

“Nearing a tipping point”



World's largest iceberg drifting away from Antarctica captured by drone vision in this video. Credit: *The Guardian*.

January media coverage of climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe plummeted 23% from December 2023. Also, coverage in January 2024 dipped 20% from January 2023 levels. 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 2024. At the regional level, January 2024 coverage decreased in North America (-6%), Latin America (-7%) [see Figure 2], Asia (-14%), the European Union (EU) (-21%), Oceania (-23%), Africa (-38%) and the Middle East (-64%) compared to the previous month of December.

2004–2024 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

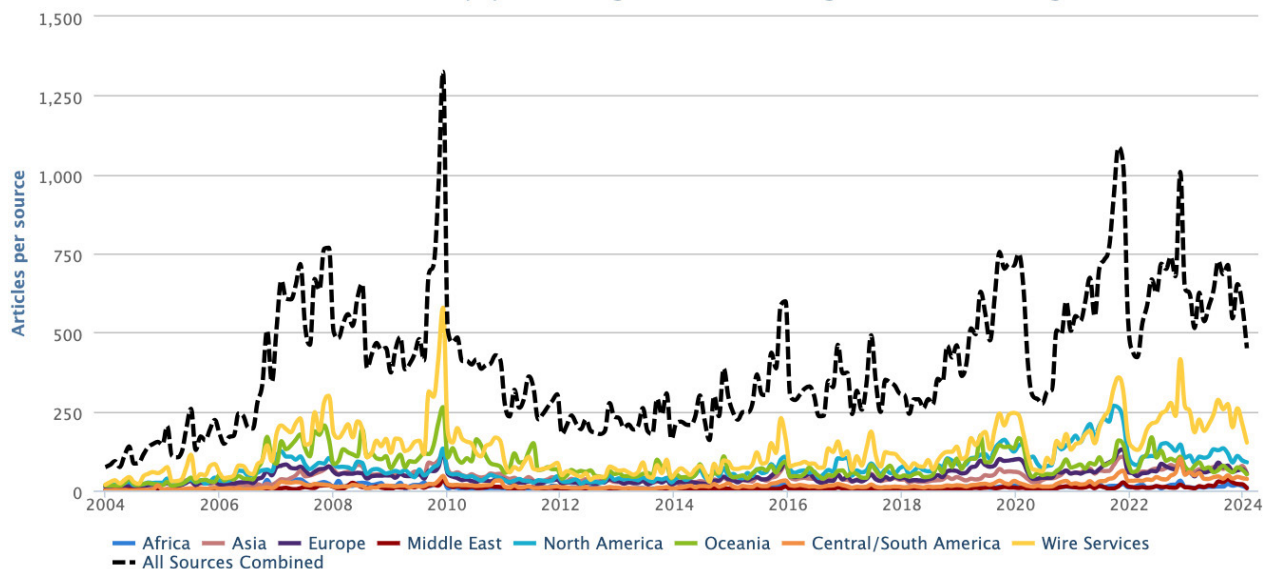


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through January 2024.

