

Twitter users in states affected by hurricanes discuss climate change up to 200% more frequently in the following weeks

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Twitter users in areas affected by major hurricanes discussed climate change much more frequently right after the hurricane, according to a

study [published](#) November 23, 2023 in the open-access journal *PLOS Climate* by Maddalena Torricelli from the City University of London, UK, and colleagues.

There's evidence that people's attitude towards climate change is influenced by extreme weather. To better understand how hurricanes might affect public discussion around climate change, Torricelli and colleagues analyzed 65 million Twitter posts (prior to the platform's rebranding to "X") related to 18 major North Atlantic hurricanes from 2010–2020. They also analyzed 240 thousand [news articles](#) linked in any of these tweets that also mentioned climate change, and classified these as reliable or unreliable using media reliability assessor NewsGuard.

The authors found that hurricanes triggered a surge in online discussion around climate change, with climate change-related tweets geolocated in states impacted by the hurricane increasing from baseline to between 80 and 200% for the most impactful hurricanes. However, these increases were limited to specific regions and returned to baseline generally within two months.

The authors' comparative analysis of news media outlets found that sources classed as unreliable by NewsGuard tended to use the term "[global warming](#)" and refer more often to conspiracy theories behind the hurricanes, such as the "US government's manipulation of weather through a radio transmitter."

Though Twitter/X users are not wholly representative of the general population, the platform remains a useful tool for studying public perception.

The study findings suggest that locally heightened public concern regarding climate change may be transient, with co-author Professor Andrea Baronchelli adding, "Our research sheds light on how extreme

weather influences the public awareness of [climate change](#). Importantly, heightened awareness in the weeks following a hurricane may offer a useful opportunity for policy makers to engage the public."

More information: How does extreme weather impact the climate change discourse? Insights from the Twitter discussion on hurricanes, *PLOS Climate* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pclm.0000277](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000277).
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