

## “Climate breakdown is accelerating rapidly”



Wildfires tearing through a forest in the Chefchaouen region of northern Morocco. Credit: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images.

February media attention to climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe – while it is a shorter month – dropped 7% from January 2022. Furthermore, coverage decreased 16% from a year before (February 2021). Meanwhile, February 2022 global radio coverage of climate change or global warming dipped 4% from January, while coverage in international wire services went

down 6% from the previous month. Compared to the previous month coverage was down in five regions, and up in three regions: North America (-6%), Asia (-10%), Europe (-17%), the Middle East (-22%), Latin America (+5%), Oceania (+11%) and Africa (+49%). 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 2021.

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

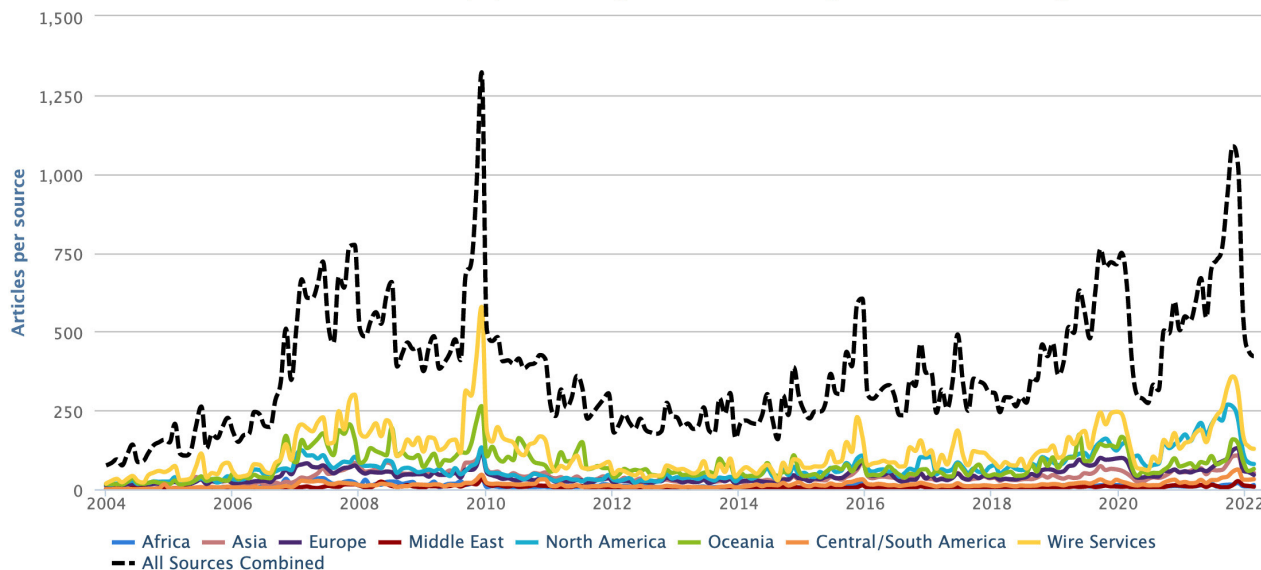


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through February 2021.

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

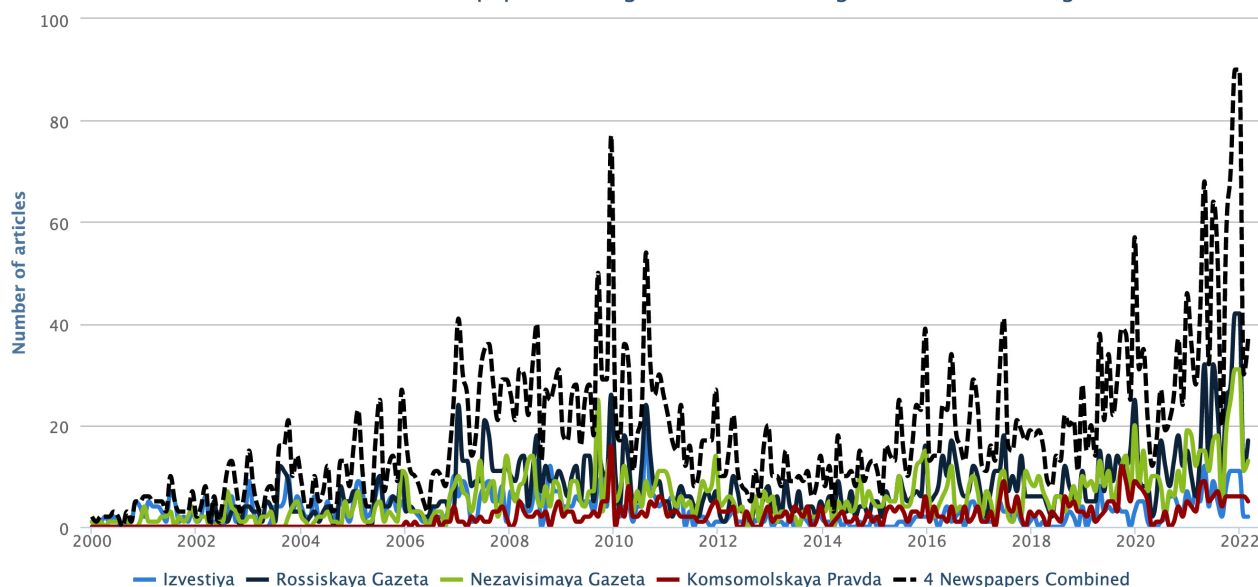


Figure 2. Russian newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through February 2021.