2005–2024 Latin American Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

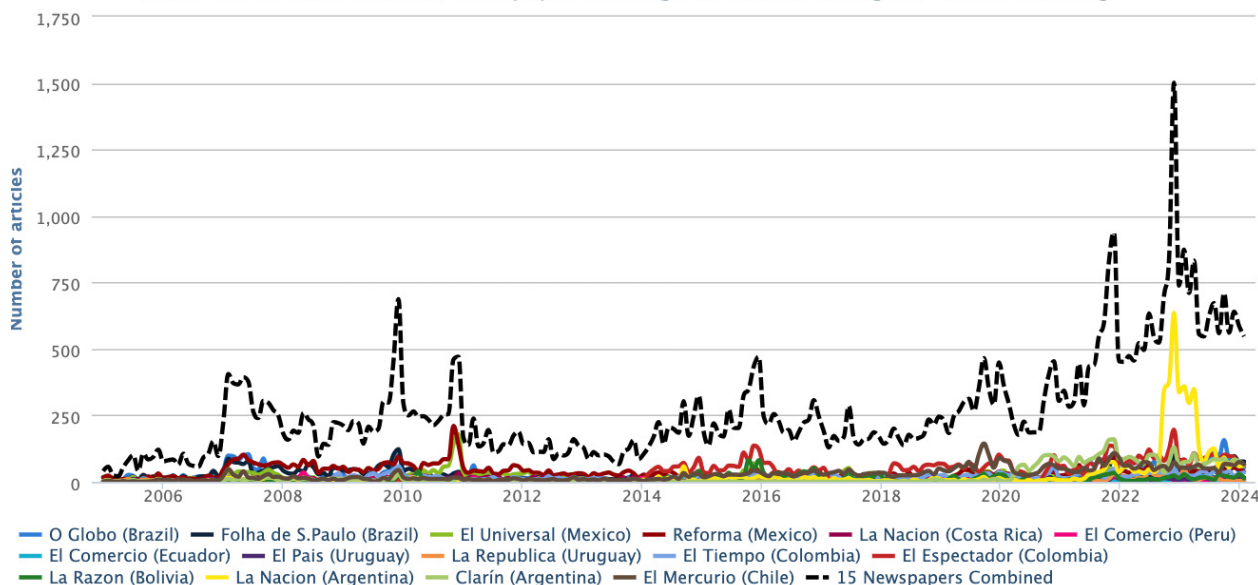


Figure 2. Newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming in Latin American newspapers from January 2004 through January 2024.

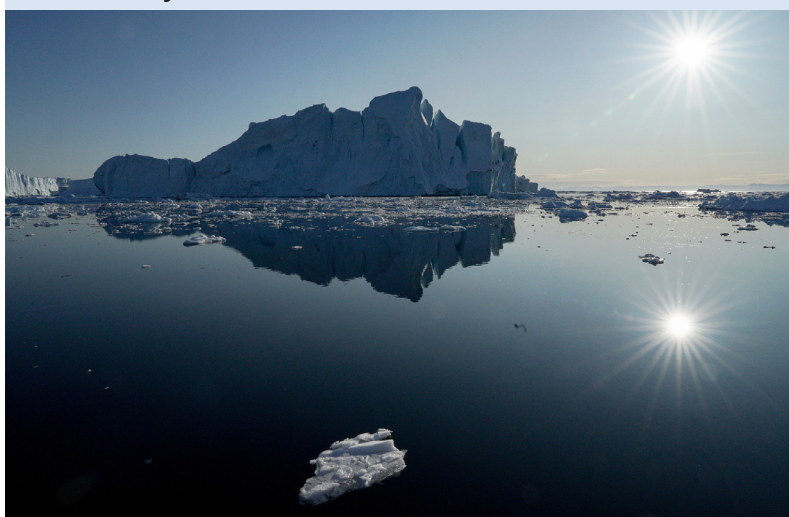
Our team at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) continues to provide three international and seven ongoing regional assessments of trends in coverage, along with 16 country-level appraisals each month. Visit our website for open-source datasets and downloadable visuals.

Scanning content in January 2024 coverage, many *scientific* themes continued to emerge in stories during the month. To illustrate, research findings focused on snow and climate change earned media attention early in the new calendar year. For example, *Washington Post* journalist Maggie Penman reported, “Snow is piling up across much of the United States this week, but new research shows this is the exception rather than the rule: Seasonal snow levels in the Northern Hemisphere have dwindled over the past 40 years due to climate change. Even so, snow responds to a warming planet in different ways. “A warmer atmosphere is also an atmosphere that can hold more water,” said Alex Gottlieb, a graduate student at Dartmouth College and lead author on the new study in the journal *Nature*. That can increase precipitation, spurring snow, or even extreme storms and blizzards that offset the effect of snowmelt amid warmer temperatures. That has made it harder for scientists to calculate how snowpack has

changed over time. But the new findings reveal that areas of the United States and Europe are nearing a tipping point where they could face a disastrous loss of snow for decades to come”. Research examining continued ice loss in Greenland also generated media attention in January. For example, *Guardian environment editor Damian Carrington reported*, “The Greenland ice cap is losing an average of 30m tonnes of ice an hour due to the climate crisis, a study has revealed, which is 20% more than was previously thought. Some scientists are concerned that this additional source of freshwater pouring into the north Atlantic might mean a collapse of the ocean currents called the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (Amoc) is closer to being triggered, with severe consequences for humanity. Major ice loss from Greenland as a result of global heating has been recorded for decades. The techniques employed to date, such as measuring the height of the ice sheet or its weight via gravity data, are good at determining the losses that end up in the ocean and drive up sea level. However, they cannot account for the retreat of glaciers that already lie mostly below sea level in the narrow fjords around the island. In the study, satellite photos were analysed by scientists to determine the end position of Greenland’s many glaciers every month from 1985 to 2022. This showed

