

# Global warming cynics unmoved by extreme weather

November 24 2014

---



Credit: Alfred Palmer/Wikipedia

What will it take to convince skeptics of global warming that the phenomenon is real? Surely, many scientists believe, enough droughts, floods and heat waves will begin to change minds.

But a new study led by a Michigan State University scholar throws cold water on that theory.

Only 35 percent of U.S. citizens believe [global warming](#) was the main cause of the abnormally high temperatures during the [winter](#) of 2012, Aaron M. McCright and colleagues report in a paper published online today in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

"Many people already had their minds made up about global warming and this extreme weather was not going to change that," said McCright, associate professor in MSU's Lyman Briggs College and Department of Sociology.

Winter 2012 was the fourth warmest winter in the United States dating back to at least 1895, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Some 80 percent of U.S. citizens reported [winter temperatures](#) in their local area were warmer than usual.

The researchers analyzed March 2012 Gallup Poll data of more than 1,000 people and examined how individuals' responses related to actual temperatures in their home states. Perceptions of warmer winter temperatures seemed to track with observed temperatures.

"Those results are promising because we do hope that people accurately perceive the reality that's around them so they can adapt accordingly to the weather," McCright said.

But when it came to attributing the abnormally warm weather to global warming, respondents largely held fast to their existing beliefs and were not influenced by actual temperatures.

As this study and McCright's past research shows, political party identification plays a significant role in determining global warming

beliefs. People who identify as Republican tend to doubt the existence of global warming, while Democrats generally believe in it.

The abnormally warm winter was just one in an ongoing series of [severe weather events](#) - including the 2010 Russian heat wave, Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines - that many believed would help start convincing global warming cynics.

"There's been a lot of talk among climate scientists, politicians and journalists that warmer winters like this would change people's minds," McCright said. "That the more people are exposed to climate change, the more they'll be convinced. This study suggests this is not the case."

**More information:** *Nature Climate Change*,  
[dx.doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2443](https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2443)

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Global warming cynics unmoved by extreme weather (2014, November 24) retrieved 24 April 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2014-11-global-cynics-unmoved-extreme-weather.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--