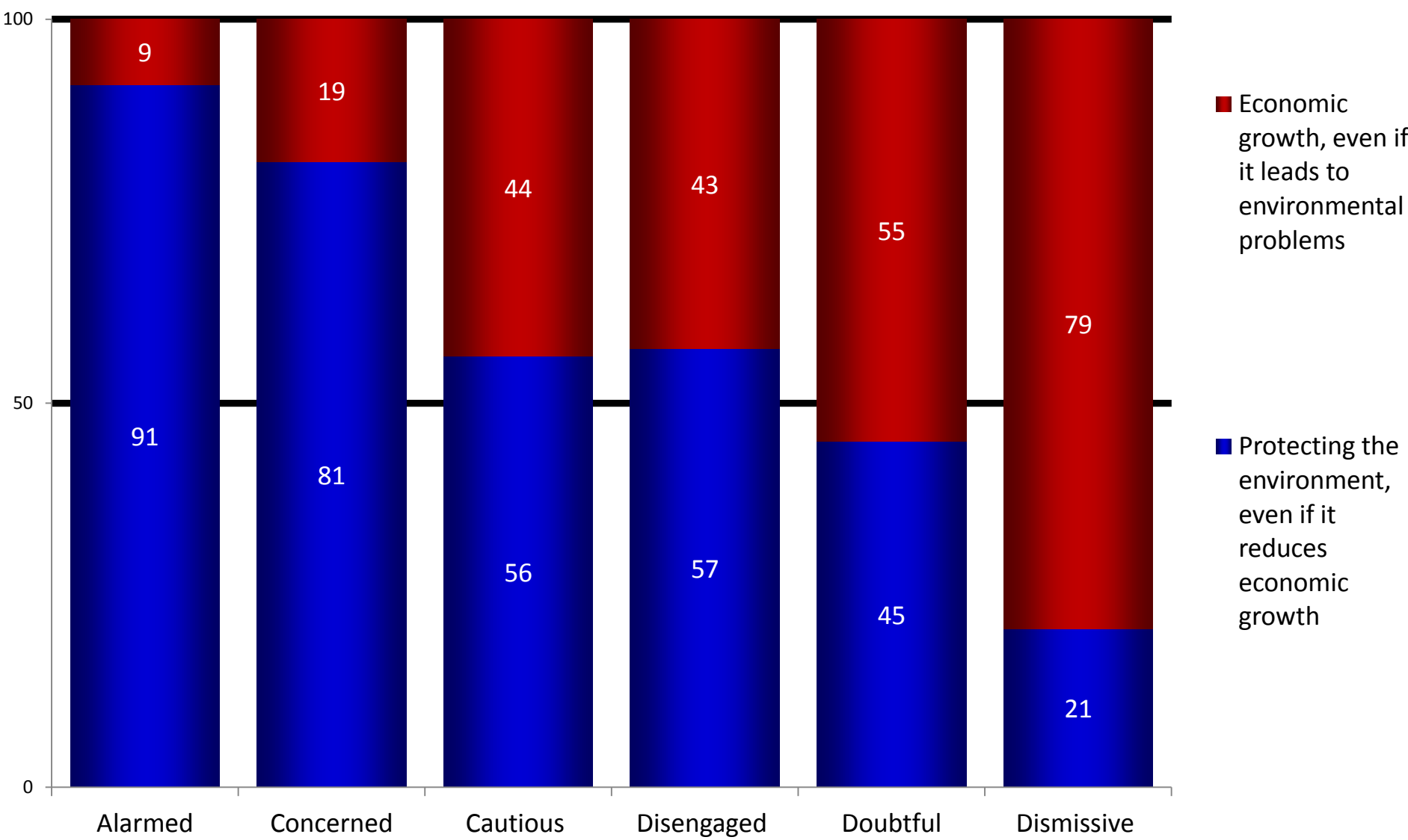
# "I consider myself an environmentalist."



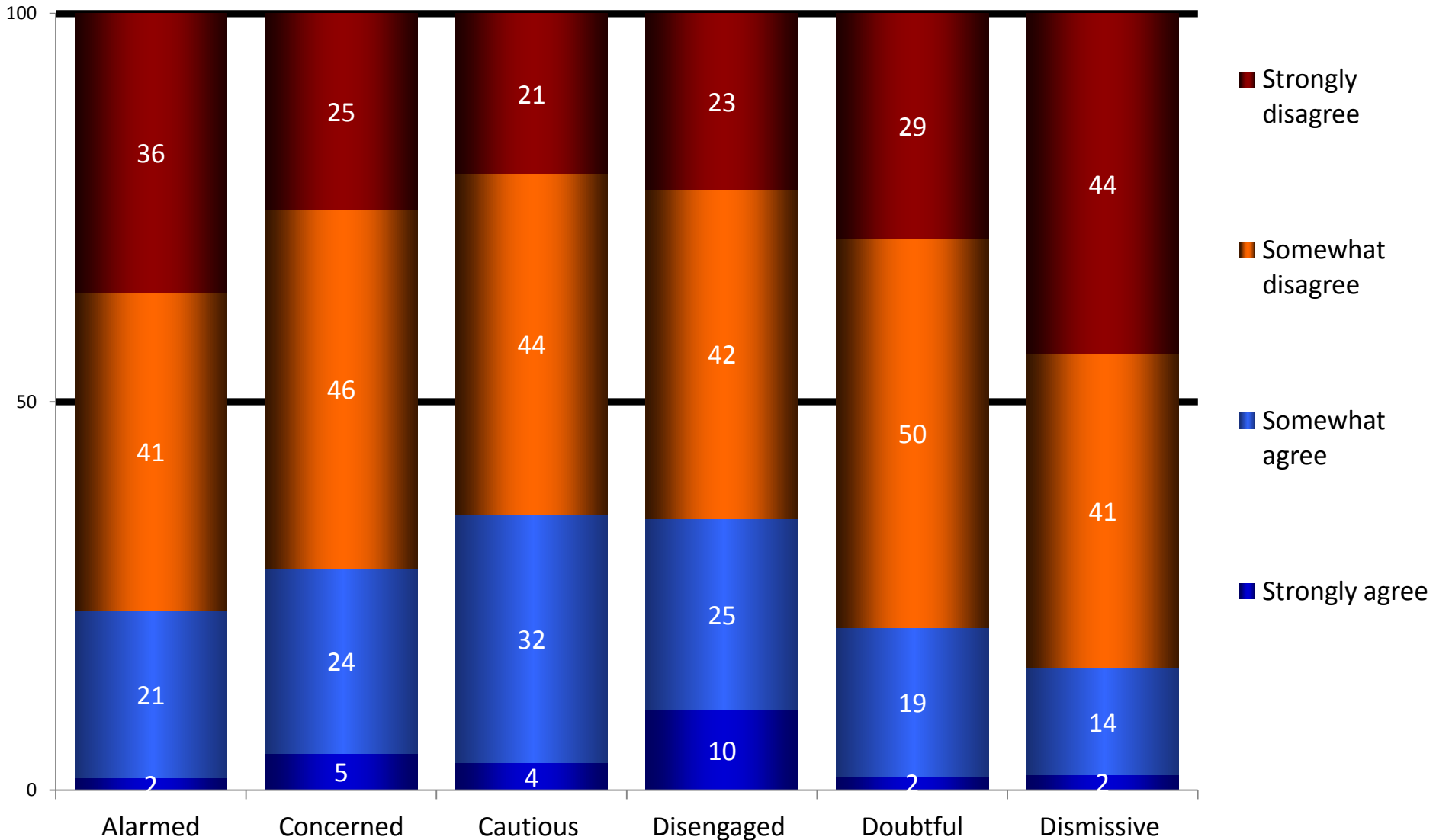
# "Overall, do you think that protecting the environment..."



