

## “The real mask-to-mask climate negotiations”



Last minute resistance at the COP26 summit over efforts to phase out coal left many countries disappointed, but the agreement still marked new progress. Photo: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images.

November media attention to climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe remained at high levels that were found in October 2021. While coverage stayed at similar levels to the previous month, coverage increased 81% from a year before (November 2020). Meanwhile, November 2021 global radio coverage of climate change or global warming was up 45% from October 2021, while coverage in international wire services decreased 12%

from the previous month. Compared to the previous month coverage was up in all regions except Oceania (-8%) and North America (-15%): Asia (+3%), Europe (+5%), Latin America (+13%), Africa (+33%), and the Middle East (+66%). Of note, coverage in Europe and Latin America remain at record high 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 November 2021.

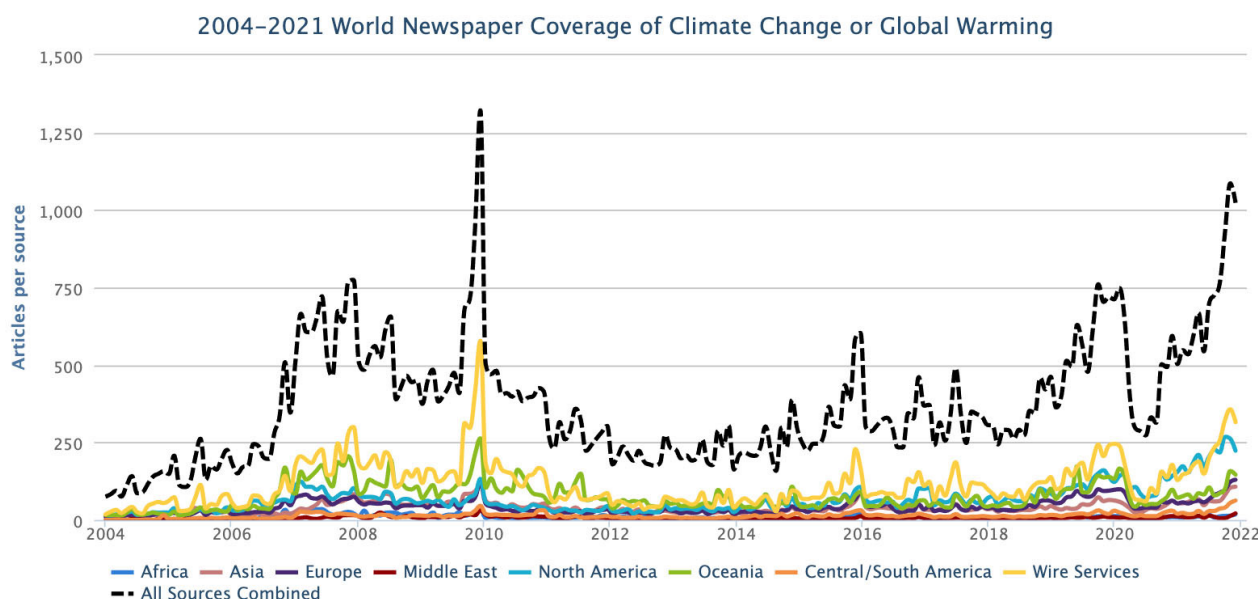


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through November 2021.

