

Americans Attribute Warm Winter Weather to Climate Change

by Rebecca Riffkin

Story Highlights

- *63% say winter was warmer than usual; 10% say it was colder*
- *Most who say it was warmer attribute this to climate change*
- *In previous two years, majorities said winter was colder than usual*

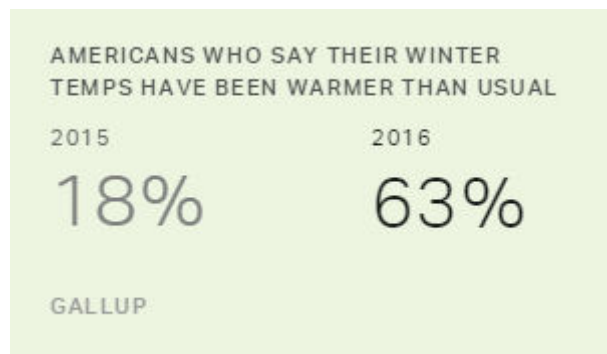
WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A majority of Americans, 63%, say the weather in their local area this winter was warmer than usual. When asked what they think caused these abnormal temperatures, more Americans say the shift was the result of human-caused climate change rather than normal variations. Just 10% of Americans say it was a colder winter than usual, and 26% say the weather was about the same.

Americans' Experience of Extremes in Local Weather and the Perceived Cause

Have temperatures in your local area been -- [ROTATED: colder than usual this winter, about the same, (or) warmer than usual this winter]? (Asked of those who say the weather has been colder/warmer than usual:) Do you think temperatures are colder/warmer mainly due to -- [ROTATED: human-caused climate change (or to) normal year-to-year variation in temperatures]?

	2015	2016
	%	%
Winter temperatures in your local area		
Colder than usual	51	10
(Due to normal variation in temperatures)	31	6
(Due to human-caused climate change)	19	4
About the same	29	26
Warmer than usual	18	63
(Due to normal variation in temperatures)	8	26
(Due to human-caused climate change)	9	34

Most recently, Americans who have said they've experienced abnormal winter temperatures have been more likely to attribute those changes to normal variations than to climate change. The shift this year is likely because a larger, more regionally and politically diverse group of Americans is reporting warmer temperatures this year.



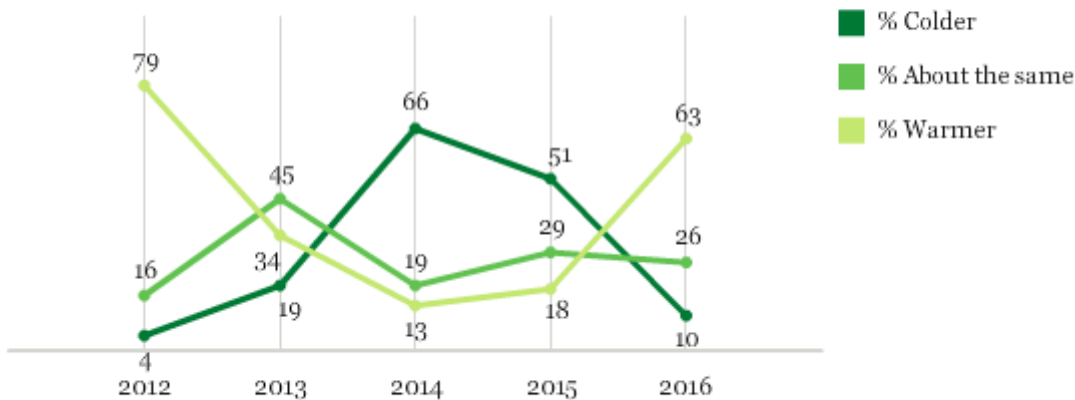
Majorities of Americans of all political identities say this winter was warmer than usual. However, more Democrats (76%) than Republicans (51%) say this, and Democrats who say it was warmer are more than twice as likely as Republicans to attribute the rise in temperatures to climate change, as Gallup has found in the past.

Gallup's annual March Environment poll has asked Americans since 2012 to report on weather conditions in their local areas. Americans appear to be reasonably accurate in their temperature assessments. This year and in 2012, majorities have said it was warmer than usual. This year's poll was conducted just before warm, spring-like temperatures came early for much of the U.S. East Coast but a few weeks after summer-like temperatures in California and much of the Southwestern region. El Nino is probably one cause of this abnormal weather.

In 2014 and 2015, Americans were most likely to say the weather was colder than usual, an assessment generally in line with official statistics.

Local Winter Temperatures Compared With Prior Winters

Next, I'd like you to think about the weather in your local area this winter season compared to past winters. Have temperatures in your local area been -- [ROTATED: colder than usual this winter, about the same (or) warmer than usual this winter]?



GALLUP

The highest proportions of adults saying it was warmer than usual this winter -- more than seven in 10 -- were in the East and Midwest, the regions most likely to experience cold winters. But even a majority of Southerners reported warmer-than-normal temperatures. Americans in the West were the least likely of all four regions to say the winter was warmer than usual; still, 49% said this.

Winter Temperatures Compared With Prior Winters, by Region

Next, I'd like you to think about the weather in your local area this winter season compared to past winters. Have temperatures in your local area been -- [ROTATED: colder than usual this winter, about the same (or) warmer than usual this winter]?

Colder

East: 5%

Midwest: 6%

South: 11%

West: 19%

About the same

East: 17%

Midwest: 21%

South: 31%

West: 31%

Warmer

East: 78%

Midwest: 72%

South: 57%

West: 49%

GALLUP, MARCH 2-6, 2016

Last year, Americans' views of their winter weather varied more by region. Westerners were more likely to say it was warmer rather than colder, and their responses were the most similar to this year's. In the other regions, especially the East, residents were more likely to say it was colder than usual last year. This again largely matched the varying weather patterns found in different parts of the country last winter.

Bottom Line

Scientists say 2015 was the warmest year on record across the globe, and temperatures increased by one of the largest amounts found since record keeping began in 1880. U.S. temperatures were also high, and that trend appears to have continued this winter, as El Nino has affected the weather. And, while scientists say climate change is driving global temperatures up, they say the more recent changes also reflect a spike in the usual patterns. Still, Americans were more likely this year to attribute the extreme weather to climate change rather than normal variations, including El Nino.

Cold weather was partially to blame for low U.S. gross domestic product figures in the first quarter of last year, because snow and cold temperatures discourage shopping and traveling and encourage people to bundle up at home, not spending money. But in the late 1990s, an El Nino event boosted GDP by at least a small amount, something that could happen again this year. So the warm weather Americans have reported this winter could be a good sign for the GDP in the first quarter, even if it means fewer people buying snow shovels and salt for sidewalks and driveways over the past few months.

Historical data are available in [Gallup Analytics](#).

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted March 2-6, 2016, on the Gallup U.S. Daily survey, with a random sample of 1,019 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 60% cellphone respondents and 40% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

[View complete question responses and trends.](#)

Learn more about how the [Gallup Poll Social Series](#) works.

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SOURCE: Gallup <http://www.gallup.com/poll/189920/americans-attribute-warm-winter-weather-climate-change.aspx>

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