

“The devil is in the details”



A climate protest in Manhattan’s financial district last year. Several major firms retreated from a global climate coalition in recent days. Photo: Spencer Platt/Getty Images.

February media coverage of climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe decreased 9% from January 2024. Moreover, coverage in February dropped 30% from February 2023 levels. Of particular note, in February international wire services dipped 29% from the previous month. Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media

coverage at the global scale - organized into seven geographical regions around the world - from January 2004 through February 2024.

At the regional level, February 2024 coverage decreased in all regions, except in Africa where it increased 39%. It went down in North America (-6%) [see Figure 2], Latin America

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

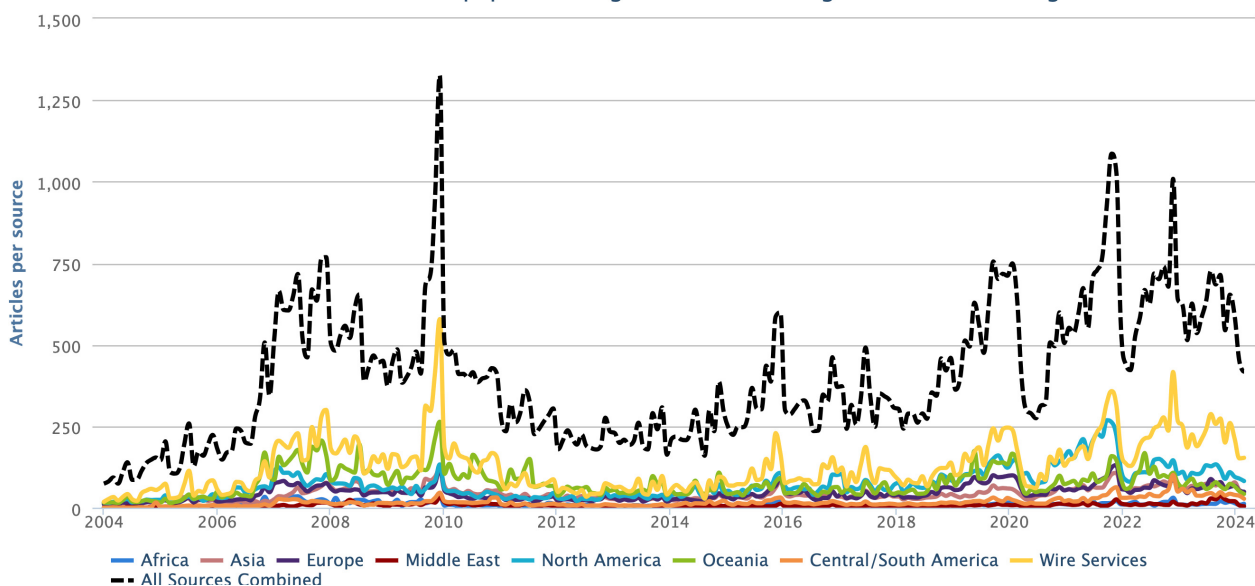


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through February 2024.