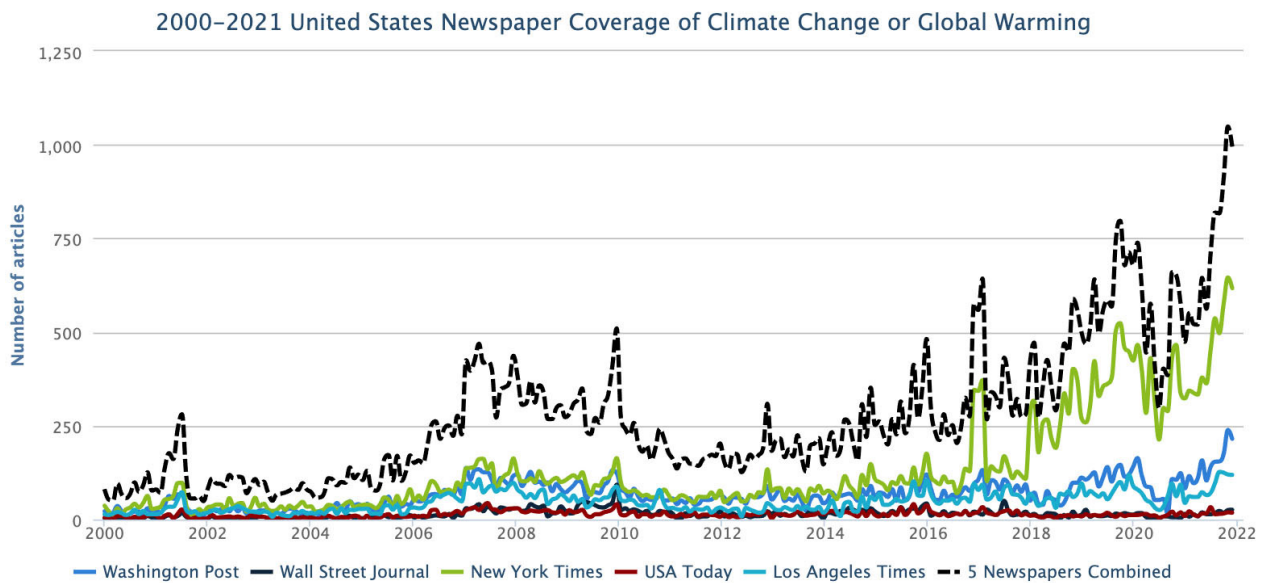


Figure 2. US print coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through November 2021.

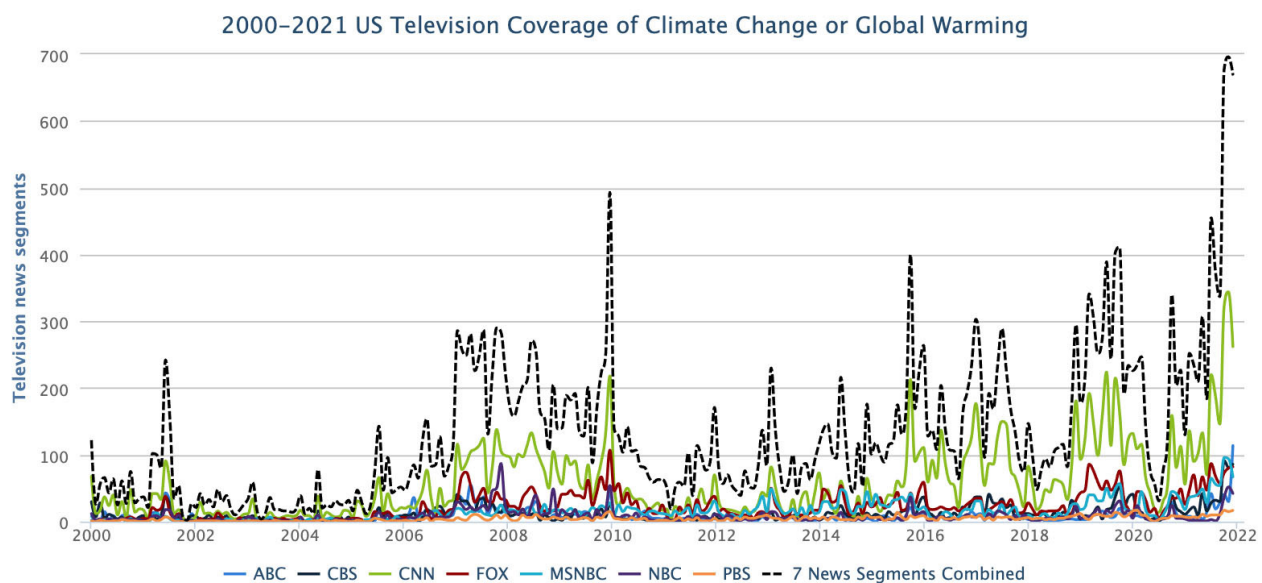


Figure 3. US television coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through November 2021.

