

“Take some comfort” that 64% now view climate change as an emergency



French President Emmanuel Macron, left, speaks during the One Planet Summit, at The Elysee Palace, in Paris, on January 11, 2021. Photo: Ludovic Marin, Pool Photo via AP.

January 2021 saw media coverage of climate change or global warming around the world increase 7% from December 2020. However, January 2021 levels remain 28% lower than coverage a year earlier (January 2020). These trends were also consistent across monitoring of international wires services, where coverage increased 14% from the previous month but was still 39%

lower than a year previous. Elsewhere, media coverage of climate change or global warming decreased across global radio (-9%) in January 2021 from the previous month of December, and was 15% lower than levels in January 2020. Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale - organized into seven geographical regions around the world - from January 2004 through January 2021.

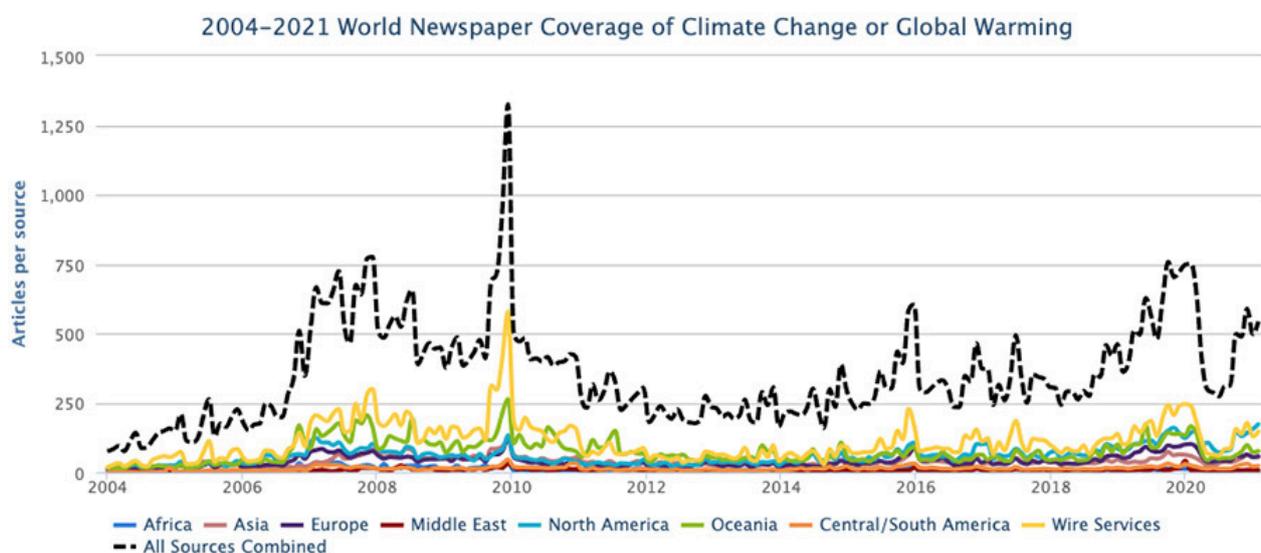


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through January 2021.

