

“Life as We Know It”



Illustration by Yann Kebbi posted in *The New York Times*.

MAY 2019

- May media attention to climate change and global warming was up 27% throughout the world from the previous month of April 2019.
- Across international wire services – *Associated Press, Agence France Presse, The Canadian Press* and *United Press International* - media attention to climate change went up nearly 20%, while across international radio programming including *American Public Media, National Public Radio, British Broadcasting Services, Southwest Radio Africa, Radio Balad* and *Radio France Internationale* – media coverage increased nearly 30%.

While coverage in the Middle East dropped 25% from the previous month, coverage in all other regions increased from April 2019 into May 2019: among them, African coverage doubled, Asian media attention to climate change was up nearly 12%, European coverage increased

nearly 22%, Central/South American coverage was up 23%, North America coverage increased almost 8% and coverage on Oceania rose over 86% compared to the previous month.

Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale - organized into

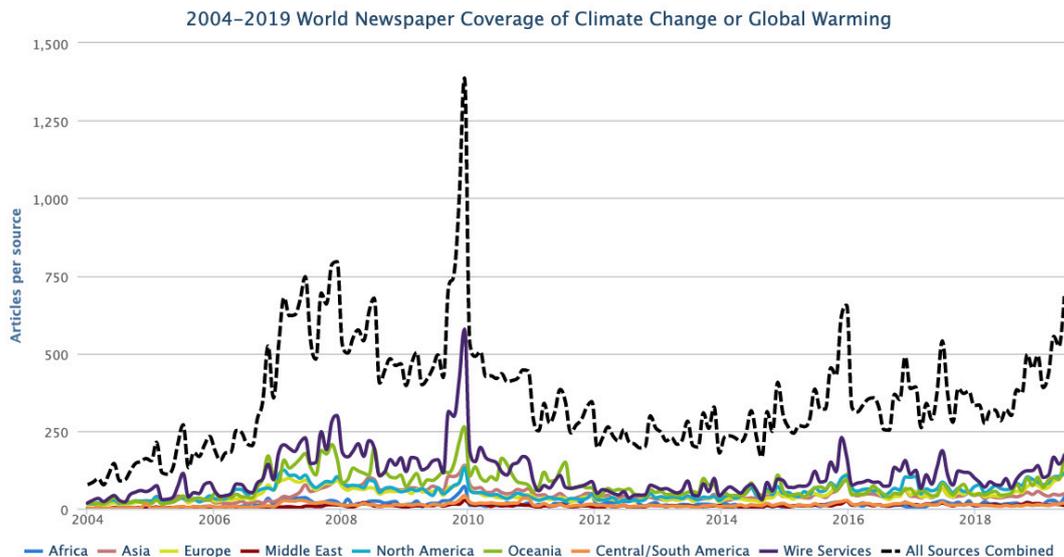


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in eight-three sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through May 2019.

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2004–2019 European Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

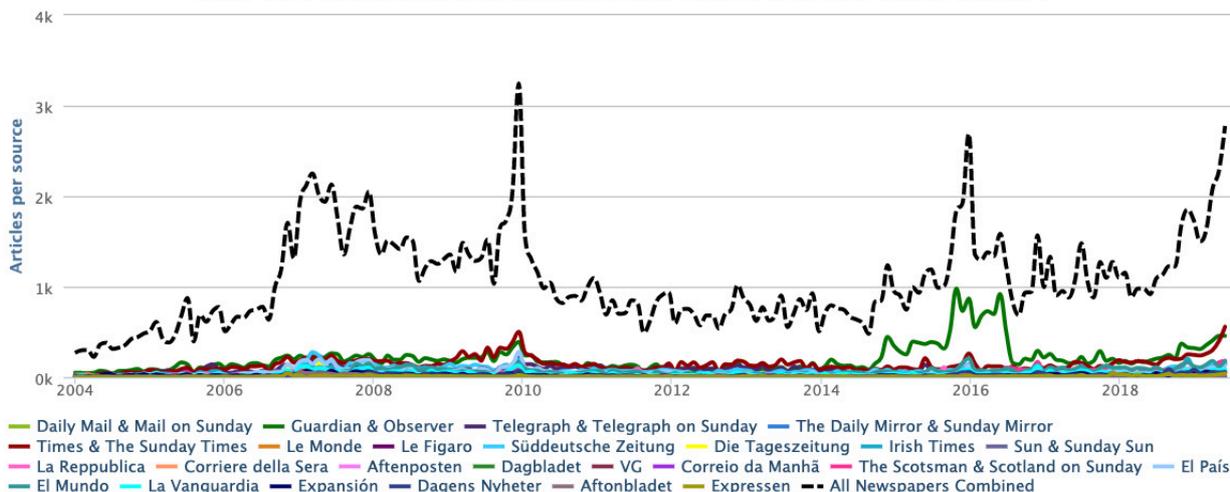


Figure 2. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in 25 sources across Europe from January 2004 through May 2019.

seven geographical regions around the world - from January 2004 through May 2019.