large and widespread shortening and in total amounted to a trillion tonnes of lost ice". Meanwhile, [Washington Post](#) journalists [Kasha Patel](#) and [Chris Mooney](#) wrote, "The Greenland ice sheet has lost 20 percent more ice than scientists previously thought, posing potential problems for ocean circulation patterns and sea level rise, according to a new study. Researchers had previously estimated that the Greenland ice sheet lost about 5,000 gigatons of ice in recent decades, enough to cover Texas in a sheet 26 feet high. The new estimate adds 1,000 gigatons to that period, the equivalent of piling about five more feet of ice on top of that fictitious Texas-sized sheet. The additional loss comes from an area previously unaccounted for in estimates: ice lost at a glacier's edges, where it meets the water. Before this study, estimates primarily considered mass changes in the interior of the ice sheet, which are driven by melting on the surface and glaciers thinning from their base on the ice sheet. The study, released Wednesday in *Nature*, provides improved measurements of ice loss and meltwater discharge in the ocean, which can advance sea level and ocean models. Loss from the edges of glaciers won't directly affect sea level rise because they usually sit within deep fjords below sea level, but the freshwater melt could affect ocean circulation patterns in the Atlantic Ocean...The researchers tracked changes in 207 glaciers in Greenland (constituting 90 percent of the ice sheet's mass) each month from 1985 to 2022. Analyzing more than 236,000 satellite images, they manually marked differences along the edges of glaciers and eventually trained algorithms to do the same. From the area measurements, the team could calculate the volume and mass of the changes

"The Greenland ice sheet has lost 20 percent more ice than scientists previously thought, posing potential problems for ocean circulation patterns and sea level rise... Scientists found that a total of 1,034 gigatons of ice was lost across all glaciers. The loss accelerated since January 2000, with the glaciers losing a total of 42 gigatons each year with **no signs of slowing down**. Most striking, nearly every glacier was shrinking – and in every corner of the ice sheet."



Icebergs that broke off from a glacier in Greenland. Photo: Bonnie Jo Mount/*The Washington Post*.

in ice. Glaciers can lose ice in many ways. One change can happen when large ice chunks break off at the edge, known as calving. They can also lose ice when it melts faster than it can form, causing the end of a glacier to retreat and move to higher elevations. Scientists found that a total of 1,034 gigatons of ice was lost across all glaciers because of this retreat and calving on their peripheries. The loss accelerated since January 2000, with the glaciers losing a total of 42 gigatons each year. It has shown no signs of slowing down. Most striking, nearly every glacier was shrinking – and in every corner of the ice sheet".

In January, there were also many *political* and *economic*-themed media stories about climate change or global warming that dominated overall coverage this month. For example, *Associated Press* correspondent [Matthew Daly reported](#), “Climate-altering pollution from greenhouse gases declined by nearly 2% in the United States in 2023, even as the economy expanded at a faster clip, a new report finds. The decline, while “a step in the right direction,” is far below the rate needed to meet President Joe Biden’s pledge to cut U.S. emissions in half by 2030, compared to 2005 levels, said a report Wednesday from the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm. “Absent other changes,” the U.S. is on track to cut greenhouse gas emissions by about 40% below 2005 levels by the end of the decade, said Ben King, associate director at Rhodium and lead author of the study. The report said U.S. carbon emissions declined by 1.9% last year. Emissions are down 17.2% from 2005. To reach Biden’s goal, emissions would have to decline at a rate more than triple the 2023 figure and be sustained at that level every year until 2030, he said. Increased economic activity, including more energy production and greater use of cars, trucks and airplanes, can be associated with higher pollution, although there is not always a direct correlation. The U.S. economy grew by a projected 2.4% in 2023, according to the Conference Board, a business research group”.

Also in January, media attention was drawn to renewable energy installation growth as examples of mode-switching sources to reduce emissions-related energy generation. For example, *Guardian* journalist [Jillian Ambrose wrote](#), “Global renewable energy capacity grew by the fastest pace recorded in the last 20 years in 2023, which could put the world within reach of meeting a key climate target by the end of the decade, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The world’s renewable energy grew by 50% last year to 510 gigawatts (GW) in 2023, the 22nd year in a row

“Global renewable energy capacity grew by the **fastest pace recorded in the last 20 years** in 2023, which could put the world within reach of meeting a key climate target by the end of the decade. The world’s renewable energy grew by 50% last year to 510 gigawatts in 2023, the 22nd year in a row that renewable capacity additions set a new record.”



A solar and windfarm in Tangshan City in north China’s Hebei province. Photo: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock.

that renewable capacity additions set a new record, according to figures from the IEA. The “spectacular” growth offers a “real chance” of global governments meeting a pledge agreed at the Cop28 climate talks in November to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 to significantly reduce consumption of fossil fuels, the IEA added. The IEA’s latest report found that solar power accounted for three-quarters of the new renewable energy capacity installed worldwide last year. Most of the world’s new solar power was built in China, which installed more solar power last year than the entire world commissioned the year before, despite cutting subsidies in 2020 and 2021. Record rates of growth across Europe, the US and Brazil have put renewables on track to overtake coal as the largest source of global electricity generation by early 2025, the IEA said. By 2028, it forecasts

renewable energy sources will account for more than 42% of global electricity generation. Tripling global renewable energy by the end of the decade to help cut carbon emissions is one of five main climate targets designed to prevent runaway global heating, alongside doubling energy efficiency, cutting methane emissions, transitioning away from fossil fuels, and scaling up financing for emerging and developing economies. Last year's relatively mild winter and continued declines in power generation from coal-fired plants drove down emissions in the U.S. power and buildings sectors, the report said".

