MECCO MONTHLY SUMMARIES
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"Humans continue to pump out planet-warming gases"

Beijing, China was once famous for being home to "nine million bicycles" is now notorious for its traffic jams, as people swap two wheels for four. Photo: VCG via Getty Images.

January media coverage of climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe dropped 1% from December 2022 but remained 24% higher than January 2022 levels. International wire services similarly decreased 6%. Radio coverage also dipped 10% from December 2022. Compared to the previous month, coverage was down in Asia (-8%), the Middle East (-8%), and Oceania (-16%). Meanwhile, coverage increased in the European Union (EU) (2%), Africa (4%), North America (7%), and Latin America (18%). 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 2023.

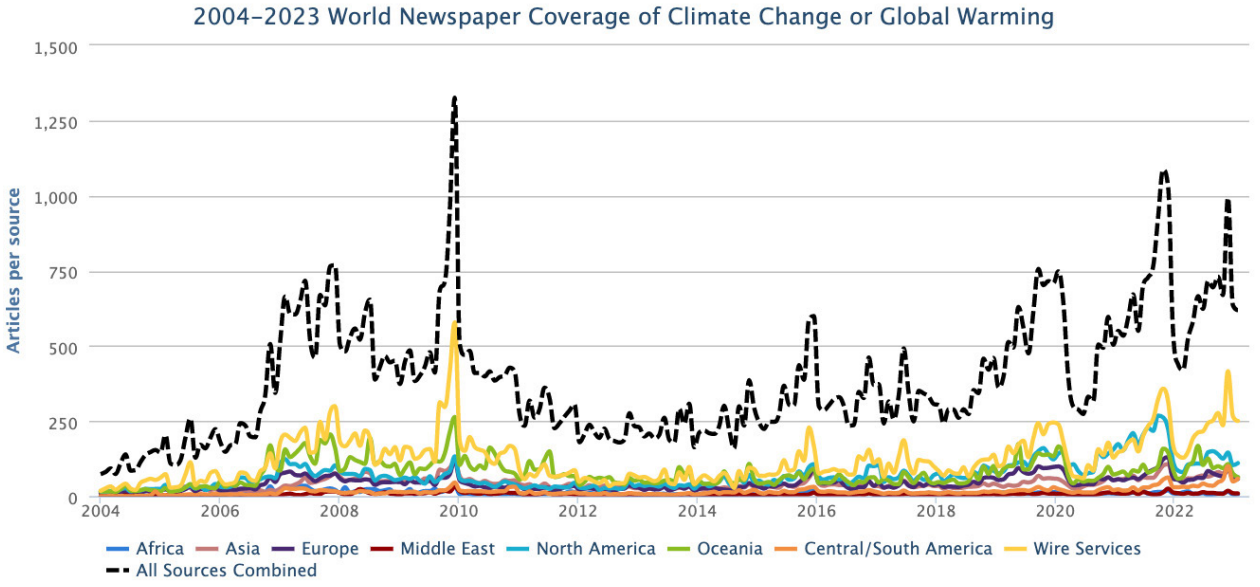

Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through January 2023.

