

Media and Climate Change Observatory (MECCO)



University of Colorado Boulder

ISSUE 14, FEBRUARY 2018

February media attention to climate change and global warming was down 23% throughout the world from the previous month of January 2018. This was the case across most regions: Asia was down 30%, Central/South America dropped 9%, Europe decreased 26%, Oceania dropped 7%, and North America was down 34%. The exceptions were Africa and in the Middle East. Global numbers were about half those (58% less) from counts a year ago (February 2017). The high levels of coverage in February 2017 were attributed to coverage of movements of the newly anointed Donald J. Trump Administration in the United States (US).

Figure 1 shows these ebbs and flows in media coverage at the global scale – organized into seven geographical regions around the world – from January 2004 through January 2018.

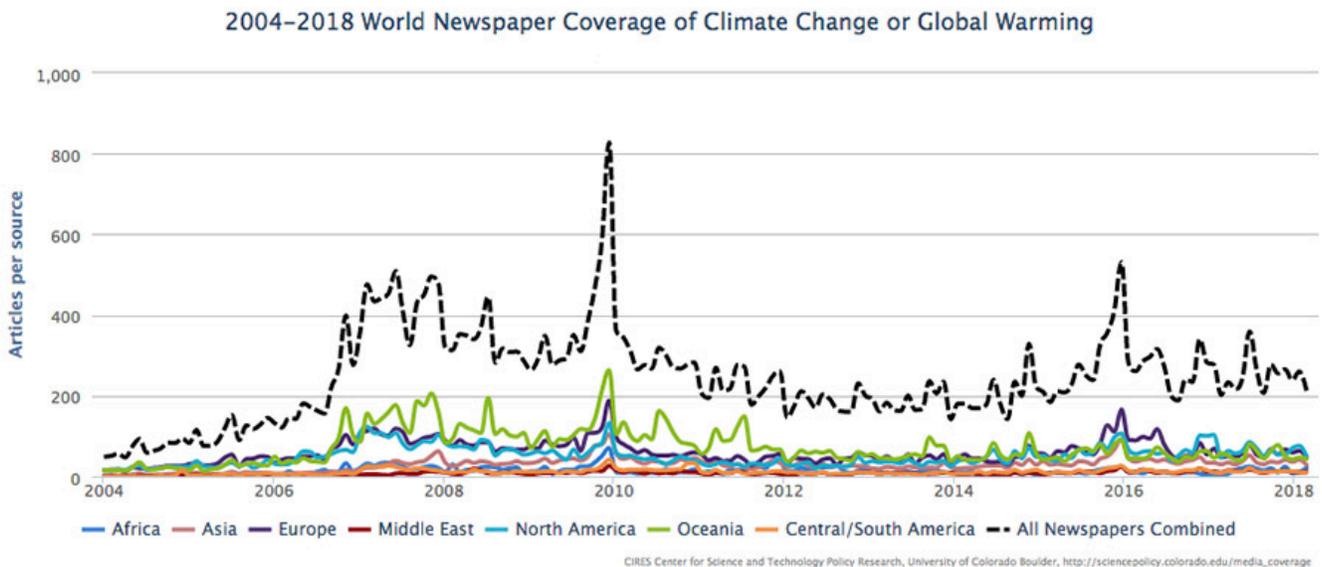


Figure 1: Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in sixty-two sources across thirty-five countries in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through February 2018.

At the country level in February 2018, coverage also went down in most countries compared to the previous month: Germany (-5%), Canada (-13%), Australia (-13%), the United Kingdom (UK) (-17%), India (-25%), Spain (-34%), and the United States (-42%). It was just up slightly in New Zealand (+6%).

Recently, MeCCO has expanded to six world radio sources (Figure 2), with monitoring of coverage beginning in January 2000. Coverage in February 2018 compared to the previous month was also down (-62%), and coverage compared to a year ago (February 2017) was similarly reduced as well (-49%).

