



The Nexus of Climate Change and Morality at Boston College

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, humans emitted over 100 gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through the combustion of fossil fuels.¹ Climate change is predicted to and is already resulting in dire consequences to people around the world, especially marginalized societies.⁴ With that said, Boston College is an elite Jesuit institution that was founded on the principles of Catholic social teaching, which call on people to care for God's creation and our communities. Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, highlights the nexus between ethics and climate change and therefore the responsibility of Catholics and others alike, to address this impending issue.³ With this massive issue in mind and the inherent responsibilities of BC students, there seems to be a disconnect between BC student's ideals and their action on climate change. This study aims to bridge this gap by measuring level of student concern about climate change, moral identifications based on Jonathon Haidt's moral matrix, and their action on climate change.⁴ The end product of this study is a comprehensive document that can provide student organizations and faculty with information on how to frame climate change in a way that not only instills interest, but more importantly: action.

Research Questions

- What is the morality foundation of the Boston College student body?
- How do their moral priorities relate to their lack of climate action?

Methods

We created an online survey for BC undergraduates to assess which of Haidt's six moral principles students identify with, their level of concern about climate change, and opinions on what group climate change will affect most.

- 1.) We emulated questions from Jonathan Haidt's moral survey website, yourmorals.org, to measure students' moral affiliations. These morality categories include: care, loyalty, sanctity, authority, fairness, and oppression.
- 2.) We utilized questions from Yale University's study "Global Warming's Six Americas," which align people based on their level concern about climate change.⁵
- 3.) 140 responses were collected on Qualtrics
- 4.) Unequal distribution amongst student demographics.
- 5.) There are 9,000 undergraduate students therefore, the survey cannot be considered statistically significant