Several **cultural**-themed stories relating to climate change or global warming also ran in January, many were reflections on the previous calendar year. Among them, writing in *The Bangkok Post*, Moe Moe Lwin wrote, "the cultural wisdom of our ancestors in Southeast Asia contains much knowledge that we urgently need to recollect, or re-learn, in the 21st century if we are to achieve the goal of limiting temperature increase to a rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius. Our ancestors in Southeast Asia knew how to live in harmony with nature, exploiting nature's bounty without destroying nature. Traditional ways of agriculture, community control of forests and watersheds, building design and construction practices, urban layout, and belief systems can be adapted to modern needs to make present-day living and working much more climate-friendly". As a second example, *New York Times* journalists David Gelles and Manuela Andreoni observed, "2023 was a year when climate change felt inescapable. Whether it was the raging wildfires in Canada, the orange skies in New York, the flash floods in Libya or the searing heat in China, the effects of our overheating planet were too

"The cultural wisdom of our ancestors in Southeast Asia contains much knowledge that we urgently need to recollect, or re-learn, in the 21st century if we are to achieve the goal of limiting temperature increase to a rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius. Our ancestors in Southeast Asia knew how to live in harmony with nature, exploiting nature's bounty without destroying nature. Traditional ways of agriculture, community control of forests and watersheds, building design and construction practices, urban layout, and belief systems can be adapted to modern needs to make present-day living and working much more climate-friendly."

- Moe Moe Lwin, *The Bangkok Post*



Young activists participate in a Global Climate Strike near the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment office in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo: Chanat Katanyu.

severe to ignore. Not coincidentally, it was also a year when climate change started to feel ubiquitous in popular culture. Glossy TV shows, best-selling books, art exhibits and even pop music tackled the subject, often with the kind of nuance and creativity that can help us make sense of the world's thorniest issues".

Finally, January 2024 media stories featured several **ecological** and **meteorological** dimensions of climate change or global warming. For example, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Eric

MECCO MONTHLY SUMMARIES

ISSUE 85, JANUARY 2024



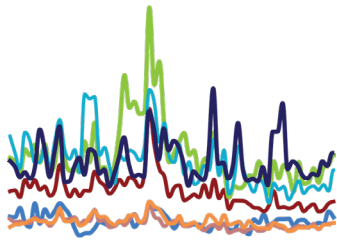
Figure 3. Examples of newspaper front pages with climate change stories in January.

Niiler noted, “The record global temperatures that spawned heavy rainfall, disastrous floods and raging wildfires in 2023 will likely continue in 2024, according to the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service. The service is the first analysis to declare—after months of speculation—that 2023 was the hottest year since record-keeping began in the mid-1800s. 2023’s global average temperature, the study found, was 14.98 degrees Celsius, or 58.96 degrees Fahrenheit. That average was 1.48 degrees C, or 2.66 degrees F, hotter than the preindustrial baseline, creeping ever closer to the 1.5 degrees C threshold the world’s nations have agreed to keep warming below to avoid the worst effects of climate change”. As a second example (among many), [journalist Jonathan Chadwick from The Daily Mail reported](#), “Scientists have long suspected it but now it’s official - 2023 was the hottest year on record. Last year’s global average temperature was 58.96°F (14.98°C), around 0.3°F (0.17°C) higher than the result in

2016, the previous hottest year, experts from the EU’s Copernicus climate change programme (CS3) reveal. The scientists have already revealed that last summer was the hottest season on record, while July was the hottest month on record. Experts warn that global temperatures are now close to the 2.7°F (1.5°C) limit - and they point to greenhouse gas emissions as the cause. 2023 has already been dubbed the year Earth suffered the costliest climate disasters like droughts, floods, wildfires and lethal heatwaves, largely due to these emissions”.

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.

~ report prepared by Max Boykoff, Rogelio Fernández-Reyes, Jennifer Katzung, Ami Nacu-Schmidt and Olivia Pearman



MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

ISSUE 84, JANUARY 2024



MeCCO monitors 131 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**

Media and Climate Change Observatory, University of Colorado Boulder

<http://mecco.colorado.edu>