



Written by [James Heiser](#) on May 26, 2010

European Public Turns Against Climate-change Theory

Public opinion about climate change is slipping away from the grasp of the Fourth Estate, to the chagrin of advocates of the theory of manmade global warming.

In the words of Elisabeth Rosenthal at the *New York Times* in an article entitled "[Climate Fears Turn to Doubts Among Britons.](#)"



Last month hundreds of environmental activists crammed into an auditorium here to ponder an anguished question: If the scientific consensus on climate change has not changed, why have so many people turned away from the idea that human activity is warming the planet?

Critics would argue that it is because the public has gotten a chance to evaluate the "science" behind climate change and has found it lacking. The collapse of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen also fueled the perception that the crisis was more about global redistribution of wealth than saving the environment and the "Climategate" and "Glaciergate" scandals — among others — certainly did not help the credibility of the theory of anthropogenic climate change.

According to the Rosenthal, polls are demonstrating a definite shift in European opinion regarding climate change:

A survey in February by the BBC found that only 26 percent of Britons believed that "climate change is happening and is now established as largely manmade," down from 41 percent in November 2009. A poll conducted for the German magazine *Der Spiegel* found that 42 percent of Germans feared global warming, down from 62 percent four years earlier.

[The significant decline in belief in global warming](#) parallels the change in the views of the American public. According to [a Gallup poll in March](#), 67 percent of Americans answered "no" to the question, "Do you think that global warming will pose a serious threat to you or your way of life in your lifetime?" Furthermore, a dramatic shift is underway in public perception of the cause of global warming, if one concedes such warming is taking place at all. Again, in the words of the Gallup study:

In 2003, 61% of Americans said such increases were due to human activities — in line with advocates of the global warming issue — while 33% said they were due to natural changes in the environment. Now, a significantly diminished 50% say temperature increases are due to human activities, and 46% say they are not.

Thus, from the perspective of environmental extremists, the overall shift in public opinion is potentially lethal to their political agenda:

Gallup's annual update on Americans' attitudes toward the environment shows a public that over the last two years has become less worried about the threat of global warming, less convinced



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that its effects are already happening, and more likely to believe that scientists themselves are uncertain about its occurrence. In response to one key question, 48% of Americans now believe that the seriousness of global warming is generally exaggerated, up from 41% in 2009 and 31% in 1997, when Gallup first asked the question.

Such a consistent, substantial shift in opinion indicates that there would be less tolerance for radical restructuring of America's economy for the sake of combating global warming than would have been the case a few years ago. And this shift in public opinion has happened in the face of the seemingly-endless sermonizing by politicians, activists, and reporters warning of the Earth's imminent demise unless immediate, draconian action is taken.

However, according to Rosenthal, the theory's advocates are hardly ready to concede defeat:

Scientists have meanwhile awakened to the public's misgivings and are increasingly fighting back. An editorial in the prestigious journal *Nature* said climate deniers were using "every means at their disposal to undermine science and scientists" and urged scientists to counterattack. Scientists in France, the Netherlands and the United States have signed open letters affirming their trust in climate change evidence, including one published on May 7 in the journal *Science*.

But such actions may easily be perceived by a skeptical public as tests of ideological orthodoxy, regardless of the intentions of their authors. Scientists are expected to be purveyors of information; terms such as "counterattack" when it comes to public perceptions means overtly entering the rough and tumble arena of advocacy politics in a way which may easily be perceived as talking down to the electorate.

And Rosenthal seems to worry about the influence of conservative media:

It is unclear whether such actions are enough to win back a segment of the public that has eagerly consumed a series of revelations that were published prominently in right-leaning newspapers like *The Times of London* and *The Telegraph* and then repeated around the world.

In January, for example, *The Times* chastised the United Nations climate panel for an errant and unsupported projection that glaciers in the Himalayas could disappear by 2035. The United Nations ultimately apologized for including the estimate, which was mentioned in passing within a 3,000-page report in 2007.

But the problems with the IPCC report are certainly not limited to a single estimate, or "conservative" reporting of that estimate. One independent evaluation gave the entire report [a final grade of "F"](#) for the many sections that reviewers found to lack sufficient peer review.

Climate-change theory is not in trouble with "right-leaning newspapers" — the trouble the theory faces is that the public doubts its credibility. "Counterattacking" those who ask the questions will not make the questions disappear.



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