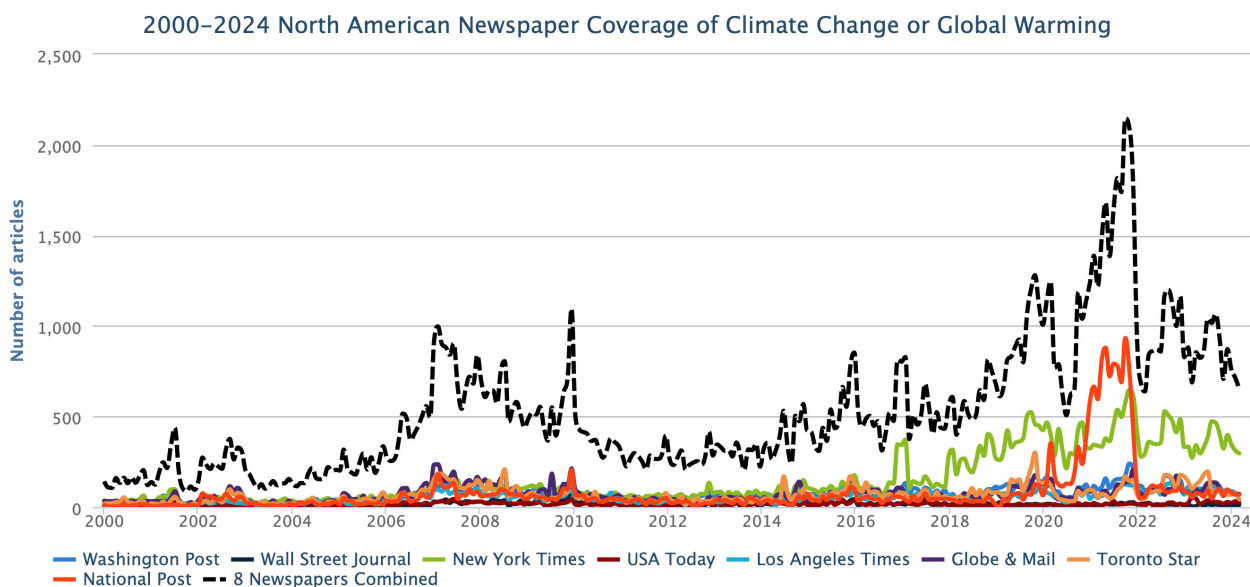


Figure 2. Newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming in North American newspapers from January 2004 through February 2024.

(-7%), the European Union (EU) (-21%), Oceania (-23%), Asia (-30%), and the Middle East (-64%) compared to the previous month of January.

The Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) team continues to provide international and regional assessments of trends in coverage, along with several country-level appraisals each month. We monitor media coverage of climate change or global warming in 14 languages. We use Factiva, Infomedia, ProQuest, Nifty, BigKind and NexisUni databases for our collective work that currently involved a team of 23 people across 15 institutions in seven countries. Visit our website for open-source datasets and downloadable visuals.

Moving to considerations of content, February 2024 media stories featured several *ecological* and *meteorological* dimensions of climate change or global warming. To begin, some exploratory links were made in early February between Chilean wildfires and climate change. For example, *New York Times* correspondents [Annie Correal](#) and [John Bartlett](#) noted, “Days after devastating wildfires ripped through Chile’s Pacific Coast, ravaging entire neighborhoods and trapping people fleeing in cars, officials said on Sunday that at least 112 people had been killed and hundreds remained missing and warned that the number of dead

could rise sharply...Several other countries in South America have also struggled to contain wildfires. Colombia has seen dozens of fires erupt in recent weeks, including around the capital of Bogotá, as the country has experienced a spell of dry weather. Firefighters have also been battling blazes in Ecuador, Venezuela and Argentina. The cyclical climate phenomenon known as El Niño has exacerbated droughts and high temperatures through parts of the continent, creating conditions that experts say are ripe for forest fires”.

Also in February, changing monarch butterfly migrations earned media attention. For example, [Guardian correspondent Catrin Einhorn](#) reported, “The number of monarch butterflies at their overwintering areas in Mexico dropped precipitously this year to the second-lowest level on record, according to an annual survey. The census, considered a benchmark of the species’ health, found that the butterflies occupied only about 2.2 acres of forest in central Mexico, down 59 percent from the prior year. Only the winter of 2013-14 had fewer butterflies. Scientists said the decline appeared to be driven by hot, dry conditions in the United States and Canada that reduced the quality of available milkweed, the only plants monarch caterpillars can eat, as well as the availability of nectar from many kinds of flowers, which they feed on as butterflies”. As a

second example, *Associated Press* correspondent [Mark Stevenson](#) noted, “The number of monarch butterflies at their wintering areas in Mexico dropped by 59% this year to the second lowest level since record keeping began, experts said Wednesday, blaming heat, drought and loss of habitat. The butterflies’ migration from Canada and the United States to Mexico and back again is considered a marvel of nature. No single butterfly lives to complete the entire journey. The annual butterfly count doesn’t calculate the individual number of butterflies, but rather the number of acres they cover when they clump together on tree branches in the mountain pine and fir forests west of Mexico City. Monarchs from east of the Rocky Mountains in the United States and Canada overwinter there. Mexico’s Commission for National Protected Areas said the butterflies covered an area equivalent to 2.2 acres (0.9 hectares), down from 5.4 acres (2.21 hectares) last year... Experts said heat and drought appeared to be the main culprits in this year’s drought. “It has a lot to do with climate change,” said Gloria Tavera, the commission’s conservation director”.

