



# CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT'S SO ALARMING?

## BJORN LOMBORG

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 is actually more encouraging than expected.

Yes, Arctic sea ice is melting faster than the models expected. But models also predicted that Antarctic sea ice would decrease, yet Antarctic Sea ice is increasing.

Yes, sea levels are rising, but the rise is not accelerating—if anything, two recent papers, one by Chinese scientists published in January 2014, and the other by U.S. scientists published in May 2013, 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 in March 2014 in the journal *Nature* actually shows a decrease in the world's surface that has been afflicted by droughts since 1982.

Facts like these are important because a one-side focus on worst-case stories is a poor foundation for sound policies.

Hurricanes are likewise used as an example of things getting worse. But look at the U.S., where we have the best statistics: if we adjust for population and wealth, hurricane damage during the period of 1900-2013 actually decreased slightly.

At the UN climate conference in Lima, Peru in December 2014 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 strong typhoons around the Philippines have actually declined since 1950, according to a study published in 2012 by the *Journal of Climate*.

Again, we're told that all things are getting worse, but the facts don't support this. This does not mean that global warming is not real, or a problem, but the one-sided story of alarmism makes us lose focus. If we want to help the world's poor, who are the most threatened by natural disasters, it's 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 130 dead every year per million people. Since then, the death rates have dropped 97% to a new low in the 2010s of less than 4 per million.

The dramatic decline is mostly due to economic developments that help 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 only a temporary dent in economic output.

If a similar hurricane hits a poorer country like the Philippines or Guatemala, it kills many more people and can devastate the economy.

So let's be clear. Climate change is not "worse than we thought" That doesn't mean it's is not a reality or not a problem. It is.

But the narrative that the world's climate is changing from bad to worse is unhelpful alarmism that 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 that's exactly what we've done for the past 20 years.

Yet despite dramatic headlines, apocalyptic documentaries and annual 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 emissions 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 International Energy Agency 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 to lower its costs, so everyone will want it, including China and India.

We urgently need a more balanced climate conversation if we are to make sensible choices and pick the right climate policy that can actually help fix climate change.

I'm Bjorn Lomborg, president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center.