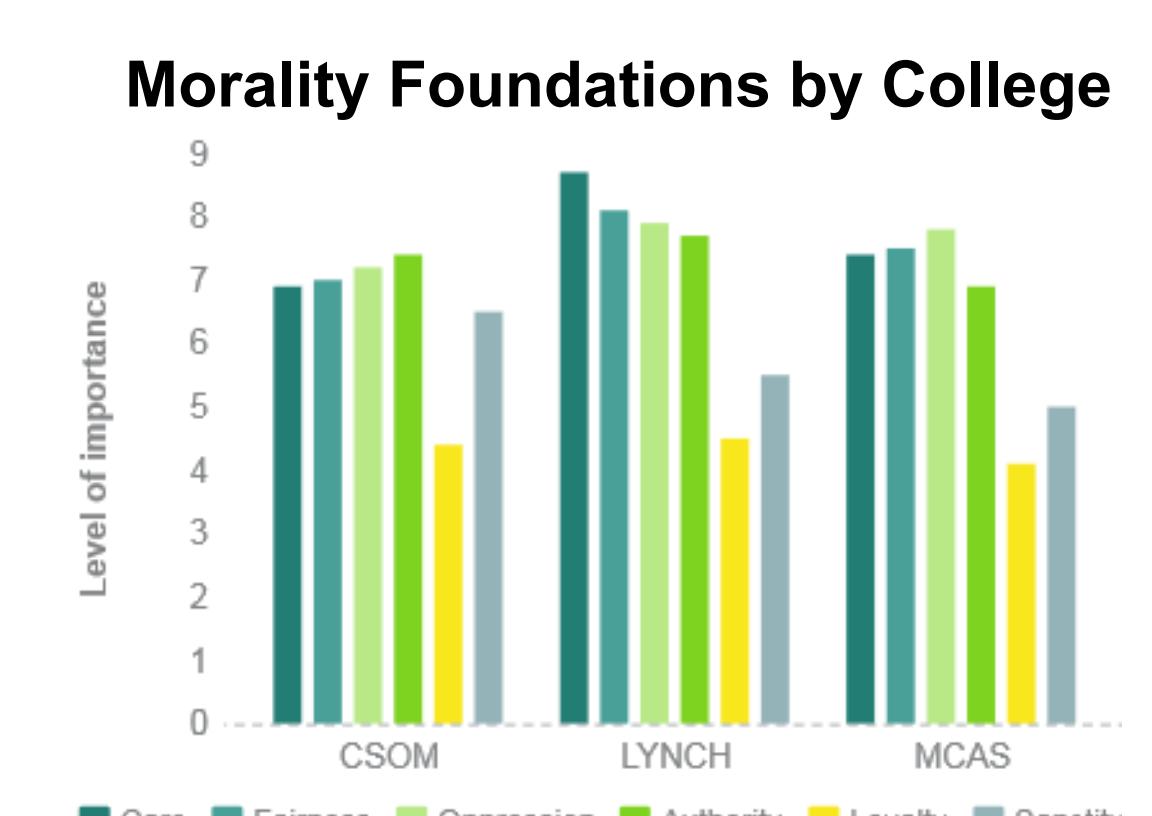


Figure 1. The morality foundations for each college; n=140. CSOM scored highest in authority, LYNCH in fairness, and MCAS in oppression

