

Hurricane Zeta leaves 2.6 million without power, kills six as record breaking US storm season continues

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Hurricane Zeta made landfall west of Grand Isle, Louisiana Wednesday at 5 p.m. local time as a Category 2 hurricane with winds reaching 110 mph. Weakening to a tropical storm, it continued to tear across the American South on Thursday before dissipating over Delaware and the Atlantic Ocean Thursday night.

As of Friday, the storm had left 2.6 million people without power across seven states and killed at least six.

In New Orleans, the storm was the strongest in recorded history to have its eye pass directly over the city. Approximately 80 percent of the city of 390,000 people was left without power and it could take 3-5 days before it is fully restored.

Several states, including Louisiana, Georgia and North Carolina, saw early voting polling sites disrupted by power outages throughout the day on Thursday. Friday, October 30, is the last day for early voting in Georgia, prompting calls for the Governor of Georgia, Brian Kemp, to extend the deadline through 9 p.m. on Friday night.

Early voting cannot be extended by a day in Georgia, but each county can choose their own hours. This will leave tens of thousands of voters to wait in line and hope their polling places remain open long enough into the evening.

Zeta is the twenty-seventh named cyclone of 2020, tied with 2005 for the second highest recorded number in a year. It is also the record breaking eleventh hurricane to make landfall on the continental United States; the previous record was nine set 104 years ago.

Zeta was a remarkable storm in an exceptional cyclone season.

Only two other tropical storms since 1850 have landed as far west along the Gulf Coast this late in the year according to meteorologist Matt Lanza. Additionally,

according to AccuWeather Senior Weather Editor Jesse Ferrell, no tropical storm has ever traveled across Northwestern South Carolina and Southwestern North Carolina in or after October.

While the 2020 hurricane season was expected to be above average, the number of tropical storms has defied all expectations.

On April 2, the Colorado State University Tropical Meteorology Project forecast 16 named storms and eight hurricanes. On May 21, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published a prediction of an above-normal season with a 70 percent chance of 13 to 19 named storms, including six to ten hurricanes and three to six major hurricanes.

By August 6, NOAA had updated its forecast to an "extremely active" season with 19 to 25 named storms and 11 hurricanes.

With a month left in the hurricane season and the possibility of further storms forming as late as December, it is very likely that 2020 will become the most active hurricane season in recorded history.

There are two main causes for this: a developing La Niña event and global climate change.

La Niña is part of a climate pattern known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). El Niño is a warming event in the ocean off the coast of South America along the equator. This causes wetter conditions in the Caribbean and Central and South America, and results in a weakening of the conditions for hurricane formation in the Atlantic.

During a La Niña event, colder water rises to the surface along the South American coast, resulting from stronger trade winds and ocean currents pushing warm water west. When this occurs, it slows the progression of winds from the Atlantic to the Pacific, giving hurricanes more time to

form and strengthen as they move into the Caribbean.

A La Niña event has been forming since August and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has given a 90 percent probability that it will persist through January at a weak to moderate rating.

The La Niña event highlights the dangers of climate change. The WMO predicts an average decline in the surface temperature of the Pacific off the South American coast of one degree Celsius during this La Niña. This seemingly small drop in temperature is expected to cause drier and warmer conditions in parts of Central America and the Southern United States, while causing wetter and colder conditions in the Northern United States.

As average ocean temperatures continue to rise due to climate change, the effect on hurricanes will be significant.

Rising ocean temperatures are not directly related to the number of tropical storms that form, but they are related to their severity. According to Yale Climate Connections, a one degree Fahrenheit rise in ocean temperature can cause a 15-20 mph rise in wind speed as a hurricane develops.

According to NOAA, a two degree Celsius rise in ocean temperatures could result in a 10-15 percent increase in storm rainfall, an up to 10 percent increase in storm severity, and a larger number of storms reaching Category 4 and 5 levels.

This will have even more devastating effects as storms slow down, allowing them to build strength for longer. A 2018 study by James P. Kossin found that tropical storms have slowed by about 10 percent between 1949 and 2016. This means that storms spend more time in one place, dumping more rain and subjecting areas to prolonged exposure to high winds and storm surges.

It is unclear how exactly climate change will impact ENSO events, largely due to their natural variability, but recent research published by the National Center for Atmospheric Research concludes that “the impact of an El Niño/La Niña event of a given strength is enhanced by mean climate warming, with accompanying increases in the probability and severity of regional temperature extremes.”

With hurricanes increasing in severity, and the potential for more severe La Niña events (which can last for up to three years) the possibility of more frequent and violent storm events is greatly enhanced.

The progressing climate disaster facing humanity is the product of the ruling class’ opposition to any significant reduction in carbon emissions or substantial restriction on

environmental degradation.

In the United States, both the Republican and Democratic parties have been active participants in protecting the profits of capitalists who pillage the planet for profit.

The Obama administration protected BP following the Deepwater Horizon spill of 2012, then proceeded with deregulating offshore drilling despite the clear dangers. It also pursued the Dakota Access Pipeline, deploying federal agents to suppress the protests of environmental groups and Native American protesters attempting to protect their water sources and sacred lands.

Fracking was expanded under the Obama administration, as well as access of fossil fuel companies to public lands. The Trump administration has garnered criticism for its similar but more aggressive policy. However, the groundwork was laid by Obama and Biden when they opened 5.7 million acres of federal land for exploitation.

Now, the Trump administration has dismantled already weak environmental regulations with little to no resistance from the Democrats. The Green New Deal, a non-binding and nationalist program, was ultimately rejected by the Democratic Party, including by most of its own sponsors.

The fight against climate change cannot be entrusted to either capitalist party. It is clear that they are opposed to any genuine attempt to fight climate change and its effects, as this would threaten the profits of their handlers.

The working class must take this fight into its own hands by fighting for socialism, transforming the global economy to serve social need and launch a global campaign to stop and reverse the effects of capitalist pollution.



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