



# The Alarming Thing About Climate Alarmism

BY BJORN LOMBORG

It is an indisputable fact that carbon emissions are rising—and faster than most scientists predicted. But many climate-change alarmists seem to claim that all climate change is worse than expected. This ignores that much of the data are actually encouraging. The latest study from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that in the previous 15 years temperatures had risen 0.09 degrees Fahrenheit. The average of all models expected 0.8 degrees. So we're seeing about 90% less temperature rise than expected.

Facts like this are important because a one-sided focus on worst-case stories is a poor foundation for sound policies. Yes, Arctic sea ice is melting faster than the models expected. But models also predicted that Antarctic sea ice would decrease, yet it is increasing. Yes, sea levels are rising, but the rise is not accelerating—if anything, two recent papers, one by Chinese scientists published in the January 2014 issue of *Global and Planetary Change*, and the other by U.S. scientists published in the May 2013 issue of *Coastal Engineering*, have shown a small decline in the rate of sea-level increase.

We are often being told that we're seeing more and more droughts, but a study published last March in the journal *Nature* actually shows a decrease in the world's surface that has been afflicted by droughts since 1982.

Hurricanes are likewise used as an example of the "ever worse" trope. If we look at the

U.S., where we have the best statistics, damage costs from hurricanes are increasing—but only because there are more people, with more expensive property, living near coastlines. If we adjust for population and wealth, hurricane damage during the period from 1900 to 2013 decreased slightly.

At the U.N. climate conference in Lima, Peru, in December, attendees were told that their countries should cut carbon emissions to avoid future damage from storms like typhoon Hagupit, which hit the Philippines during the conference, killing at least 21 people and forcing more than a million into shelters. Yet the trend for landfalling typhoons around the Philippines has actually declined since 1950, according to a study published in 2012 by the American Meteorological Society's *Journal of Climate*. Again, we're told that things are worse than ever, but the facts don't support this.

This is important because if we want to help the poor people who are most threatened by natural disasters, we have to recognize that it is less about cutting carbon emissions than it is about pulling them out of poverty.

The best way to see this is to look at the world's deaths from natural disasters over time. In the Oxford University database for death rates from floods, extreme temperatures, droughts and storms, the average in the first part of last century was more than 13 dead every year per 100,000 people. Since then the death rates have dropped 97% to

a new low in the 2010s of 0.38 per 100,000

people.

The dramatic decline is mostly due to economic development that helps nations withstand catastrophes. If you're rich like Florida, a major hurricane might cause plenty of damage to expensive buildings, but it kills few people and causes a temporary dent in economic output. If a similar hurricane hits a poorer country like the Philippines or Guatemala, it kills many more and can devastate the economy.

In short, climate change is not worse than we thought. Some indicators are worse, but some are better. That doesn't mean global warming is not a reality or not a problem. It definitely is. But the narrative that the world's climate is changing from bad to

worse is unhelpful alarmism, which prevents us from focusing on smart solutions.

A well-meaning environmentalist might argue that, because climate change is a reality, why not ramp up the rhetoric and focus on the bad news to make sure the public understands its importance. But isn't that what has been done for the past 20 years? The public has been bombarded with dramatic headlines and apocalyptic photos of climate change and its consequences. Yet despite endless successions of climate summits, carbon emissions continue to rise, especially in rapidly developing countries like India, China and many African nations.

Alarmism has encouraged the pursuit of a one-sided climate policy of trying to cut carbon emis-

sions by subsidizing wind farms and solar panels. Yet today, according to the International Energy Agency, only about 0.4% of global energy consumption comes from solar photovoltaics and windmills. And even with exceptionally optimistic assumptions about future deployment of wind and solar, the IEA expects that these energy forms will provide a minuscule 2.2% of the world's energy by 2040.

In other words, for at least the next two decades, solar and wind energy are simply expensive, feel-good measures that will have an imperceptible climate impact. Instead, we should focus on investing in research and development of green energy, including new battery technology to better store and discharge solar and wind energy and lower its costs. We also need to invest in and promote growth in the world's poorest nations, which suffer the most from natural disasters.

Climate-change doomsayers notwithstanding, we urgently need balance if we are to make sensible choices and pick the right climate policy that can help humanity slow, and inevitably adapt to, climate change.

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**Exaggerated, worst-case claims result in bad policy and they ignore a wealth of encouraging data.**