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage decreased 5% while television coverage also decreased 4% from the previous month (see Figures 2 & 3). These are slight dips from the highest levels of coverage on record to date that were detected in October 2021.

Meanwhile, compared to the previous month, coverage decreased in Germany (-1%), the United Kingdom (UK) (-2%), Sweden (-5%), Japan (-9%), Finland (-13%), Australia (-14%), and Canada (-25%), but rose in other countries that we at the Media and Climate Change

Observatory (MeCCO) monitor: New Zealand (+13%), India (+15%), Denmark (+16%), Spain (+43%), and Norway (+56%) in November 2021. Of note, this slight decrease in UK print coverage in November follows a record high level of coverage in the UK in October 2021 (see Figure 4).

In November, there were many *political* and *economic* themed media stories about climate change or global warming. As the G20 Summit wrapped up in Rome at the end of October, the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP26)

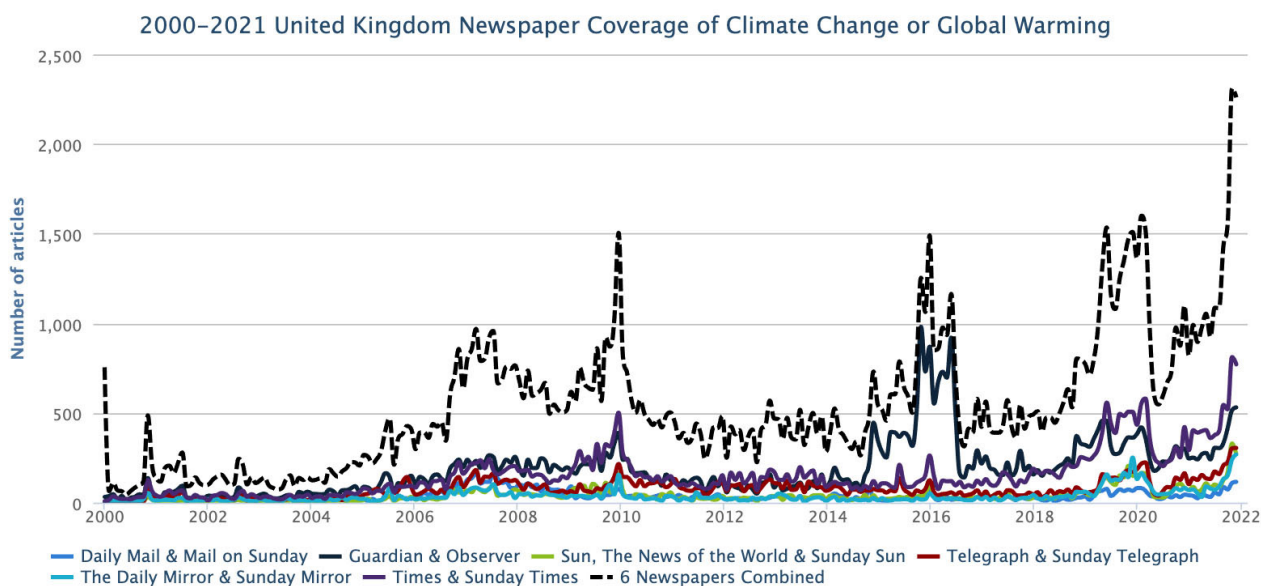


Figure 4. UK newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through November 2021.

meeting began in Glasgow, Scotland. And news associated with COP26 proliferated throughout the two week conference ending November 13.

