

“The seven hottest years ever recorded were, by a clear margin, the past seven”



Rising Atlantic Ocean waters erode land near the town of Muanda in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP/Getty Images.

January media attention to climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe dropped 13% December 2021. Furthermore, coverage decreased 11% from a year before (January 2021). Meanwhile, January 2022 global radio coverage of climate change or global warming dipped 67% from December 2021, while coverage in international wire services went down 20% from the previous

month. Compared to the previous month coverage was down in all regions, but held steady in Latin America: Europe (-3%), Africa (-6%), Asia (-8%), the Middle East (-20%), North America (-26%), and Oceania (-34%). 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 2021.

2004–2022 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

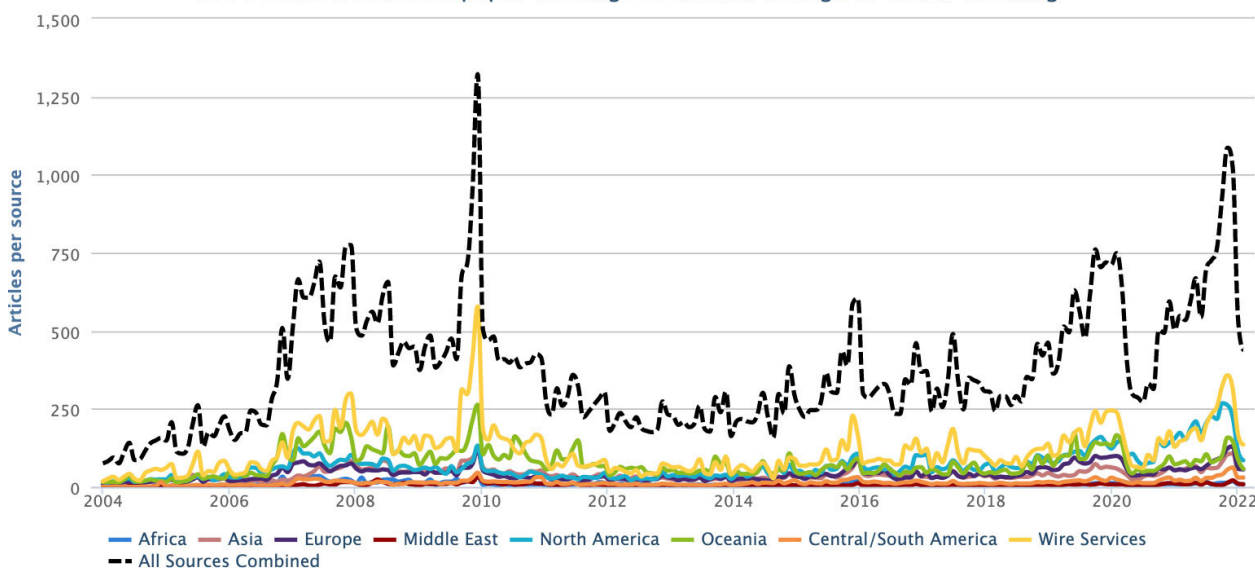


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through January 2021.

