Science as a weapon: climate researchers admit ignorance

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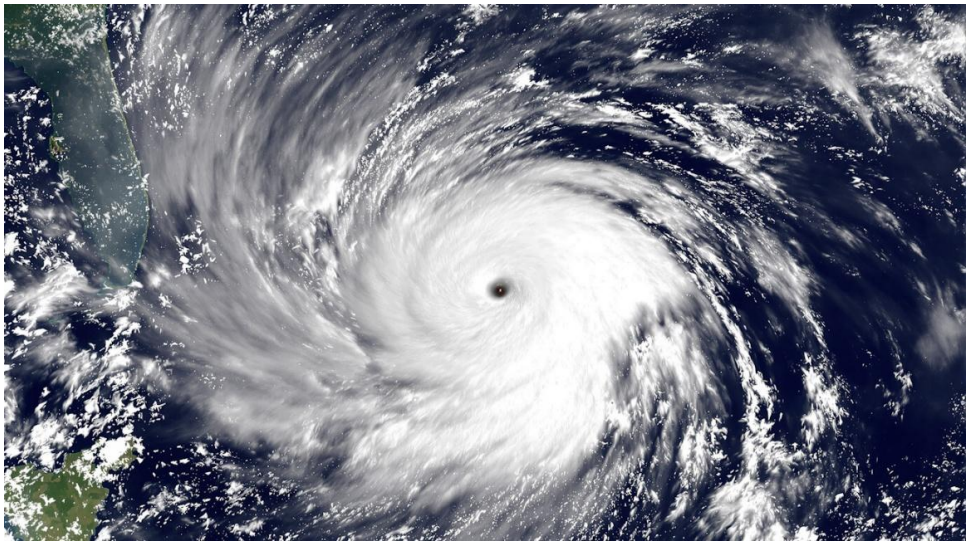

Symbolic image hurricane. (C) R24/AI

Climate science has a problem with honesty. A recent commentary in the renowned scientific journal Nature is a good example of how political certainty is constructed from scientific uncertainty. In their analysis of hurricane risks, the authors Adam Sobel and Kerry Emanuel freely admit that there is much they do not know - but nevertheless call for immediate action.

The Nature commentary "Hurricane risk in a changing climate - the role of uncertainty" published in May 2025 begins with a remarkable admission: "There is also a lot we don't know" about the effects of climate change on hurricanes. However, this apparent scientific modesty quickly turns out to be a rhetorical trick. Instead of treating ignorance as a reason for restraint, the authors turn it into a lever for increased intervention, as Charles Rotter also notes on the climate portal "Whats up with that".

The central thesis is: "In general, uncertainty increases risk." This statement sounds plausible at first, but on closer inspection it turns out to be a tautology. More uncertainty does not automatically increase the actual risk - it merely expands the range of possible scenarios. In politicized climate science, however, this range is systematically interpreted in favour of the worst assumptions.

Selective certainties and changing narratives

The way Sobel and Emanuel structure their arguments is particularly revealing. They present various hurricane risk factors "in roughly decreasing order of certainty" - a rhetorical trick that suggests a hierarchy of credibility without making the actual uncertainties transparent.

The authors are still confident about the amount of precipitation: scientists are certain that hurricane precipitation will increase in a warmer climate, as "more water vapor can be held in a warmer atmosphere". However, this theoretical finding is not quantified, nor is it explained how this increase will translate into measurable damage - especially in light of improved infrastructure and forecasting systems.

When it comes to storm frequency, the authors are much more cautious: "Researchers do not yet fully understand what controls the global frequency of hurricanes, and models produce inconsistent predictions." Rather than citing this fundamental knowledge gap as a reason for political reticence, they delve deeper into the complexity, apparently hoping that the confusion will mask the weakness of their argument.

Contradictory explanations for the same trend

The discussion of the increase in hurricane activity in the Atlantic is particularly revealing. The authors concede that this trend is "a response to decreasing air pollution rather than increasing greenhouse gases". This statement directly contradicts the common narrative that CO_2 is the main culprit. Yet they only use this finding to claim that the hurricane increase is real - even if the supposed culprit is a different one.

The explanation of aerosol effects reveals the arbitrariness of the argument. As German climate researchers confirm, air pollution control has led to fewer reflective particles in the atmosphere, resulting in warmer seas. The authors conclude that if this explanation is correct, the recent increase in hurricane intensity in the Atlantic is unlikely to continue, but neither will the low hurricane activity of the 1970s and 1980s be repeated. In other words: Whatever happens, the authors' thesis remains valid. With heads they win, but with tails everyone else loses.

Models versus reality

The article reaches the height of scientific confusion when discussing climate models. The authors write: "Earth system models project that greenhouse gases will tend to further increase temperatures in the equatorial eastern Pacific... This is consistent with the expectation of low hurricane activity in the Atlantic in the coming decades." However, this is immediately followed by: "But observations have instead shown the opposite."

In any other field of science, such a discrepancy between model predictions and reality would lead to a fundamental review of assumptions. In climate science, it is apparently just another paragraph. Experts such as Mojib Latif confirm the link between ocean warming and hurricane intensity, but the fundamental prediction problems remain unsolved.

Political theater with scientific props

The conclusion of the Nature commentary reveals the true nature of this exercise: "Our overall opinion is that the current US hurricane hazard is greater than the longer-term historical average" due to "well-understood factors that increase the hazard and poorly understood ones that may increase it."

This statement is remarkably honest in its dishonesty. The authors admit that they don't know what they don't know, but still demand that they act as if they do know. This is no longer empirical science, but moral theater with peer-reviewed props.

The real danger

The problem lies not in the storms themselves, but in the political winds that follow them. When scientists turn complex, poorly understood and regionally diverse phenomena such as hurricane frequency into political instruments, they undermine trust in science itself.

The Climate Risk Index 2025 shows that extreme weather is already causing considerable damage today because, as a result of population growth, more and more people are living in endangered areas that were previously avoided. But instead of talking honestly about the limits of knowledge and developing appropriate adaptation strategies, uncertainty is being used as a weapon to push through political goals.

The real danger to society lies not in the forces of nature, which we do not fully understand, but in a science that sacrifices its credibility for short-term political gain. When "I don't know" becomes the justification for "you must obey", the end of rational debate has been reached.