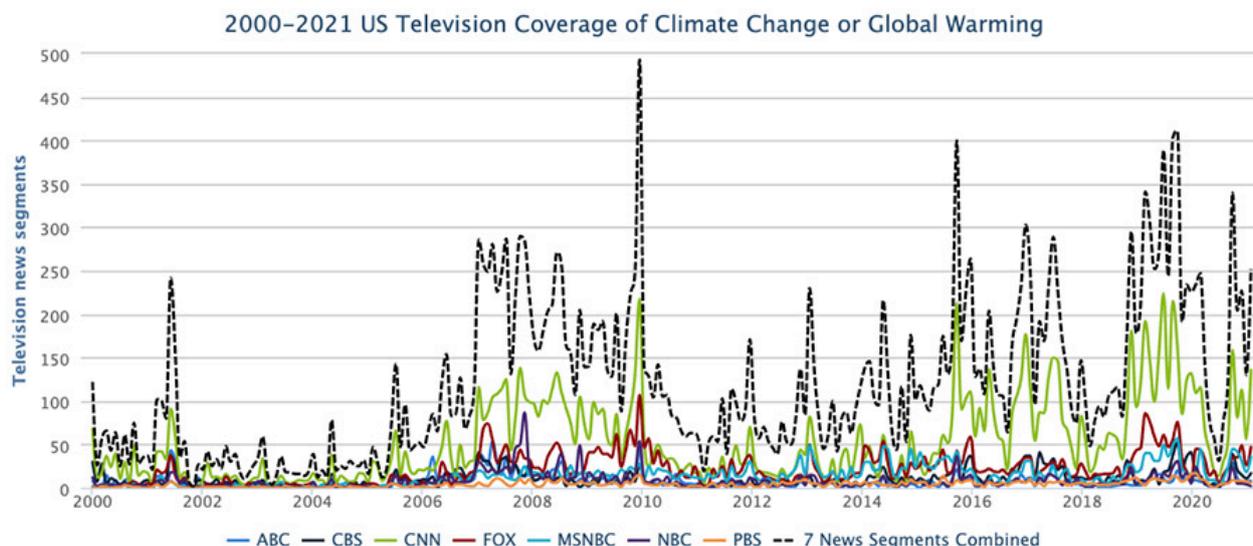


Figure 2. US television media coverage of climate change or global warming in *ABC News*, *CBS News*, *CNN*, *Fox News*, *MSNBC*, *NBC News* and *PBS Newshour* from January 2000 through January 2021.

In January 2021, newspaper attention to climate change or global warming increased in eight of the 13 countries we in the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor monthly: Australian coverage was up 5%, Canadian coverage was up 9%, German coverage was up 19%, New Zealand coverage was up 9%, Norwegian coverage increased 8%, Spanish coverage was up 15%, United Kingdom (UK) coverage increased 38% and United States (US) coverage was up 16%. Japanese coverage held steady compared to December 2020 while lower levels of media attention were detected in Denmark (down 11%), India (down 9%), Russia (down 22%) and Sweden (down 43%). Regionally, media attention increased most dramatically in Latin America in January 2021 (up 13%) followed by North America (up 12%), Europe (up 7%) and Oceania (up 6%). Media attention decreased in the Middle East (down 5%) and across Africa (down 23%) while it held steady in Asia from December 2020 to January 2021. Notably, US television media coverage increased 94% in January 2021 from the previous month and was also up 8% from January 2020.

From the quantity to the quality and content of coverage, many *political* and *economic* themed media stories emerged in January about climate change or global warming. To begin, a set of country statements issued through the ‘High

Ambition Coalition for Nature and People’ called for protecting at least 30% of land and oceans worldwide. This new ambition in 2021 generated media attention. For example, [Associated Press reporter Sylvie Corbet wrote](#), “At least 50 countries committed to protecting 30% of the planet, including land and sea, over the next decade to halt species extinction and address climate change issues, during a global summit Monday aimed at protecting the world’s biodiversity. About 30 leaders, government officials and heads of international organizations participated in the One Planet Summit, which was being held by videoconference because of the coronavirus pandemic. Top U.S. officials were notably absent, as were the leaders of Russia, India and Brazil. French President Emmanuel Macron announced that the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, which was launched in 2019 by Costa Rica, France and Britain to set a target of protecting at least 30% of the planet by 2030, has now been joined by 50 countries”. As a second example, [Guardian journalists Patrick Greenfield and Fiona Harvey noted](#), “The High Ambition Coalition (HAC) for Nature and People, which includes the UK and countries from six continents, made the pledge to protect at least 30% of the planet’s land and oceans before the One Planet summit in Paris...Scientists have said human activities are driving the sixth mass extinction of life on

Earth, and agricultural production, mining and pollution are threatening the healthy functioning of life-sustaining ecosystems crucial to human civilisation. In the announcement, the HAC said protecting at least 30% of the planet for nature by the end of the decade was crucial to preventing mass extinctions of plants and animals, and ensuring the natural production of clean air and water". Meanwhile, in another angle [Guardian correspondent Kim Willshire reported](#), "The French president, Emmanuel Macron, has pledged to invite young Africans rather than their political leaders to a key France-Africa summit in a video call with the actor Idris Elba. The Élysée Palace said Elba, a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations' international fund for agricultural development, had asked to speak to the French leader. The Guardian was the only newspaper invited to attend the discussion at the Élysée, which marked the start of the One Planet biodiversity summit in Paris. Macron also announced that he would increase France's contribution to the International Fund for Agricultural Development from €57.8m to €86.7m".