2000–2022 Spain Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

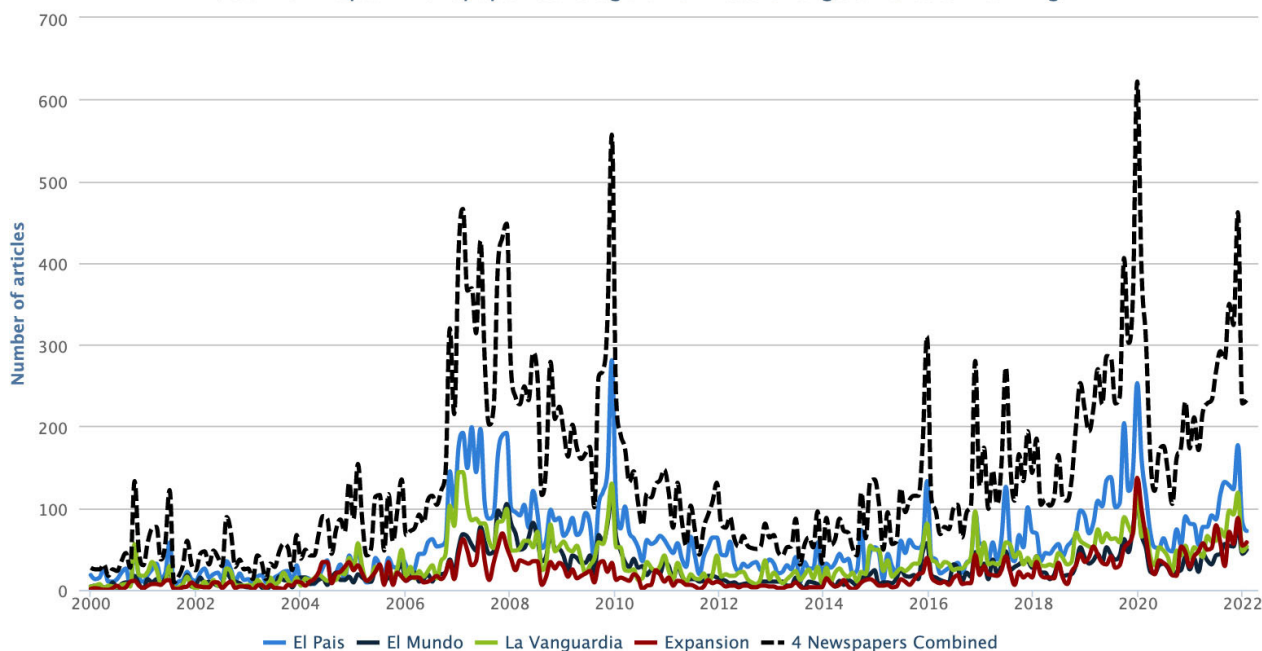


Figure 2. Spanish newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through January 2021.

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage diminished 21% while television coverage also decreased 37% from the previous month. Meanwhile, compared to the previous month, coverage decreased in all 14 countries that we at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor, except in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom (UK) where coverage was up 2% in the three countries. For example, coverage dropped 7% in Norway, 12% in Japan, 12.5% in Sweden, 17% in Finland, 37% in New Zealand, 41% in India, 41% in Australia, 48% in Denmark, and 65% in Canada in January 2022. Coverage in January 2022 in these countries was also down from a year before in most cases, with exceptions in Finland (+6%), Spain (+10%), and Australia (+16%) while holding steady in Germany.

In January, many climate change or global warming stories in January focused on *scientific* themes. Among them, studies revealing continued increases in greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 along with ongoing increases in temperatures around the globe made news. For example, *Guardian* journalist Bibi van der Zee reported, “More than 400 weather stations around the world beat their all-time highest temperature records in 2021, according to a

climatologist who has been compiling weather records for over 30 years. Maximiliano Herrera keeps track of extreme weather around the world, and publishes an annual list of records broken in the previous year. He and many other climatologists and meteorologists who follow these issues closely expect that 2021 will probably not be the hottest year in history...But it is likely to be in the top five or six, continuing the long-term upward trend. The past six years have been the six hottest on record”. Meanwhile, *New York Times* journalist Raymond Zhong noted, “Last year was Earth’s fifth hottest on record, European scientists announced on Monday. But the fact that the worldwide average temperature didn’t beat the record is hardly reason to stop worrying about global warming’s grip on the planet, they said. Not when both the United States and Europe had their warmest summers on the books. Not when higher temperatures around the Arctic caused it to rain for the first time at the Greenland ice sheet’s normally frigid summit. And certainly not when the seven hottest years ever recorded were, by a clear margin, the past seven. And, as is now the norm, a sheaf of new heat records have been broken, according to Herrera. Ten countries – Oman, UAE, Canada, the United States, Morocco, Turkey, Taiwan, Italy, Tunisia and Dominica – broke or tied their



Figure 3. Illustrative front-page newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming in January 2021.

national highest record, 107 countries beat their monthly high temperature record, and five beat their monthly low temperature record". As a third example, *New York Times* journalists Krishna Karra and Tim Wallace wrote (in an article with many visual representations), "Temperatures in the United States last year set more all-time heat and cold records than any other year since 1994...Heat waves made up most of these records. All-time heat records were set last year at 8.3 percent of all weather stations across the nation, more than in any year since at least 1948, when weather observations were first digitally recorded by the U.S. government. The world has been warming by almost two-tenths of a degree per decade. Extreme-temperature events can often demonstrate the most visible effects of climate change". And, *Guardian* journalist Aliya Uteuova noted, "2021 was the fourth hottest year for the US on record and winter is the fastest-warming season in 38 out of 49 American states, excluding Hawaii, since 1970".