“The number of monarch butterflies at their wintering areas in Mexico **dropped by 59%** this year to the second lowest level since record keeping began, blaming heat, drought and loss of habitat. The butterflies’ migration from Canada and the United States to Mexico and back again is considered a marvel of nature. No single butterfly lives to complete the entire journey.”



Monarch butterflies land on branches at Monarch Grove Sanctuary in Pacific Grove, Calif., on Nov. 10, 2021. The number of western monarch butterflies overwintering in California dropped 30% from the previous year likely due to a wet winter. Photo: Nic Coury/AP.

February 2024 coverage also contained many *scientific* themes in stories during the month. Among them, considerations of hurricanes and climate change made news. For example, *Associated Press* correspondent [Seth Borenstein](#) wrote, “A handful of super powerful tropical storms in the last decade and the prospect of more to come has a couple of experts proposing a new category of whopper hurricanes: Category 6. Studies have shown that the strongest tropical storms are getting more intense because of climate change. So the traditional five-category Saffir-Simpson scale, developed more than 50 years

ago, may not show the true power of the most muscular storms, two climate scientists suggest in a Monday study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. They propose a sixth category for storms with winds that exceed 192 miles per hour (309 kilometers per hour). Currently, storms with winds of 157 mph (252 kilometers per hour) or higher are Category 5. The study’s authors said that open-ended grouping doesn’t warn people enough about the higher dangers from monstrous storms that flirt with 200 mph (322 kph) or higher. Several experts told The Associated Press they don’t think another category is necessary. They said

it could even give the wrong signal to the public because it's based on wind speed, while water is by far the deadliest killer in hurricanes".

February coverage continued to also track record-breaking warmth on the planet. For example, [ABC News reporters Julia Jacobo, Daniel Peck and Ginger Zee](#) noted, "Last month's global temperatures led to the warmest January on record, continuing a pattern of eight consecutive hottest months on record, according to scientists. The average surface air temperature on Earth in January was 13.14 degrees Celsius, or 55.65 degrees Fahrenheit -- about 1.26 degrees Fahrenheit above the 1991 to 2020 average for January and 0.22 degrees Fahrenheit above the previous record, set in January 2020, according to the monthly report released Wednesday by Copernicus, the European Union's climate change service. The month as a whole was 1.66 degrees Celsius (or 2.99 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than an estimate of the January average for 1850 to 1900, the designated pre-industrial reference period, the report, which highlights changes observed in global surface air temperature, sea ice cover and hydrological variables, found. February 2023 through January 2024 was the warmest 12-month stretch on record with the global mean temperature measuring at 1.52 degrees Celsius -- or 2.74 degrees Fahrenheit -- above the 1850 to 1900 pre-industrial average, according to the researchers. The Paris Agreement, a collective climate change agreement among the majority of the world's countries, aims to keep global temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming since the Industrial Revolution".

Further into the month, ecological stories relating to climate change and conservation circulated. For example, [CNN journalists Angela Dewan and Rachel Ramirez](#) reported, "Female

"Last month's global temperatures led to the **warmest January on record**, continuing a pattern of eight consecutive hottest months on record. The average surface air temperature on Earth in January was 13.14 degrees Celsius, or 55.65 degrees Fahrenheit -- about 1.26 degrees Fahrenheit above the 1991 to 2020 average for January and 0.22 degrees Fahrenheit above the previous record, set in January 2020."



People run on the National Mall, Jan. 26, 2024, in Washington, D.C. Photo: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images.