# When there is a conflict between environmental protection and economic growth, which do you think is more important?

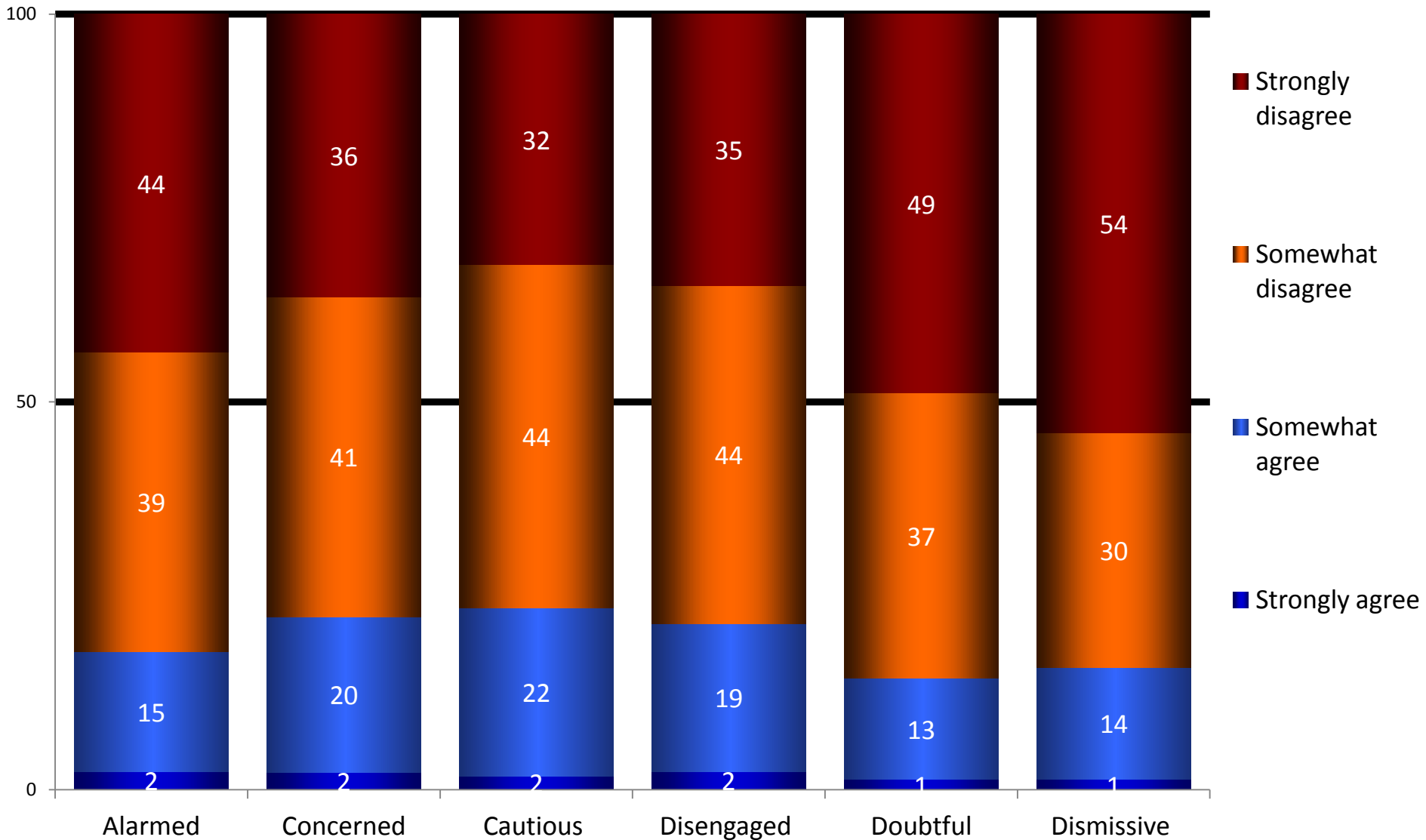


# "It's very important to me to have a home as well-equipped and furnished as that of other people I know."

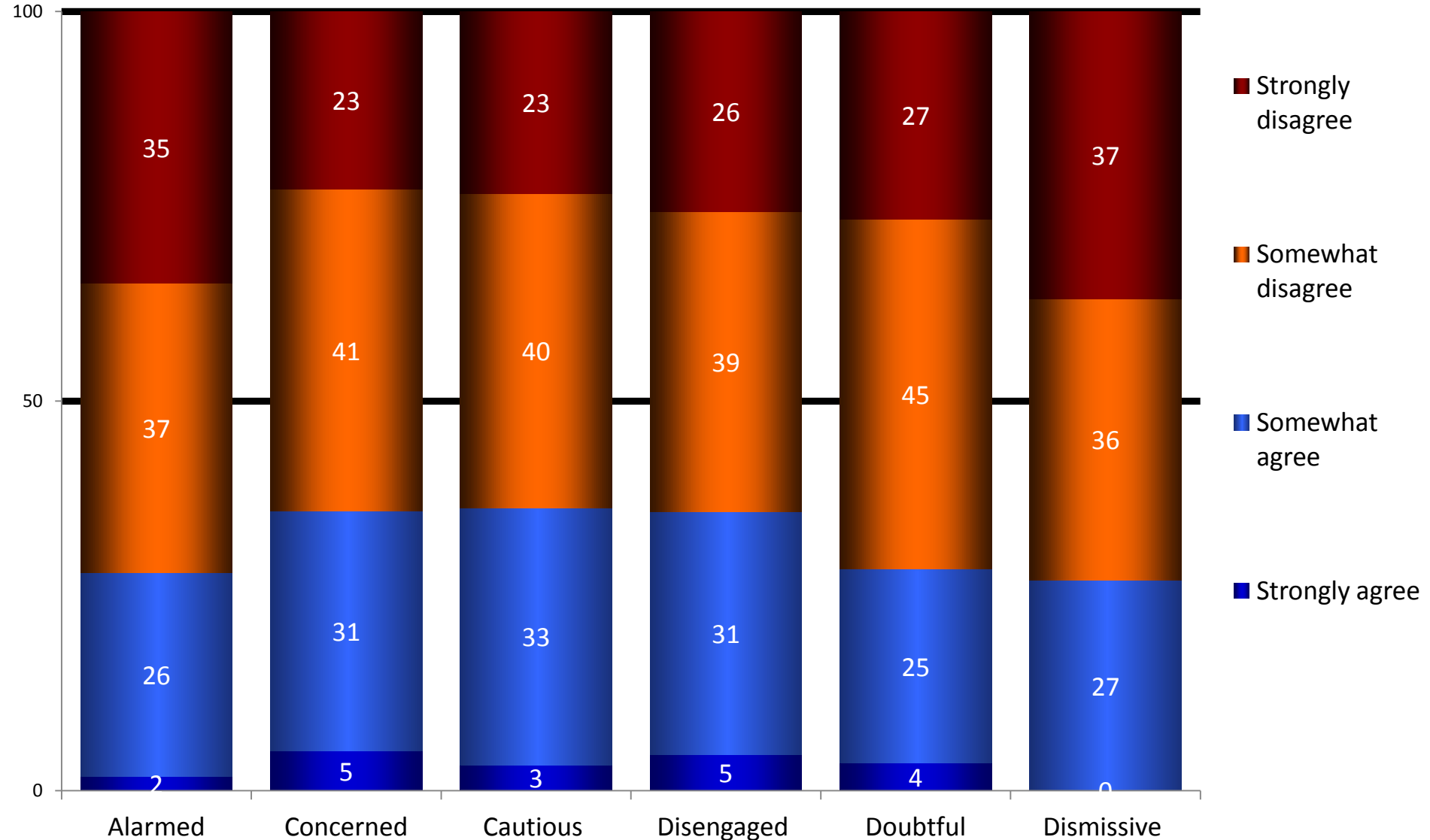




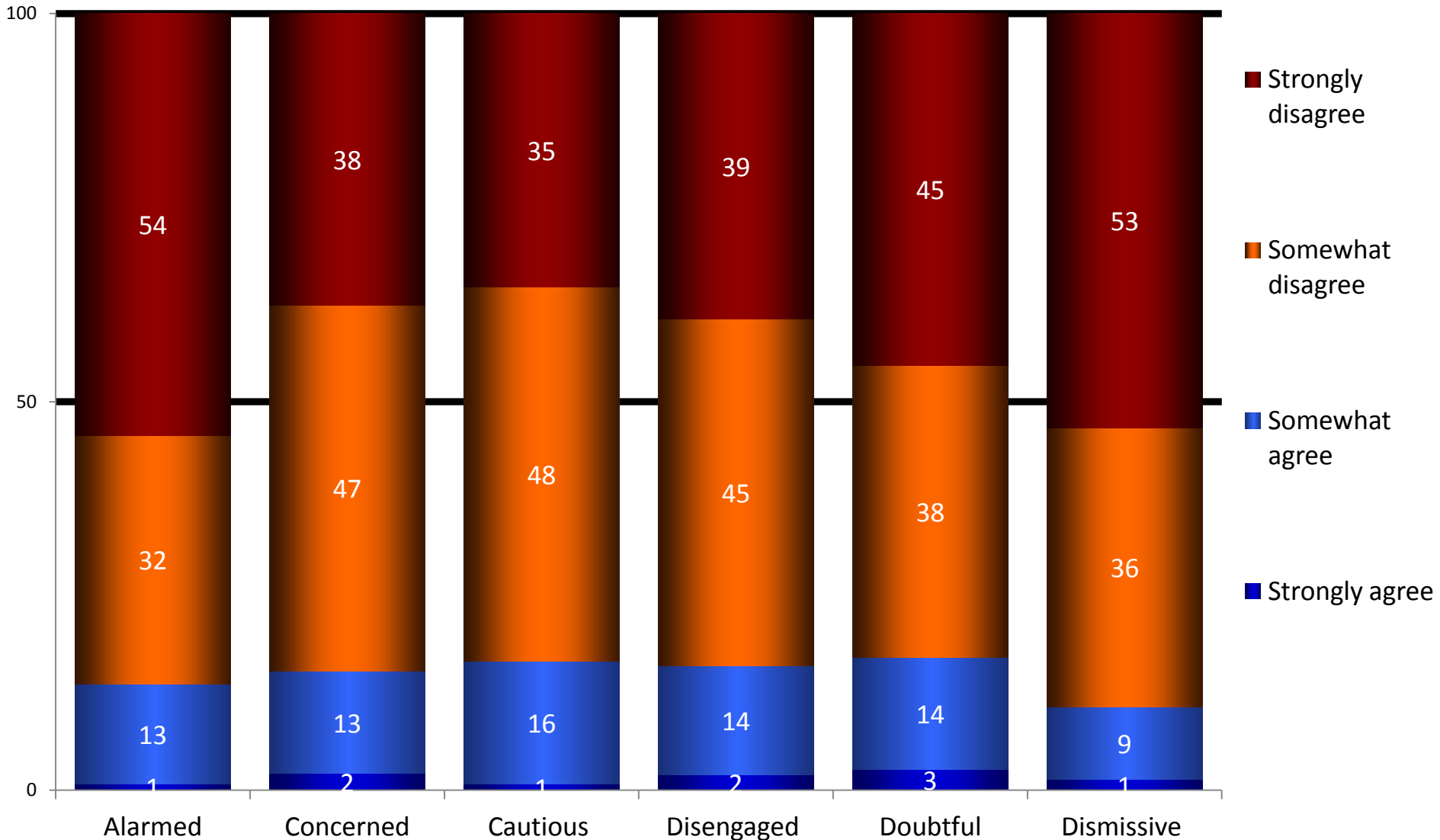
# "I follow the latest trends and fashions."



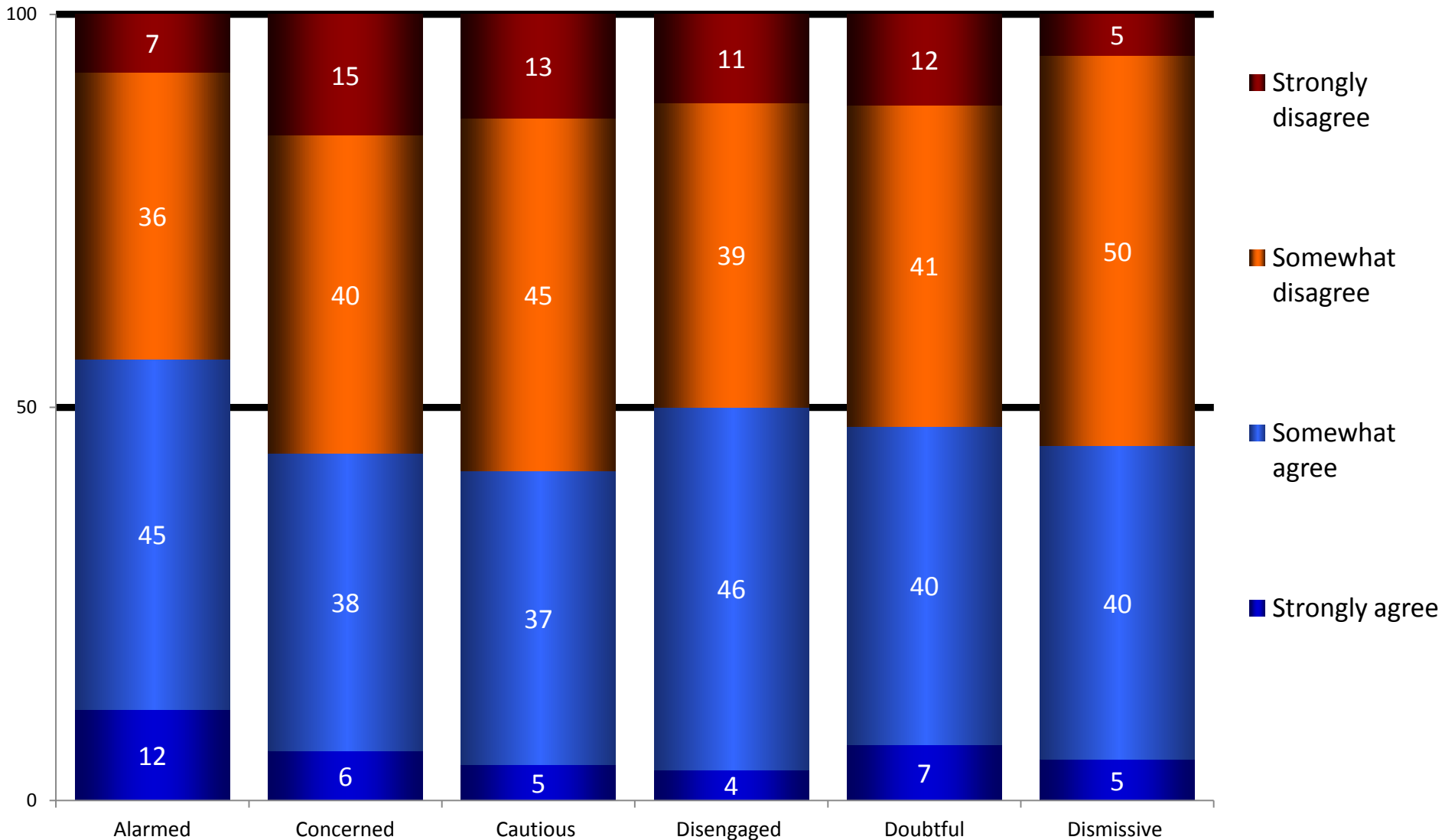
# "You can tell if people are successful by the things they own and the way they dress."



# "I prefer brands and products that make me feel accepted by others."



# "I would rather make something than buy it."

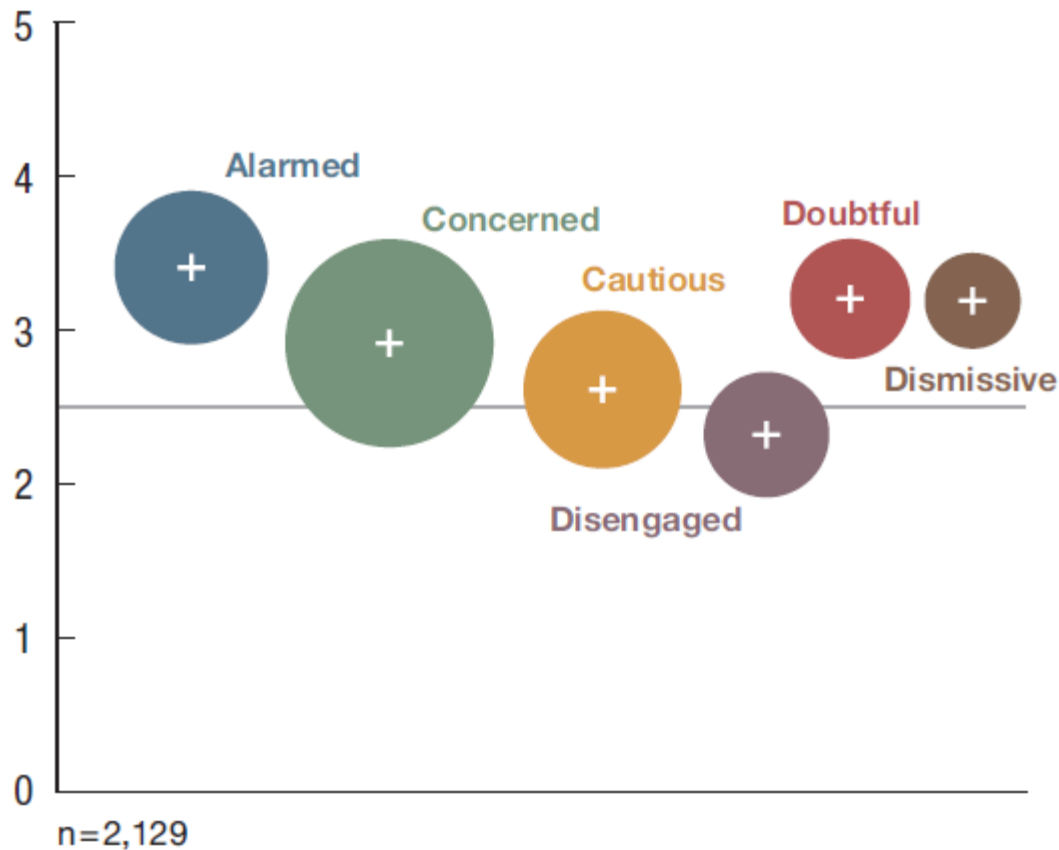


A satellite view of Earth showing the Americas and surrounding oceans, with the text "CONSERVATION ACTIONS" overlaid in the center.

