

“This is not your grandparents’ climate”



Residents at a cooling center during a heatwave in Portland, Oregon, U.S., on Monday, June 28, 2021. Photo: CNN.

June media attention to climate change or global warming increased 26% at the global level from the previous month of May. Comparing the first six months (January-June) of 2020 to the first six months of 2021, coverage around the world has increased 27%. In fact, levels of coverage increased in all media and locations in June from the previous month of May and from June 2020 with one exception: Denmark (where coverage dropped 15% from

May 2021). Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale – organized into seven geographical regions around the world – from January 2004 through June 2021.

Globally in June 2021, radio coverage of climate change or global warming increased 41% from May 2021, while also increasing 35% across international wires services. Regionally, compared to the previous month coverage was

2004–2021 World Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

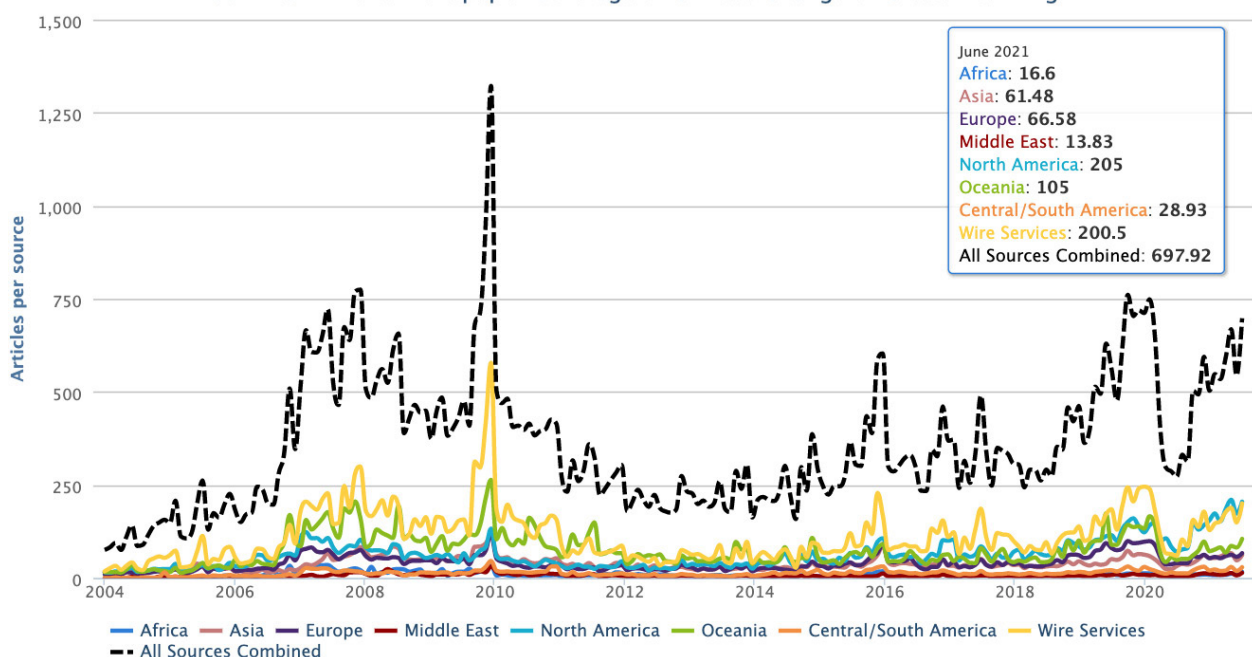


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through June 2021.

up everywhere: Europe (+17%), North America (+18%), Oceania (+28%), Latin America (+51%), Africa (+77%) and the Middle East (+98%).

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage increased 27% and television coverage was up 147% from the previous month. Of note, CNN coverage of climate change or global warming more than tripled from May 2021 while levels of coverage increased in each of the other outlets (*ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *PBS*, *MSNBC* and *Fox News*) (see Figure 2).

Meanwhile, compared to the previous month coverage rose in Finland (+2%), Canada (+13%), Spain (+15%), the United Kingdom (UK) (+18%), Germany (+25%), Australia (+26%), New Zealand (+32%), Sweden (+32%), India (+36%) and Norway (+91%) in June 2021. Again, the one place we monitor where June 2021 coverage was down was Denmark (-15%) from May 2021.