As the month began, in the US new rulemaking from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding methane emissions reductions generated news attention. For example, [Washington Post](#) journalists [Dino Grandoni](#) and [Steven Mufson](#) reported, “More than 100 countries have signed the Global Methane Pledge, which requires a 30 percent cut in methane emissions by 2030, one of the Biden administration’s priorities for the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland. The pledge’s signatories now represent nearly half of human-caused methane emissions. On Tuesday, the Biden administration also unveiled a sweeping set of domestic policies to cut emissions of methane from oil and gas operations across the United States. The proposals, announced at the U.N. climate summit, represent one of the president’s most consequential efforts to combat climate change. Proposed rules from the Environmental Protection Agency would establish standards for old wells, impose more frequent and stringent leak monitoring, and require the capture of natural gas that is found alongside oil and is often released into the atmosphere. They mark the first time the federal government has

moved to comprehensively tackle the seepage of methane from U.S. oil and gas infrastructure. President Biden told delegates in Glasgow that cutting methane emissions is essential to keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above levels in the late 1800s before widespread industrialization”.

Also in early November, a new constellation of banks and financial firms called ‘The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero’ earned media attention as the COP26 climate negotiations began. For example, [Wall Street Journal](#) correspondent [David Benoit](#) reported, “Most of the world’s big banks, its major investors and insurers, and its financial regulators have for the first time signed up to a coordinated pledge that will incorporate carbon emissions into their most fundamental decisions. The lenders and investors say they will help fund a shift that will reduce carbon emissions by businesses and spur the growth of industries that can help limit climate change. Regulators are putting in place new rules to oversee the shift. The United Nations’ Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero says financial groups with assets of \$130 trillion have committed to its program to cut emissions. That is enough scale to generate \$100 trillion through 2050 to fund investments needed for new technologies, and enough reach to impose pathways for corporations and financial

institutions to restructure themselves, the group said. The funding, unveiled Wednesday by U.N. Climate Envoy Mark Carney during the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, can take the form of bank loans and investments by venture capitalists, private-equity firms, mutual funds, endowments and other big investors that buy stocks and bonds. These would all be used to shift funds toward investments that help lower carbon emissions, while still earning a profit. Financial regulators, including the U.S. Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, plus the global accounting-standards organization have agreed to add their own oversight to the system through reviews and disclosure standards”.

Yet, the overwhelming majority of political and economic themed media coverage of climate change or global warming in November was linked to activities and actions at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. As world leaders gathered and made pronouncements at the start of the meeting, news attention followed. For example, [journalist Seth Borenstein from \*The Associated Press\* reported](#), “The princes, presidents and prime ministers have left, and now the real mask-to-mask climate negotiations start. For the next 10 days, maybe more, the professional diplomats at the crowded United Nations climate conference must convert marching orders left by their heads of government into compromises and agreements. The talks happen in a limited number of meeting rooms in Glasgow, with a Friday, Nov. 12, deadline and a record long agenda listing 104 items that must be settled. The negotiations are restricted by the pandemic but aided by a year and a half of virtual meetings, instant soup brought from Norway and chocolates from Swiss and Australian diplomats. By next week, the deadline pressure is sure to intensify. Meetings will go around the clock. Food and sleep will be put aside, except when someone dozes off in a seat or on a colleague’s shoulder”.

As COP26 continued, an announcement by more than 40 countries that they have agreed to stop burning coal sparked many media accounts. For example, [New York Times journalists Brad Plumer and Lisa Friedman reported](#), “More than 40 countries pledged to phase out coal, the dirtiest

