

“Tensions have flared”



Group of 7 leaders at the Itsukushima Shrine in Japan on Friday. Their final communiqué only modestly modified previous language on natural gas investment. Photo: Kenny Holston/The New York Times.

May media coverage of climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe increased 8% from April 2023 but dropped 9% from May 2022 levels. International wire services increased 11% while radio coverage also increased 56% from April 2023. Compared to the previous month, coverage increased in

North America (5%), the European Union (EU) (6%), Oceania (7%), Asia (9%), Africa (30%), and the Middle East (57%). In May, coverage only decreased in the Latin American region (-1%). Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale - organized into seven geographical regions around the world - from January 2004 through May 2023.

2004–2023 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

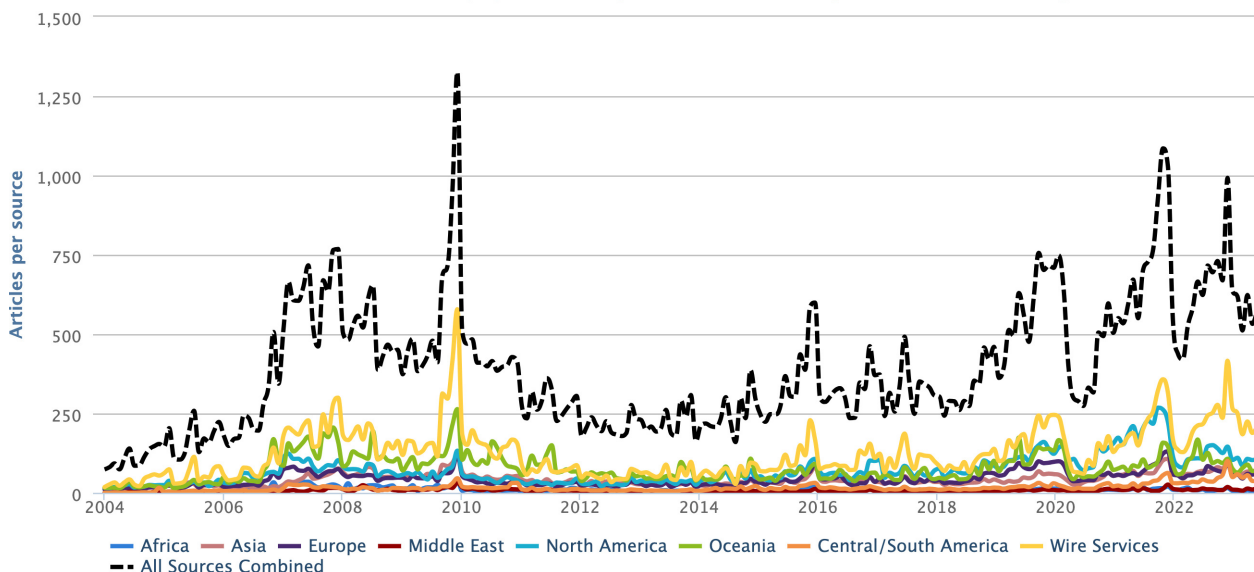


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through May 2023.