To begin, there were several media stories laced with *ecological* and *meteorological* dimensions of climate change and global warming in June. For instance, findings that the planet's atmosphere now holds more carbon dioxide than at any time in the last four million years and 50% more than

at the start of the Industrial Revolution sparked many media accounts. (This was garnered from the annual May peak assessment by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). For example, longtime *USA Today* climate journalist [Doyle Rice](#) wrote, "The COVID-19 pandemic barely registered as a blip as humanity continued to spew carbon dioxide into Earth's atmosphere over the past year to levels not seen in more than 4 million years, scientists announced Monday. Measurements of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the chief human-caused greenhouse gas, averaged 419 parts per million at Mauna Loa, Hawaii, for May, when carbon levels in the air peak, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said. That's 1.82 parts per million higher than in May 2020 and 50% higher than the stable pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million. Overall, NOAA said, "there was no discernible signal in the data from the global economic disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic". As a second example, *Associated Press* correspondent [Seth Borenstein](#) noted, "The annual peak of global heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the air has reached another dangerous milestone: 50% higher than when the industrial age began. And the average rate of increase is faster than ever, scientists reported Monday. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric

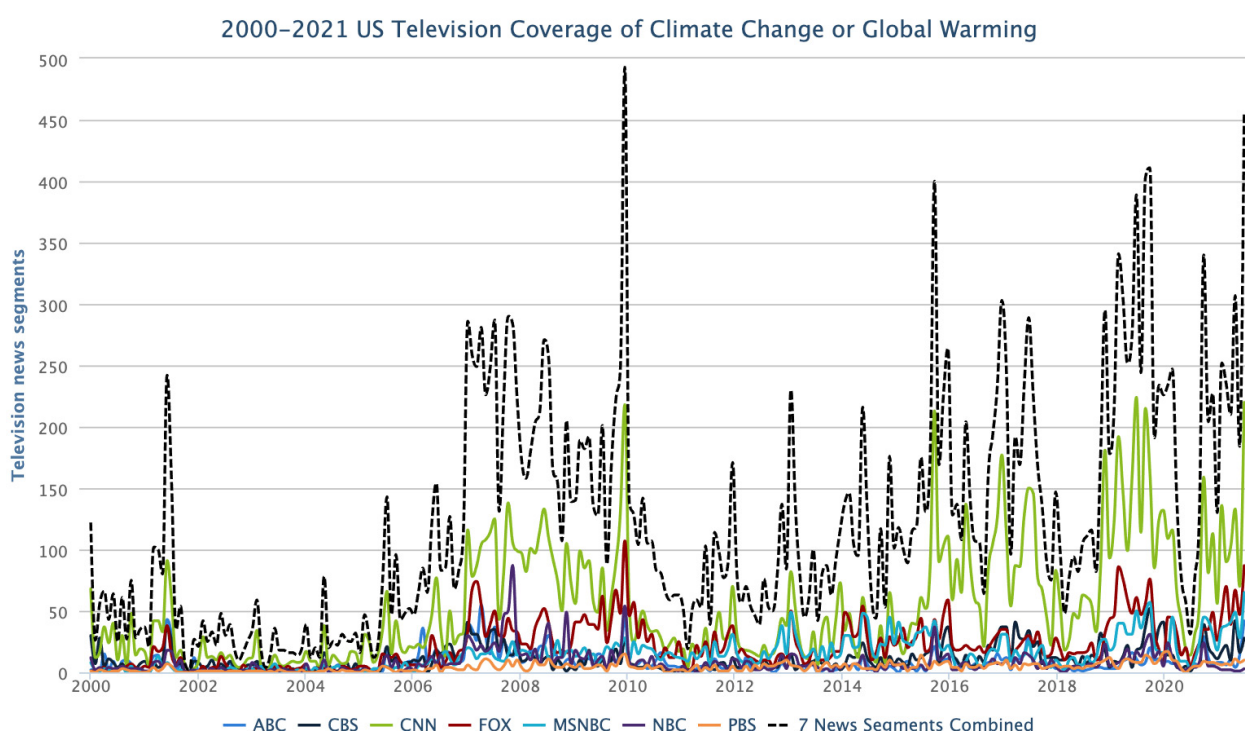


Figure 1. United States television coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through June 2021.