# CONSERVATION ACTIONS

## Figure 26: Number of energy efficiency improvements made to home

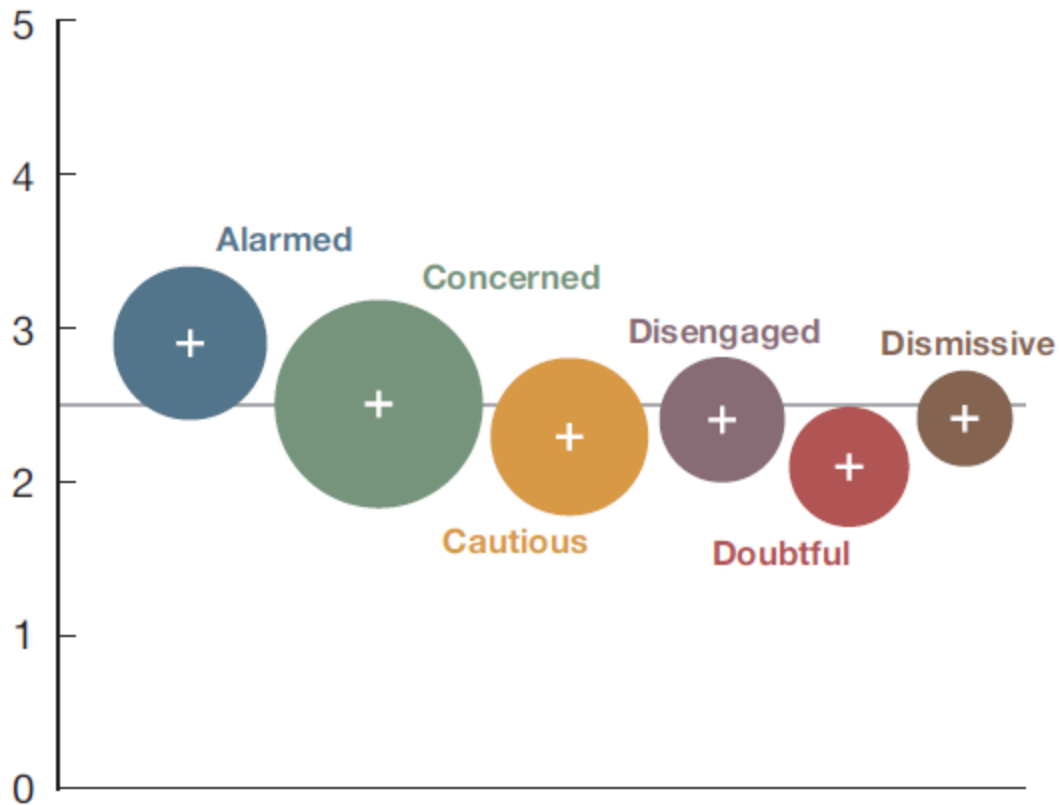
*Number of improvements made from the following list of five: Insulating the attic; caulking and weather-stripping the home; installation of an energy-efficient water heater; installation of an energy-efficient furnace; installation of an energy-efficient air conditioner.*





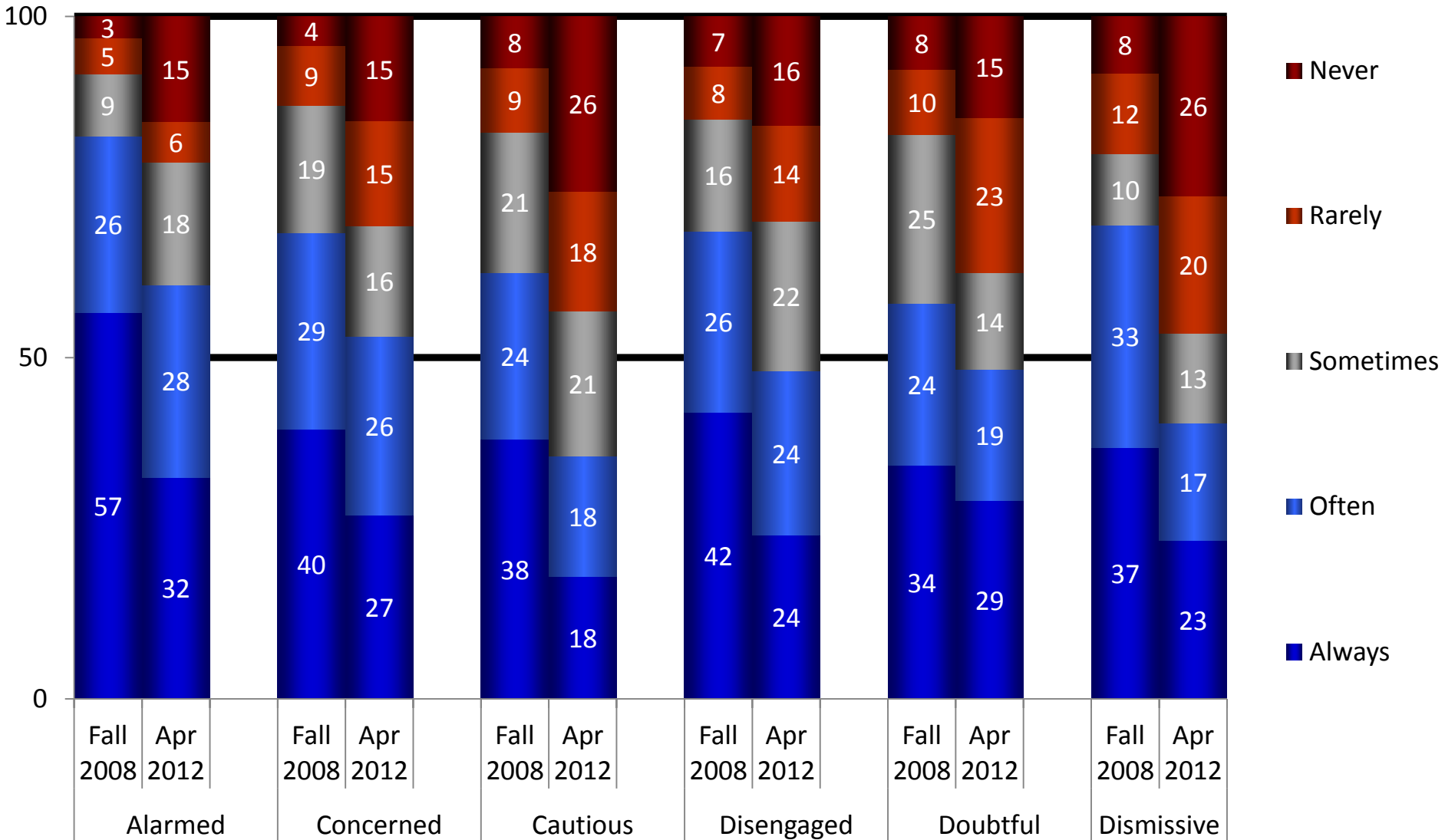
## Figure 27: Number of habitual conservation actions

Number of actions that respondent does "always" or "often" from the following list of five: turning off unneeded lights; raising the thermostat to 76 or higher or using less air conditioning in summer; lowering the thermostat to 68 or cooler in winter; walking or biking instead of driving; using public transportation or car pools.