fossil fuel, in a deal announced Thursday at the United Nations climate summit that prompted Alok Sharma, the head of the conference, to proclaim “the end of coal is in sight.” But several of the biggest coal consumers were notably absent from the accord, including China and India, which together burn roughly two-thirds of the world’s coal, as well as Australia, the world’s 11th-biggest user of coal and a major exporter. The United States, which still generates about one-fifth of its electricity from coal, also did not sign the pledge. The new pact includes 23 countries that for the first time have promised to stop building and issuing permits for new coal plants at home and to eventually shift away from using the fuel. Among them are five of the world’s top 20 power-generating countries: Poland, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam and Ukraine. The decision by the United States to abstain appeared to be driven by American politics. President Biden’s domestic agenda is split between two pieces of major legislation that have been pending on Capitol Hill and that hinge on the support of Senator Joe Manchin III, Democrat of West Virginia. Mr. Manchin’s state is rich in coal and gas, the senator has financial ties to the coal industry and he is sharply opposed to any policy that would harm fossil fuels”. Also, [US National Public Radio reporter Frank Langfitt noted](#), “Prime Minister Boris Johnson opened this week’s climate summit in Glasgow by warning world leaders to take the necessary measures to prevent global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, or face catastrophic damage from climate change...It was one of the more impassioned speeches of the summit’s opening day. But Johnson failed to mention that even as the United Kingdom hosts the U.N. climate summit, it is also considering plans to open a new coal mine, the country’s first in decades”.

Meanwhile, back in the US the passing of the infrastructure bill in the House of Representatives – with funding for climate policy actions – grabbed some media attention away from COP26. For example, [journalist Jennifer Hiller from \*The Wall Street Journal\* reported](#), “The roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure package passed by Congress on Friday provides a spark to efforts to build a national network of

electric-vehicle charging stations. The bipartisan measure touches on nearly every aspect of the electric-vehicle industry and eclipses previous efforts in the U.S. It also includes funding to help transform the nation's aging electric grid by upgrading high-voltage transmission lines and other infrastructure set to become even more crucial as the country electrifies more of its transportation system. It directs \$5 billion to expanding electric-vehicle highway charging, which once in place would let drivers take longer road trips without the fear of running out of power. Proponents consider long-distance charging networks a critical missing ingredient for wider adoption of EVs. A further \$2.5 billion in federal grant funding could go toward electric-vehicle charging or alternatives such as hydrogen-fueling infrastructure, while \$2.5 billion is set aside for electrifying school buses. Even more money for EVs could come through a separate \$2.5 billion for low-emissions school buses, or measures such as \$2.25 billion for ports that could be tapped for electrification projects".

This House of Representatives action though fed into ongoing COP26 activities as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and others visited Glasgow and announced that the US government has re-engaged in national and international climate policy action. For example, [journalist Lisa Friedman from \*The New York Times\* reported](#), "Speaker Nancy Pelosi and nearly two dozen House Democrats barnstormed global climate talks here on Tuesday, claiming that "America is back" in the effort to slow global warming, even as their party remains divided over a \$1.85 trillion budget bill upon which their climate agenda depends. Ms. Pelosi noted that she was accompanied by a record number of lawmakers attending a U.N. climate summit and said they had flown to Glasgow "ready to take on the challenge, to meet the moment." But they haven't yet. The stalled legislation includes \$555 billion in tax credits and incentives to promote wind and solar power, electric vehicles, climate-friendly agriculture and forestry programs, and a host of other clean-energy programs. Those measures would bring the country about halfway to Mr. Biden's goal of cutting the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 50 to 52 percent from 2005

levels by 2030. Ms. Pelosi said it would be "the most ambitious and consequential climate and clean energy investment of all time"".

As COP26 came to a close, early drafts of the 'Glasgow Climate Pact' were leaked to the press. Stories proliferated about what was in and what was out of this draft agreement. For example, [CNN journalists Angela Dewan, Ivana Kottasová, Ingrid Formanek and Amy Cassidy reported](#), "UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called on leaders and delegates to just "get on and do it" as the COP26 climate talks appear to have stalled. A draft of a summit agreement was published on Wednesday by the COP26 presidency. It includes language that says the world should be aiming to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and acknowledges the role of fossil fuels in the climate crisis, a first for the annual Conference of the Parties on climate. If the draft is agreed in current form, it could pave the way for deeper emissions cuts by the end of next year. But details of opposition by Saudi Arabia, among other fossil fuel producing nations, have emerged and appear to be a major hurdle in progressing. "Now is the time for everyone to come together and show the determination needed to power on past the blockages," Johnson said in a press conference Wednesday, acknowledging that there were still gaps between what different nations want in the final text. The document is not final and COP26 delegates from nearly 200 countries will now negotiate the details over the next few days. Consensus from all nations is required".

