

Nate Silver, the statistician who blogs at fivethirtyeight.com and made national news (and the [Colbert Report](#)) last year by being the most accurate and reliable predictor of the presidential election results, has turned his attention to climate change. In response to an op-ed yesterday by George Will in the Washington Post, Silver analyzes temperature trends and debunks the idea that there was a “global cooling” trend either in the 1970s or over the past century, or that this idea was ever accepted by many scientists. His [new post](#) explains just one of many reasons why George F. Will's recent op-ed in the Washington Post was factually incorrect and deeply misleading:

[A]ccording to George F. Will, many scientists were convinced in the 1970s that global *cooling* was a significant threat to the planet. And if those scientists were so wrong before, why should we trust them when they say that global *warming* is a threat now?

There's just one little problem with this story, which reappears every so often in conservative discourse on the environment. Specifically, it's a crock of shit.

And Silver provides the [statistical analysis](#) to back up this assertion.

David Roberts at Grist.org has a [scathing review of Will's op-ed](#) as well. (Grist also has the useful page [“How to Talk to a Climate Skeptic.”](#) a resource devoted to debunking the primary misinformation out there, which includes several other ideas that Will endorses in his op-ed.)

As Roberts points out, it is particularly ironic that Will's column was published on the same day as Dr. Chris Field, one of our most eminent climate scientists, [noted that climate change is very likely happening even faster than expected](#). (As I noted in the linked post, Dr. Field taught a session of our small climate seminar at UCLA last year. One thing he was able to do very well was to sharpen our understanding the probabilities of various scenarios, and where the real uncertainties still lie; unfortunately for all of us, his persuasive conclusion was that the odds are strongly in favor of some very bad outcomes.)

Will also argues that environmentalists (and, presumably, insurers, other multinational companies, and national and subnational governments that are afraid enough of climate change that they are expending serious resources to study it and to try to figure out how slow climate change or adapt to the changes it's likely to bring) are idealists pining for a state of grace, saying:

An unstated premise of eco-pessimism is that environmental conditions are, or recently were, optimal. The proclaimed faith of eco-pessimists is weirdly optimistic: These optimal conditions must and can be preserved or restored if government will make us minimize our carbon footprints and if government will “remake” the economy.

What Will doesn't realize is that our infrastructure and economy are indeed adapted to current conditions. Significant changes in our climate will unquestionably result in displacement, massive need for changes in risk-bearing mechanisms such as insurance, and need for dramatic changes in such basic public services as water supply. And the more the climate changes, the more it will cost – in money as well as lives – to adapt. (See [this earlier post](#) for more on adaptation.)

Joseph Romm at Climate Progress does a thorough [analysis of Will's op-ed](#), in which he closely examines Will's assertions one by one and shows why they are wrong. He also notes that the Post has been a haven for ill-informed columnists on this subject for some time.

Will is entitled to his opinion that climate change isn't a problem worth addressing. But it's unfortunate that the Washington Post would publish op-eds that get their facts wrong on this important subject.