2000–2023 Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

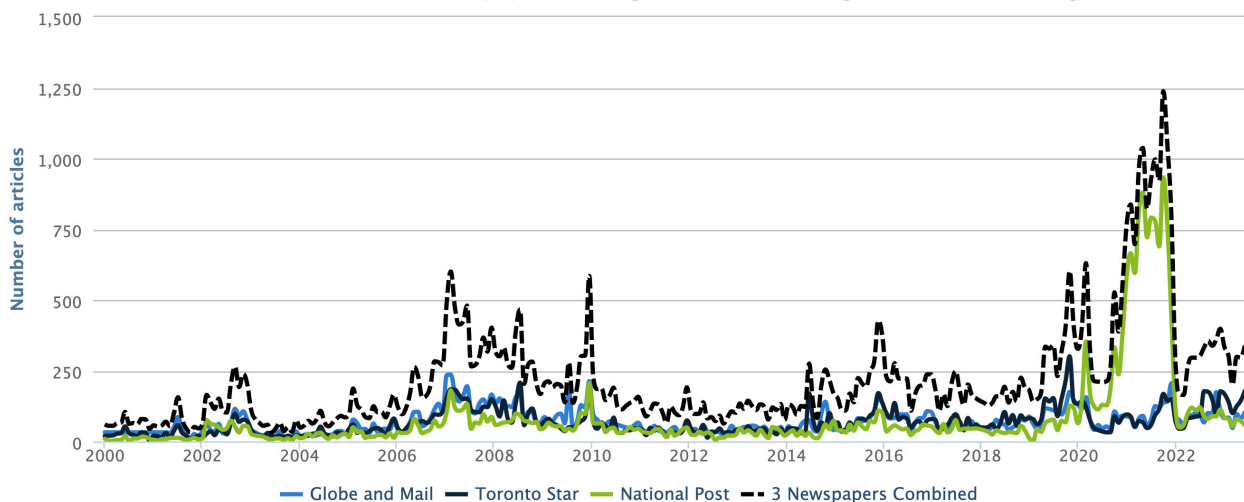


Figure 2. Newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming in three Canadian newspapers (*Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, and *National Post*) from January 2000 through May 2023.

Among countries that we at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor, United States (US) print coverage remained about the same from the previous month of April, but was down 8% from May 2022. In Canada, coverage went up 14% from coverage in April 2023 and remained about the same quantity from May 2022.

Turning to the content of coverage, **political** and **economic**-themed media stories about climate change or global warming shaped overall coverage in the month of May. To begin, several media stories made connections between Canadian wildfires, smoke drifting to the intermountain US western states and air quality as well as climate policy actions. For example, [Washington Post correspondent Diana Leonard reported](#), “An all-too-familiar scene is playing out in western Canada this week: forests in flames amid extreme heat while hazardous smoke engulfs cities downwind of the fires. Over the last several years, similar scenes have unfolded across the globe, including in Australia, California, the Pacific Northwest, Europe and China. As both heat waves and wildfires worsen, recent research is tying these extremes ever more strongly to climate change, painting a troubling picture if the world continues on its emissions path. About 1.3 million hectares (3.2 million acres) have burned so far this year in Canada, which is far above the 20-year

average of 55,050 hectares for this point in the season, according to data from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Center. Firefighting agencies are at preparedness level 5 nationally, the highest level, and extra resources from the United States have joined the fight.”

Meanwhile, [New York Times journalist Ian Austen observed](#), “When I arrived in Alberta recently to report an upcoming political story, there was no shortage of people wanting to talk about politics and the provincial election on May 29. But, even as wildfires flared earlier than usual and raged across an unusually wide swath of forest, discussions about climate change were largely absent... I asked Feodor Snagovsky, a professor of political science at the University of Alberta, about this apparent disconnect in Alberta between public opinion about climate change and campaign discourse. “It’s very tough to talk about oil and gas in Alberta because it’s sort of the goose that lays the golden egg,” he said. “It’s the source of a remarkable level of prosperity that the province has enjoyed for a long time.” This year oil and gas revenues will account for about 36 percent of all the money the province takes in. And during the oil embargo of the late 1970s, those revenues were more than 70 percent of the province’s budget. Among other things, that has allowed Alberta to be the only province without a sales tax and it has kept income and corporate taxes generally

low relative to other provinces. But oil and gas production account for 28 percent of Canada's carbon emissions, the country's largest source. While the amount of carbon that's released for each barrel produced has been reduced, increases in total production have more than offset those gains. The energy industry is also an important source of high-paying jobs, though. So the suggestion that production might have to be limited in order for Canada to meet its climate targets raises alarms".

In mid-May, the gathering of the Group of 7 (G7) nations in Japan generated several climate change-related stories from the discussions. For example, *New York Times* journalists [Motoko Rich](#), [Lisa Friedman](#) and [Jim Tankersley](#) wrote, "In theory, the world's largest industrialized democracies have agreed to stop using fossil fuels within a little over a quarter-century and to switch to new sources of power such as solar and wind as fast as they can. But as leaders of the Group of 7 gathered in Hiroshima, Japan, this weekend for their annual meeting, some countries were wrangling over whether to loosen commitments to phase out the use of carbon-emitting fuels like gas and coal in time to avert the worst effects of global warming. The final communiqué from the summit, released on Saturday afternoon, included language sought by Japan that blesses continued investment in certain types of coal-fired power plants that the Japanese government is helping to finance. But leaders only modestly modified language from last year's meeting that supported some new investment in natural gas infrastructure. Germany, which pushed for the endorsement in 2022 as it scrambled to replace Russian gas imports in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, had sought to broaden the wording this year. The behind-the-scenes battle underscored the political, economic and practical challenges that many Group of 7 nations have run into as they seek to accelerate a global energy transition with trillions of dollars in government incentives. Jarred by the invasion of Ukraine, countries in Europe are seeking to quickly secure sources of natural gas to keep the lights on. At the same time, countries like Japan and even to some degree the United States are