During this time, the US and China announced a bilateral climate agreement that generated considerable media attention. For example, [Sydney Morning Post journalists Nick O'Malley and Bevan Shields reported](#), "The shock new pact between China and the United States unveiled in Glasgow has been hailed as a breakthrough as the deadline looms for the climate summit's negotiations. The world's two largest emitters declared global warming an existential crisis which demands co-operation between the superpowers. In a boost to the flagging COP26 talks and sign of a possible thawing in the fractured relationship between both countries,



Figure 5. Front page coverage of COP26 around the world at various points of the two-week negotiations.

Chinese climate envoy Xie Zhenhua and his US counterpart John Kerry stunned observers by unveiling the joint declaration pledging tougher action this decade. The agreement was negotiated in secret for months during about 30 virtual meetings and negotiation sessions in Shanghai, London and Washington before final terms were settled in Glasgow”.

After COP26 was concluded on November 13, many media accounts then examined what was accomplished as well as the work that remained. For example, *Washington Post* correspondents [Steven Mufson and Annabelle Timsit reported](#), “Many world leaders and activists expressed disappointment this weekend with the climate deal that emerged from two weeks of heated negotiations in Glasgow, Scotland – warning that countries will have to strengthen their commitments if they want to avert disastrous consequences and help at-risk nations cope with the damage that’s already occurring from

climate change. Key officials in the United States and Europe vowed to work harder to help developing nations shift to cleaner energy sources, after delegates from China and India proposed a last-minute edit that weakened a provision in the text to phase out fossil fuels. The paragraph initially called for the “phase out” of unabated coal and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, but the final agreement refers only to a “phase-down.” European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement that while some meaningful progress was made on the goals of COP26, more work remains and that the key to determining the impact of the conference will be how the commitments secured in Glasgow are actually implemented”. Meanwhile, *CNN* journalists [Angela Dewan, Amy Cassidy, Ingrid Formanek and Ivana Kottasová commented](#), “Nearly 200 nations reached a climate agreement on Saturday at COP26 with an unprecedented reference to the role of fossil fuels in the climate crisis, even after an

11th-hour objection from India that watered down the language around reducing the use of coal. The COP process has tried and failed for years to include an acknowledgment that the climate crisis has been caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Coal is the single biggest source of greenhouse gases and phasing it out was a key priority of COP26 President Alok Sharma. But despite that progress, the text doesn't reflect the urgency expressed by international scientists in their "code red for humanity" climate report published in August. Rather, it defers more action on reducing fossil fuel emissions to next year. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported the world needs to roughly halve emissions over the next decade. Visibly teary after a long two weeks, and following marathon talks that went late into the night Friday, Sharma formalized the agreement with strikes of a gavel. He orally made India's requested amendment, changing the text to a phasing "down" of coal as opposed to a phasing "out." The text also includes language around moving away from fossil fuel subsidies".

In the US - just after COP26 closed - President Joe Biden signed the infrastructure bill into law. With the earmarks for climate action this too generated many media stories. For example, [Wall Street Journal correspondents Andrew Restuccia and Eliza Collins noted](#), "President Biden signed into law a roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure bill to repair the nation's aging roads and bridges, upgrade the electrical grid and expand access to broadband internet. The legislation, the largest federal investment in infrastructure in more than a decade, is a central component of Mr. Biden's domestic-policy agenda and marks a rare bipartisan policy win for the White House".