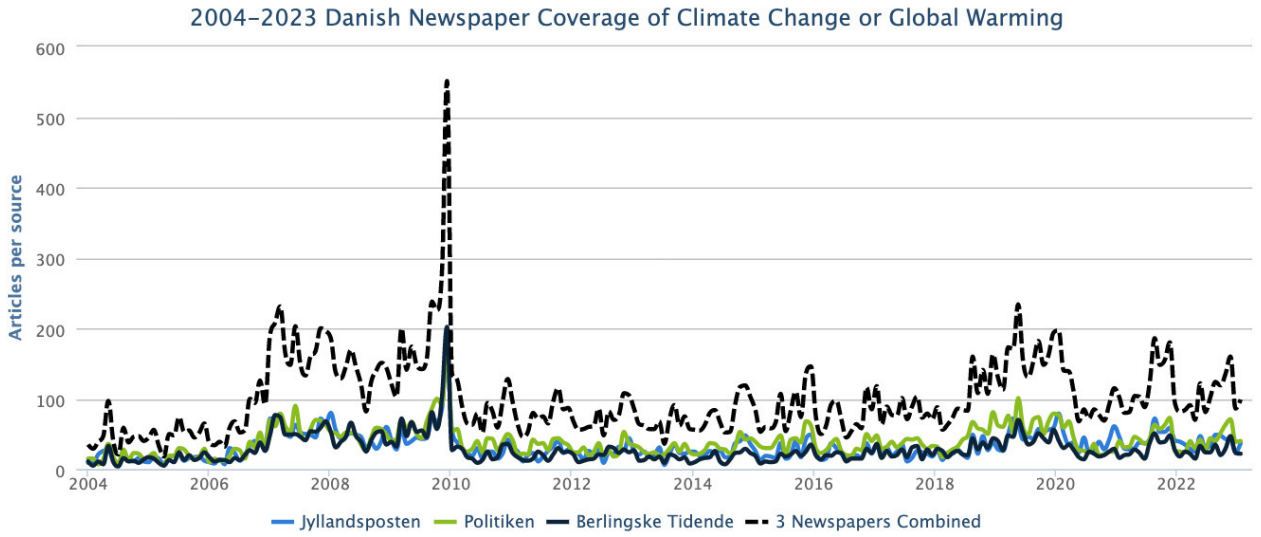

Figure 2. Newspaper coverage of climate change ("klimaforandringer") or global warming ("global opvarmning" and "[den] globale opvarmning") in the Danish newspapers Jyllandsposten, Politiken, and Berlingske Tidende from January 2004 through January 2023.

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage went up 17% while television coverage also increased 6% from the previous month. Among other countries that we at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor, coverage dropped in Japan (-1%), the United Kingdom (UK) (-7%), Canada (-9%), Sweden (-10%), Korea (-11%), and Australia (-23%). However, coverage in January 2023 increased in India (+3%), New Zealand (+4%), Germany (+6%), Spain (+8%), Norway (+14%), Denmark (+15%), and Finland (+31%).

Turning to the content of coverage, media attention to climate change or global warming was punctuated with ***ecological*** and ***meteorological*** themes. For instance, continued extreme weather into January in North America – with links made to climate change – generated news. For example, *CNN* journalist Rachel Ramirez reported, "Parts of drought-plagued California are facing an onslaught of powerful storms to start the new year, bringing flooding rainfall and even mud and debris flows to the state. The latest in the series of storms are expected to reach the coast Wednesday morning, and while the entire state will see impacts by the end of Thursday, Northern California and the Bay Area are likely to see the worst of the weather. A so-called "bomb cyclone" over the Pacific Ocean – named because of how rapidly it intensifies over a short period of time – will sling a series of fronts at the West Coast. These fronts are being super-fueled with tropical moisture from a potent atmospheric river that stretches west to Hawaii. While the prolonged wet conditions will provide some relief to the drought conditions, the rain has proved too much too fast…This dramatic swing in periods of drought and high precipitation, or weather whiplash, can occur more often and become more intense under a rapidly warming climate. And scientists say the chances of these sudden transitions happening in California will become much higher, if humans continue to pump out planet-warming gases".

Meanwhile, in early January a heatwave across continental Europe prompted climate change news. For example, journalist Isabella Kwai from *The New York Times* reported, "In the coastal Spanish town of San Sebastián, residents swapped coats for T-shirts and headed to the beach for a swim. In Rome, tourists and locals strolled in the sunshine in light sweaters. And in low-lying areas of the Pyrenees, a lack of snowfall forced some French ski resorts to close trails. The unusually warm opening days of January broke dozens of weather records across Europe. Meteorologists called the warm spell and the records it broke "staggering," as several countries saw the hottest start to the year ever measured…while tying a single heat wave or warm spell to climate change requires

analysis, it is clear that global warming is causing heat waves around the world to become hotter, more frequent and longer lasting".

