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UNH Research Finds Awareness of Winter Warming Depends on Political Identity

Monday, February 17, 2020

(HTTPS://WWW.UNH.EDU/UNHTODAY/NEWS/2020/02/17/UNH-RESEARCH-FINDS-AWARENESS-WINTER-WARMING-DEPENDS-POLITICAL-IDENTITY)

DURHAM, N.H.—Fewer than half of New Hampshire residents are aware that average winter temperatures have risen in the state, according to new research (https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/nh-winters-warming) released by the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. Although many residents have not noticed, their winters have been warming about twice as fast as global warming. The researchers also found that awareness of the warming is no higher among people who participate in winter sports, nor are there significant differences by age, sex or level of education.

But winter-warming awareness does vary with political identity. Liberals and moderates are significantly more likely than conservatives to acknowledge the warming trend, according to the researchers.

While average winter temperatures are clearly rising, trends in snowfall (which can be heaviest when it is just below freezing) appear less clear-cut. “It’s possible the lack of consistent trends in winter snowfall and snow cover over the past 20 years may cause some residents to believe there has been little change in temperature,” they noted. Future studies might consider whether different types of winter sport participation affect perceptions of winter warming. For example, studies of skiers’ perceptions about changing winters have been limited and focused on adaptive response such as snowmaking rather than climate change itself.

This research was conducted by Elizabeth Burakowski, research assistant professor in the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space, and Lawrence Hamilton, professor of sociology and senior fellow in the Carsey School.

The Carsey School of Public Policy is nationally recognized for research, policy education and bringing people together for thoughtful dialogue to address important societal challenges. The school develops and facilitates innovative, responsive and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

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Media Contact

Erika Mantz (/unhtoday/contributor/erika-mantz) | Communications and Public Affairs | erika.mantz@unh.edu (mailto:erika.mantz@unh.edu)

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