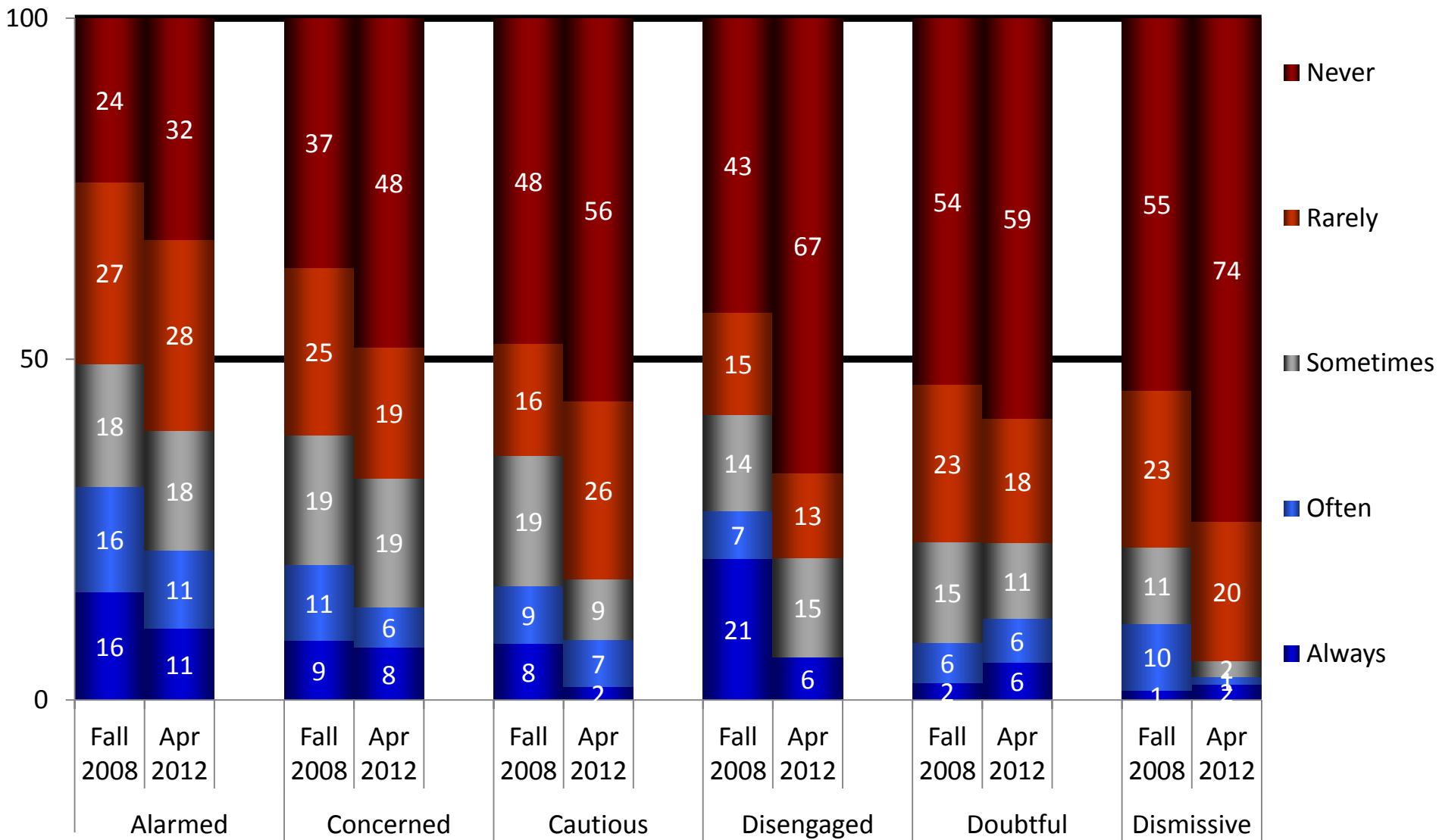


n=2,129

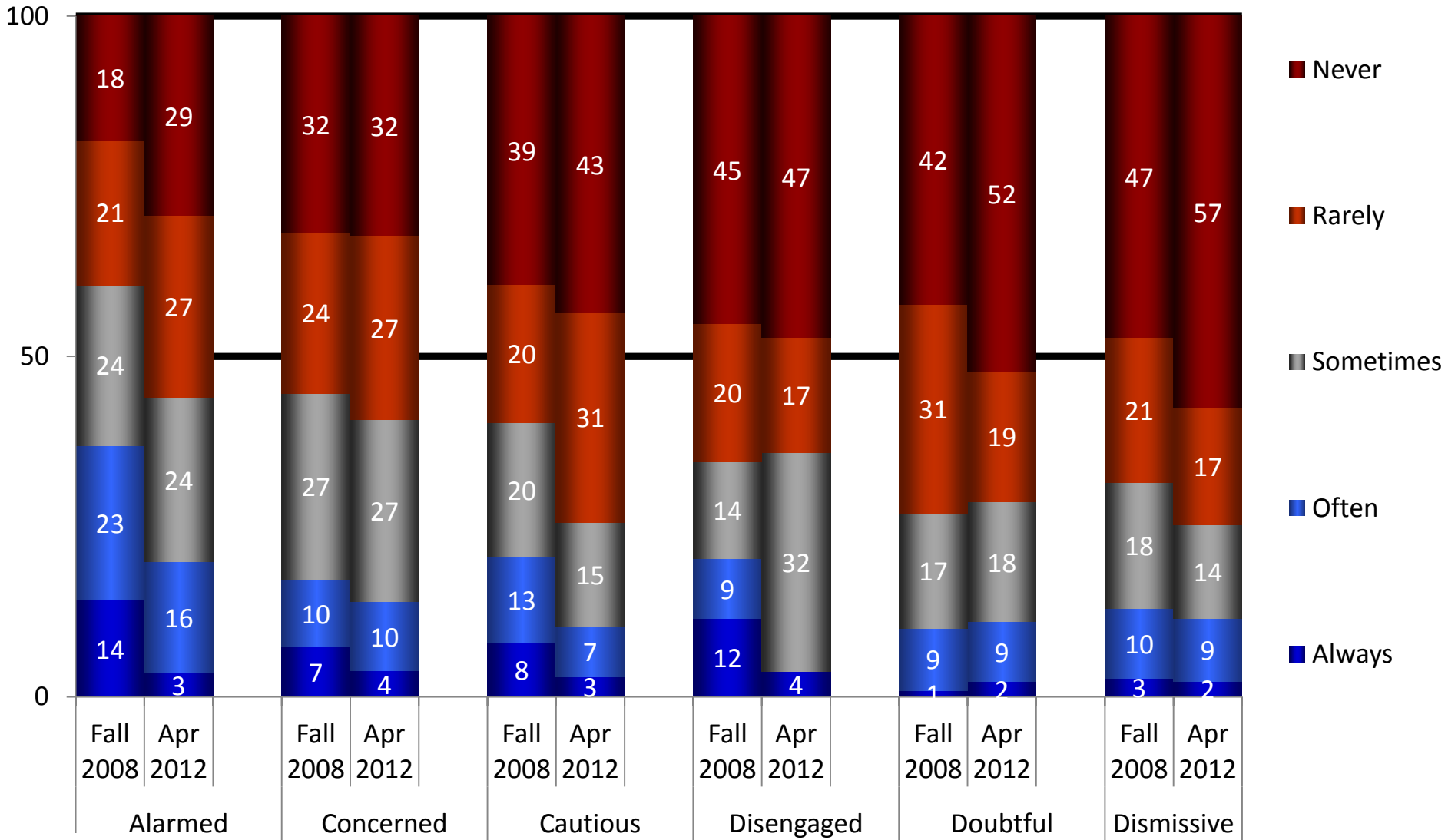
# Set Thermostat to 68 or Cooler in Winter



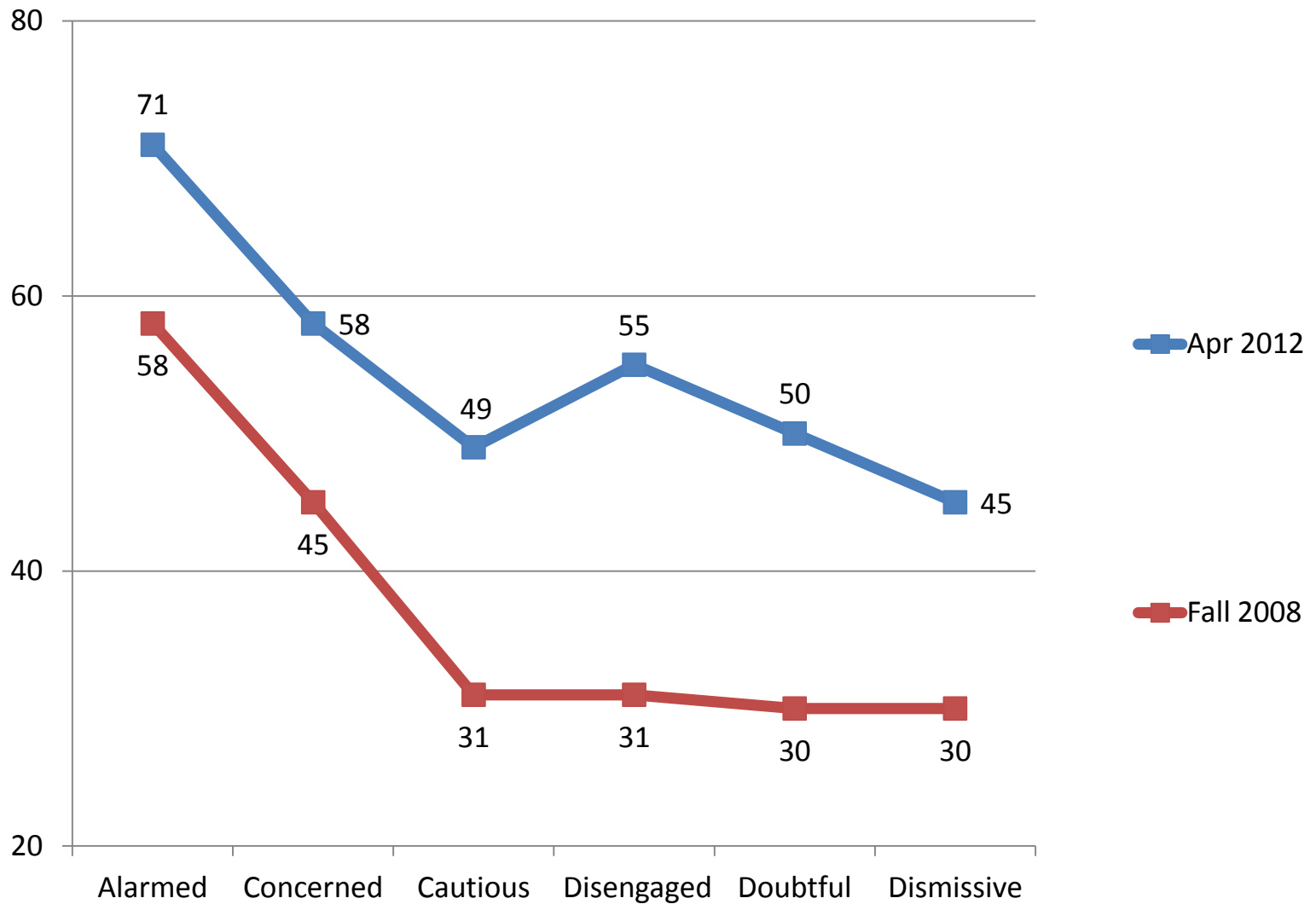
# Use Public Transportation or Carpool



# Walk or Bike Instead of Driving



# Proportion of Households with Most or All CFL Light Bulbs



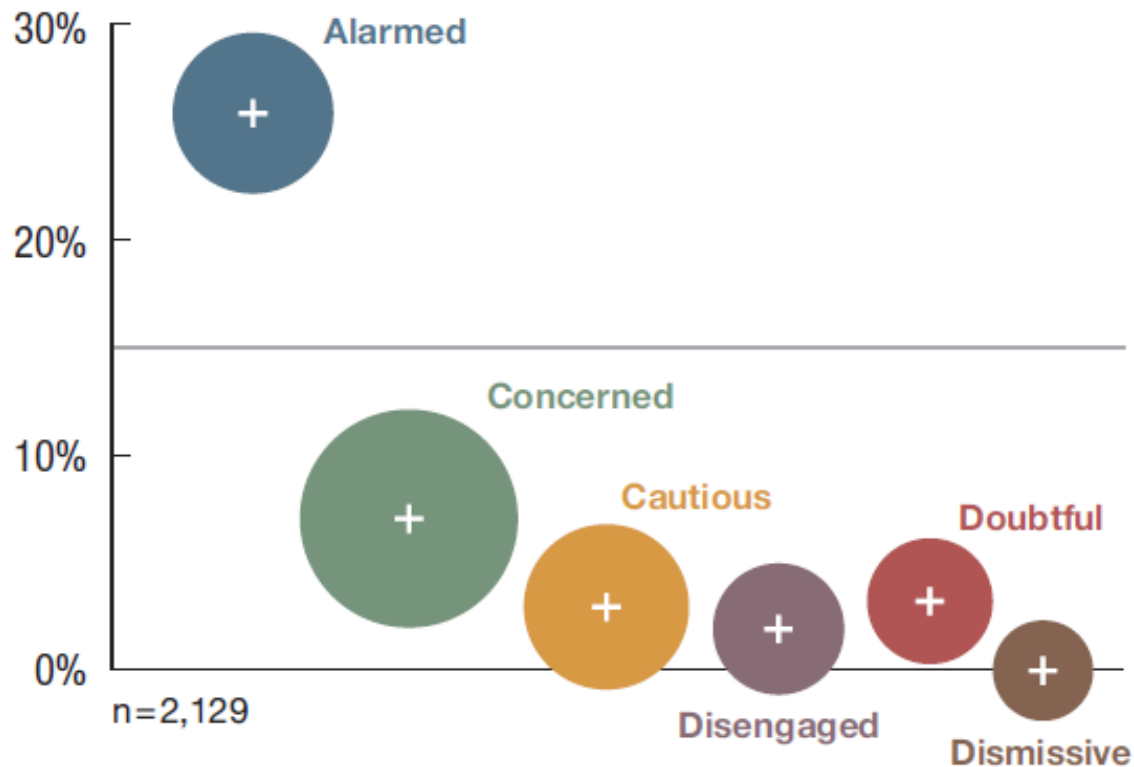


**POLITICAL &  
CONSUMER  
ACTIVISM**

### Figure 23: Proportion who have contacted elected officials to urge action on global warming

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you done each of the following?

- Written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming?

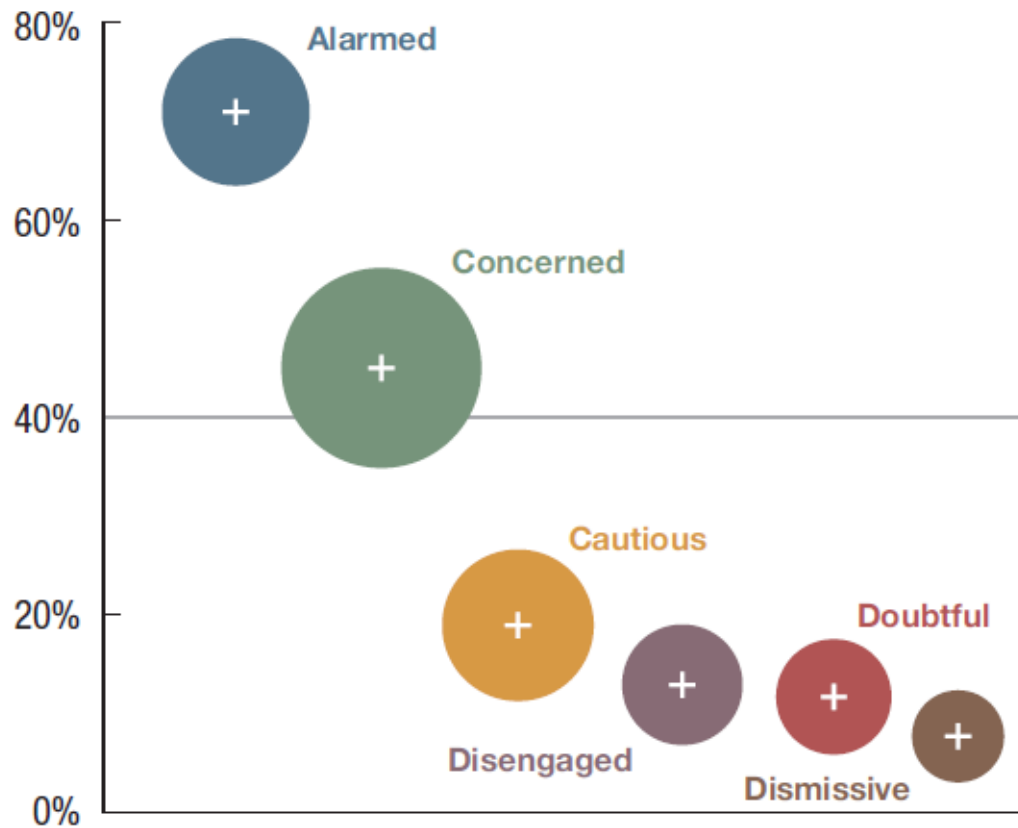


Note: Figure shows the proportion who have contacted officials one or more times over the past 12 months.

