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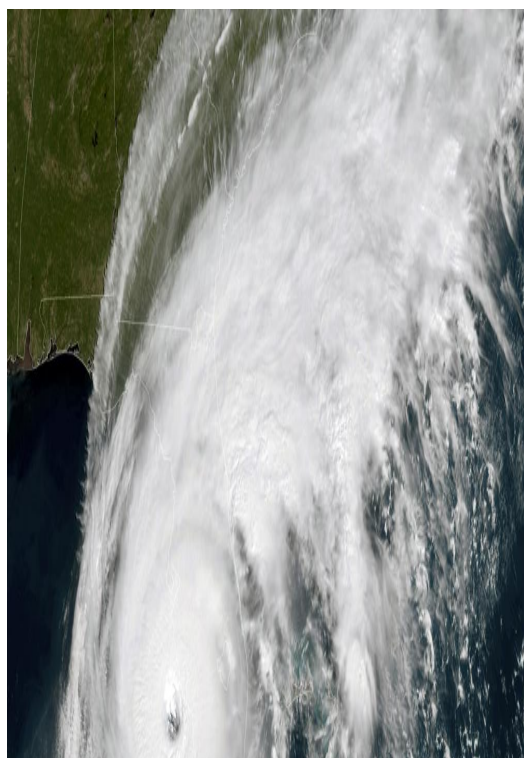


Fact-checking

# Misleading claims downplay climate change's effect on hurricanes

U.S. News World News

By PHILIP MARCELO yesterday



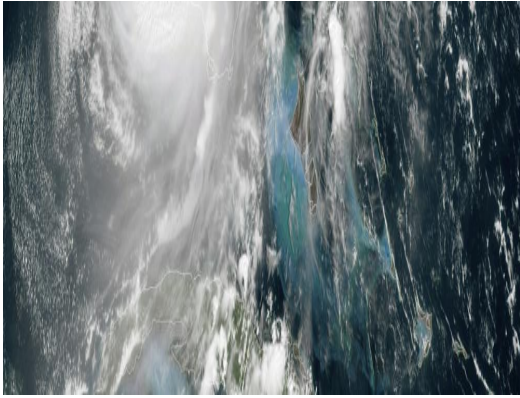
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CLAIM: Climate change isn't real because hurricanes in Florida and across the U.S. haven't increased in frequency, intensity or landfall in more than a century.

AP'S ASSESSMENT: Missing context. While studies have found no evidence of an increase in hurricane landfalls in the past century in Florida and across the U.S., experts say this data doesn't disprove the fact that climate change is a real

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phenomenon  
impacting  
hurricanes in  
other ways.  
Globally, the  
intensity of  
tropical cyclones  
has been  
increasing, and  
studies project  
that trend will  
continue, even  
as the frequency  
of the storms is  
expected to  
remain steady or  
decrease.

#### THE FACTS:

Following the  
[devastation](#)  
[wrought by](#)  
[Hurricane Ian in](#)  
[southwest](#)  
[Florida](#) last  
week, some  
social media  
users are citing  
U.S. data that  
shows  
hurricanes  
haven't become  
more frequent or  
intense to  
misleadingly  
assert that  
climate change is  
not impacting  
storm behavior.

"No trend in

landfalling  
Florida  
hurricanes since  
1903. Not in  
frequency. Not  
in intensity. Not  
in anything,”  
wrote a user on  
Twitter.  
“Climate is a  
hoax.”

The post, which  
has been liked or  
shared more  
than 3,700 times  
as of Thursday,  
includes a  
scatter plot map  
of major  
landfalling  
hurricanes in  
Florida since  
1903 and their  
corresponding  
wind speeds to  
suggest there’s  
been no  
significant trend  
in intensity or  
frequency of the  
storms.

Another Twitter  
user cited data  
showing there  
were 19  
hurricanes that  
made landfall in  
the U.S. between  
2011 and 2020 —

the same  
number as there  
were between  
1851 and 1860.

