

EXTREME WEATHER IS NEARLY UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE: AP-NORC POLL

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Floodwaters surround homes and vehicles in the community of Pajaro in Monterey County, Calif., March 13, 2023. An overwhelming majority of the U.S. public say they have recently experienced extreme weather, and most of them attribute that to climate change, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. | Photo Credit: AP

An overwhelming majority of people in the United States say they have recently experienced an extreme weather event, [a new poll shows, and most of them attribute that to climate change](#).

But even as many across the country mark Earth Day on April 22, the poll shows relatively few say they feel motivated when they talk about the issue.

The findings from *The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research* poll echo growing evidence that many individuals question their own role in combating climate change. Still, the poll suggests people are paying attention.

About half of U.S. adults say they have grown more concerned about the changing climate in the past year, and a growing number say they are talking about it.

Adriana Moreno said she feels like she's been talking about climate change for years, but it's only recently that the 22-year-old high school teacher has noticed her older family members bringing up the issue more and more – “almost every time I see them,” said Moreno, a Democrat in New York.

Her family on the East Coast talks about how the seasons have changed while her family in El Salvador talks about how poorly some crops on their farm are faring. After years of hearing about Moreno's own interest in the issue, her parents have themselves become more interested.

It's not that they didn't believe in climate change before, Moreno said, but it was “out of sight, out of mind.” Overall, about 8 in 10 US adults say that in the past five years they have personally felt the effects of extreme weather, such as extreme heat or drought, according to the poll.

Most of them — 54% of the public overall — say what they experienced was at least partly a result of climate change. They're not wrong, said the head of the federal agency overseeing

weather and climate issues.

“It is a reality that regardless of where you are in the country, where you call home, you’ve likely experienced a high impact weather event firsthand,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief Rick Spinrad said at a meteorological conference this year, noting that the United States has the most weather disasters that cost USD 1 billion of any nation in the world.

NOAA uses weather disasters that cost \$1 billion as a measure of climate change and how it affects people. Last year there were 18 of those events, costing more than \$165 billion in total and killing 474 people. That included Hurricane Ian and an ongoing drought in the West.

These types of weather events hit the nation on average once every 82 days in the 1980s, but are now smacking the country at a rate of slightly more than once every two weeks, Spinrad said.

“With a changing climate, buckle up,” Spinrad warned. “More extreme events are expected.” The poll shows about three-quarters of US adults say recent extreme weather events have had at least some influence on their beliefs about climate change.

After 2 1/2 years living in Agoura Hills, California, Rick Hoeft has noticed extreme weather events that make him concerned about climate change now more than ever before.

He hadn’t been face to face with the same weather whiplash when he lived for decades in Hawaii and Michigan, where he’s moving back to this month.

“Hearing about the things like the fires and seeing the hills around here being brown and not getting any rain for three, four, five months in a row ... it’s not something I’d ever thought of anywhere else because I’ve never been in such extreme drought,” the 65-year-old Republican retiree said. Then, “when we finally do get rain, it’s extreme.” He says his girlfriend, who had lived in California for 45 years, tells him “this isn’t normal.” Extreme downpours, like the series of winter storms that flooded California, and large droughts are happening more frequently and with more intensity because of climate change, studies show.

Tornadoes are moving further east and the supercells that spawn them are expected to get more frequent and move even further east as the world warms. Wildfires have been devastating for years, worsened by warming.

Half of US adults say they have spoken with friends and family about climate change in the past year, compared with about 4 in 10 who said the same last June.

Still, many say they rarely or never talk about the issue.

John Laubacker, a 36-year-old truck driver from Lockport, New York, says climate is an important issue to him personally. But he doesn’t find himself talking about it much.

Laubacker, a moderate Republican, says he finds the conversation on climate, like other issues, is dominated by those with extreme views on both sides of the aisle.

The poll finds people don’t tend to talk about climate change with people they outright disagree with on the issue. Among those who talk with family and friends, about half say they mostly agree with those they talk to, while most of the remainder say they tend to equally agree and disagree.

A clear majority say they have learned new information in a conversation on the subject, but only 19 per cent of US adults say their minds have been changed because of a conversation about climate change.

The poll also finds few feel very hopeful or motivated when they talk about climate change; roughly half feel those at least somewhat. That's true of anxiety and sadness as well.

Anthony Thompson, a 74-year-old retiree and a Democrat, thinks climate change has accelerated, but he picks and chooses who he talks to about it in “ruby red” Jackson, Tennessee. But if it comes up when tornadoes or hailstorms tear through their area, he offers what he's learned as “food for thought.” To Thompson, changes in weather have become more severe – as has his concern.

“I’m more concerned now because I think people kind of take everything for granted and I don’t think they really care, to be quite honest,” he said. “Hopefully if we concentrate on some of this stuff we can at least slow it down.”

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