## Figure 24: Proportion who have rewarded companies that support action to reduce global warming

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you done these things?

- Rewarded companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming by buying their products.

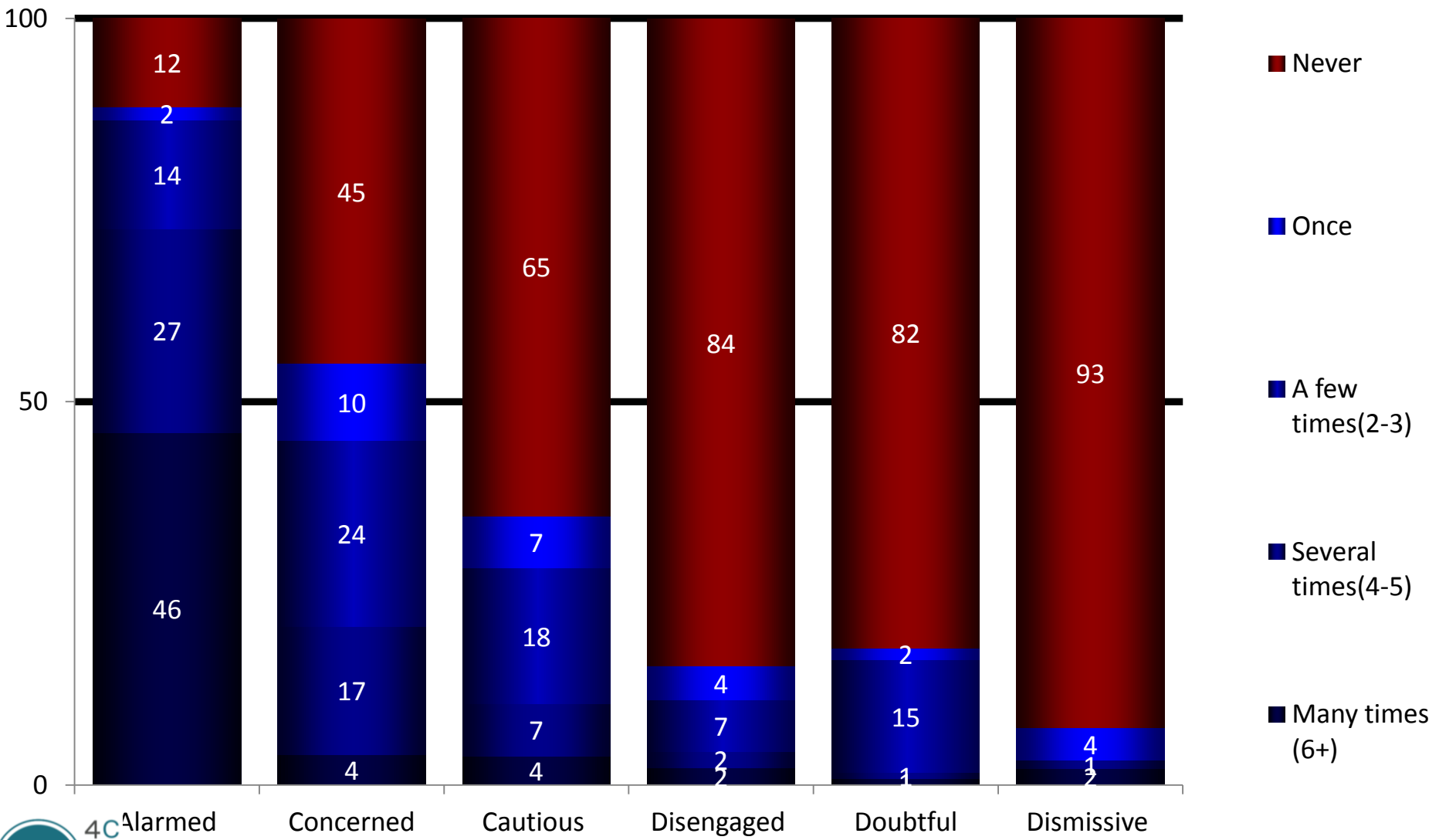


n=2,129

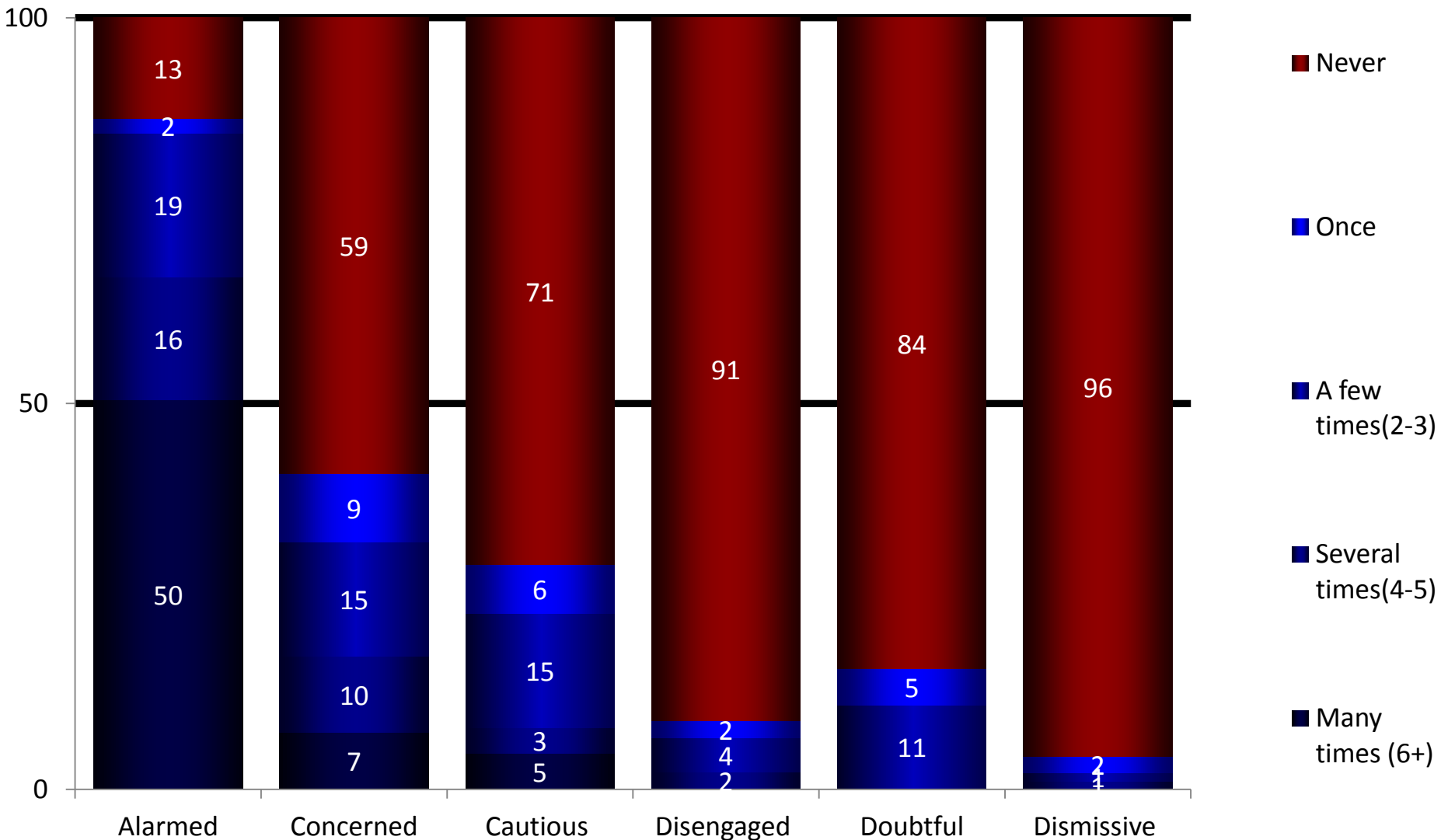
Note: Figure shows the proportion who have rewarded companies one or more times over the past 12 months.



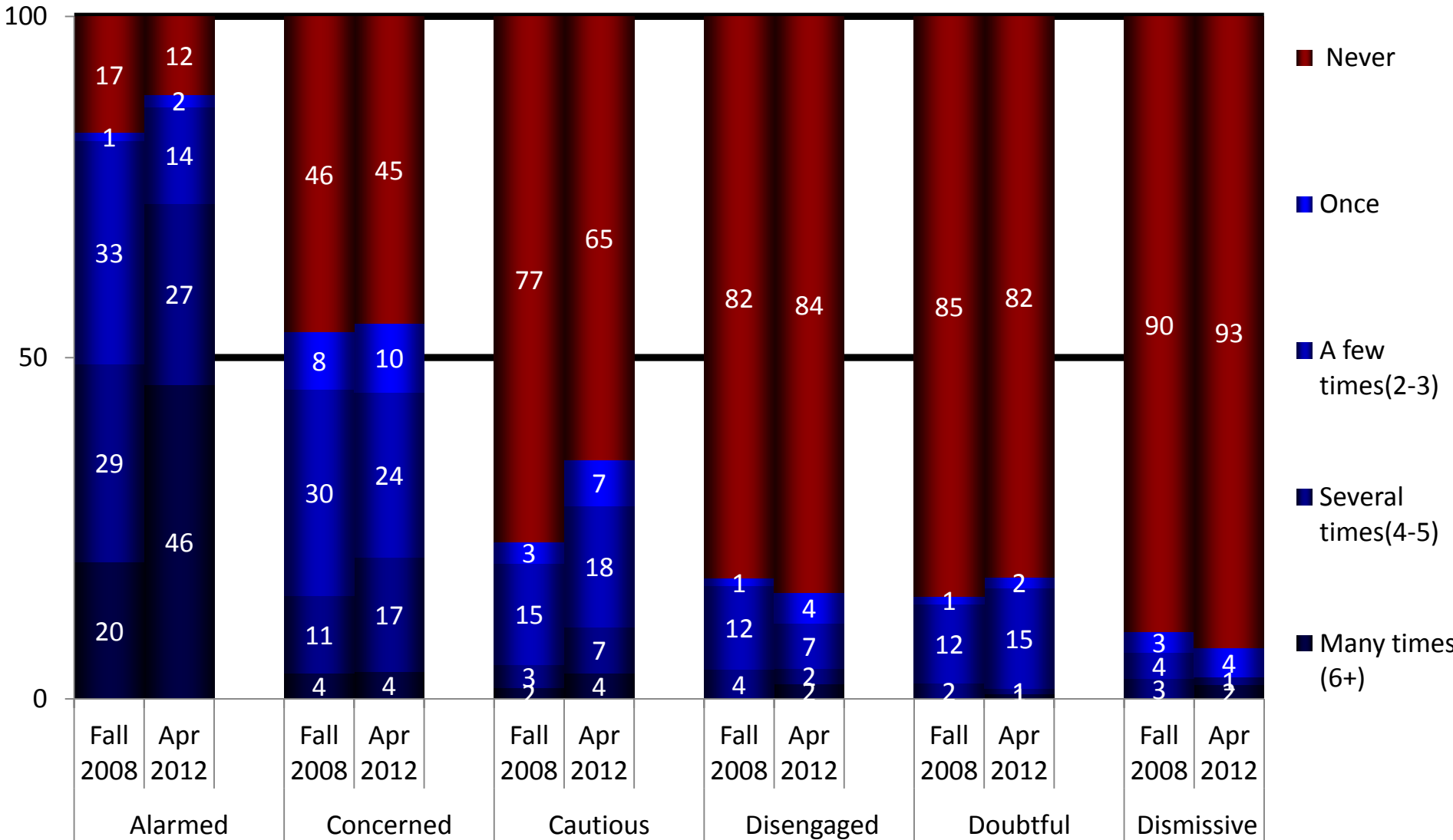
# Rewarded Companies that Are Taking Action to Reduce Global Warming by Buying Their Products: Frequency in 2012