As the rains and flooding – with links to a changing climate – persisted, media stories also continued. For example, US *National Public Radio* correspondents Juliana Kim and James Doubek reported, "Another powerful winter storm system is causing flooding, snow and mudslides in areas of California, where intense downpours have already wreaked havoc on communities earlier this month. The National Weather Service says California is in the middle of two major episodes of rain taking place "in quick succession"." Meanwhile, *USA Today* correspondents Elizabeth Weise and Dinah Voyles Pulvar reported, "California faces a "parade of storms" over the next several weeks, on top of deluges that have killed at least 14 people, caused flooding, knocked out power and forced evacuations and school closures up and down the coast. Given the Mediterranean climate of the state's coastal areas, wet winters and dry summers are a natural part of California's weather patterns going back millennia".

Furthermore, winter in Europe started with record-high temperatures. Meteorologists link it to climate change. *El Mundo* journalist Carlos Fresneda noted, "The already known 'winter heat wave', which has brought unusually high temperatures for these dates since the New Year, has already struck down hundreds of records in Europe and may be a foretaste of what lies ahead for us expect in 2023. 2022 was the hottest year in the UK, France and Spain, confirming Europe's trend as 'ground zero' for climate change. Globally, it was the fourth hottest year, largely due to the cooling effect of the Pacific due to the phenomenon known as 'La Niña', which after three years will hand over to 'El Niño' in 2023". As a consequence of this heat, alpine ski slopes were closed. *La Vanguardia* journalist Antonio Cerrillo wrote, "The unprecedentedly warm temperatures registered at the beginning of the year in Europe have forced the closure of many ski slopes and the conversion of these stations into nature viewpoints or simple paths for excursions and contemplation, when they are not they have had to close completely. Grass and mud replace seasonal snow from Chamonix in France to Innsbruck in Austria. The Alps seem like a stage designed for first-hand viewing of the effects of climate change, which is melting glaciers and exposing the remains of ancient aircraft and the bodies of long-lost mountaineers".

Last, assessments of extreme weather disasters in 2022 – with links drawn to climate change – populated several news stories at the start of the 2023 calendar year. For example, *Associated Press* journalist Seth Borenstein reported, "Costly weather disasters kept raining down on America last year, pounding the nation with 18 climate extremes that caused at least $1 billion in damage each, totaling more than $165 billion, federal climate scientists calculated Tuesday. Even though 2022 wasn't near record hot for the United States, it was the third-wildest year nationally both in number of extremes that cost $1 billion and overall damage from those weather catastrophes, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a report issued at the American Meteorological Society's conference. The amount, cost and death toll of billion-dollar weather disaster s make up a key measurement, adjusted for inflation, that NOAA uses to see how bad human-caused climate change is getting. They led to at least 474 deaths".

In January, various ***cultural*** stories relating to climate change or global warming were evident in wider news coverage. To illustrate, news of Google sales to clients that spread climate disinformation broke in January. For example, *Guardian* journalist Geoff Dembicki reported, "media outlet founded by conservative influencer Ben Shapiro paid Google to advertise on search pages questioning whether the climate crisis is real, according to new research from a disinformation watchdog group. The Daily Wire bought ads on search terms over the past year such as "climate change is a hoax" and "why is climate change fake", meaning that when people Googled these phrases, stories from Shapiro's outlet were some of the

Figure 3. Newspaper front pages stories in January with links to climate change and climate risks

first results that appeared, the research found. Google sold these ads even after announcing a new policy in October 2021 prohibiting ads that promote climate crisis denial. Its CEO, Sundar Pichai, publicly stated at the time that "when people come to Google Search with questions about climate change, we'll show authoritative information from sources like the United Nations"."

January 2023 media coverage of climate change in this cultural sphere also featured the greenhouse gas emissions and potential health dangers associated with gas stoves. For example, *New York Times* correspondent Hiroko Tabuchi wrote, "Whether many Americans will continue to cook and warm their homes with gas, or instead switch to electricity, has become one of the most divisive issues in public health, as well

as the fight over climate action. A growing body of scientific research has documented indoor air pollution and health problems caused by gas stoves, which emit nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and fine particulate matter when they are turned on. A December study estimated that gas-burning stoves were associated with 13 percent of childhood asthma in the United States. Gas stoves also emit methane, even when the stoves are off. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas and significant contributor to global warming. Almost 100 cities and counties have adopted electrification ordinances that ban or discourage gas hookups for new buildings in favor of electric appliances and heat pumps".

