

## Record Heat Wave Pushes U.S. Belief in Climate Change to 70%

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By Mark Drajem on July 18, 2012

A record heat wave, drought and catastrophic wildfires are accomplishing what climate scientists could not: convincing a wide swath of Americans that global temperatures are rising.

In the four months since March there has been a jump in U.S. citizens' belief that climate change is taking place, especially among independent voters and those in southern states such as Texas, which is now in its second year of record drought, according to nationwide polls by the University of Texas.

In a poll taken July 12-16, 70 percent of respondents said they think the climate is changing, compared with 65 percent in a similar poll in March. Those saying it's not taking place fell to 15 percent from 22 percent, according to data set to be released this week by the UT Energy Poll.

Following a winter of record snowfall in 2010, the public's acceptance of climate change fell to a low of 52 percent, according to the National Survey of American Public Opinion on Climate Change, which was published by the Brookings Institution in Washington. After this year's mild winter, support jumped to 65 percent, the same as that found by the UT Energy Poll in March.

"There has been a rebound in belief" in global warming, Barry Rabe, a University of Michigan professor who published the research on the Brookings study. "All respondents are quite likely to use observations of weather as a big part of their explanation."

Temperatures Rising

The average temperature for the U.S. during June was 71.2 degrees Fahrenheit (21.7 Celsius), which is 2 degrees higher than the average for the 20th century, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The June temperatures made the preceding 12 months the warmest since record-keeping began in 1895, the government agency said. The U.S. is also experiencing its worst drought since 1956, with 55 percent of the contiguous states in moderate to severe drought.

Global temperatures reached a record in 2010, with data showing surface temperatures increased at a rate of about 0.31 degrees Fahrenheit since 1980, according to a NOAA report released this month. Those temperatures fell last year because of the effect of La Nina, a weather pattern associated with cooler waters in the equatorial Pacific. Still, it was one of the 15 warmest years on record, the annual State of the Climate report said.

'No Debate'

While the survey didn't ask about the causes of climate change, Sheril Kirshenbaum, the poll director, said "there is no debate" that man-made carbon emissions are warming the planet. "We need to get beyond arguing if it's occurring and start developing policies to adapt to extreme weather events and rising sea levels," she said in an e-mail.

Still, the American public's views on the issue are linked to recent trends in the weather, Rabe said.

The jump in public opinion over the past four months took place in southern states, including drought-ravaged Texas, where it climbed 13 percentage points to 70 percent this month, according to the poll. Other areas of the country showed modest variations in levels of support.

The latest University of Texas poll also found a sharp divide between political parties, with 87 percent of Democrats saying climate change is taking place compared with 53 percent of Republicans. In March 45 percent of Republican respondents said climate change is happening.

Among independent voters, those saying temperatures are rising jumped to 72 percent in July from 60 percent in March.

Partisan affiliation is the best predictor of someone's belief in climate change, Rabe said.

The University of Texas poll of 1,039 respondents was taken online July 12-16; there were 2,371 respondents in March. The surveys are conducted by the University of Texas at Austin's Energy Management and Innovation Center, a research facility within the McCombs School of Business, with assistance and assistance from industry and environmental groups.

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