Furthermore, an *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences* study found that records were set not just in the atmosphere but also in the oceans. This generated media attention. For example, *Washington Post* correspondent Kasha Patel reported, "The warmth of the world's oceans hit a record. Again. A new analysis, published Tuesday in the journal *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, showed that oceans contained the most heat energy in 2021 since measurements began six decades ago – accelerating at a rate only possible because of human-emitted greenhouse gases. Since the late 1980s, Earth's

oceans warmed at a rate eight times faster than in the preceding decades...The team analyzed data from a worldwide network of buoys in seven ocean basins. Overall, it found that the upper 2,000 meters (6,562 feet) of Earth's oceans absorbed more than 227 excess zettajoules of energy, compared with the 1981-2010 average. Last year broke the previous record set in 2020 by at least 14 zettajoules".

In other scientific findings making news, a study in the journal *Pediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology* published in January noted that climate change is harming human fetuses and babies. For example, *Guardian* journalist Damian Carrington reported, "The climate crisis is damaging the health of foetuses, babies and infants across the world, six new studies have found. Scientists discovered increased heat was linked to fast weight gain in babies, which increases the risk of obesity in later life. Higher temperatures were also linked to premature birth, which can have lifelong health effects, and to increased hospital admissions of young children. Other studies found exposure to smoke from wildfires doubled the risk of a severe birth defects, while reduced fertility was linked to air pollution from fossil fuel burning, even at low levels. The studies, published in a special issue of the journal *Pediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology*, spanned the globe from the US to Denmark, Israel and Australia".

January media accounts also featured cultural stories relating to climate change or global warming. For example, *Washington Post*

journalist Steven Mufson reported, “The public relations giant Edelman vaulted to the top of its profession with clever campaigns that burnished the images of leading corporations. Now, under fire for its work on behalf of fossil fuel companies, Edelman is scrambling to bolster its own reputation. On Wednesday, more than 450 scientists called on public relations and advertising firms, including the prestigious Edelman, to stop working for oil and gas companies. The firms’ ad campaigns for these companies, the scientists said, “represent one of the biggest barriers to the government action science shows is necessary to mitigate the ongoing climate emergency.” A group of 100 activists and former Edelman employees partnered with Clean Creatives, a campaign pressuring PR and ad agencies to quit fossil fuels, to issue the same demand. The question for the PR and ad business is whether this emboldened coalition of academics and advocates can turn fossil fuel companies into social pariahs – a sort of New Tobacco”.

Also, in January several stories ran about climate change misinformation on social media. For example, *The South China Morning Post* carried a story that noted, “The climate is changing, but misinformation about it on the major social media platforms is not. Climate change falsehoods, hoaxes and conspiracy theories are still prevalent on Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube despite pledges to crack down, a new report says. Social media posts and videos denying climate change, disputing its causes or underplaying its effects not only can still be found on these platforms, but they are often also missing warning labels or links to credible information, according to Advance Democracy, a research organisation that studies misinformation. Climate scientists say they’re frustrated by the lack of progress in stemming the tide of climate change misinformation. For years, they’ve urged social media companies to identify, flag and take down the misinformation and the accounts that spread it”.

And the film ‘Don’t Look Up’ released at the end of December 2021 generated media attention and discussion in January. For example, *New York*

Times journalist Maya Salam wrote, “In “Don’t Look Up,” a satirical incision from Adam McKay with only humor as an anesthetic, these themes are lampooned in equal measure and in no uncertain terms. Though heavy with metaphors – most important, the comet signifying climate change – its message is clear and not open to interpretation: Wake up! That the movie amassed 152 million hours viewed in one week, according to Netflix, which reports its own figures, suggests a cultural trend taking shape. There’s a hunger for entertainment that favors unflinching articulation and externalization over implication and internalization – to have our greatest fears verbalized without restraint, even heavy-handedly, along with a good deal of style and wit”.

January media accounts about climate change or global warming also were infused with several *ecological* and *meteorological* stories. For instance, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) assessment of extreme weather events attracted reporting. *Associated Press* journalist Seth Borenstein reported, “The United States staggered through a steady onslaught of deadly billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in an extra hot 2021, while the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions last year jumped 6% because of surges in coal and long-haul trucking, putting America further behind its 2030 climate change cutting goal. Three different reports released Monday, though not directly connected, paint a picture of a U.S. in 2021 struggling with global warming and its efforts to curb it. A report from the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm, on Monday said that in 2021 America’s emissions of heat-trapping gas rebounded from the first year of the pandemic at a faster rate than the economy as a whole, making it harder to reach the country’s pledge to the world to cut emissions in half compared to 2005 by 2030. And last year was the deadliest weather year for the contiguous United States since 2011 with 688 people dying in 20 different billion-dollar weather and climate disasters that combined cost at least \$145 billion, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Monday. That was the second highest number of billion-dollar weather disasters – which are