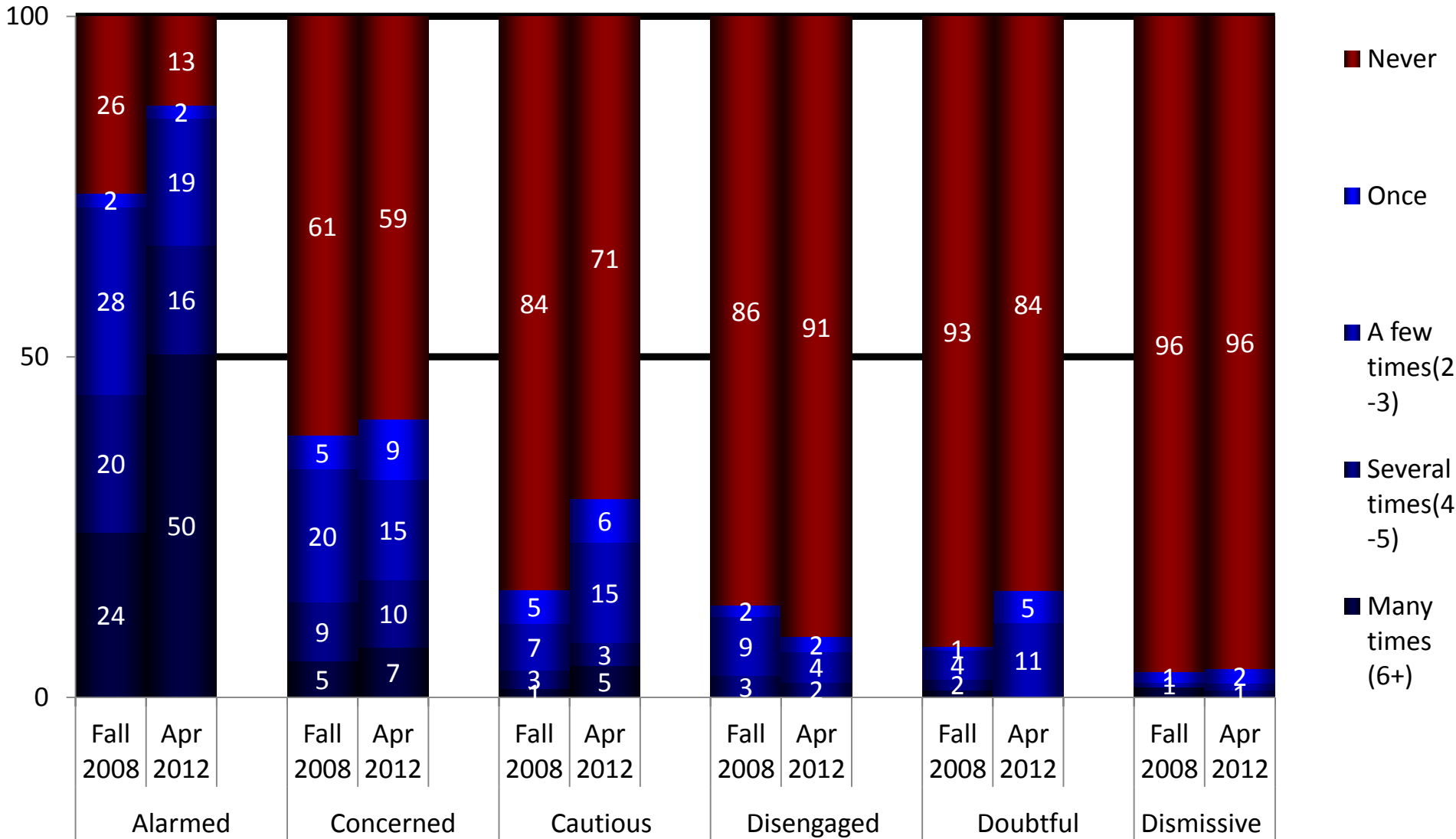
# Punished Companies that Oppose Reducing Global Warming By Not Buying Their Products: Frequency in 2012



# Rewarded Companies Taking Steps to Reduce Global Warming by Buying Their Products: Changes 2008-2012

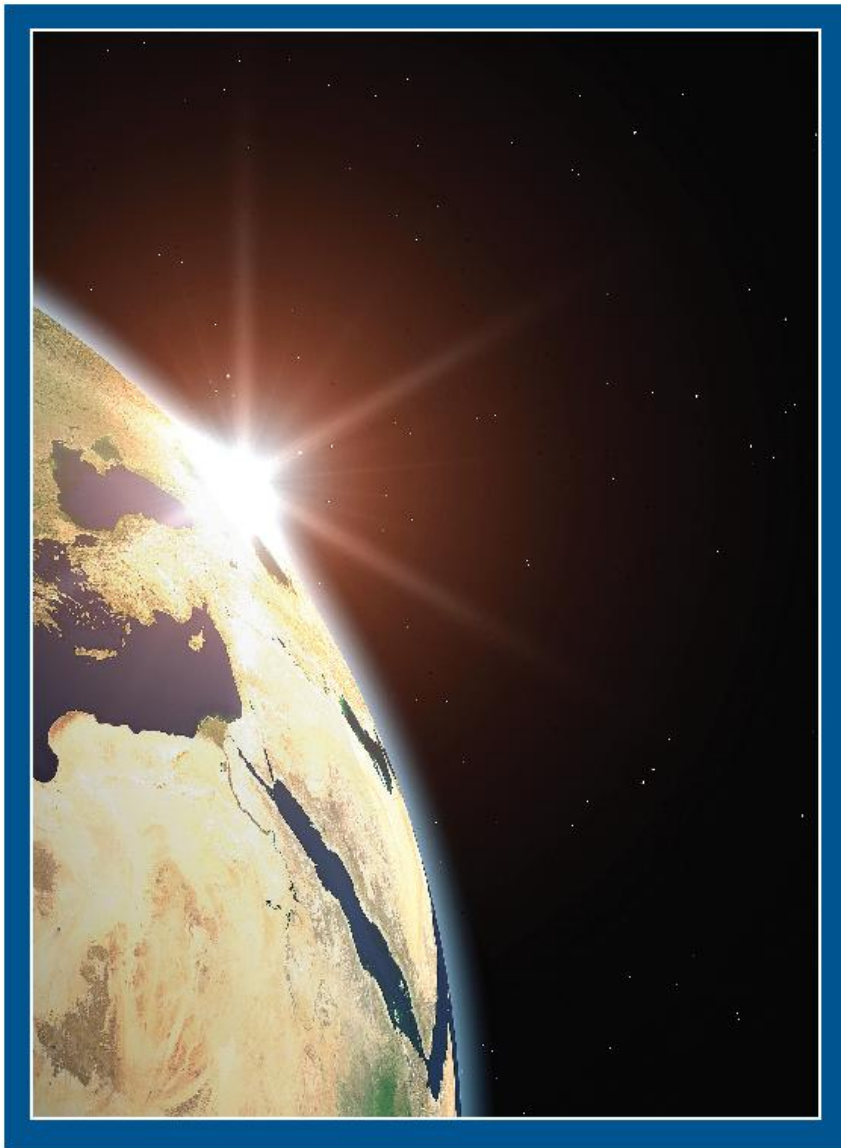


# Punished Companies that Oppose Reducing Global Warming by Not Buying Their Products: Changes 2008-2012



## Conclusions

- Understanding the realities and dangers of climate change – as reflected in the Six Americas segmentation – is strongly associated with cultural and environmental values.
- It is *NOT* strongly related to attitudes toward consumption, which are very similar among the six groups, suggesting that Americans don't yet perceive the connection between consumerism and climate change.
- Nor is segment strongly related to home conservation or transportation choices, and across segments, these behaviors have declined somewhat over the past four years.
- Segment is related to political activism, but even among those who are highly concerned about climate change, political activism is low.
- The strongest relationship between understanding climate change and actual behavior is found in consumer activism: Large numbers of Americans say they make consumer choices based on companies' climate-related practices.
- These practices have remained steady, or increased over the past four years.