Many ***scientific*** themes continued to emerge in media stories during the month of January through new studies, reports, and assessments. For instance, new research in *Science* about emissions reductions and reductions of glacial melt generated several news accounts. For example, *Washington Post* journalist Chris Mooney reported, "A sweeping study of all the world's glaciers outside of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets has found that nearly half of them will melt by century's end, even if the world meets its most ambitious global warming goal. The study, published Thursday in the journal Science, finds that even with just 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming above preindustrial levels, some 104,000 of the world's more than 215,000 mountain glaciers and ice caps will melt, raising global sea levels by a little shy of 4 inches. A rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius beyond preindustrial temperatures is now extraordinarily difficult to avoid, suggesting that a change of this magnitude may be nearly unstoppable. With every additional increment of temperature increase, the study finds, the outlook becomes worse. Three degrees C (5.4 degrees F) of warming, the research finds, would translate into a loss of over 70 percent of global glaciers and result in about 5 inches of global sea-level rise. So, even if many losses are baked in, the authors say, it is still worth trying to avoid whatever warming we can".

Meanwhile, a Rhodium Group report about 2022 US greenhouse gas emissions in early

"A sweeping study of all the world's glaciers outside of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets has found that nearly half of them will melt by century's end, even if the world meets its most ambitious global warming goal."

The Nigardsbreen glacier in Jostedal, Norway has lost almost 1.8 miles of length in the past century. Photo: Bram Janssen/AP.

January also generated news. For example, *New York Times* reported Elena Shao wrote, "America's greenhouse gas emissions from energy and industry rose last year, moving the nation in the opposite direction from its climate goals…Emissions ticked up 1.3 percent even as renewable energy surpassed coal power nationwide for the first time in over six decades, with wind, solar and hydropower generating 22 percent of the country's electricity compared with 20 percent from coal. Growth in natural gas power generation also compensated for coal's decline".

In January, another *Science* research article by Geoffrey Supran, Stefan Rahmstorf, and Naomi Oreskes also garnered significant media attention. For example, *Guardian* journalist Oliver Milman wrote, "The oil giant Exxon privately "predicted global warming correctly and skilfully" only to then spend decades publicly rubbishing such science in order to protect its core business, new research has found. A trove

of internal documents and research papers has previously established that Exxon knew of the dangers of global heating from at least the 1970s, with other oil industry bodies knowing of the risk even earlier, from around the 1950s. They forcefully and successfully mobilized against the science to stymie any action to reduce fossil fuel use. A new study, however, has made clear that Exxon's scientists were uncannily accurate in their projections from the 1970s onwards, predicting an upward curve of global temperatures and carbon dioxide emissions that is close to matching what actually occurred as the world heated up at a pace not seen in millions of years. Exxon scientists predicted there would be global heating of about 0.2C a decade due to the emissions of planet-heating gases from the burning of oil, coal and other fossil fuels. The new analysis, published in Science, finds that Exxon's science was highly adept and the "projections were also consistent with, and at least as skillful as, those of independent academic and government models". Exxon knew of climate change in 1981, email says – but it funded deniers for 27 more years. Geoffrey Supran, whose previous research of historical industry documents helped shed light on what Exxon and other oil firms knew, said it was "breathtaking" to see Exxon's projections line up so closely with what subsequently happened".

Research from the UK Met Office also generated several news stories in January. For example, *Guardian* environment editor Damian Carrington reported, "The record-breaking heat in the UK in 2022 was made 160 times more likely by the climate crisis, indicating the dominant influence of human-caused global heating on Britain. Last year has been confirmed as the UK's hottest on record, with the average annual temperature passing the 10C mark for the first time. Scientists at the Met Office calculated that such heat is now expected every three to four years. Without the greenhouse gases emitted by humanity, such a warm year would be expected only once every five centuries. The 10.03C recorded in 2022 beat the previous record of 9.88C set in 2014, and is 0.89C above the average of the last three decades. All the UK nations set new record annual temperatures. The world's longest instrumental record of temperature is the 364-year-long Central England Temperature and this also set a new high in 2022 of 11.1C. Scientists were shocked in July when the daily temperature record passed 40C for the first time, obliterating the previous high of 38.7C. The hot summer led to thousands of early deaths. A cold spell in December made little difference to the overall average annual temperature. The scientists estimated the influence of global heating on the UK's record hot year by comparing the results of climate models reflecting today's high levels of carbon dioxide with models representing the pre-industrial period, when CO2 levels were much lower".