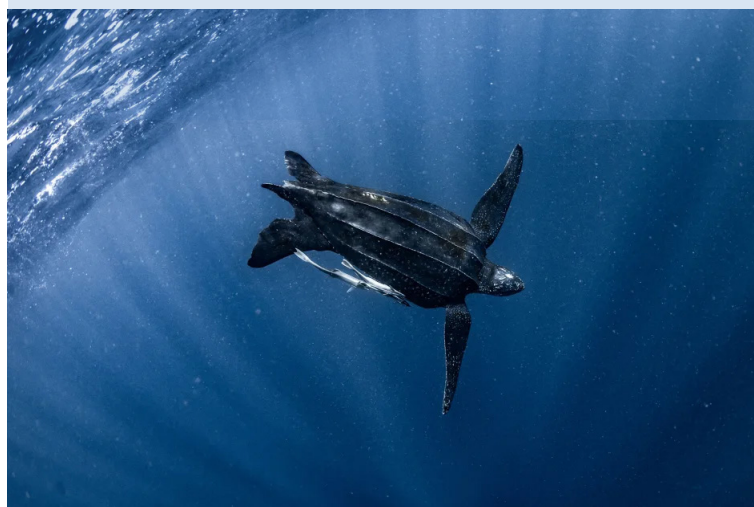
leatherback turtles are among the world's most intrepid creatures, making journeys as far as 10,000 miles after nesting to find food in far-away seas. They've been known to set off from tropical Southeast Asia up to the cold waters of Alaska, where jellyfish are abundant. But travelling such a long way means encountering threats that can be fatal: fishing nets intended for other species, poachers, pollution and waters warmed by the climate crisis, which force the turtles to travel even further to find their prey. These turtles are just one of hundreds of migratory species -- those that make remarkable journeys each year across land, rivers and oceans -- that are facing extinction because of human interference, according to a landmark UN agency report published Monday. Of the 1,189 creatures listed by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, or CMS, more than one in five are

threatened. They include species from all sorts of animal groups – whales, sharks, elephants, wild cats, raptors, birds and insects, among others. Some 44% of those species listed are undergoing population declines, the report said. Most alarming is the state of the world’s migratory fish: Nearly all, 97%, of those listed are threatened with extinction”.

February featured ongoing **cultural**-themed stories relating to climate change or global warming as well. To illustrate, a decade-long legal case about defamation of a climate scientist came to a close and it generated several media accounts. For example, [Washington Post journalist Dino Grandoni reported](#), “Michael Mann, a prominent climate scientist, won his long-standing legal battle against two right-wing bloggers who claimed that he manipulated data in his research and compared him to convicted child molester Jerry Sandusky, a major victory for the outspoken researcher. A jury in a civil trial in Washington on Thursday found that the two writers, Rand Simberg and Mark Steyn, defamed and injured the researcher in a pair of blog posts published in 2012, and awarded him more than \$1 million. “I hope this verdict sends a message that falsely attacking climate scientists is not protected speech,” Mann said in a statement Mann’s victory comes amid heightened attacks on scientists working not just on climate change but also on vaccines and other issues. But the case was one that some critics worried could have a stifling effect on free speech and open debate in science”.

Last, many **political** and **economic**-themed media stories about climate change or global warming were evident in coverage this month. For instance, business commitments to climate action – and backtracking therein – earned

“Female leatherback turtles are among the world’s most intrepid creatures, making journeys as far as 10,000 miles after nesting to find food in far-away seas. Traveling such a long way means encountering threats that can be fatal: fishing nets intended for other species, poachers, pollution and waters warmed by the climate crisis, which force the turtles to travel even further to find their prey. These turtles are just one of hundreds of migratory species – those that make remarkable journeys each year across land, rivers and oceans – that are facing extinction because of human interference.”



Leatherback turtles encounter many threats during their long migration journeys, and now face extinction due to human activity, a UN report shows. Photo: Samuel J. Coe/Getty Images.

media attention in February. For example, [New York Times journalist David Gelles noted](#), “Many of the world’s biggest financial firms spent the past several years burnishing their environmental images by pledging to use their financial muscle to fight climate change. Now, Wall Street has flip-flopped. In recent days, giants of the financial world including JPMorgan, State Street and Pimco all pulled out of a group called Climate Action 100+, an international coalition of money managers that was pushing big companies to address

climate issues. Wall Street's retreat from earlier environmental pledges has been on a slow, steady glide path for months, particularly as Republicans began withering political attacks, saying the investment firms were engaging in "woke capitalism." But in the past few weeks, things accelerated significantly. BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, scaled back its involvement in the group. Bank of America reneged on a commitment to stop financing new coal mines, coal-burning power plants and Arctic drilling projects. And Republican politicians, sensing momentum, called on other firms to follow suit. The reasons behind the burst of activity reveal how difficult it is proving to be for the business world to make good on its promises to become more environmentally responsible. While many companies say they are committed to combating climate change, the devil is in the details".