In April 2019, we at MeCCO added eight European sources to our ongoing counts: *Correio da Manhã* (Portugal), *La Republica* (Italy), *Corriere della Sera* (Italy), *Le Monde* (France), *Le Figaro* (France), *El Mundo* (Spain), *La Vanguardia* (Spain) and *Expansion* (Spain). We combined these to eleven sources that we had been tracking across Europe in the past, providing a first look at trends in 'European Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming'¹ like we have done with our work to track 'Latin American Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming'² in the past.

Tracking coverage now through May 2019, we have also now added six sources from Sweden (*Dagens Nyheter*, *Aftonbladet*, and *Expressen*) and Norway (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, and *VG*) to our European monitoring. These new sources, along with previous monitoring in Europe bolster our work. In June 2019, we in MeCCO now provide European regional tracking of climate change media coverage in 25 source in eight languages (English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Norwegian and Swedish) (see Figure 2).

1 See https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/europe for more.

2 See https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/latin_america for more.



We now track media coverage of climate change or global warming across 96 sources (newspapers, TV and radio) in 43 countries and 9 languages (English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Norwegian and Swedish).



In June 2019, we in MeCCO now provide European regional tracking of climate change media coverage in 25 source in eight languages (English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Norwegian and Swedish).

Overall, these new sources expand our monitoring to two new countries (Norway, Sweden) and two new languages (Swedish and Norwegian). Therefore, we at MeCCO now track media coverage of climate change or global warming across 96 sources (newspapers, TV and radio) in 43 countries and 9 languages (English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Norwegian and Swedish)³.

3 See https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/table.html for more.

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six mentions per article on average a year ago (and approximately 38 mentions per segment on average on ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox News Network, MSNBC, and NBC in May 2018).

That said, Trump casts a long shadow over current nominees for the Democratic US nomination where the candidates (and their stances or perspectives or plans on climate change) were mentioned less frequently in May 2018 (see Figure 4).

In the US, the steadily building US Democratic Presidential primary race generated numerous stories about rhetoric on climate action along with some plans too. For example, US Presidential hopeful and Washington governor Jay Inslee (mentioned second most frequently among the Democratic presidential hopefuls) released a set of plans (he called the 'Evergreen Economy Plan'⁵) to spur decarbonization of industry and society, clean energy development and emission-free transportation. Journalist Ken Thomas from *The Wall Street Journal* noted, "Gov. Jay Inslee proposed Friday that the U.S. should require carbon-neutral power by 2030, laying out a climate plan at the start of his presidential campaign that embraces elements of the Green New Deal, which many Democrats have backed. The Washington state governor, who has made climate change central to his long-shot bid for the White House, said that if elected he would set targets for achieving 100% clean energy across the electrical grid and in new vehicles and buildings".⁶ In an article calling his plan 'radical', journalist Emily Holden from *The Guardian* reported, "Jay Inslee, the governor of Washington state, is introducing a second portion of his climate change plan as most Democratic

5 <https://jayinslee.com/issues/evergreen-economy>

6 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jay-inslee-unveils-climate-proposal-in-line-with-green-new-deal-11556907479>

Joe Biden was mentioned most frequently among the Democratic presidential hopefuls in US press coverage of climate change in May 2019.



Joseph R. Biden Jr. answered questions during a campaign event in Hampton, New Hampshire. Photo: Elizabeth Frantz/The New York Times.

contenders for president have yet to officially roll out their own big-picture proposals. Inslee's 38-page document is focused on creating jobs. It outlines a \$9tn investment over 10 years and seeks to create 8m jobs aimed at decarbonizing the economy. In an earlier plan, he vowed to make the US carbon neutral by 2045. Inslee wants to upgrade buildings, replace water and transit infrastructure, clean up manufacturing and quintuple spending on clean energy and climate research. Many of those efforts would require congressional legislation. The blueprint echoes progressives' Green New Deal, but with far more details and fewer commitments to social programs".⁷

