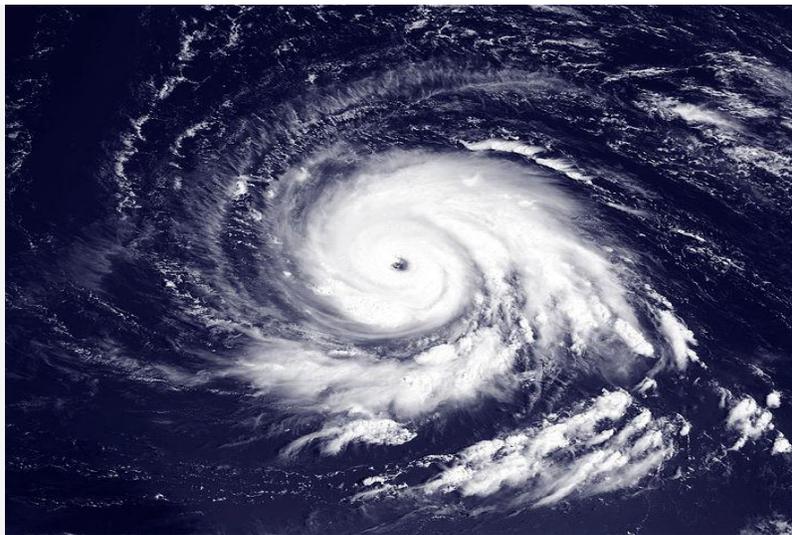


CHANGE OF MIND: THE INFLUENCE OF HURRICANES

Traumatic weather events, such as **hurricanes**, may lead people to think more seriously about **climate change**, express a greater belief that climate change is caused by human activity, and become more supportive of environmentally sustainable policies – all together, these are the findings and implications of a study recently published in the journal Psychological Science.

The study, entitled “When Truth Is Personally Inconvenient, Attitudes Change: The Impact of Extreme Weather on Implicit Support for Green Politicians and Explicit Climate-Change Beliefs” examined the support of New Jersey residents for politicians committed or opposed to policies designed to combat climate change — before and after residents experienced Hurricanes Irene and Sandy.



Credit: U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Although most scientists agree that climate changes occurring today have been speeded up by man's activities, many politicians and citizens seem dubious about such relationship – the result is limited support for environmental policies, especially when the short-term consequences amount to higher taxes.

Laurie Rudman of Rutgers University, lead author of the study, says: “Americans tend to vote more from a self-interested perspective rather than demand that their government affect change.”

In 2010, Rudman and her colleagues Meghan McLean and Martin Bunzl surveyed over 250 Rutgers undergraduate students, measuring their attitudes toward two politicians, one who favored and another who opposed environmental policies that involve tax increases.

The researchers asked the students whether they believed that humans are causing climate change, and they also had the students complete a test intended to reveal their automatic, instinctual preferences toward the politicians. Though most students *said* they preferred the green politician, their automatic preferences suggested otherwise. The automatic-attitudes test indicated that the students tended to prefer the politician who did *not* want to raise taxes to fund environment-friendly policy initiatives.

After Hurricanes Irene and Sandy devastated many areas on the Eastern Seaboard in 2012, Rudman and colleagues wondered whether they would see any differences in students' attitudes toward environmental policies. "It seemed likely that what was needed was a change of 'heart,'" Rudman explains. "Direct, emotional experiences are effective for that."

In contrast with the first group, students tested in 2012 showed a clear preference for the green politician, even on the automatic attitudes test. And those students who were particularly affected by Hurricane Sandy – experiencing power outages, school disruptions, even damaged or destroyed homes – showed the strongest preference for the green politician. "Not only was extreme weather persuasive at the automatic level, people were more likely to base their decisions on their gut-feelings in the aftermath of Sandy, compared to before the storm," Rudman explains.

The researchers don't know whether or not the first group of students would have shown a shift in attitudes after the storms – however, the researchers believe their findings provide evidence that personal experience is one factor that can influence instinctive attitudes toward environmental policy. If storms do become more prevalent and violent as the climate changes, they argue, more people may demand substantive policy changes.

Source: <http://theglobalfool.com/change-of-mind-the-influence-of-hurricanes/>