Administration said the average carbon dioxide level for May was 419.13 parts per million. That's 1.82 parts per million higher than May 2020 and 50% higher than the stable pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million, said NOAA climate scientist Pieter Tans. Carbon dioxide levels peak every May just before plant life in the Northern Hemisphere blossoms, sucking some of that carbon out of the atmosphere and into flowers, leaves, seeds and stems. The reprieve is temporary, though, because emissions of carbon dioxide from burning coal, oil and natural gas for transportation and electricity far exceed what plants can take in, pushing greenhouse gas levels to new records every year".

Also in June, the heat wave and 'heat dome' that struck the US Pacific Northwest and Canada prompted many news stories that made connections with climate change or global warming. For example, [Washington Post correspondent Amanda Coletta wrote](#), "Scientists say human-caused climate change has made unprecedented heat waves such as this one more probable". Moreover, [USA Today journalist Elinor Aspegren noted](#), "Heat causes more deaths in the U.S. than all other natural disasters combined. Scientists expect more frequent and intense heat waves because of climate change and the worst drought in modern history". Meanwhile, [PBS Newshour anchor Judy Woodruff and journalist David Phillips discussed it in this way](#): "every time we see an extreme event, we say, well, is this climate change? And I think we have hidden enough behind the fact that we say, well, climate change doesn't create weather, it doesn't create heat waves and forest fires and hurricanes. But, Judy, what it does is, it contributes to it. There are many factors that create extreme weather, and physical factors, but now we're realizing that there's human factors. And this heat wave would not have been as – nearly as brutal and deadly if it hadn't been for what's coming out of our tailpipes and smokestacks". In a [New York Times guest essay](#), [Michael Mann and Susan Joy Hassol noted](#), "In the old days, we could escape the summer heat by heading north – to the Adirondacks in the East or to the cool, forested Pacific Northwest in the West. But this is not your grandparents' climate". As the heat

wave continued, some international news outlets covered the record-breaking heat. For example, [The Guardian ran an opinion piece by Simon Lewis where he observed](#), "Without an immediate global effort to combat the climate emergency, the Earth's uninhabitable areas will keep growing...As climate change drives temperatures upwards, heatwaves and accompanying unliveable temperatures are predicted to last longer and occur over larger areas and in new locations, including parts of Africa and the US south-east, over the decades to come".

Incidentally, many media outlets' persistence in accompanying these stories with photos of people frolicking in public fountains came under scrutiny by many social sciences researchers. There remains more work to do on appropriate imagery to describe such events that does not risk making light of the dangers associated with them.

In June 2021, many media stories about climate change or global warming continued to focus on [scientific](#) themes. Among them, a [Nature Climate Change study](#) that found that climate change contributes to more than one-third of global heat-related deaths each year garnered media attention. In the study, heat deaths in 732 cities from 1991-2018 were examined and they found 37% of deaths – 9,700 each year – 'directly attributable to climate change'. For example, [New York Times journalist John Schwartz reported](#), "More than a third of heat-related deaths in many parts of the world can be attributed to the extra warming associated with climate change, according to a new study that makes a case for taking strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to protect public health. The sweeping new research, published on Monday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, was conducted by 70 researchers using data from major projects in the fields of epidemiology and climate modeling in 43 countries. It found that heat-related deaths in warm seasons were boosted by climate change by an average of 37 percent, in a range of a 20 percent increase to 76 percent. Some earlier studies have performed similar analysis for individual cities during particular heat waves, but the new paper applies these ideas to hundreds of locations and across decades to draw broader conclusions".

Another prominent [study from the journal *Science Advances*](#) attracted media attention in June. Researchers found that the ice shelf that holds Antarctica's Pine Island Glacier is breaking up faster than previously thought, risking increased sea level rise (that Pine Island Glacier holds enough water to raise global sea levels by more than 19 inches). For example, [Associated Press journalist Seth Borenstein wrote](#), "A critical Antarctic glacier is looking more vulnerable as satellite images show the ice shelf that blocks it from collapsing into the sea is breaking up much faster than before and spawning huge icebergs, a new study says. The Pine Island Glacier's ice shelf loss accelerated in 2017, causing scientists to worry that with climate change the glacier's collapse could happen quicker than the many centuries predicted. The floating ice shelf acts like a cork in a bottle for the fast-melting glacier and prevents its much larger ice mass from flowing into the ocean. That ice shelf has retreated by 12 miles (20 kilometers) between 2017 and 2020, according to a study in Friday's *Science Advances*. The crumbling shelf was caught on time-lapse video from a European satellite that takes pictures every six days". Meanwhile, [Washington Post correspondent Sarah Kaplan reported](#), "The Pine Island glacier was already scary. The 160-mile-long river of ice is known as "the weak underbelly" of West Antarctica. It contributes more to sea level rise than any other glacier on the continent and ranks among the fastest melting glaciers in the world. Unlike other Antarctic glaciers, Pine Island is not sheltered from the warming ocean by a vast expanse of sea ice. The only thing preventing it from flowing directly into the Amundsen Sea embayment is a shelf of floating ice that sticks out from the glacier's edge. This shelf is like a cork in a bottle, pressing against the stable sides of the bay to contain the tremendous pressure at its back. But the ice shelf is tearing itself apart. It has lost one-fifth of its mass in the last five years, shedding icebergs the size of cities. Rifts have opened up in the center of the shelf, potentially adding to the instability. Now the world has a whole new reason to worry about Pine Island. According to research published Friday in the journal *Science Advances*, the glacier is flowing toward the ocean 12 percent faster than at the