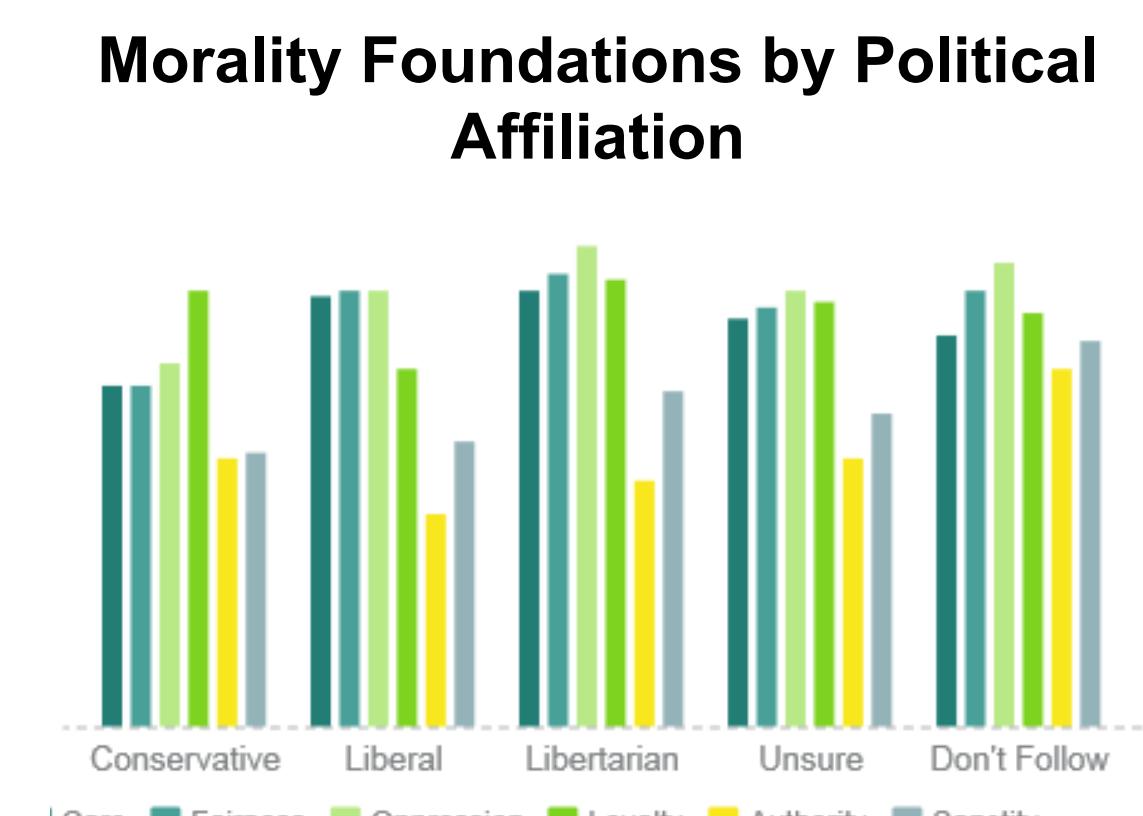
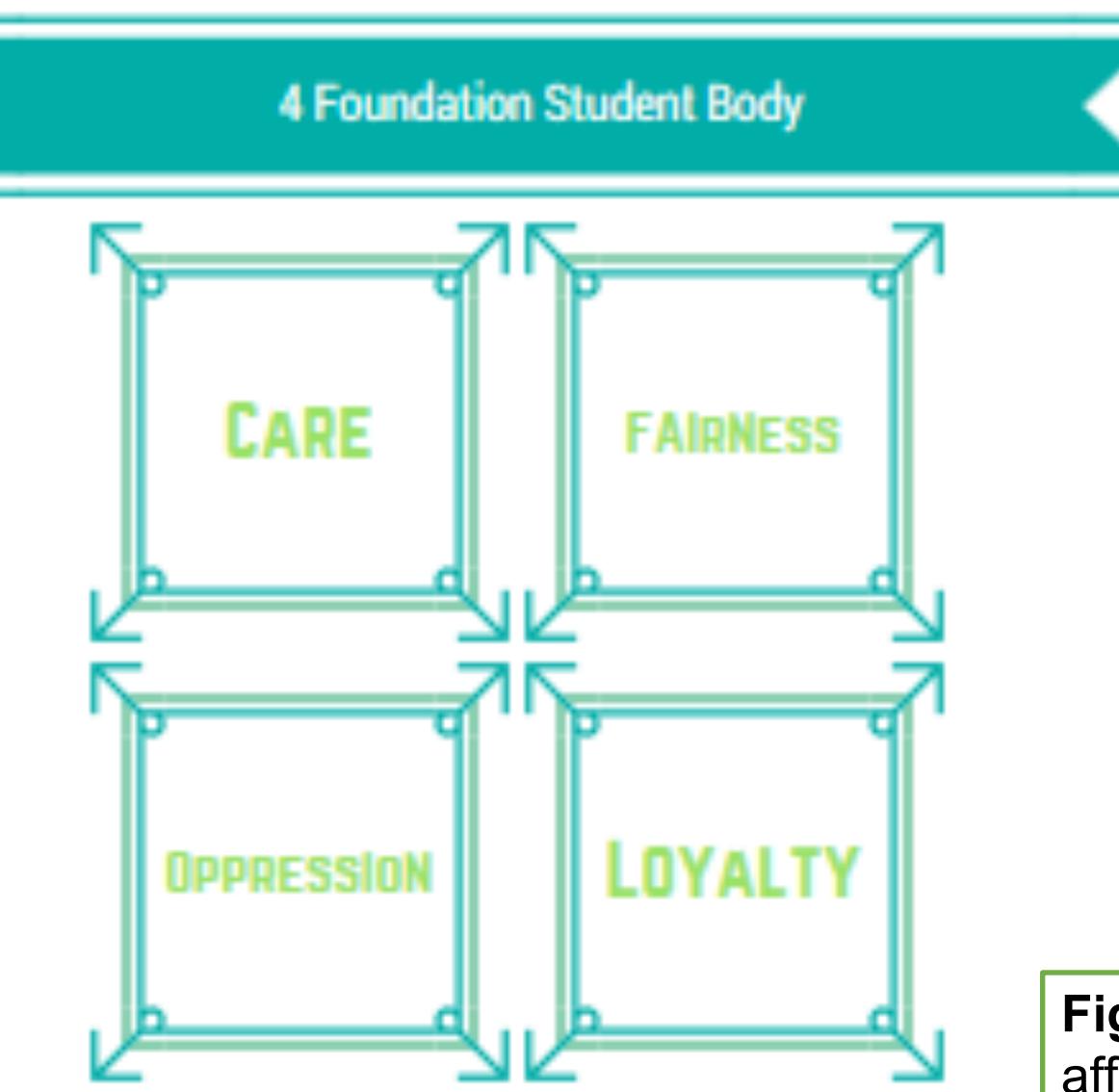


Figure 2. The morality foundations for the political affiliations of BC; n=140. At BC, all the political parties have a four-foundation morality.