Also in February, protests by European farmers about agricultural policies intersected with climate change in several media portrayals. For example, *Expansión* journalist J. Díaz wrote, "One of the great triggers of the protests are the growing regulatory and administrative demands derived from the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Green Deal, such as the obligation to allocate 4% of arable land to fallow; that the use of fertilizers be reduced by 20% between now and 2030 or the use of pesticides by 50%". As a second example, *El País* María R. Sahuquillo noted, "The farmers' protests in several European countries and, above all, everything, the fear of populism that feeds on the mobilization and cries out against EU regulations, as well as pressure from conservatives, who fear losing ground to the extreme right, push the European Union to reduce its ambition in the green transition. The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that she is putting aside the pesticide reduction regulations, one of the star formulas within the green pact".

Last, the United Nations environment assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in late February also generated climate-related news. For example, *Associated*

"One of the great triggers of the protests are the growing regulatory and administrative demands derived from the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Green Deal, such as the obligation to allocate 4% of arable land to fallow; that the use of fertilizers be reduced by 20% between now and 2030 or the use of pesticides by 50%."



Farmers protest in Girona, Spain in February 2024. Photo: Albert Gea/Reuters.

Press correspondent Carlos Mureithi noted, "The world's top decision-making body on the environment is meeting in Kenya's capital this week to discuss how countries can work together to tackle environmental crises like climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity. The meeting in Nairobi is the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, and governments, civil society groups, scientists and the private sector are attending. At the opening plenary at the U.N. Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi on Monday, Leila Benali, the president of this year's assembly, urged members to work toward making "a tangible difference to people's lives." "It is up to us to deliver a clean greener and safer future for all people," she said. Kenya's environment minister, Soipan Tuya, described this year's assembly as "an opportunity to inject optimism

MECCO MONTHLY SUMMARIES

ISSUE 86, FEBRUARY 2024

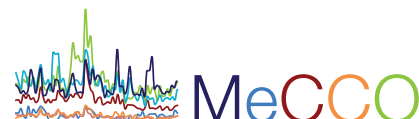


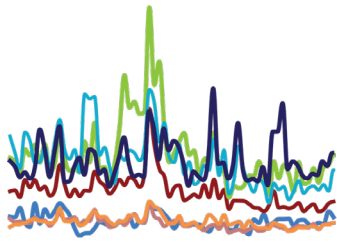
Figure 3. Examples of newspaper front pages with climate change stories in February 2024.

and restore faith” in the global environmental governance system. At the gathering, member states discuss a raft of draft resolutions on a range of issues that the assembly adopts upon consensus. If a proposal is adopted, it sets the stage for countries to implement what’s been agreed on”. As a second example, *Guardian* journalist [Caroline Kimeu reported](#), “In an attempt to avoid the “injustices and extractivism” of fossil fuel operations, African leaders are calling for better controls on the dash for the minerals and metals needed for a clean energy transition. A resolution for structural change that will promote equitable benefit-sharing from extraction, supported by a group of mainly African countries including Senegal, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Chad, was presented at the UN environmental assembly in Nairobi on Wednesday and called for the sustainable use of transitional minerals. “This resolution is crucial for African countries, the environment and the future of our population,” said Jean Marie

Bope, a delegate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which supported the resolution. Demand for transitional minerals and metals, which are used to build renewable energy technologies such as solar plants, windfarms and electric vehicles, has surged over the past decade as the world transitions from fossil fuels. Billions of tonnes of transitional minerals will be needed in the next three decades if the world is to meet its climate goals, according to the United Nations Environment Programme”.

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](#), [Ami Nacu-Schmidt](#) and [Olivia Pearman](#)



MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

ISSUE 86, FEBRUARY 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>