start of 2017 – a result of the weakened ice shelf's inability to act like plug".

Also, news at the other pole attracted media attention in June. News that the Arctic ice is thinning more rapidly than previously thought was captured in several media accounts. For example, [Guardian journalist Damian Carrington reported](#) that "Arctic ice is thinning twice as fast as thought...Less ice means more global heating, a vicious cycle that also leaves the region open to new oil extraction".

Several prominent [political](#) and [economic](#) themed media stories about climate change or global warming pervaded the airwaves, broadcasts and newsprint in June. For example, early in the month the story that first broke in late May (see our May summary for more) stories continued to follow the ExxonMobil board of directors elections. For example, [Guardian journalist Jasper Jolly reported](#), "ExxonMobil expects to lose a third board seat to an activist hedge fund, Engine No 1, adding to the pressure on one of the world's largest oil companies to introduce a more effective climate transition plan. The Texas-based producer announced late on Wednesday that lawyers counting shareholder votes had found a third director nomination was secured by Engine No 1, which argued Exxon had not done enough to prepare for the global shift from fossil fuels. The vote for the third director had been too close to call immediately after Exxon's annual meeting last week, in which two rebel directors from Engine No 1 were voted in by shareholders. The rebellion came on the same day as a series of victories for climate activists – both shareholders and campaigners – as Chevron lost a vote calling for it to reduce the carbon emissions of the products it sells. Its Anglo-Dutch rival Royal Dutch Shell was ordered by a Dutch courtroom to cut its emissions by 45% by 2030, in a landmark ruling". Meanwhile, [Wall Street Journal correspondent Christopher Matthews noted](#), "The final vote hasn't been certified, Exxon said, and could take days or weeks to be finalized, according to people familiar with the matter. Engine No. 1, which owns a tiny fraction of Exxon's stock, had sought four seats on the board and argued the Texas oil giant should

commit to carbon neutrality, effectively bringing its emissions to zero—both from the company and its products—by 2050, as some peers have. If the preliminary voting results hold, it will control a quarter of Exxon’s 12-person board. The vote culminated one of the most expensive proxy fights ever. It puts new pressure on Exxon Chief Executive Darren Woods, who personally campaigned against Engine No. 1 and could complicate his plans to maintain Exxon as the largest Western oil producer. Mr. Woods was re-elected to the board along with eight of Exxon’s candidates”.

In June, climate negotiations (held virtually) in the lead up to the Conference of Parties meeting (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland took place. These generated media attention. For example, as the talks began [journalist Frank Jordans from The Associated Press reported](#), “The U.N. climate office in Bonn, Germany, has designed a schedule of virtual sessions that will see negotiators share the burden of joining meetings before dawn, during the afternoon or late at night – depending on their respective time zones...Negotiations will focus on resolving some of the outstanding issues arising from the 2015 Paris climate accord, including rules for international carbon markets, harmonizing countries’ timeframes for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing aid to developing nations. Progress on all of those issues is seen as key to making the U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, in November a success. However, due to concerns about the format, no official decisions are expected at the virtual talks that run until June 17”.