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A solar panel energy farm in Philipsburg, NJ, in 2021. The United States has moved to incentivize renewable energy investment. Photo: Erin Schaff/New York Times.

seeking to protect longstanding investments in the fossil fuel industry at home or abroad... But tensions have flared in the coalition over efforts by some countries to lock in their access to fossil fuels for decades to come. According to three people familiar with the discussions, the German government, concerned about securing enough energy to power its economy, pushed in Hiroshima to loosen the language that leaders released last year just months after the start of Russia's war on Ukraine. The 2022 communiqué endorsed public investment in gas, but only in "exceptional circumstances" and as a "temporary response" to relieve nations from dependency on Russian energy. Any expansion, the statement said, should not derail nations from their pledges to slash greenhouse gas emissions. The 2023 statement repeated that language and did not go much further".

Meanwhile, in Europe a French government decision to ban three flights where there was train replacement service of 2.5 hours or less generated considerable media attention. For example, an [editorial in *El País*](#) entitled 'More train and less plane' discussed "the decision of the French Government to prohibit internal flights that have an alternative train lasting less than two and a half hours has more symbolic than effective value, but it establishes a first precedent (...) with it France takes the lead in one of the policies that the European Union wants to promote to curb climate change. In those countries with a good high-speed rail development, it does not make sense to cover journeys by plane that have a much lower environmental cost by train. The approved proposal is one of the 149 that emerged from a citizen assembly on measures against climate change, convened by the Government of Emmanuel Macron (...) It is just a first step destined to be expanded in the future and inspire similar measures in other countries. The third European aviation environmental report estimates that CO₂ – the main gas causing global warming – emitted by planes that took off in European airspace increased by 34% between 2005 and 2019, and the European Aviation Safety Agency itself estimates that up to 2050 could increase a further 28% without measures to correct this trend".

Later in the month, pressure mounted on the upcoming UN climate negotiations president Sultan Al-Jaber to step down. He is set to represent host nation United Arab Emirates and also runs the state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. For example, [Washington Post journalist Maxine Joselow noted](#), "More than 130 members of Congress and the European Parliament on Tuesday called for the ouster of the oil executive leading the next U.N. Climate Change Conference in the United Arab Emirates this fall. Tuesday's letter represents a remarkable rebuke of the decision to name Sultan Al Jaber, who runs the state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, as president of the climate summit. It comes as human rights advocates also voice anger and disbelief over the UAE's invitation of Syria's embattled

president to the climate talks, known as COP28. Both climate and human rights activists say the integrity of the climate gatherings are at stake".

In the US, private insurance company State Farm's decision to no longer offer new home insurance to any Californians – citing reasons of climate-connected wildfire, flood and drought risk – made several headlines as a watershed moment in climate risk meeting insurers' risk limits. For example, [USA Today journalist Francisco Guzman reported](#), "State Farm will no longer provide home insurance to new California customers because of wildfire risks and an increase in construction costs, the company said Friday. On Saturday, the insurance company stopped accepting applications for business and personal lines and casualty insurance in California, the company said in a news release. State Farm said it made this decision because of "historic increases in construction costs outpacing inflation, rapidly growing catastrophe exposure and a challenging reinsurance market." Meanwhile, [Guardian reporter Gloria Oladipo added](#), "Existing customers insured by State Farm will not be impacted by the decision. In response to State Farm's statement, a spokesperson with the California department of insurance told Fox Business News that it is working to protect homeowners. "The factors driving State Farm's decision are beyond our control, including climate change, reinsurance costs affecting the entire insurance industry and global inflation," said the spokesperson.