Top Ranking Morality Foundations by College

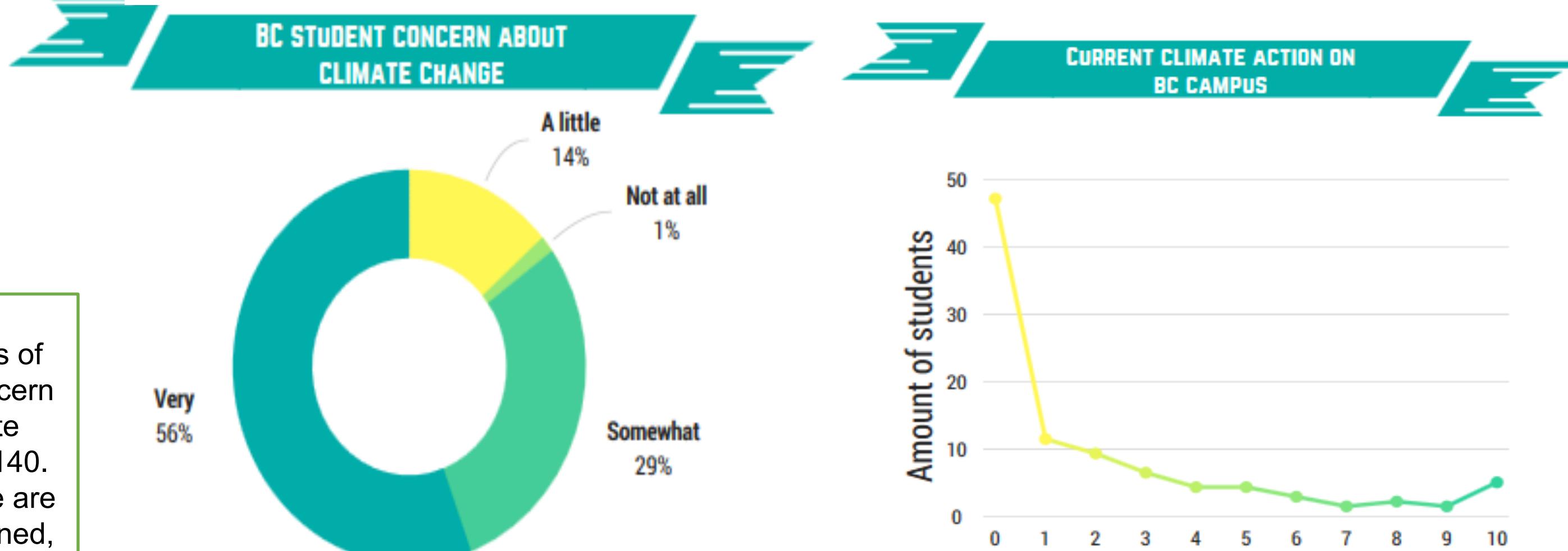


Figure 3. Percentages of student concern about climate change; n=140. Most people are very concerned, 56%.

Figure 4. The number of climate-gearied events attended by the BC student body. Most of the participants have attended 0 events.

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK CLIMATE CHANGE WILL HARM ...