On January 20, in US President Joe Biden's first day of office, his Executive Order for the US to rejoin the Paris Agreement generated media attention around the world. For example, [Guardian journalist Oliver Millman reported](#), "Joe Biden has moved to reinstate the US to the Paris climate agreement just hours after being sworn in as president, as his administration rolls out a cavalcade of executive orders aimed at tackling the climate crisis. Biden's executive action, signed in the White House on Wednesday, will see the US rejoin the international effort curb the dangerous heating of the planet, following a 30-day notice period. The world's second largest emitter of greenhouse gases was withdrawn from the Paris deal under Donald Trump". On the United States domestic front, for a second example [New York Times journalists Coral Davenport and Lisa Friedman wrote](#), "President Joseph R. Biden Jr. on Wednesday recommitted the United States to the Paris climate agreement, the international accord designed to avert catastrophic global warming, and ordered federal agencies to start reviewing and reinstating more than 100 environmental

regulations that were weakened or rolled back by former President Donald J. Trump. The moves represent a first step in healing one of the deepest rifts between the United States and the rest of the world after Mr. Trump defiantly rejected the Paris pact and seemed to relish his administration's push to weaken or undo major domestic climate policies. Mr. Biden has elevated tackling the climate crisis among his highest priorities".

In January, many *cultural* themes emerged in stories about climate change or global warming. Early in the month, survey results - from the largest poll to date on climate change - were released through a partnership with the United Nations Development Program and the University of Oxford. News outlets across the globe took note. For example, [NBC News reporter Adela Suliman noted](#), "the biggest global survey of its kind has found that almost two thirds of people believe climate change remains a global emergency, despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The Peoples' Climate Vote, published Wednesday, conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the University of Oxford, surveyed 1.2 million people across 50 countries. In total, 64 percent of respondents agreed that climate change represented a pressing emergency. The survey also found a distinct age divide, with the majority of young people more concerned about climate change". Meanwhile, [BBC correspondent Matt McGrath added](#), "More than a million people in 50 countries took part in the survey, with almost half the participants aged between 14 and 18. Conserving forests and land emerged as the most popular solution for tackling the issue... The poll, called the "People's Climate Vote", has been organised by the United Nations Development Programme in conjunction with Oxford University. The organisers distributed poll questions through adverts in mobile gaming apps across 50 countries, between October and December last year. Around 1.22 million people of all genders, ages, and educational backgrounds took part, but with significant numbers of younger people...US President Joe Biden can take some comfort that 65% of those in the US taking part now view climate change as an emergency". As a



third example, [CNN journalist Laura Smith-Spark noted](#), “Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe that climate change is a “global emergency,” according to a survey of 1.2 million people in dozens of countries around the globe -- and many want urgent action to tackle the problem. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which ran the poll with Oxford University, described it as the largest survey of public opinion on climate change ever conducted. Unusually, it captured the views of more than half a million people under the age of 18, a key but typically hard-to-reach constituency, the organization said. The “Peoples’ Climate Vote” was undertaken late last year in 50 high, middle and low income countries that together account for more than half of the world’s population, according to the UNDP report”.

Furthermore, [ecological](#) and [meteorological](#) dimensions of climate change and global warming were evident in January media accounts. For instance, in January the Copernicus Climate Change Service released its assessments of global surface temperatures across the planet in 2020. They reported that 2020 was part of the hottest decade on record (2011-2020) and was tied with 2016 as the hottest year in recorded history. News attention abounded. Writing in [The New York Times](#), [journalist Henry Fountain noted](#), “Last year [2020] effectively tied 2016 as the hottest year on record, European climate researchers announced Friday, as global temperatures continued their relentless rise brought on by the emission of heat-trapping greenhouse gases. The record warmth – which fueled deadly heat waves, droughts, intense wildfires and other environmental disasters around the world in 2020 – occurred despite the development in the second half of the year of La Niña, a global climate phenomenon marked by surface cooling across much of the equatorial Pacific Ocean. And while 2020 may tie the record, all of the last six years are among the hottest ever...” Elsewhere, [Guardian environment editor Damian Carrington wrote](#), “The climate crisis continued unabated in 2020, with the joint highest global temperatures on record, alarming heat and record wildfires in the Arctic, and a record 29 tropical storms in the