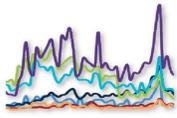


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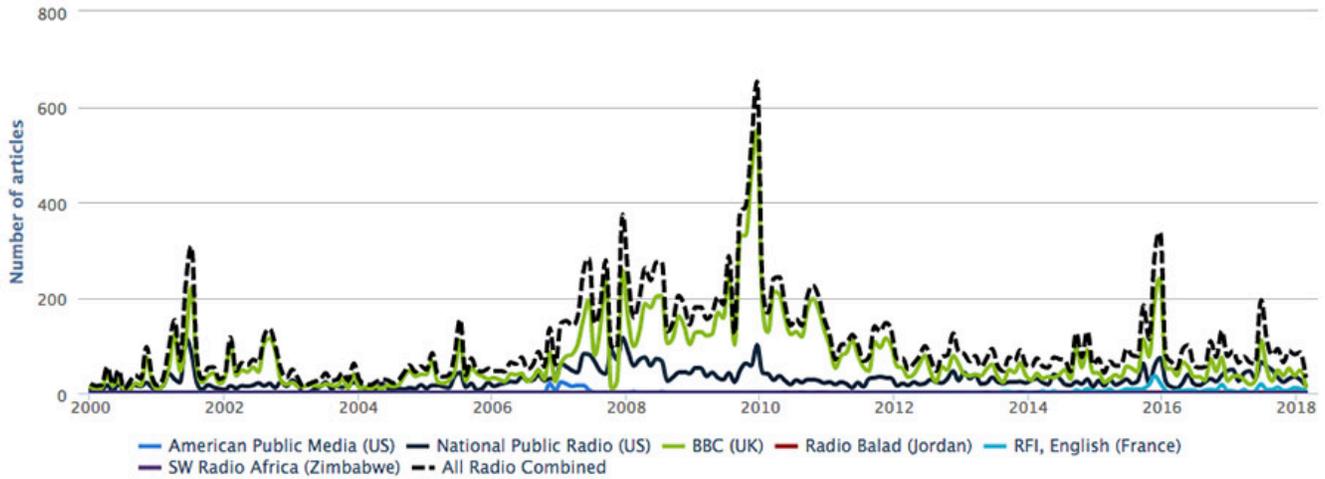
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2000–2018 World Radio Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming



CIRES Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Colorado Boulder, http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage

Figure 2: Radio coverage of climate change or global warming in 6 main sources: **US American Public Media**; **US National Public Radio** (National Public Radio-NPR, NPR All Things Considered, NPR Ask Me Another, NPR Code Switch, NPR Fresh Air, NPR Hidden Brain, NPR Morning Edition, NPR All Tech Considered/Parallels, NPR Planet Money, NPR TED Radio Hour, NPR Wait Wait Don't Tell Me!, NPR Weekend All Things Considered, NPR Weekend Edition Saturday, NPR Weekend Edition Sunday); **UK BBC** (IR, IR-Asian Pacific Stories, IR-European stories, IR-Middle East and Africa Stories, IR-North/South America Stories, IR-Top News Stories); **Radio Balad** (Jordan); **RFI** (France); and **SW Radio Africa** (Zimbabwe)

Moving to considerations of content within these searches, Figure 3 shows word frequency data at the country levels in global newspapers and radio, juxtaposed with US newspapers and US television in February 2018.

The five newspapers and six television sources in the US showed continuing yet diminishing signs in February of the ‘Trump Dump’ (where media attention that would have focused on other climate-related events and issues instead was placed on Trump-related actions (leaving many other stories untold)). However, analyses of content in media reporting outside the US context show that this pattern of news reporting continues to be limited to the US. To illustrate, in February, US news articles related to climate change or global warming, Trump was invoked 1439 times through the 272 stories this month (a ratio of 5.3 times per article on average) in *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *the Los Angeles Times*. In US television sources of *ABC*, *CBS*, *CNN*, *Fox News Network*, *MSNBC*, and *NBC*, Trump was mentioned 722 times in 43 news segments (16.8 mentions per segment). In contrast, in the UK press, Trump was mentioned in the *Daily Mail & Mail on Sunday*, *Guardian & the Observer*, *the Sun*, *the Daily Telegraph & Sunday Telegraph*, the

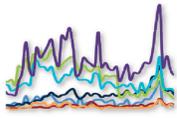


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Daily Mirror & Sunday Mirror, the Scotsman & Scotland on Sunday, and the Times & Sunday Times 348 times in 448 February articles (approximately 0.8 mentions per article on average).

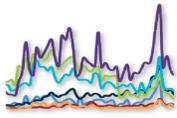
That said, diminishing signs are indicated by the ratio in the US, now down from 8.8 times per article and 43 times per television segment in January (drops in these ratios of 40% and 61% respectively). These diminished trends were evident across media publications outside the US as well in February 2018 (e.g. 0.9 times/article in Canada, 0.3 times/article in Australia, 0.2 times/article in New Zealand and 0.3 times/article in Germany). We will see if this declining Trump influence on media coverage of global warming or climate change in US sources and elsewhere continues to decline as 2018 unfolds. However, this current trend can quickly change if the Trump Administration focuses attention on the issues in March and beyond.



Figure 3: Word clouds showing frequency of words (4 letters or more) invoked in media coverage of climate change or global warming in global radio (left), along with US newspapers (center), and US television (right) in February 2018.