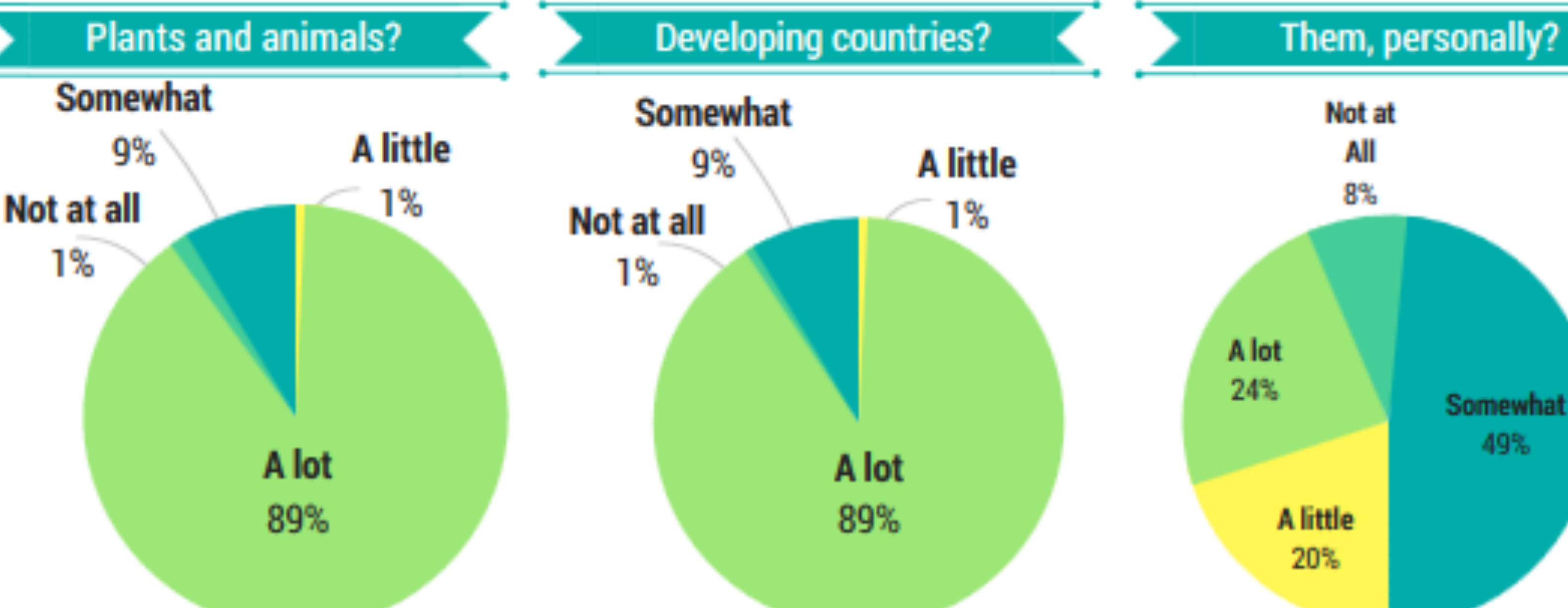


Figure 3. Percentages of sample that think climate change will harm, plants and animals, developing countries, and them personally. Notice that while most of the BC study body thinks that it will harm plants and animals as well as developing countries a lot (89%), only 24% thinks it will affect them a lot personally.

Discussion

Our survey resulted in several major findings:

- 87% of BC students are very certain that climate change is happening, but most do not think it will affect them personally.
- 66% of BC students consider climate change to be extremely or very important to them personally.
- 39% of BC students have attended more than one climate action event on campus within the past year.
- All students highly value care, fairness, loyalty and oppression almost equally, regardless of their political affiliation or undergraduate school.

Recommendations

- When marketing climate change events, organizations should not use purely natural imagery, instead more relatable images should be used such as cities, or people from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to BC students.
- Create a "where were you when..." campaign that appeals to a combination of the 4 foundations and causes students to think critically about their role in the climate crisis.⁶
- Student groups should bring guest speakers to speak about climate change and who appeal to different political parties, and therefore different moral matrices.
- Student groups should collaborate with non-environmental student organizations to illustrate the intersectionality between climate change and all other subjects.

Conclusion

In the future:

- Bring survey distribution to a larger scale to more accurately represent the student body and to be considered statistically significant.
- Student organizations should market their events so as to appeal to care, fairness, loyalty and oppression.
- Student organizations as well as faculty members should help students in the classroom to draw the connection between humans and the environment, to show that humans are the environment and that everyone will be affected by climate change.