

# Choosing a path



**The impacts of climate change are becoming difficult to ignore with more frequent climate extreme events across the globe. Yet, whether these events may influence individuals and society to engage in climate discussion and action is currently unclear.**

**E**xtrême climate events dominate the news on a regular basis. This boreal summer has, so far, seen wildfires across swathes of southern Europe, Canada, the United States as well as the islands of Maui and Tenerife. As discussed in our July editorial<sup>1</sup>, the ongoing El Niño is pushing temperatures higher, as seen by July 2023 being the hottest month in the recorded history<sup>2</sup>.

The message from research is clear – the IPCC Assessment Report 6 Synthesis Report, released earlier this year, highlights that warming of 1.1 °C above pre-industrial levels has already occurred. This brings with it adverse impacts, many of which we are seeing reported on the news with increasing regularity, but there are even more that do not make the headlines that are altering lives around the globe. Yet, there is still a lack of meaningful action.

Research shows that extreme events, or exposure to climate change, can increase individual understanding of anthropogenic climate change and its impacts to varying degrees. Work in Australia showed that climate scepticism has reduced from 2009 to 2019, particularly among conservatives, and that hotter temperatures in the year before the survey predicted lower scepticism<sup>3</sup>. Considering extreme events, survey data in the United States between 2014 and 2019 show that experience with hurricanes resulted in a significant increase in belief that climate change is occurring, while exposure to fires and floods did not<sup>4</sup>. Whereas data from German households found that flood experience did have a positive effect on beliefs, most strongly for those in close proximity to the event and with previous belief in climate change<sup>5</sup>.

However, analysis has also shown that a single extreme event may only lead to limited



discussion on climate change and the event, and certain factors, such as scientific attribution and socio-demographics, influence the extent of discussion<sup>6</sup>.

Looking at society more broadly, in this issue of *Nature Climate Change*, Brian O'Neill asks us to reconsider how research and assessment of climate change are conducted and communicated. The [Comment article](#) discusses total risk, and how climate change is currently considered as an additional risk without being contextualized with total risk. Putting climate change risks into this broader context of well-being could encourage stakeholders and society to act.

Considering climate action as part of a larger issue is in line with statements from outgoing IPCC Chair Hoesung Lee. In a [Q&A](#) in this issue, Lee comments on how climate action – mitigation and adaptation – will support progress towards achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the midpoint of the SDGs 15-year period, progress towards the goals has been slow. Reflecting on this, a number of journals in the Nature Portfolio have brought together content published across the pages on progress

and success stories in a collection entitled '[Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#)'. The collection remains open to submissions.

September is an important month with the SDG Summit and the Climate Ambition Summit taking place in New York City, with aspirations to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs by the 2030 deadline, and to do likewise for climate action by focusing on three tracks – ambition, credibility and implementation.

As we head towards the two summits in September and COP28 later this year, this is the chance and the time to choose the path of increased ambition and action.

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## References

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