Also in the month of May, media attention to climate change or global warming was punctuated by [ecological](#) and [meteorological](#) themes. For instance, a heat wave across Asia in early May prompted media portrayals making links to longer-term climate change. For example, [Guardian and Agence France Presse reported](#), "Vietnam has reported a record-high temperature of 44.1C (111.38F), as weather experts and authorities told the population to remain indoors during the hottest parts of the day. Scientists have said global warming is aggravating adverse weather. Neighbouring countries registered record temperatures during

a heatwave in Asia in April. Vietnam's record was measured indoors at Hoi Xuan station in northern Thanh Hoa province on Saturday, the National Centre for Hydro Meteorological Forecasting said, breaking the 2019 record of 43.4C. Nguyen Thi Lan, a farmer, said temperatures in the central city of Danang had forced workers to start their days earlier than ever. "We have had to finish before 10am to avoid the heat," she said. Vietnam's weather varies from north to south, but the country as a whole is now entering its hottest summer months. "This is a worrying record in the context of climate change and global warming," Nguyen Ngoc Huy, a climate change expert, said from the capital, Hanoi. "I believe this record will be repeated many times. It confirms that extreme climate models are being proven to be true."

Also in May, Category 5 Cyclone Mocha that battered parts of south and southeast Asia made news, with several stories linking this extreme event to climate change or global warming. For example, [Associated Press correspondent Julhas Alam reported](#), "Thousands of people hunkered down Sunday in monasteries, pagodas and schools, seeking shelter from a powerful storm that slammed into the coast of Myanmar, tearing roofs off buildings and killing at least three people. Cyclone Mocha made landfall Sunday afternoon in Myanmar's Rakhine state near Sittwe township with winds of up to 209 kilometers (130 miles) per hour, Myanmar's Meteorological Department said. The storm previously passed over Bangladesh's Saint Martin's Island, causing damage and injuries, but turned away from the country's shores before landfall. As night fell, the extent of the damage in Sittwe was not clear. Earlier in the day, high winds crumpled cell phone towers, cutting off communications in much of the area. In videos collected by local media before communications were cut off, deep water races

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Thousands of street vendors in Vietnam have had no choice but to work through recent heatwaves. Photo: Nhac NGUYEN.

through streets while wind lashes trees and pulls boards off roofs. Rakhine-based media reported that streets were flooded, trapping people in low-lying areas in their homes as worried relatives outside the township appealed for rescue...Climate scientists say cyclones can now retain their energy for many days. Cyclone Amphan in eastern India in 2020 continued to travel over land as a strong cyclone and caused extensive devastation".

Wildfires across Alberta, Canada and then in Nova Scotia, Canada in May generated media attention. For example, [New York Times journalists Dan Bilefsky and Meagan Campbell wrote](#), "As wildfires buffeted western Canada on Tuesday, a blaze on the opposite end of the country in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has forced the evacuation of more than 16,000 people,

compounding the national anxiety over out-of-control wildfires upending peoples' lives. Video footage of downtown Halifax late Sunday showed a dense plume of smoke enveloping the city, the sun an apocalyptic red, as a fire northwest of the city raged, spreading the smoke. The blaze broke out in an area that is about 15 miles from Halifax and that is home to many suburban professionals and families. Wildfires have broken out throughout western Canada, including British Columbia, and hardest hit has been Alberta, an oil- and gas-producing province sometimes referred to as "the Texas of the North." Earlier this month, the province declared a state of emergency. Climate research suggests that heat and drought associated with global warming are major reasons for bigger and stronger fires".

Meanwhile, in Italy the same region that suffered from drought in summer was inundated by flooding in May, causing 14 deaths and 20,000 evacuees that garnered media attention. For example, *La Vanguardia* journalist [Anna Buj](#) wrote, "The phenomena that have hit Emilia-Romagna and, previously, Ischia or the Marches, are still exceptional, but in reality they are part of a new normality in a context of climate change. In particular, something happened in this region in 15 days that some time ago we would have expected to happen every 30 or 50 years", explains Francesca Giordano, a researcher at the Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research. "It rains differently, more concentrated. If the increase in temperatures is added to this, what awaits us in the future scenario is a greater forecast of heat waves, which will also endanger the most fragile citizens", she points out". Yet, in Spain *La Vanguardia* journalist [Laura Aragón](#) wrote, "The first day of summer now comes a month earlier than in the sixties. Each time 30°C is reached earlier in Spain. If during the sixties and eighties the first day of summer was recorded for the first time at the beginning of May, now it is reached in April, on average. Almost a month before. Climate change extends summer in time and cuts part of spring and a good part of autumn (...) If 2022 ended as the warmest since records began in 1961, 2023 is on its way to

reissue the anniversary". Concurrently, in North Africa *El País* journalist [Juan Carlos Sanz](#) noted, "Morocco suffers the worst drought in 40 years, in a situation of water stress since 2021 due to the lack of rain and the increase in temperatures due to climate change".

