Barriers to Climate Action

Human Cognition
◦ Short-term thinking & focus on near-term needs (including failure to recognize/care about and prepare for future problems)
◦ Optimism bias
◦ Bystander Effect
◦ Inappropriate lack of fear (vs. COVID for example)
◦ Climate change is not caused by an enemy (and lack of other threat indicators)
◦ Lack of "systems thinking" in understanding problem and designing and implementing solutions
◦ Lack of imagination of what a better world looks like
◦ Politicization/Tribal identity (e.g., conservatives tend to be against climate action)
◦ Misunderstanding of uncertainty ("Uncertainty is not your friend")
◦ Climate change is framed as an environmental issue (far away, affects others) vs. WW2-type problem
◦ Language framing: Climate change/crisis/emergency

Communications/Education
◦ Almost no well-funded coordinated "green" information campaigns
◦ Ad-supported communications networks promoting disinformation ahead of information (Carl Bergstrom's research)
◦ Failure of media to inform properly
◦ Lack of knowledge about climate change and clean solutions (policymakers, media, public)
◦ Lack of understanding about exponentials: Infinite growth on a finite planet
◦ Individuals don't know what to do/feel powerless to change the system
◦ Few well-known spokespeople to deliver climate message, including lack of trusted "tribe" members

Economics/Misaligned Incentives
◦ Wrong economic incentive systems (e.g., no price on carbon, subsidies for fossil fuels) - "Biggest market failure in history"
◦ Discounting of future damage vs. current costs
◦ Nature not valued in economic terms
◦ Desire/incentives for economic growth
◦ Tragedy of the Commons
◦ Poverty and economic instability preventing ability to focus on future problems

Political
◦ Failure of political leadership (and wrong/short-term incentives for political leaders)
◦ Governments tied to fossil fuel industry and dependent on fossil fuel revenues (money buys influence)
◦ Focus on future action ("Net-Zero by 2050") vs. current action ("Climate change is not an end-point problem.")
◦ Individualism vs. collective action
◦ Climate impacts will disrupt society and government functioning while trying to deploy solutions (already started)
◦ Migration, water scarcity, famine, etc. has/will inflame international relations and political institutions

Inertia
◦ Desire to maintain status quo (even though status quo is not one of the remaining options)
◦ Existing infrastructure (power plants, industrial plants, gas heating in homes, cars/trucks/planes/ships)
◦ Inertia of current fossil fuel, agriculture, and forestry industries

Interest of Few vs. Benefit of Many
◦ Active disinformation campaigns (Merchants of Doubt, oil companies, Russia, Fox News)
◦ Wealthy and policymakers feel immune to climate impacts
◦ Hi-emitters in charge of response
◦ Climate denial morphing into "It's too late" thinking
◦ Focus on individual energy use vs. dirty energy supply ("Climate change is your fault because you drive and fly.")

Other
◦ Lack of agreement or coordinated plan among "green" groups
◦ Concern that solutions will be unjust/not equitable
◦ Failure to consider worse case scenarios