In addition, many climate change or global warming stories in November remained focused on [scientific](#) themes. Among them, a [Nature Communications publication](#) found that fossil fuel consumption by the world's richest 20 nations (G20) contributed to 2-4 million premature deaths from particulate pollution. This research garnered several media stories. For example, [Washington Post journalist Kasha Patel noted](#), "Fossil fuel burning by the world's

richest nations and their citizens' consumption habits cause half the global deaths from fine-particle pollution, according to a study released Tuesday. Most of these deaths take place in developing countries, researchers found, laying bare stark environmental inequities. The new findings come as world leaders meet in Glasgow, Scotland, at COP26, in an effort to combat climate change. Particle pollution, which is dangerous when inhaled, is different from the greenhouse gases heating the planet but comes from burning coal, oil and gas. Around 4 million people die prematurely from particle pollution each year: The study suggests that 2 million of these deaths are tied to goods sent to and consumed by the world's 20 largest economies. Researchers estimated that one premature death resulted from the lifetime consumption of every 28 people living in a Group of 20 country. G-20 countries make up nearly two-thirds of the global population, 80 percent of the world's economic output and three-quarters of international trade. They also have large environmental footprints when it comes to consumer products, with mostly developing countries manufacturing these goods and suffering the health impacts that arise from these operations".

November media accounts were punctuated by [cultural](#) stories relating to climate change or global warming. For example, social movement activities - events, protests and demonstrations - in an around COP26 as well as across the world during the negotiations generated media attention. For example, [Guardian journalists Libby Brooks, Fiona Harvey, Nina Lakhani and Robin McKie reported](#), "Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Glasgow on Saturday to demand stronger climate action from world leaders as the climate crisis summit reached its halfway stage. Protests were also held in London and other parts of Britain. There were rallies in South Korea, Indonesia, the Netherlands and France. Environmental groups, charities, climate activists, trade unionists and indigenous people all joined the Glasgow march in heavy rain. Extinction Rebellion activists dressed as Ghostbusters while another group, Scientist Rebellion - wearing white lab coats - blocked King George V bridge, one of the city's

busiest routes. Organisers claimed more than 100,000 people turned up for the march, which began in Kelvingrove Park in the city's west end and finished at Glasgow Green in the east".

Meanwhile, in a story entitled 'Frustrations grow as marchers demand faster climate action'. [Associated Press](#) journalists [Ellen Knickmeyer](#), [Seth Borenstein](#) and [Frank Jordans](#) observed, "Tens of thousands of climate activists marched Saturday through the Scottish city hosting the U.N. climate summit, physically close to the global negotiators inside but separated by a vast gulf in expectations, with frustrated marchers increasingly dismissive of the talks and demanding immediate action instead to slow global warming. The mood at the protest in Glasgow was upbeat despite the anger and bursts of rain. Similar protests were also held in London, Amsterdam, Paris, Dublin, Copenhagen, Zurich and Istanbul. Many of the marchers condemned government leaders for failing to produce the fast action they say is needed, with some echoing activist Greta Thunberg's view Friday that the talks were just more "blah, blah, blah".

As another example, [Guardian](#) journalist [Tom Ambrose](#) reported, "The UK has received the ironic "Fossil of the Day" award for failing to make Cop26 the most accessible climate summit and "hindering civil society's access to the negotiations". The prize, organised by Climate Action Network International (CAN), is traditionally awarded every day during the Cop conferences to countries that "have done their best to block negotiations". CAN said the UK presidency of Cop26, along with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), received the award also in part for a lack of organisation after long queues formed to access the conference venue on Monday".

Elsewhere, stories of who was in the climate talks (e.g. lobbyists) and who remained outside the security gates (e.g. civil society) earned media attention. For example, [BBC](#) correspondent [Matt McGrath](#) reported, "Campaigners led by Global Witness assessed the participant list published by the UN at the start of this meeting. They found that 503 people with links to fossil fuel