Many media accounts in February focused on primarily *scientific* dimensions of climate change and global warming. For example, early in February a new study in *Science magazine* by Anthony Pagano and colleagues – perhaps primed by wintry weather in the Northern Hemisphere – found that consumption of high-fat prey by polar bears is becoming scarcer in ice-free conditions, and they therefore are having to work harder to find their calories¹. Journalist Amina Khan in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that this research into free-ranging Arctic polar bear behavior and metabolism over a two year period confirmed suspicions that the loss of sea ice detrimentally impacts their health and survival, writing, “they burn calories at a faster rate than previously thought”.² Later in February, a considerable amount of media attention focused in on a scientific article in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* by Steve Nerem (from the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at CU Boulder (also where MeCCO is housed)) and colleagues. They found through examinations of twenty-five years of sea level data that the pace of sea level rise has increased.³ From

¹ <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6375/568>
² <http://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-polar-bears-metabolism-20180201-story.html>
³ <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2018/02/06/1717312115>



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the research, *Associated Press* journalist Seth Borenstein and many others wrote about how the researchers then projected that there would now be a global sea level rise higher than previously expected, of approximately two feet (0.6 meters) by 2100.⁴

Attention paid to *political* content of coverage during the month was often tethered to decarbonization trends. As one example, a report on increasing wind capacity in Europe garnered widespread media attention. Among stories, journalist Adam Vaughan from *The Guardian* wrote, “Britain accounted for more than half of the new offshore wind power capacity built in Europe last year, as the sector broke installation records across the continent”.⁵ As a second example, the fate of coal generated a number of stories as well. While a study from the US Appalachian Regional Commission noted that coal production in that region has fallen precipitously⁶, other stories covered how US Trump Administration policy action has reversed these trends in the short term. For instance, Journalist Kris Maher from *The Wall Street Journal* wrote, “Miners in Indiana and other states are getting a small lift from global markets: American companies are shipping more coal to Europe and Asia, helping to stop the years long drop in the number of U.S. mining jobs. The latest job increase runs counter to the long-term decline in coal used to generate electricity in the U.S., as coal-fired power plants are closed in favor of plants that burn cheap, abundant and cleaner natural gas...The stronger export market is translating into a bump in coal-mining jobs”⁷.

Across the globe in February, stories also intersected with the *cultural* dimensions. For example, a *New York Times* piece by Maggie Astor entitled ‘No children because of climate change? Some people are considering it’ focused on how an uncertain climate future has played a role in childbearing decisions among interviewees ages 18 to 43 in the US.⁸

Meanwhile in February, coverage relating primarily to *ecological* and *meteorological* issues continued to draw attention. To illustrate, continued impacts from hurricane damage – particularly hurricanes Irma and Maria – whipped up media attention. One representative story by writer Tim Craig and photojournalist Bonnie Jo Mount called ‘Shredded roofs, shattered lives’ in *The Washington Post*⁹ was emblematic of coverage that touched on cultural and societal dimensions and reverberations as they related to ecological/meteorological facets of climate change. In addition, record temperatures in the Arctic in late February generated further coverage. For example, in a piece entitled ‘North Pole surges above freezing in the dead of winter, stunning scientists’, *Washington Post* journalist Jason Samenow

⁴ <https://apnews.com/cf2f9386c024449aae126351d6c67cde/Satellites-show-warming-is-accelerating-sea-level-rise>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/06/uk-built-half-of-europes-offshore-wind-power-in-2017>

⁶ https://www.arc.gov/research/researchreportdetails.asp?REPORT_ID=141

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/coal-jobs-get-a-boost-from-exports-1519473600>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/climate/climate-change-children.html>

⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/02/06/feature/as-tourism-returns-hurricane-recovery-in-the-virgin-islands-is-leaving-some-residents-behind/?utm_term=.9270c868e11b

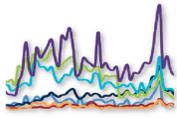


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wrote, “The Arctic’s temperatures are soaring, with one analysis estimating the North Pole edged above freezing temperatures last weekend even as polar winter continues without sunlight. Although there are no direct temperature measurements at the North Pole, the U.S. Global Forecast System model pegged the temperature as high as 35 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) — more than 50 F (30 C) above normal”.¹⁰

These *cultural* and *ecological/meteorological* infused stories wove back into *political* dimensions of disaster relief responses now five months since the tragedies struck in the Caribbean Basin. For instance, *US National Public Radio*’s Greg Allen reported on the weak state of health care services in the US Virgin Islands.¹¹

As a general lull in media reporting of climate change or global warming pervades in February 2018, there nonetheless remains an ongoing concern relating to the ‘fierce urgency of now’.

- ***report prepared by Max Boykoff, Jennifer Katzung and Ami Nacu-Schmidt***

¹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2018/02/26/north-pole-surges-above-freezing-in-the-dead-of-winter-stunning-scientists/?utm_term=.82281c6248b2

¹¹ <https://www.npr.org/2018/02/04/582256476/in-the-u-s-virgin-islands-health-care-remains-in-a-critical-state>



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