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Communication

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Hour Project.*

<http://climatechange.gmu.edu>  
<http://research.yale.edu/environment/climate>

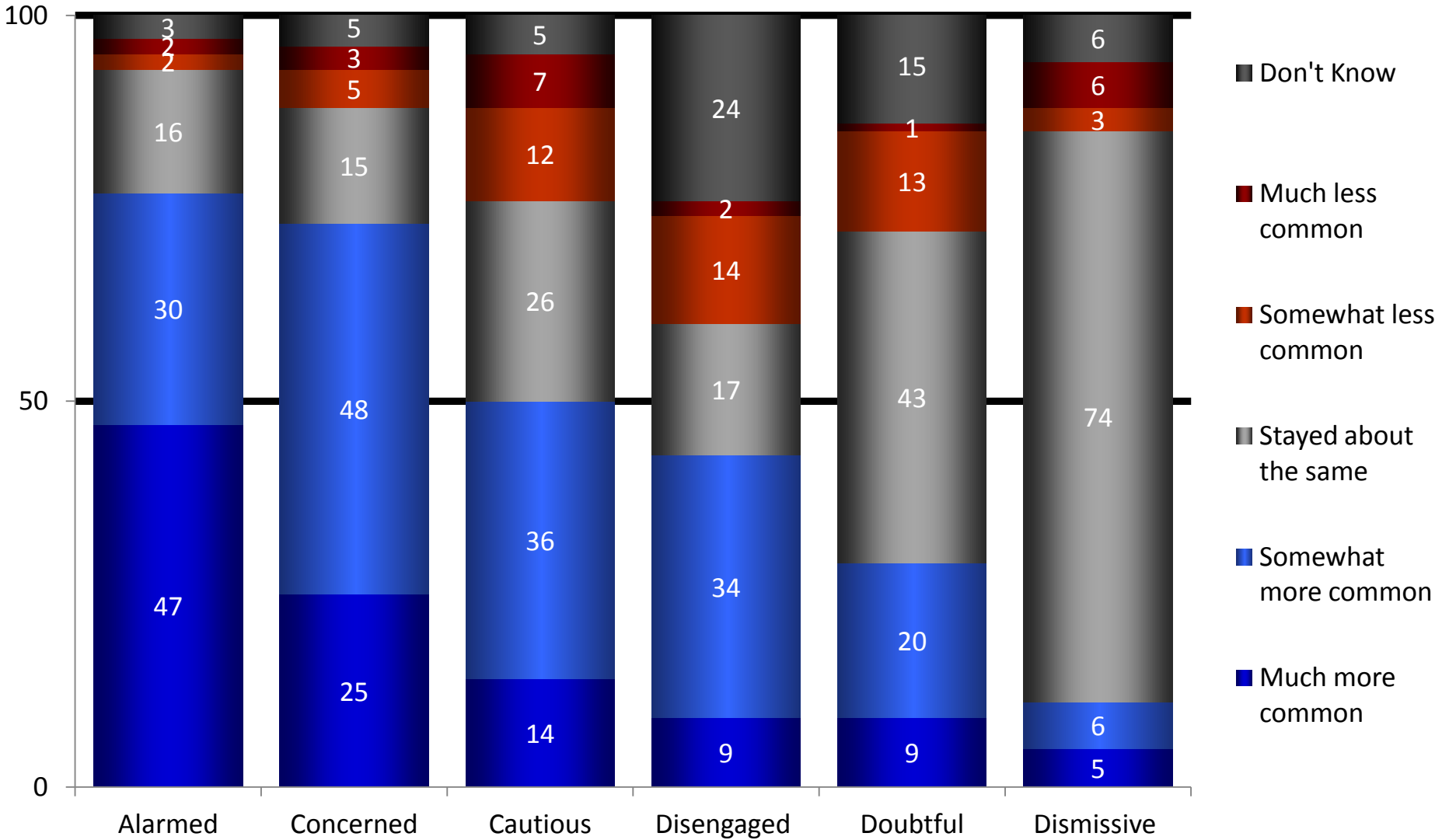
# Supplementary Slides, Part I

## Extreme Weather: Beliefs, Experience, and Interpretations



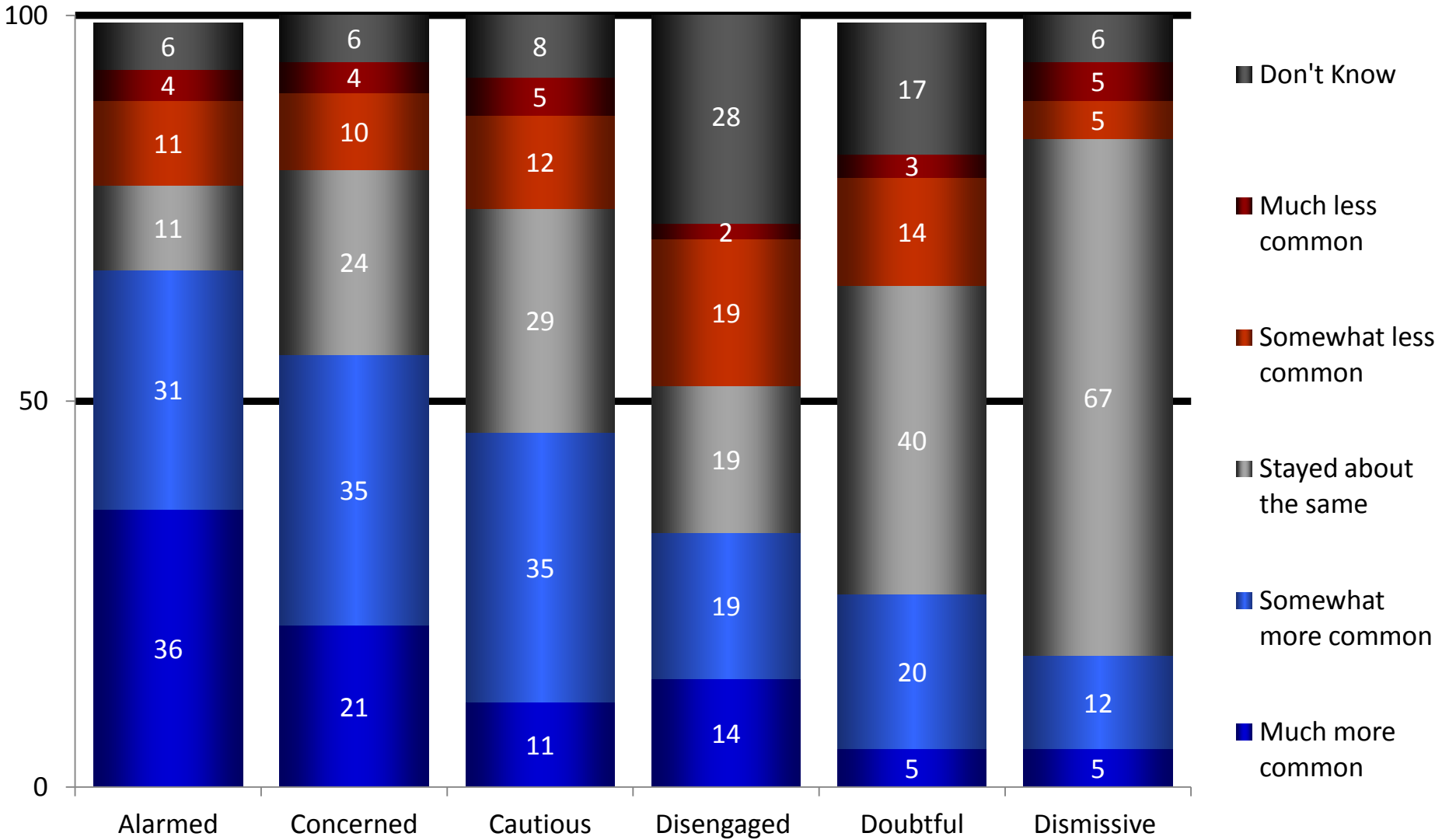
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# Have each of the following types of extreme weather events become more or less common in your local area over the past few decades? *HEAT WAVES*

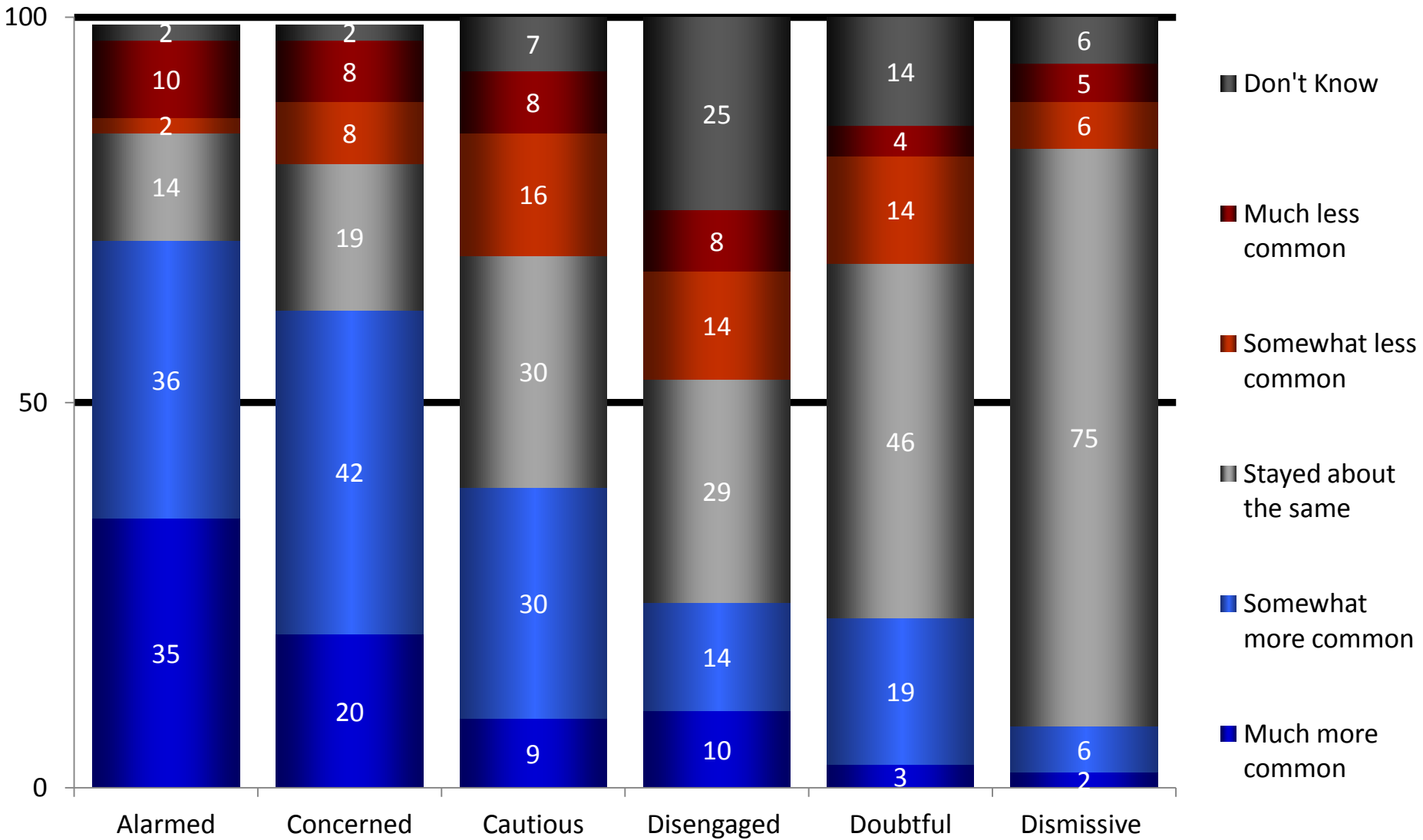




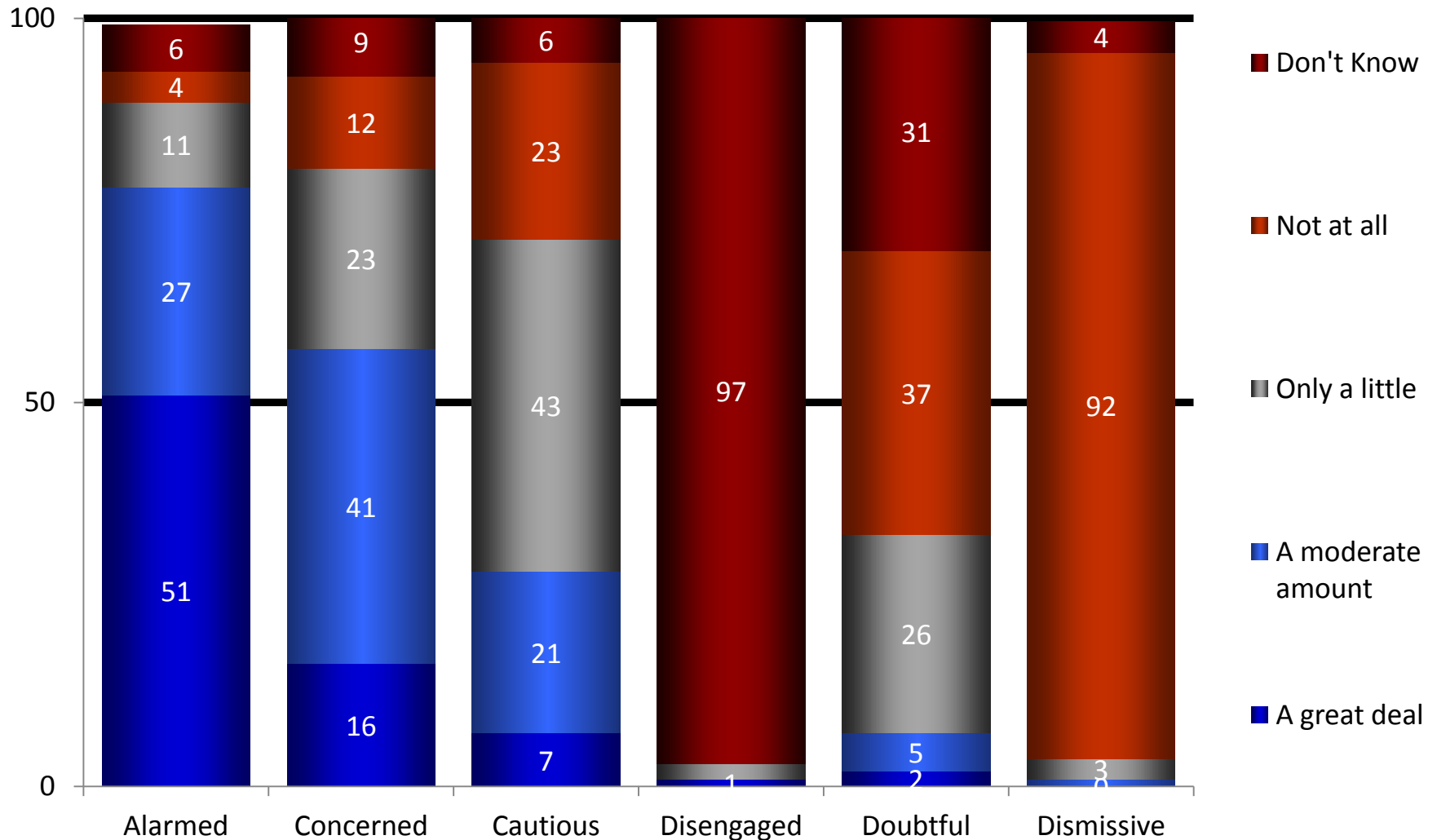
# Have each of the following types of extreme weather events become more or less common in your local area over the past few decades? *DROUGHTS*