Many ***political*** and ***economic***-themed media stories about climate change or global warming continued to roll out in the month of January. At the start of the month, the naming of Sultan al-Jaber – CEO of the United Arab Emirates' state-run oil company – as president of the next United Nations climate negotiations later this year (COP28) gave rise to several media stories. For example, *BBC* correspondent Matt McGrath reported, "The head of one of the world's biggest oil companies has been named to lead the COP28 global climate talks in Dubai, later this year. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber is currently the chief executive officer of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. He is also the minister for industry and advanced technology for the COP28 hosts, the United Arab Emirates. Campaigners say he must stand down from his oil business role while president as it is a clear conflict of interest. They believe someone steeped in the oil industry may not push countries to rapidly reduce their production and use of fossil fuel, which scientists say is critical to avoiding dangerous climate change".

Furthermore, oil and gas company profiteering – with associated climate change impacts – made news in January. For example, *Associated Press* reporter Cathy Bussewitz noted, "Exxon Mobil posted record annual profits in 2022 as consumers globally struggled with high prices for gasoline, home heating and consumer goods. The energy giant brought in $55.7 billion in annual profits, exceeding its previous record

of $45.22 billion in 2008, when a barrel of oil soared close to $150. Exxon's bounty came as Americans shelled out $4 per gallon for gasoline throughout most of the spring and summer with millions hitting the road. At one point gasoline topped $5 a gallon. Supplies grew tight and prices rose globally after Russia invaded Ukraine and reduced energy supplies to Europe. The year marked a dramatic turnaround from 2020 when travel ground to a halt during the coronavirus pandemic and demand for fuel evaporated. That year, the price for future oil contracts plummeted below zero at one point, dozens of oil and gas companies filed for bankruptcy protection and thousands of industry workers lost their jobs. Exxon, for the first time in decades, lost money in 2020. Two years later, Exxon booked $12.75 billion in profits and $95.43 billion in revenue in just its final quarter". Meanwhile, US *National Public Radio* correspondent Camila Domonoske added, "ExxonMobil earned nearly $56 billion in profit in 2022, setting an annual record not just for itself but for any U.S. or European oil giant. Buoyed by high oil prices, rival Chevron also clocked $35 billion in profits for the year, despite a disappointing fourth quarter. Energy companies have been reporting blockbuster profits since last year, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent oil prices sharply higher… The high profits have also revived perennial conversations about how much profit is too much profit for an oil company – especially as urgency over the need to slow climate change is mounting around the world. Exxon's blockbuster earnings, announced Monday, will likely lead to more political pressure from the White House. Last year President Biden called out Exxon for making "more money than God." The White House and Democrats accuse oil companies of hoarding their profits to enrich shareholders, including executives and employees, instead of investing the money in more production to ease prices at the gas pump. Last year, between dividends and share buybacks, Exxon returned $30 billion to shareholders, while Chevron paid out more than $22 billion. Exxon plans to hold production flat in 2023, while Chevron plans to increase production by 0 to 3%".

Last, climate change made news at the Davos Forum in January. For example, *Expansión* journalist Víctor Cruzado wrote, "After several years of listening to the song without paying enough attention, the wolf finally seems to have arrived. The lack of measures to mitigate and adapt development to climate change and its effects, from natural disasters to increased social instability, is already configured as the main global risk for the next decade, according to the World Economic Forum. The consequences of climate change are ahead of weapons of mass destruction, water crises, large-scale involuntary migration and sudden swings in energy prices, the number one major concern for doing business in 93 economies and the most widespread risk. Variations in weather harm economic development, multiplying geopolitical instability".

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, Presley Church, Rogelio Fernández-Reyes, Jennifer Katzung, Ami Nacu-Schmidt and Olivia Pearman

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:

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MeCCO
Media and Climate Change Observatory

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

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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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