

Blowing hot and cold: US belief in climate change shifts with weather

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A University of British Columbia study of American attitudes toward climate change finds that local weather – temperature, in particular – is a major influence on public and media opinions on the reality of global warming.

The study, published today by the journal *Climatic Change*, finds a strong connection between U.S. [weather trends](#) and public and media attitudes towards [climate science](#) over the past 20 years – with skepticism about global warming increasing during cold snaps and concern about climate change growing during hot spells.

"Our findings help to explain some of the significant fluctuations and inconsistencies in U.S. public opinion on climate change," says UBC Geography Prof. Simon Donner who conducted the study with former student Jeremy McDaniels (now at Oxford University).

The researchers used 1990-2010 data from U.S. [public opinion polls](#) and media coverage by major U.S. newspapers, including The New York Times, Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today. They evaluated the relationship between average national temperatures and opinion polls on climate change, along with the quantity and nature of media editorials and opinion pieces related to climate change.

While many factors affect climate change attitudes – political views, media coverage, personal experience and values – the researchers suggest that headline-making weather can strongly influence climate

beliefs, especially for individuals without strong convictions for or against [climate change](#).

"Our study demonstrates just how much [local weather](#) can influence people's opinions on global warming," says Donner. "We find that, unfortunately, a cold winter is enough to make some people, including many newspaper editors and opinion leaders, doubt the overwhelming scientific consensus on the issue."

Provided by University of British Columbia

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