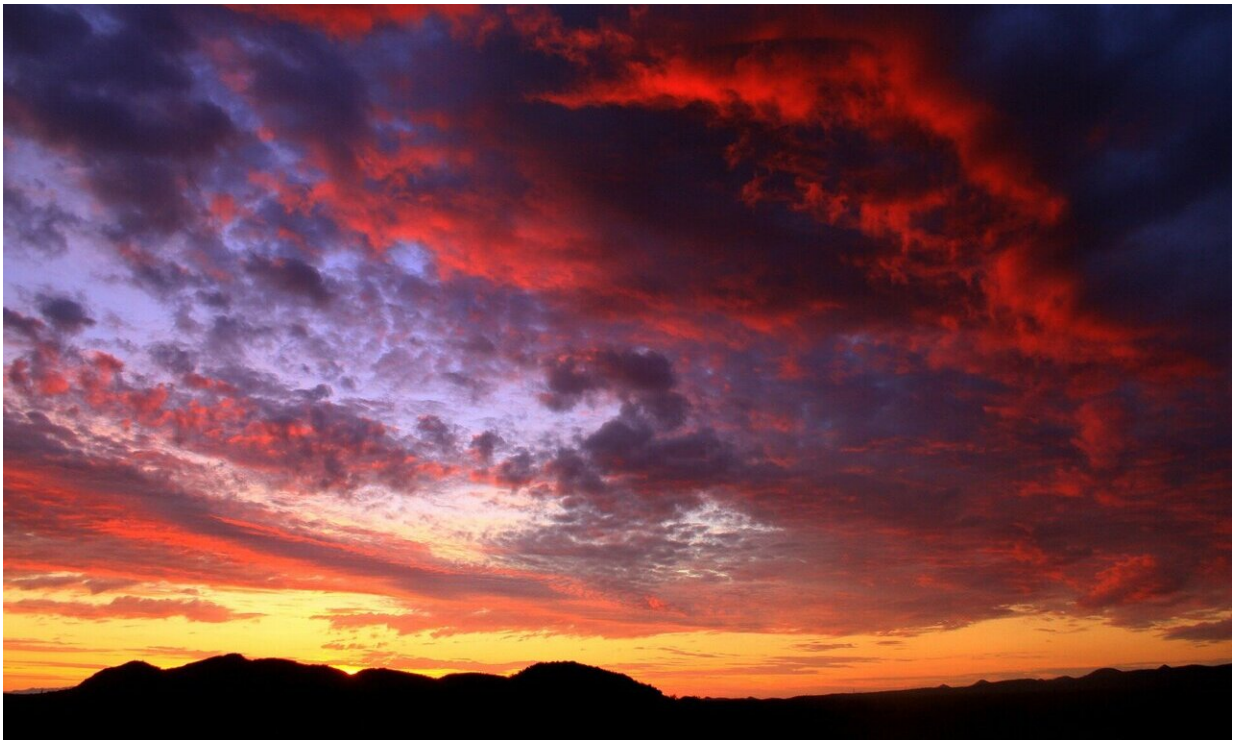


Americans more willing to pay for climate action after extreme weather

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People who personally experience extreme climate events, especially wildfires and hurricanes, are willing to pay significantly more for climate action, even if they report skepticism about human-caused climate change, finds new research from the University of Vermont.

Trump voters who reported experiencing an extreme weather event were more likely to vote in favor of a clean energy referendum than Trump voters who had not experienced such events.

"Despite people's beliefs about climate change being human-caused, despite people's political affiliation—both of which we know have really strong impacts on how people think about climate change—we find that when people have experienced extreme events, they are more likely to support climate mitigation policy, even if it costs more money," says study co-author Rachelle Gould of University of Vermont (UVM).

For the study, researchers from UVM and University of Colorado examined survey data from nearly 6,000 residents of the U.S. northeast, southeast and West about their experiences of [extreme climate events](#) in the past five years. Respondents were asked if they would support a clean energy policy and if they would pay a utility bill increase—a [random number](#) between \$5 and \$265—which allowed the researchers to study how willingness to pay differed among respondents who reported different climate change beliefs and different experiences with extreme climate events. In addition to the [survey data](#), the team independently verified the occurrence of the reported climate events using a variety of data sources.

The findings, [published](#) in the journal *Global Environmental Change*, suggest that when respondents have truly felt the impacts of climate change, regardless of their stated stances on the issue, they are willing to pay more for a means of mitigating climate change—about \$100 more per year than people with similar beliefs and attributes who hadn't experienced an extreme event.

"When climate change is a distant concept, we've had a hard time getting people to be willing to actually pay more money for a mitigation policy," study co-author Trisha Shrum of UVM says. "There's something that

clicks when climate change comes to your doorstep in a way that makes people willing to say, 'Ah, I get it, it's worth it to invest in renewable energy.'" She adds, "It was very interesting to see that effect even among people who report that they think maybe the climate is changing, but it's not caused by humans."

According to the researchers, the study is novel in various ways. While past research has explored the effects of confirmed extreme events on people's beliefs or examined outcomes for people who'd reported experiencing an extreme event, this research paired people's reported experiences with external climate data—the first study to bring both methods together to see how they match up.

Also novel is the researchers' separate considerations of different extreme climate events, to understand how each affects respondents' willingness to pay for climate mitigation policies. For example, hurricanes and wildfires had a strong effect on willingness to pay, while tornadoes and droughts did not have a significant effect on their own.

In addition to mental and emotional anguish, climate disasters can also create financial devastation. From [medical costs](#) to cleanup of homes and communities to lost property or the need to move—extreme climate events can leave behind tremendous financial costs for those who live through them.

"People can get really polarized on big ideological issues," says study co-author Donna Ramirez-Harrington of UVM. "But when you look at people's firsthand experiences with climate change, the results imply that they understand how it can hit their pocketbook. I think that's when decisions get made, and at the end of the day, those who experience extreme events first-hand are willing to pay more."

What does this mean? The authors note that there are different ways to

view the data, but they strike an optimistic note. "There's a hopeful message here," Gould says. "People recognize climate change as an important issue that's worth spending a bit of money on. They are willing to contribute to the societal good, and that is encouraging."

More information: Rachelle K. Gould et al, Experience with extreme weather events increases willingness-to-pay for climate mitigation policy, *Global Environmental Change* (2024). DOI: [10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102795](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102795)

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