Also, the Group of Seven (G7) summit garnered media attention as part of the talks related to climate policy action. For example, [CNN business correspondent Matt Egan reported](#), “Investors managing more than \$41 trillion in assets are loudly calling on world leaders to immediately step up their climate game if they don’t want to miss out on a wave of clean energy investment. More than 450 major investors signed a letter that was released Thursday urging governments to set more ambitious emission reduction targets, detail “clear” road maps to decarbonize

pollution-heavy industries and implement mandatory climate risk disclosure requirements. The letter, signed by Fidelity, State Street and other influential asset management firms, marks the strongest call yet from investors urging governments around the world to take bolder steps to fight the climate crisis. And it comes just as the leaders of G7 nations meet in the United Kingdom to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and other major global issues”.

As the talks wrapped up, many media outlets assessed progress made regarding climate policy cooperation. For example, [Washington Post journalists Karla Adams, Ashley Parker, Tyler Pager and John Hudson reported](#), “As Group of Seven leaders wrapped their three-day summit here on Sunday, President Biden said democratic governments face a defining challenge: to show they can meet tests such as global health crises and climate change better than autocracies such as China and Russia. “I think we’re in a contest, not with China per se, but a contest with autocrats, autocratic governments around the world, as to whether or not democracies can compete with them in a rapidly changing 21st century,” Biden told reporters during the first news conference of his first foreign trip as president. He singled out China and Russia for reprobation after working here to enlist U.S. allies in what he has repeatedly cast as the existential battle of the 21st century”. Elsewhere, [National Public Radio correspondents Franco Ordoñez and Asma Khalid](#) noted, “Leaders of the G-7 wrapped up their first in-person meeting in two years agreeing to work together to combat the coronavirus pandemic, confront climate change, and – in a win for President Biden – counter the rising influence of China...Biden had one-on-one meetings with leaders from Germany, Italy and Japan. He met with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison – who as at the G-7 as a guest. He later met with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, another guest invited to the summit. During his meetings with leaders, Biden also talked about the COVID-19 response, climate change, the drawdown of troops in Afghanistan and instability in the Sahel region of West Africa, the White House said”.



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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And [Guardian environment correspondent Fiona Harvey observed](#), "The G7 summit ended with rich nations reaffirming their goal to limit global heating to 1.5C, and agreeing to protect and restore 30% of the natural world by the end of this decade, but failing to provide the funds experts say will be needed to reach such goals. Boris Johnson badly needed a successful G7 deal on climate finance to pave the way for vital UN climate talks, called Cop26, to be held in Glasgow this November. Climate finance is provided by rich countries to developing nations, to help them cut greenhouse gas emissions and cope with the impacts of climate breakdown, and was supposed to reach \$100bn a year by 2020, but has fallen far short".

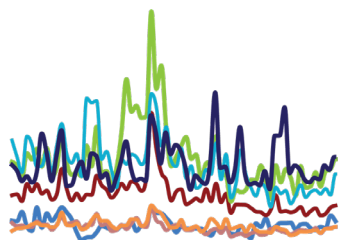
And in June, several energy-themed media stories were published on climate change or global warming. To illustrate, news about a report prepared by the international analysis group REN21 on the evolution of renewable energies in the world generated attention. For example, [El País journalist Manuel Planelles](#) wrote that "Humanity is still hooked on oil, natural gas and coal. The report indicates that 80% of the energy is generated with fossil fuels, the same as a decade ago. Why? Rana Adib, director of the study center answered "demand continued to increase without structural change and the increase in clean technologies, which went from 8.7% to 11.2%, was very insufficient to make a dent in that distribution of the energy cake. We need a drastic reduction in energy demand and we need to ban fossil fuels", Adib argued".

Relating to these political and economic themes, in many [cultural](#) stories circulated about climate

change or global warming in June. For example, World Environment Day on June 5 prompted news stories relating to climate change. For example, [China Daily correspondent Candra Samekto reported](#), "Smallholders and the rural poor have a crucial role to play in the restoration of ecosystems and the conservation of natural resources. The theme of this year's World Environment Day focuses on restoring ecosystems. The past decades have been marked by the growing pressures on ecosystems, which support all life on Earth. The demands of a rapidly growing global population, coupled with climate change, and continuing pollution have magnified the degradation of global ecosystems. Marking World Environment Day is an important reminder of the need to take actions to protect our natural surroundings, without further delay. Continued degradation of global ecosystems will also influence poverty and inequality, with smallholders and the rural poor bearing the brunt of environmental and socioeconomic challenges. Smallholders are among those most vulnerable to the impact of environmental degradation and climate change, as their productivity and source of income are dependent on natural resources, including the availability of usable water and land".

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, Ami Nacu-Schmidt and Olivia Pearman



MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

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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**