interests had been accredited for the climate summit. These delegates are said to lobby for oil and gas industries, and campaigners say they should be banned. "The fossil fuel industry has spent decades denying and delaying real action on the climate crisis, which is why this is such a huge problem," says Murray Worthy from Global Witness. "Their influence is one of the biggest reasons why 25 years of UN climate talks have not led to real cuts in global emissions." About 40,000 people are attending the COP. Brazil has the biggest official team of negotiators according to UN data, with 479 delegates. The UK, which is hosting the talk in Glasgow, has 230 registered delegates". Meanwhile, [CNN](#) correspondent [Angela Dewan](#) noted, "More than 100 fossil fuel companies are understood to have sent 500 lobbyists to the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, more than any single country at the summit, according to the environmental campaign group Global Witness. The group analyzed the UN's provisional list of named corporate attendees and found at least 503 people linked with coal, oil and gas companies were at the conference. Fossil fuel use is the biggest driver of human-made climate change. The list included people either directly affiliated with fossil fuel companies, including Shell, Gazprom and BP, as well as those attending as members of delegations and groups that act on behalf of the fossil fuel industry. The analysis found that the fossil fuel lobby had around two dozen more than the largest country delegation. They also outnumber the event's official Indigenous constituency by around two to one, as well as the number of delegates from the eight-worst affected countries by climate change over the last two decades -- Puerto Rico, Myanmar, Haiti, the Philippines, Mozambique, the Bahamas, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Last, November media accounts about climate change or global warming were also populated by [ecological](#) and [meteorological](#) stories. For instance, torrential rains and flooding in south India generated news accounts linking the extreme events to a changing climate. For example, [The Associated Press](#) reported, "At least 14 people have died in the southern



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>

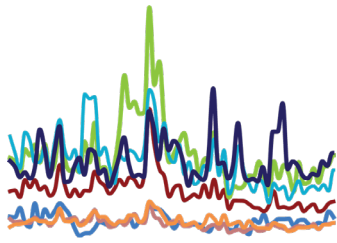
Indian state of Tamil Nadu during days of heavy rains, officials said Thursday. Several districts in the state are on high alert, bracing for more torrents as a depression over the southwest Bay of Bengal was set to cross northern Tamil Nadu on Thursday evening. The Indian Meteorological Department warned of intense rains in isolated places...Rains at this time in Tamil Nadu are not unusual, but experts have warned that climate change has exacerbated the problem, making the downpours more intense and frequent. Last month, flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains killed at least 28 people in neighboring Kerala state".

Also in November, rain and flooding in the Pacific Northwest US and in British Columbia in Canada earned media attention as links were made to climate change and global warming. For example, *Guardian* journalist [Leyland Cecco](#) noted, "Communities in western Canada who were forced to flee their homes this summer by wildfires and extreme heat are once again under evacuation orders after overwhelming floods across the region. The heavy rainfall and pounding storms are also taking a toll on the US Pacific north-west, where flooding and mudslides in Washington state have also forced evacuations and school closures. Helicopters were dispatched on Monday to Highway 7, more than 100 kilometres (62 miles) east of Vancouver, to rescue about 275 people, including 50 children, who had been stranded on the road since it was blocked by a mudslide late on Sunday. Footage from the area shows stranded travelers heading toward a yellow emergency helicopter during the rescue operation. The surrounding landscape is littered

with debris from a landslide blocking access to the highway...Since June, the province has experienced a record-setting "heat dome", huge wildfires that destroyed two towns and choked the air for weeks, extreme events that experts say were worsened by the climate crisis. Last week, Vancouver, British Columbia's largest city, was briefly placed under tornado watch, a rare event for the region". A story [by journalists Jim Morris and Rob Gillies from \*The Associated Press\* a few days later described](#), "The Canadian Pacific coast province of British Columbia declared a state of emergency Wednesday following floods and mudslides caused by extremely heavy rainfall, and officials said they expected to find more dead. Every major route between the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, where Canada's third largest city of Vancouver is, and the interior of the province has been cut by washouts, flooding or landslides following record-breaking rain across southern British Columbia between Saturday and Monday. The body of a woman was recovered from one of the mudslides late Monday...The weather events are all connected and can be attributed to climate change, said John Clague, a professor in the Earth Sciences Department at Simon Fraser University".

Thanks for your ongoing 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 59, NOVEMBER 2021



MeCCO monitors 127 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>