Meanwhile, 2020 presidential candidate Joe Biden's occupation of a 'middleground' approach on climate action drew much consternation and critique picked up on by media stories. Consequently, Joe Biden was mentioned most frequently among the Democratic presidential hopefuls in US press coverage of climate change

7 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/16/2020-jay-inslee-climate-change-plan>

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in May 2019 . For instance, Journalist Katie Glueck from *The New York Times* explained, “Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. defended his record on climate change on Monday in the face of criticism from rivals for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, and called for a “green revolution” that is “rational” and affordable...liberal activists and candidates like Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont questioned his boldness on climate. Mr. Biden, echoing the language of revolution used by Mr. Sanders, said Monday that the nation needed ‘environmental revolution’” and that “he had, in fact, introduced the first bill addressing climate change in the 1980s”.⁸ Meanwhile, Fox News correspondent Lukas Mikelionis noted, “Biden’s plan, which hasn’t yet been released, aims to appeal to both die-hard environmentalists and blue-collar voters who voted for President Trump in 2016. The core of the plan will likely include the U.S. re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement and focusing on technology and regulations to limit emissions from the burning of fossil fuels”.⁹ Meanwhile, journalist Valerie Volcovici from *Reuters* wrote that Biden was “carving out a middle ground approach that will likely face heavy resistance from green activists”.¹⁰

And in an effort not to be overlooked (though he still did not make the top eight of US Democratic hopefuls vying for the nomination in the 2020 election [see Figure 4]), US Colorado senator and 2020 presidential hopeful Michael Bennet called for concerted climate action, including the founding of a ‘Climate Bank’ to devote resources to a net-zero emissions economy by mid-century. *CBS News* reporters Cara Korte and Adam Brewster noted, “The plan is broken into five “principles” which contain plans to fight climate change through a mix of individual and corporate incentives, government reforms,

8 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/13/us/politics/joe-biden-climate-change.html>

9 <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ocasio-cortez-assails-bidens-middle-ground-climate-change-plan-says-its-dealbreaker>

10 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-biden-climate-exclusive/exclusive-presidential-hopeful-biden-looking-for-middle-ground-climate-policy-idUSKCN1SG18G>

and executive actions. His proposal includes an implementation timeline, too, that would begin on his first day in office as president”.¹¹

And in May 2019, beyond stories of US politics and climate change, there were many other media stories addressing *political* and *economic* connections with climate issues around the world. For example, in the UK, news was made when the country set a record (of a week) without producing energy from coal: this was newsworthy in part due to that having been the longest stretch of coal-free power for over 100 years, and in part because it was seen as a sign of carbon-free energy generation to come in the UK. Journalist Jasper Jolly from *The Guardian* wrote, “Britain has gone a week without using coal to generate electricity for the first time since Queen Victoria was on the throne, in a landmark moment in the transition away from the heavily polluting fuel... Coal-fired power stations still play a major part in the UK’s energy system as a backup during high demand but the increasing use of renewable energy sources such as wind power means it is required less. High international coal prices have also made the fuel a less attractive source of energy. The latest achievement – the first coal-free week since 1882, when a plant opened at Holborn in London – comes only two years after Britain’s first coal-free day since the Industrial Revolution. Burning coal to generate electricity is thought to be incompatible with avoiding catastrophic climate change, and the UK government has committed to phasing out coal-fired power by 2025”.¹²

National-level elections in Australia, India and Canada in May 2019 also connected to themes of climate change and global warming policy. In particular, there was a doubling of media portrayals of climate change in Australia compared to the previous month, largely through connections made between the Australian election and climate change. For

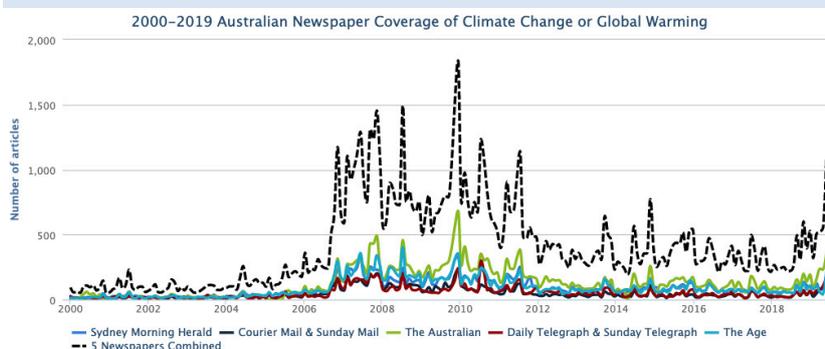
11 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/michael-bennet-introduces-climate-change-plan-the-first-policy-rollout-of-his-campaign>

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/08/britain-passes-1-week-without-coal-power-for-first-time-since-1882>

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National-level elections in Australia, India and Canada in May 2019 also connected to themes of climate change and global warming policy. In particular, media portrayals of climate change in Australia increased 76% compared to the previous month, largely through connections made between the Australian election and climate change.



Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in 5 sources across Australia from January 2000 through May 2019.

example, in an article entitled ‘Australia’s Politics May Be Changing With Its Climate’, journalist Somini Sengupta from *The New York Times* covered the lead up to the May 18 Australian elections, writing “It’s been a year of extremes for this country. The hottest summer ever. Torrential rains in the north. A crippling drought in its southeastern farm belt. Now, with national elections scheduled for May 18, a vital question looms: To what degree will climate change sway the way Australians vote? The answer could provide important lessons for other democracies in the age of climate change”.¹³

In May, *ecological* and *meteorological* content also shaped overall media coverage throughout the month. Particularly, a spate of tornado activity in May in North America then prompted questions about how this increase may relate to a changing climate. For example, *Associated*

13 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/climate/australia-climate-change-politics.html>

Press journalists Rick Callahan and Grant Schulte wrote “So far this year, 38 people have died in 10 tornadoes in the United States, including a combined seven within the last week in Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma and Ohio. The relative quiet in recent years followed the massive tornado that killed 161 people and injured more than 1,100 in Joplin, Missouri, in 2011. The EF5 storm packed winds in excess of 200 mph and was on the ground for more than 22 miles. Scientists also say climate change is responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme weather such as storms, droughts, floods and fires, but without extensive study they cannot directly link a single weather event to the changing climate”.¹⁴ Meanwhile, journalists Kevin Williams and Alan Blinder from *The New York Times* noted, “Climate change is increasingly

linked to extreme weather, but limited historical information, especially when compared with temperature data that goes back more than a century, has made it difficult for researchers to determine whether rising temperatures are making tornadoes more common and severe. Kerry A. Emanuel, a professor of atmospheric science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who specializes in hurricanes, noted that the science of the connection between tornadoes and climate change is simply less comprehensive than what researchers have compiled on tropical cyclones. Dealing with tornadoes and climate change, he said, is “absolutely complicated,” and there are relatively few papers that discuss tornadoes and climate because “it’s almost impossible to see any signal in the data.” What’s more, he said, the data of the current generation of radar technology goes back to only about 1990, a shorter period than

14 <https://www.apnews.com/496ec60aef0d4585b40f563fedb54855>

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that for good hurricane data”.¹⁵ And, *NBC News* reporter Denise Chow commented, “Climate change is causing ocean temperatures and global surface temperatures to increase, which in turn drives atmospheric instability when warm, moist air moves across the middle of the country, according to Kevin Trenberth, a senior scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. “All of this provides more fuel for thunderstorms and sets the stage for tornadoes to develop,” Trenberth said. But while scientists also predict that wind shear may decrease as the Arctic warms, climate models show that atmospheric instability from climate change will probably contribute to more tornadoes overall. “If you don’t have a cold Arctic, it’s hard to get a really strong wind shear across the Pacific Ocean,” Gensini said. “It’ll be a bit of a struggle between these two blocking weather patterns, but our climate models show that instability wins out, which suggests that we’ll see more tornadoes.” Gensini said it is difficult to know the impact that climate change is having on specific extreme weather events, or in particular regions of the country, but that general trends are consistent with models that incorporate the planet’s changing climate. “The analogy I like to use is with baseball’s steroid era,” Gensini said. “It’s a very difficult question to answer if this one home run was caused by steroids, but when you look at the batting average or the number of home runs over that time period, it’s easy to say that, yes, statistically a lot of those home runs were likely caused by steroids.”¹⁶

Also, connections between flooding and climate change in the US Midwest generated media attention as May came to a close. For example, in an article titled ‘Mississippi River flood is longest-lasting in over 90 years, since ‘Great Flood’ of 1927’ *USA Today* journalist Doyle Rice reported, “Flooding in at least 8 states along portions of the Mississippi River – due to relentless, record-breaking spring rainfall – is the longest-lasting since the “Great Flood” of 1927, the National

¹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/us/tornadoes-usa.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/science/what-s-fueling-spate-recent-tornadoes-across-u-s-cnca1011036>

Across the globe in May, many news stories focused on *scientific* themes. For example, a report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services linking biodiversity loss and climate change generated significant media attention.



