



CLIMATE CHANGE: AMERICANS' VIEWS IN 2014

March 14, 2014

Americans Don't Attribute Colder Weather to Climate Change

Many more say colder temperatures due to normal yearly variation

by Jeffrey M. Jones

This article is the third in a series that will analyze Gallup's latest March update on Americans' views on [climate change](#) and examine how these views have changed over time. The series will explore public opinion on the severity and importance of climate change, its causes and effects, the extent of Americans' understanding of the issue, and much more.

PRINCETON, NJ -- Two in three Americans say their local area is experiencing colder-than-usual temperatures this winter, and one in four say their area is experiencing drought. When asked why they think these extreme weather events are happening, many more say they are attributable to normal yearly variation in temperature or rainfall than to human-caused climate change or global warming.

Americans' Experience of Extremes in Local Weather and the Perceived Cause

	%
WINTER TEMPERATURES IN LOCAL AREA	
Colder than usual	66
(Due to normal variation in temperatures)	(46)
(Due to human-caused climate change)	(19)
(Unsure)	(1)
About the same	19
Warmer than usual	13
EXPERIENCING DROUGHT	
Yes	25
(Due to normal variation in rainfall)	(15)
(Due to global warming)	(9)
(Unsure)	(1)
No	75

March 6-9, 2014

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Gallup's March 6-9 Environment poll asked Americans to report on weather conditions in their local areas. Extreme cold and snow have blanketed the Northeast and Midwest all winter, with frigid temperatures and snowfall extending into the Deep South at times. Also, California and the Southwestern part of the country have experienced drought conditions.

Democrats are much more inclined than Republicans to attribute the extreme weather to global warming or climate change. Forty-seven percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents who perceive colder temperatures in their areas attribute this to climate change, compared with 11% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who perceive colder temperatures.

Meanwhile, 51% of Democrats and Democratic leaners experiencing drought attribute it to global warming, compared with 14% of Republicans.

Those political patterns on global warming are consistent with the [Republican-Democratic divide](#) on global warming attitudes more generally.

Extreme Weather Patterns Apparent by Region

Americans certainly appear to be aware of the more extreme temperature ranges the country has been experiencing in recent years, with many reporting colder-than-usual temperatures this year, compared with an even higher percentage who reported warmer-than-usual temperatures two years ago.

Specifically, 66% of Americans say their local area is experiencing colder winter temperatures than normal this winter, a sharp contrast to 2013 (19%) and 2012 (4%). In 2012, 79% said winter temperatures were warmer than usual.

Winter Temperatures Compared With Prior Winters

Next, I'd like you to think about the weather in your local area this winter season compared to past winters. Have temperatures in your local area been -- [ROTATED: colder than usual this winter, about the same, (or) warmer than usual this winter]?



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Perceptions that the temperatures have been colder than usual vary by region. There is widespread consensus among Eastern and Midwestern residents that temperatures have been colder this winter, with 87% in each region holding that view. A majority of Southern residents, 68%, say the same about local temperatures in their part of the country. In contrast, 41% of Western residents say temperatures have been warmer where they live, consistent with the record warmth that California has seen this winter.

Winter Temperatures Compared With Prior Winters, by Region

Next, I'd like you to think about the weather in your local area this winter season compared to past winters. Have temperatures in your local area been -- [ROTATED: colder than usual this winter, about the same, (or) warmer than usual this winter]?

	East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%
Colder	87	87	68	26
About the same	9	10	21	31
Warmer	1	3	9	41

March 6-9, 2014

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Overall, drought is affecting far fewer Americans, with 25% saying their area is suffering from a shortage of rainfall. That small national percentage is likely because drought conditions are largely confined to one part of the country -- 65% of Western residents say they are experiencing drought, compared with between 4% and 20% in the other regions of the country.

Local Area Experiencing Drought, by Region

Is your local area experiencing a drought, that is, a serious shortage of rainfall this year, or not?

	East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%
Yes, is	4	11	20	65
No, is not	96	87	80	35

March 6-9, 2014

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Implications

Recent years have brought extreme weather to the United States and raised the possibility that it is evidence of global warming's effects. But Americans tend not to attribute this winter's colder weather in most of the country, or the drought in the Southwestern part of the country, to global warming or climate change. Rather, they are more likely to view these as simply normal variations in weather patterns, though Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to believe this. The belief that temperature extremes are part of normal variation is not new; almost eight in 10 Americans in 2012 thought that the temperatures that winter had been [warmer than usual](#), but most of those also said this reflected normal variations rather than the effect of global warming.

Americans' views of what is causing this winter's weather may be influenced by their relative lack of concern about global warming or climate change, with only about four in 10 predicting it will [seriously threaten their way of life](#). If Americans were more likely to see global warming as an immediate threat, they might be more willing to see it as a cause of current weather patterns.

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted March 6-9, 2014, with a random sample of 1,048 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 50% cellphone respondents and 50% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability, nonresponse, and double coverage of landline and cell users in the two sampling frames. They are also weighted to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, population density, and phone status (cellphone only/landline only/both, and cellphone mostly). Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population. Phone status targets are based on the most recent National Health Interview Survey. Population density targets are based on the most recent U.S. census. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or

bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

[View survey methodology, complete question responses, and trends](#)

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit www.gallup.com.

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