Furthermore, *cultural* stories relating to climate change or global warming were also evident in wider news coverage in May. In particular, many protests and social movement activities earned media attention in May. To illustrate, in early May climate activists that disrupted the Met Gala in New York City garnered media coverage. For example, *Los Angeles Times* correspondent [Emily St. Martin](#) reported, "It's Met Gala Monday and not everyone was excited. Climate protesters blocked Paris Hilton's car from arriving at the Costume Institute's grand ball and models condemned the gala's honoree on the Met's steps. The 2023 Met Gala kicked off with a bang (and a few honks) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It's the most extravagant red carpet haute couture event of the year, which depending on whom you ask is "the Super Bowl of fashion events" (André Leon Talley) or "such a jerk parade" (Tina Fey)".

As the month unfolded, further protests in Europe grabbed media headlines. For example, *CNN* correspondent [Barbie Latza Nadeau](#) reported, "Climate change activists turned the blue water of the Trevi Fountain in central Rome black with diluted charcoal on Sunday. Around 10 activists from the climate group Ultima Generazione (Last Generation) entered the 18th century late-Baroque fountain holding a banner that said, "Let's not pay for fossil campaigns considering what is happening in Emilia Romagna," referring to the deadly flooding in northern Italy, which some experts have linked to the climate crisis. "Our country is dying," other banners stated. All activists were arrested and face vandalism charges, Rome police said".

From Rome to Geneva, *Guardian* correspondent [Rupert Neate](#) noted, "Dozens of climate activists have disrupted Europe's largest private jet trade fair by chaining themselves to aircraft to protest

against the sector’s carbon emissions. The demonstrators on behalf of Greenpeace, Stay Grounded, Extinction Rebellion and Scientist Rebellion also attached themselves to the entrance gates of the event at Geneva airport in the hope of preventing prospective buyers from entering the annual show. The activists, who were calling for a global ban on the use of private jets because of their carbon footprint, stuck tobacco-style health warning labels on some of the jets at the European Business Aviation Convention and Exhibition (EBACE) saying private jets “burn our future”, “kill our planet”, and “fuel inequality”.

“German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday sharply criticized climate activists as “nutty” for drastic protests such as blocking streets or gluing themselves to famous paintings in museums. “I think it’s completely nutty to somehow stick yourself to a painting or on the street,” Scholz said during a visit to an elementary school in the town of Kleinmachnow outside of Berlin, German news agency dpa reported. The chancellor added that he did not think anybody’s opinion on climate change could be changed by such actions but rather that these protests made people angry. “That’s an action that I don’t think is going to help,” Scholz told the students. Members of the group Last Generation have repeatedly blocked roads across Germany in an effort to

From Rome and Geneva to Berlin, *Associated Press* journalist *Kirsten Grieshaber* wrote,



Figure 3. Examples of newspaper front pages with climate change stories in May.

pressure the government to take more drastic action against climate change. In recent weeks, they've brought the traffic to a halt on an almost daily basis in Berlin, gluing themselves to busy junctions and highways. They've also glued themselves to various paintings in Berlin and elsewhere over the past year".

Then at the end of the month, climate demonstrations crossed over to the US with a protest about Senator Chuck Schumer's role in negotiating permitting of the Mountain Valley pipeline in order to get the debt ceiling to potentially pass. For example, [Guardian correspondent Dharna Noor reported](#), "Climate activists have stepped up protests over the inclusion of a provision to speed up a controversial gas pipeline's completion in the deal to raise the debt ceiling as Congress prepares to vote on Wednesday, aiming criticism at Democrats Chuck Schumer and Joe Manchin. The pipeline project has long been championed by Manchin, the West Virginia senator who was the top recipient of fossil fuel industry contributions during the 2022 election cycle. Activists, led by the advocacy group Climate Defiance and supported by Food and Water Watch, Climate Families NYC, Center for Popular Democracy, Sunrise Movement NYC and others, rallied outside the Senate majority leader's home in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood on Tuesday evening, chanting "Schumer, stop the dirty deal" and demanding the \$6.6bn Mountain Valley Pipeline be stripped from the legislation. Schumer has also received donations from one of the companies behind the pipeline. The protests came hours after nearly 200 groups sent a letter to Schumer and members of Congress remove the pipeline from the deal".

