

# Climate change: Don't wait until you can feel it

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Credit: NASA

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence for the impending dangers of human-made climate change, policy decisions leading to substantial emissions reduction have been slow. New work from Carnegie's Katharine Ricke and Ken Caldeira focuses on the intersection between personal and global impacts. They find that even as extreme weather events influence those who experience them to support policy to address climate change, waiting for the majority of people to live through such conditions firsthand could delay meaningful action by decades.

Their findings are published by *Nature Climate Change*.

Nearly every year, [extreme weather events](#) such as heat waves and hurricanes spur the discussion of climate change in the media and among politicians. This can create a window of opportunity for those seeking to enact policy aimed at reducing [greenhouse gas emissions](#). But this window of opportunity could be delayed by decades due to the vagaries of weather.

"When support for doing something about climate change is based on personal observations of [local weather](#), policymaking may end up being dictated by the roulette wheel of natural climate variability," says Ricke.

Ricke and Caldeira's modeling studies show that within 50 years nearly every country in the world will experience the kind of extreme weather that can be a policy trigger. However, local natural variability in weather means that majority of people in each nation, particularly large countries like China and the United States, could personally experience these extremes for themselves either tomorrow or many years from now. If citizens do not support emissions reductions and other efforts to fight climate change until they experience extreme events firsthand, naturally-driven variations in weather could delay action by decades, Ricke and Caldeira found. They find that sound science should guide policy rather than the vagaries of weather. "Local weather is anecdotal information, but [climate change](#) is sound science," Caldeira said. "Good politics can be based on a good anecdote, but good policy needs to be based on sound science."

Provided by Carnegie Institution for Science

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