adjusted for inflation with records going back to 1980– and third costliest...Scientists have long said human-caused climate change makes extreme weather nastier and more frequent, documenting numerous links to wild and deadly weather events. They say hotter air and oceans and melting sea ice alter the jet stream which brings and stalls storm fronts, makes hurricanes wetter and stronger, while worsening western droughts and wildfires". Meanwhile, [CNN reporter Rachel Ramirez added](#), "As in the US, extremes are becoming more frequent and more intense around the world due to the climate crisis. A recent report by the World Meteorological Organization found that an extreme weather event or climate disaster had occurred every day on average somewhere in the world over the last 50 years, a five-fold increase in frequency over that period. Globally, the economic toll of these disasters has climbed seven-fold since the 1970s, the WMO reported".

As a second example in January, a report from the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) concluded that the summer of 2021 was the hottest and most extreme in Europe. [Journalist Teresa Guerrero, from the newspaper El Mundo noted](#), "A summer that was not only marked by the heat waves suffered by Greece, Spain or Italy, but also by numerous and destructive extreme weather events: devastating fires in Greece, Turkey and other countries of the Mediterranean area and the heavy floods in Central Europe in July that affected Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and in which more than 200 people died. "These events are a stark reminder of the need for us to change our habits, take decisive and effective steps towards a sustainable society and work to reduce net carbon emissions," said Carlo Buontempo, Director of the Copernicus Climate Change Service, during the presentation of the results". On the other hand, there was an unusual episode of heat at the beginning of the year in Spain". [Victoria Torres Benayas, a journalist for El País wrote](#), "In the space of a year, two consecutive winters, Spain has experienced a historic snowfall, the hardest cold wave in 45 years, and a heat wave in January. Is it due to the natural variability of the weather without

anthropogenic causes, as the deniers allege, is this normal? It is not, say experts who, in the absence of attribution studies, link it "without a doubt" to climate change".

Last, [political](#) and [economic](#) themed media stories about climate change or global warming continued in January. A subset of stories continued to focus on investing and climate change. For example, [Guardian correspondent Julia Kollewe wrote](#), "Larry Fink, the chief executive of BlackRock, the world's biggest investment fund manager, said pushing climate policies was about profits, not being "woke". In his annual letter to CEOs, Fink said businesses, cities and countries that do not plan for a carbon-free future risk being left behind. He argued that the pursuit of long-term returns was the main driver behind climate policies, after being criticised for seeking to influence companies. "Stakeholder capitalism is not about politics. It is not a social or ideological agenda. It is not 'woke'," he wrote. "We focus on sustainability not because we're environmentalists, but because we are capitalists and fiduciaries to our clients".

As a second example, in the European political arena there was a debate on whether to include gas and nuclear energy as green technologies. This issue appeared on the front pages of various European newspapers. [In the newspaper El País, journalists Ignacio Fariza and Xosé Hermida narrated](#), "The Spanish Government rejects the European Commission's proposal that both nuclear energy and combined cycle plants, fueled by natural gas, be considered green technologies. In the European arena, the biggest proponent of nuclear receiving the label of green energy is France, a country in which nuclear power plants provide two thirds of the electricity consumed. The most influential voice of environmentalists in the German Executive, Deputy Chancellor Robert Habeck, was quick on Saturday to express his discontent with the Brussels draft". On the other hand, in the economic field, the Davos Forum once again had climate change as the main challenge according to the Global Risk Report". Furthermore, [journalist Piergiorgio M. Sandri wrote in La Vanguardia](#), "What is the greatest



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.

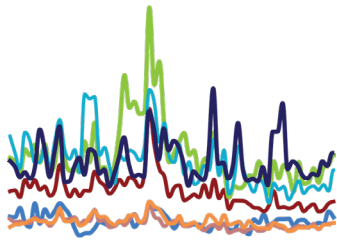
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concern of businessmen and global leaders in 2022? Maybe the pandemic? The escalation of inflation? A possible puncture of the debt bubble? None of all this. What most worries the economic elite of the planet has little to do with the progress of the economy or health evolution: it is climate change. The climate first appeared as a risk in 2011: today it is the number one priority”.

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



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MeCCO monitors 126 sources (across newspapers, radio and TV) in 58 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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