Atlantic. Despite a 7% fall in fossil fuel burning due to coronavirus lockdowns, heat-trapping carbon dioxide continued to build up in the atmosphere, also setting a new record. The average surface temperature across the planet in 2020 was 1.25C higher than in the pre-industrial period of 1850-1900, dangerously close to the 1.5C target set by the world’s nations to avoid the worst impacts”.

Through separate monitoring in January at [NASA](#), [NOAA](#) and the [Met Office](#), these sad superlatives were confirmed. These corroborations also garnered media interest. For example, [USA Today journalist Doyle Rice reported](#), “Global warming didn’t take the year off in 2020: The planet was near record-hot again last year, climate groups announced Thursday. While NASA said 2020 essentially tied with 2016 as the Earth’s warmest year on record, other groups, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said it was the second-warmest year”. As another example, [CBS News correspondent Jeff Berardelli noted](#), “NASA, NOAA and Berkeley Earth all released their assessments of Earth’s temperature in 2020 on Thursday. The conclusion: 2020 was nearly tied with 2016 for the warmest year globally on record. NOAA’s data shows global temperatures were just 0.04 of a degree Fahrenheit below the record high set in 2016 – making it officially the second warmest ever, but so close that it’s “effectively tied,” according to scientists from Berkeley Earth. Headlines like this have become commonplace every January when the major climate monitoring agencies tally the numbers for the year before. Because of human-caused climate change, the last six years have been the warmest six years in the record books, which date back into the 1800s. NOAA concludes the United States had its fifth warmest year on record, with all five of the warmest years occurring since 2012. This warmth was boosted by severe heat waves across the Southwest last summer, with much of the southwestern quarter of the nation experiencing its hottest year on record. The U.S. Climate Extremes Index (USCEI) for 2020 was 80% above average and ranked as seventh highest in the 111-year record due to extreme heat, drought and hurricane activity”.



Thank you for your ongoing interest in the work we do through MeCCO. We remain committed to our work monitoring media coverage of these intersecting dimensions and themes associated with climate change.

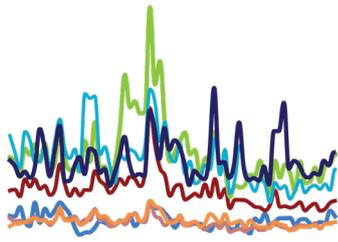
**Our ongoing work is dependent on financial support
so please consider contributing:**

<https://giving.cu.edu/fund/media-and-climate-change-observatory-mecco>

In January, there were also many media stories about *scientific* research and findings about aspects of climate change or global warming. To begin, [research results](#) documenting record ice loss sparked significant media attention. For example, [journalist Yereh Rosen from Reuters reported](#), “Earth’s ice is melting faster today than in the mid-1990s, new research suggests, as climate change nudges global temperatures ever higher. Altogether, an estimated 28 trillion metric tons of ice have melted away from the world’s sea ice, ice sheets and glaciers since the mid-1990s. Annually, the melt rate is now about 57 percent faster than it was three decades ago, scientists report in a study published Monday in the journal *The Cryosphere*”.

Due to funding challenges, while we in the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) remain here for you, committed to our work monitoring media coverage of these intersecting dimensions and themes associated with climate change, these monthly summaries will be more succinct and less aesthetically pleasing for the time being.

- report prepared by Max Boykoff, Presley Church, Jennifer Katzung, Ami Nacu-Schmidt, and Olivia Pearman



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MeCCO monitors 120 sources (across newspapers, radio and TV) in 54 countries in seven different regions around the world. MeCCO assembles the data by accessing archives through the Lexis Nexis, Proquest and Factiva databases via the University of Colorado libraries. These sources are selected through a decision processes involving weighting of three main factors:



**Geographical
Diversity**

favoring a greater geographical range



Circulation

favoring higher circulating publications



**Reliable Access to
Archives Over Time**

**favoring those accessible consistently
for longer periods of time**

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