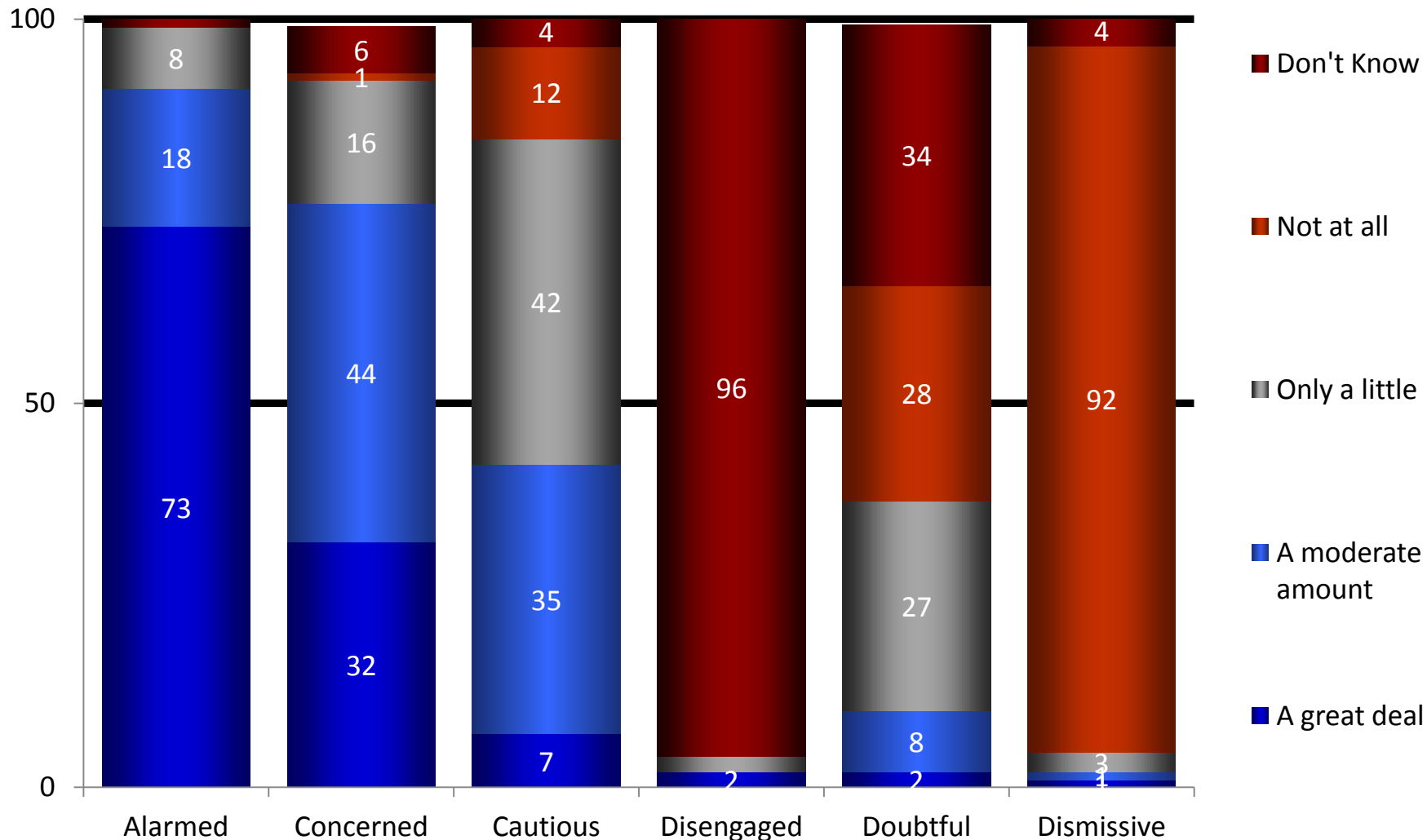
# Have each of the following types of extreme weather events become more or less common in your local area over the past few decades? *VERY HEAVY RAINSTORMS*



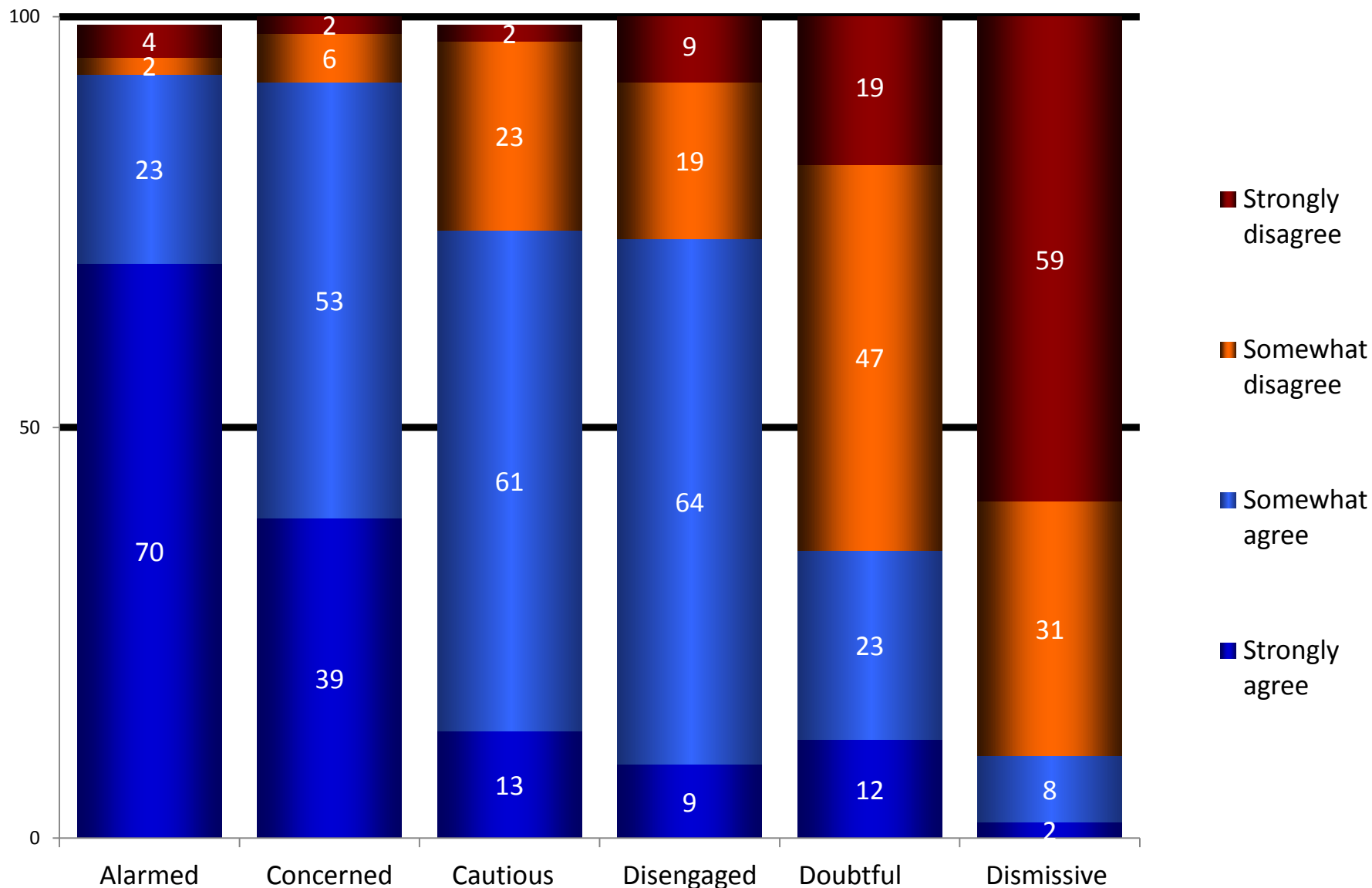
## Harm Global Warming Will Cause Over Next 20 Years To Public Property (e.g., roads, schools, sewer systems and public buildings)



## Harm Global Warming Will Cause Over Next 20 Years To Outdoor Recreational Areas (e.g., parks, beaches, lakes, rivers, forests)



# “Global warming is affecting the weather in the United States.”



# Personal Experience of Extreme Weather and Natural Disasters

In the past year have you personally experienced each of the extreme weather events or natural disasters listed below?

Mar 2012 National Average	Alarmed (13%)	Concerned (26%)	Cautious (29%)	Disengaged (6%)	Doubtful (15%)	Dismissive (10%)
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*Table shows proportion who experienced each event*

Extreme high winds	<b>59</b>	73	71	56	46	50	39
Extreme rain storm	<b>47</b>	70	58	43	37	35	27
Extreme heat wave	<b>41</b>	63	54	37	39	24	20
Drought	<b>34</b>	50	36	33	30	26	22
Extreme cold temperatures	<b>28</b>	42	32	27	31	23	12
Extreme snow storm	<b>25</b>	42	24	24	20	22	14
Tornado	<b>21</b>	36	23	17	21	20	9
Flood	<b>19</b>	34	19	16	17	12	15
Hurricane	<b>15</b>	33	17	11	7	13	7
Wildfire	<b>14</b>	26	17	11	14	12	9

Proportion who experienced at least one extreme weather event or natural disaster in the past year

<b>81</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>66</b>
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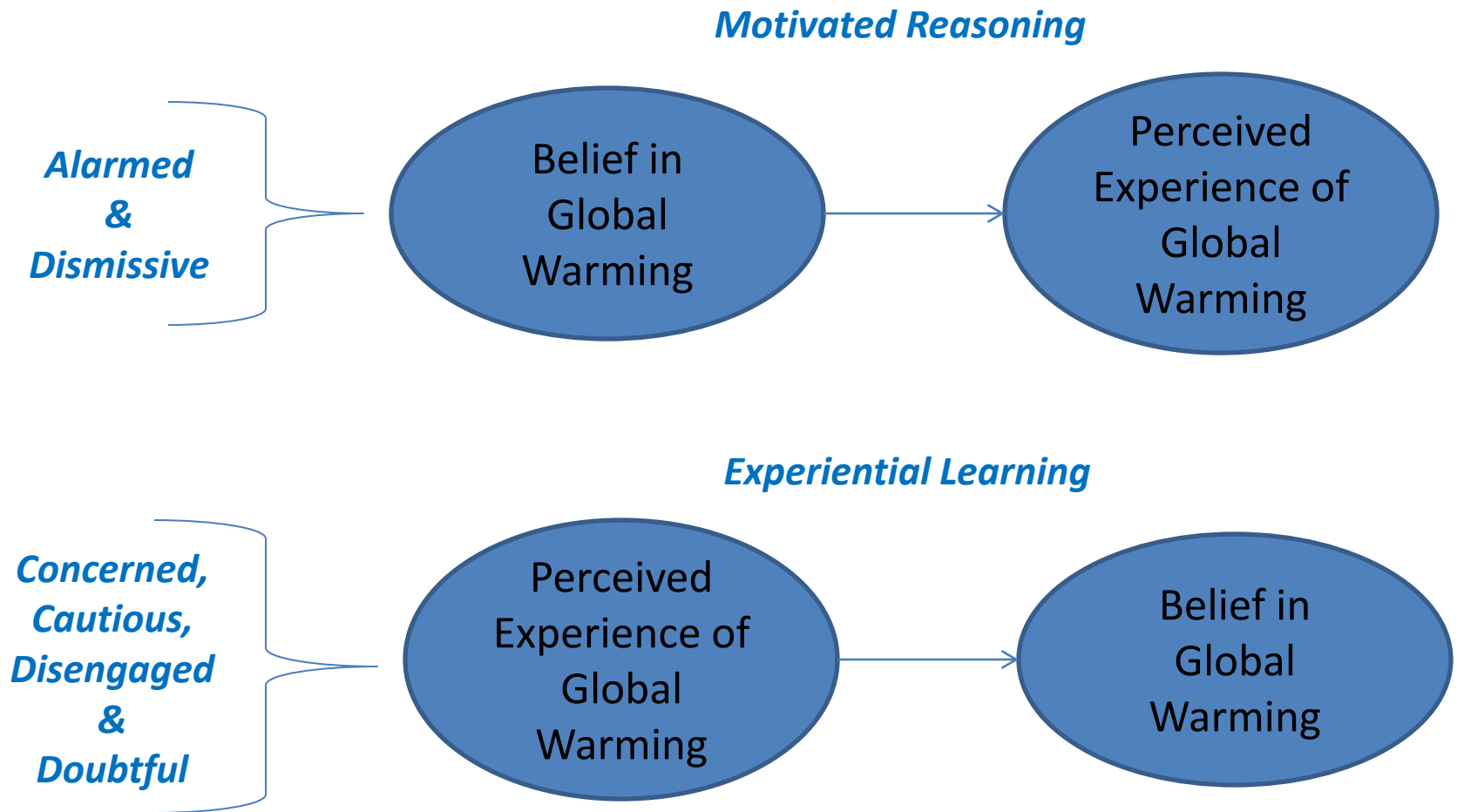
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# The Chicken and Egg: Do Perceptions Shape Beliefs about Global Warming... Or Do Beliefs about Global Warming Shape Perceptions?





# Supplementary Slides, Part II

## Demographics of the Six Americas



## Gender Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
Female	55%	56%	51%	69%	43%	43%	52%
Male	45%	44%	49%	31%	57%	57%	48%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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## Education Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
Bachelor's degree or higher	36%	31%	27%	12%	25%	36%	29%
Some college	24%	32%	34%	26%	35%	29%	31%
High school	30%	30%	29%	40%	30%	29%	31%
Less than high school	9%	7%	9%	21%	10%	5%	10%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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## Race/Ethnicity Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
2+ Races, Non-Hispanic	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	4%	2%
Hispanic	14%	11%	11%	11%	7%	6%	10%
Other, Non-Hispanic	4%	4%	5%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Black, Non-Hispanic	9%	9%	12%	20%	7%	3%	10%
White, Non-Hispanic	71%	73%	70%	66%	81%	86%	74%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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## Age Distribution among the Six Americas

	Alarmed	Concerned	Cautious	Disengaged	Doubtful	Dismissive	Total
75+	3%	4%	4%	6%	9%	6%	5%
65-74	15%	13%	9%	15%	17%	22%	14%
55-64	26%	23%	24%	26%	23%	21%	24%
45-54	21%	20%	17%	16%	18%	21%	19%
35-44	13%	16%	15%	16%	14%	13%	15%
25-34	13%	13%	15%	13%	9%	10%	12%
18-24	9%	12%	17%	9%	11%	6%	12%

Yale/George Mason, May 2011; n=1,010



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