Keeper Zachariah Mutai in Kenya attends to Fatu, one of only two female northern white rhinos left in the world. Photo: Sunday Alamba/AP.

Weather Service said...As the planet warms due to human-caused climate change, heavy downpours are increasing in the Midwest, according to the National Climate Assessment. From the early 1990s to the mid-2010s, very heavy precipitation events in the Midwest increased by 37%, the assessment said”.¹⁷ This has delayed planting of crops in the Midwestern ‘breadbasket’, and further connections to a changing climate have been raised in media accounts. For example, journalist Katie Mettler from *The Washington Post* noted, “For the past five years, the 18 states that produce the majority of the United States’ corn crop had an average of 90 percent of their fields planted by the end of May, according to data released Tuesday by the Agriculture Department. At the same point this year, 58 percent of the corn crop is in the

¹⁷ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/05/28/mississippi-river-flooding-longest-lasting-since-great-flood-1927/1261049001>

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ground. The outlook for soybeans is just as dismal, with 29 percent in the ground compared with 66 percent in years past. In individual states, the gap is even more severe. Just 22 percent of the corn crop had been planted as of May 26 in ... Indiana. Soybeans stood at 11 percent ... Some farmers blame this spring's extreme weather on the changing climate, another example of the way Mother Nature has become increasingly unruly and unpredictable, alongside historically strong hurricanes, bitter cold and devastating, deadly wildfires. Others...say they've accepted that farmers can't control the weather – and should instead look to federal aid and insurance programs that help people like him when the crops don't cooperate".¹⁸

Across the globe in May, many news stories focused on *scientific* themes. For example, a report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services linking biodiversity loss and climate change generated significant media attention. Journalist Denise Chow from *NBC News* reported, "A sweeping report assessing the state of the natural world found that humans are having an "unprecedented" and devastating effect on global biodiversity, with about 1 million animal and plant species now threatened with extinction. A summary of the report's findings was released Monday by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which was established in 2012 by the United Nations Environment Programme and includes representatives from 132 countries".¹⁹ Meanwhile, in rather stark language, *BBC* journalist Matt McGrath wrote, "On land, in the seas, in the sky, the devastating impact of humans on nature is laid bare in a compelling UN report. One million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. Nature everywhere is declining at a speed never previously seen and our need for ever more food and energy are the main drivers. These trends

18 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/05/30/extreme-weather-is-pummeling-midwest-farmers-are-deep-trouble>

19 <https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/science/1-million-species-under-threat-extinction-because-humans-report-finds-ncna1002046>

can be halted, the study says, but it will take "transformative change" in every aspect of how humans interact with nature. From the bees that pollinate our crops, to the forests that hold back flood waters, the report reveals how humans are ravaging the very ecosystems that support their societies".²⁰ This report also prompted *The New York Times* editorial team to publish an editorial entitled 'Life as We Know It' where they wrote "Humanity's culpability in what many scientists believe to be a planetary emergency has now been reaffirmed by a detailed and depressing report compiled by hundreds of international experts and based on thousands of scientific studies..." "Most of nature's contributions are not fully replaceable," the report says. But humans can stop or at least limit the damage".²¹

Amid media attention paid to *cultural* dimensions of climate change and global warming in the month of May, a report from the Climate Literacy and Energy Awareness Network regarding teaching about climate change in K12 US schools earned press attention. Journalist Michael Melia from the *Associated Press* reported, "The Climate Literacy and Energy Awareness Network, funded by federal grants, reviewed more than 30,000 free online resources and found only 700 acceptable for use in schools. "There's a lot of information that's out there that is broken, old, misleading, not scientifically sound, not sound technically," said Frank Niepold, a climate education coordinator at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration".²²

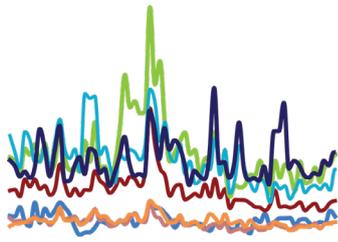
Going forward, our international MeCCO team carries on monitoring and analyzing political, economic, scientific, cultural, ecological and meteorological stories as they unfold. We will continue to keep you posted too.

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

20 <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-48169783>

21 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/opinion/sunday/extinction-endangered-species-biodiversity.html>

22 <https://www.apnews.com/d6d431f046c9494d8bf5bab5a07bfb55>



MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

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Office for Outreach and Engagement
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER



CENTER & FOR
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MeCCO monitors 96 sources (across newspapers, radio and TV) in 43 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**

Media and Climate Change Observatory, University of Colorado Boulder
http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage