

Climate Crises Catalyzes Climate Action Opportunities, Briefly

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As climate-driven disasters wreak havoc across the globe, a pressing question arises: how do these catastrophic events influence political attitudes and policy preferences? This inquiry could not be more timely, as an increasing number of people face the devastating repercussions of climate disasters not only in the United States but worldwide. These disasters exact an immense toll on lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, and displace countless individuals. In a study recently published in the *American Political Science Review*, Sabrina Arias and Christopher Blair shed light on the wide-ranging implications of exposure to climate disasters on public opinion, attitudes, and behaviors.

Arias and Blair's study took an innovative approach, launching a weekly survey across four US states—Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and North Carolina—from August to October 2022, spanning the period before and after Hurricane Ian struck in September. These electorally pivotal states have repeatedly faced the wrath of climate disasters, yet their residents have historically exhibited climate-skeptic anti-migration attitudes. In September 2022, Hurricane Ian battered the Southeast US causing widespread devastation, upending lives, and displacing more than 50,000 people. For this study, Arias and Blair also followed up with an additional survey in March 2023 to gauge the durability of Hurricane Ian's impact on public perceptions.



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As residents exhibited a stronger belief that climate change should be a top priority. They expressed more positive attitudes toward climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, including clean energy investment, traditional energy divestment, climate-proofing military bases, strengthening coastlines, and flood retrofitting. Strikingly, beliefs about climate science increased even among Republicans after experiencing the hurricane's fury. Moreover, the exposure to this climate disaster translated into tangible political outcomes. During Florida's November 2022 general election, areas impacted by Hurricane Ian were more supportive of pro-climate ballot measures. Finally, the study also found that low-income individuals, who face the highest risks from climate change yet have the fewest resources to adapt by relocating, showed the largest shift in favor of pro-climate policies after Ian struck. However, Arias and Blair also found that these pro-climate attitudes were short-lived, dissipating within six months of exposure to the disaster, particularly among those who had received federal relief aid in the aftermath.

This research arrives at a crucial juncture as climate-fueled disasters are expected to grow more severe and frequent. The findings suggest that exposure to climate disasters opens a small, fleeting window of opportunity to make headway toward green policies. Ultimately, Arias and Blair's study indicates that severe climate disasters can galvanize bipartisan support to tackle the crisis, albeit briefly. Their work underscores the urgent need for policymakers and stakeholders to seize these transient windows and enact substantive measures to address the looming climate emergency.

As the world grapples with the escalating consequences of a changing climate, this research serves as a poignant reminder that public opinion can be swayed by visceral experiences, even if temporarily. Capitalizing on these critical junctures could prove pivotal in shaping climate-friendly public policy. ■

ARIAS, SABRINA B., and CHRISTOPHER W. BLAIR. 2024. "In the Eye of the Storm: Hurricanes, Climate Migration, and Climate Attitudes." *American Political Science Review*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000352>.