Finally, many [scientific](#) themes continued to emerge in media stories during the month of May through new studies, reports, and

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Protesters in Brooklyn outside the home of Chuck Schumer. Activists have urged Democrats to remove the pipeline provision from the debt ceiling deal. Photo: Ken Schles/Food and Water Watch.

assessments. To illustrate, a [study](#) by the Union of Concerned Scientists, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters* quantified how greenhouse gas emissions have exacerbated wildfires in the US and Canada. This study gained media coverage in several outlets. For example, [CNN journalist Rachel Ramirez reported](#), "Millions of acres scorched by wildfires in the Western US and Canada – an area roughly the size of South Carolina – can be traced back to carbon pollution from the world's largest fossil fuel and cement companies, scientists reported Tuesday. The study by the Union of Concerned Scientists, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, found that 37% of the area burned by wildfires in the West since 1986 – nearly 19.8 million acres out of 53 million – can be blamed on the planet-

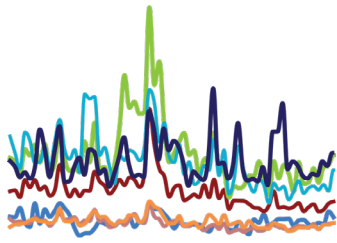
cooking pollution from 88 of the world's major fossil fuel producers and cement manufacturers, the latter of which have been shown to produce around 7% of all carbon dioxide emissions. The amalgam of megadrought and record-breaking heat that's drying out vegetation due to climate change has stoked the West's wildfires. And researchers found that since 1901, the fossil fuel activities of these companies, including ExxonMobil and BP, among others, warmed the planet by 0.5 degrees Celsius – nearly half of the global increase during that period. Carly Phillips, a research scientist with the Science Hub for Climate Litigation at the Union of Concerned Scientists and co-author on the study, said the findings add to a significant library of research that directly links climate change or the impacts of the crisis to burning fossil fuel”.

Further into the month of May, observations that rising sea surface temperatures – the highest since 1982 – sparked media accounts. For example, [CNN correspondent Laura Paddison reported](#), “Ocean surface heat is at record-breaking levels. Temperatures began climbing in mid-March and skyrocketed over the course of several weeks, leaving scientists scrambling to figure out exactly why. Temperatures have fallen since their peak in April – as they naturally do in the spring – but they are still higher than they have ever been on record for this time of year. “It is remarkable,” said Gregory C. Johnson, an oceanographer at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which calculates the ocean surface temperature using a network of ships, buoys, satellites and floats. Although it's still preliminary data, if it holds up, he said, “this is another milestone.” The record may not

seem huge – it's nearly two-tenths of a degree higher than the previous record in 2016 – but given how much heat is needed to warm up this huge body of water, “it's a massive amount of energy,” Matthew England, professor of ocean and climate dynamics at the University of New South Wales, Australia, told CNN”. Meanwhile, [NBC News reporter Evan Bush noted](#), “As ocean surface temperatures soar to record highs, the World Meteorological Organization said Wednesday it expects a shift toward El Niño by this fall, which could shake up weather patterns and trigger more extreme weather events in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Forecasters expect the temporary El Niño pattern to alter rainfall patterns, elevate average air temperatures and contribute to more intense storm systems. The El Niño pattern, which is a temporary and natural climate anomaly, will layer on top of the warming attributable to human-caused climate change. Both trends push average air and sea temperatures higher. Daily sea surface temperatures last month reached highs not seen in at least four decades of recordkeeping”.

Turning to the content of coverage, media attention to climate change or global warming. Thanks for your interest in our Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) work monitoring media coverage of these intersecting dimensions and themes associated with climate change and global warming.

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MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

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MeCCO monitors 130 sources (across newspapers, radio and TV) in 59 countries in seven different regions around the world. MeCCO assembles the data by accessing archives through the Nexis Uni, 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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