“‘Climate  
change,’ right?”  
asked a  
suggestive  
caption on the  
post, which had  
been liked or  
shared nearly  
30,000 times as  
of Thursday.

Those making  
the point [cite a  
National  
Oceanic and  
Atmospheric  
Administration  
web page](#) that  
compiles and  
analyzes  
research on  
climate change  
and hurricanes,  
including [a 2011  
study](#) that found  
no strong  
evidence that  
more hurricanes  
had made  
landfall in the  
U.S. in the last  
century.

“We conclude  
that the  
historical

Atlantic hurricane data at this stage do not provide compelling evidence for a substantial greenhouse warming-induced century-scale increase in: frequency of tropical storms, hurricanes, or major hurricanes, or in the proportion of hurricanes that become major hurricanes,” the federal agency wrote, after explaining the study and other research.

But David Zierden, Florida’s state climatologist based at the Center for Ocean-Atmospheric Prediction Studies at Florida State University, cautioned

against “cherry-picking” statistics for hurricanes in Florida or the Atlantic Ocean basin.

After all, hurricanes, which are known as tropical cyclones elsewhere, occur worldwide and most of them stay out at sea and never reach the coast, he and other experts said.

“There are many published studies showing increase in strength of the strongest hurricanes, increased rainfall from landfalling tropical systems, increased potential for strong hurricanes, increase in the occurrence of rapid intensification and worsening

storm surge with the contribution of sea level rise,” Zierden wrote in an email.

Indeed, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [concluded last year](#) that, globally, the proportion of major tropical cyclone occurrence -- those at Category 3 or higher -- has increased over the last four decades.

Tropical cyclones are also projected to increase in intensity in the future, even as the frequency of the storms is expected to decrease, according to [a 2020 study](#) published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological



Society. In both cases, global warming due to increased greenhouse gas concentrations is a driving force, the study suggests.

Other studies have found that human-caused [climate change is behind increasingly wetter hurricanes](#) that can put coastal communities at greater risk of flood damage.

Tom Knutson, a senior scientist at NOAA who studies climate change and hurricanes and authored the agency's web page on the matter, stressed that hurricane data isn't the most conclusive proof of climate change, either.

In fact, older records on

hurricanes —  
ones collected  
before the  
advent of  
satellites in the  
1960s — have  
limitations since  
they were largely  
drawn from data  
collected by  
ships out at sea,  
he said.

Gabriel Vecchi, a  
Princeton  
professor of  
geosciences who  
studies  
hurricanes,  
agreed, saying it  
was a “non-  
sequitur” to  
conclude climate  
change isn’t real  
simply because  
hurricanes aren’t  
making landfall  
in the U.S. more  
frequently.

“Climate change  
is very real, and  
evident in the  
concentrations  
of CO<sub>2</sub> in the  
atmosphere,  
global average  
temperature of  
the planet, the  
heat content of  
the oceans, sea

level rise,  
melting land ice,  
among many  
other factors,”  
he wrote in an  
email.

Jacob Carstens, a  
meteorologist  
and hurricane  
researcher at  
Penn State  
University, said  
research into the  
links between  
hurricanes and  
climate change is  
in its early  
stages, and it’s  
likely “more  
signals will  
emerge” with  
more reliable  
data.

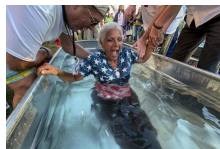
“Warmer oceans  
provide more  
fuel for  
hurricanes,  
which can raise  
the ceiling on  
how intense they  
can get,” he said  
by email.

“Climate change  
may not be the  
reason that a  
particular storm  
forms, but it can  
and does amplify  
a storm’s

impacts.”

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This is part of AP’s effort to address widely shared misinformation, including work with outside companies and organizations to add factual context to misleading content that is circulating online. [Learn more about fact-checking at AP.](#)



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