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage diminished 8% while television coverage also decreased 24% from the previous month. Looking at each print outlet, coverage in *The New York Times* increased 7% and increased 12% in *The Wall Street Journal*, but decreased 22% in *The Washington Post*, 33% in *USA Today* and 34% in *The Los Angeles Times*. Looking at each television outlet, coverage on *Fox News* was up 23% and coverage on *ABC* jumped 58%. But coverage went down 12% on *CNN*, 37% on *PBS*, 53% on *MSNBC*, 80% on *CBS* and 95% on *NBC*.

Meanwhile, compared to the previous month, coverage decreased in several countries that we at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor: Canada (-2%), Finland (-6%), Japan (-8%), Norway (-11%), Germany (-12%), New Zealand (-19%), the United Kingdom (UK) (-24%), Spain (-25%) and Sweden (-29%). Meanwhile, coverage increased 2% in Denmark, 23% in Australia and Russia (see Figure 2) and 33% India.

While coverage was curiously up in Russian print media, the general downward trend of media attention paid to climate change in February 2022 can be attributed in part to global media attention transfixed on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As such, Figure 3 shows many front pages on February 28, the day that the United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its second working group report

of the Sixth Assessment Report on ‘Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability’. While these reports have often generated substantial media attention (for example, see our August 2021 explainer documenting high levels of coverage of the first working group report on ‘The Physical Science Basis’), there was moderate coverage (as we explain further below) but not abundant coverage through these 126 newspaper, television and radio sources that we monitor.

That said, in February, nonetheless many climate change or global warming stories in February focused on *scientific* themes, including the UN IPCC second working group report of the Sixth Assessment Report on ‘Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability’. To begin the month, a study examining the ongoing and extreme drought in the US West garnered media attention. For example, [ABC News reporter Julia Jacobo reported](#), “Southwest experiencing driest conditions in at least 1,200 years due to climate change...The megadrought that has been plaguing the Southwestern U.S. for at least two decades is causing the region to experience its driest conditions in 1,200 years, according to new research. Researchers analyzed tree ring patterns, which provide insights about soil moisture levels over long timespans, and found that the current megadrought has exceeded the severity of one experienced in the late 1500s and is the driest since the year AD 800”.



Figure 3. Front page headlines on February 28 that focused on the war in Ukraine displaced attention that may have otherwise been paid to the UN IPCC second working group report of the Sixth Assessment Report on ‘Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability’ that was released that day.

Also in early February, a study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) found that predicted sea level rise of one foot in the next 28 years in the US will make some coastal areas uninhabitable while putting hundreds of thousands of homes at risk from frequent flooding. For example, [Washington Post](#) journalists Sarah Kaplan and Brady Dennis noted, “The shorelines of the United States are projected to face an additional foot of rising seas over the next three decades, intensifying the threat of flooding and erosion to coastal communities across the country, according to a report released Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Human-caused climate change, driven mostly by the burning of fossil fuels, has accelerated global sea level rise to the fastest rate in more than 3,000 years. The report by NOAA, NASA and five other federal agencies – updating a study from 2017 – predicts that ocean levels along U.S. coasts will increase as much by 2050 as they did over the past century. This amount of water battering the coasts “will create a profound increase in the frequency of coastal flooding, even in the absence of storms or heavy rainfall,” NOAA said”.

In mid-February, a United Nations report that found that climate change was driving a global increase in extreme wildfires drove media coverage. For example, [journalist Rachel Ramirez](#)

[from CNN reported](#), “Wildfires have intensified around the globe, providing a stark reminder of how the climate crisis is upending lives and inflicting billions of dollars a year in damage. And it will only get worse, according to dozens of global fire experts. A report released Wednesday by the UN Environment Programme suggests it’s time we “learn to live with fire” and adapt to the uptick in the frequency and severity of wildfires that will inevitably put more lives and economies in harm’s way. The number of extreme wildfire events will increase up to 14% by 2030, according to the report’s analysis. By 2050, the increase will climb to 30%. Even with the most ambitious efforts to slash heat-trapping emissions, the report shows that those near-term consequences are locked in”.

But then on the last day of the month (February 28), the UN IPCC second working group report of the Sixth Assessment Report on ‘Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability’ did generate substantial media stories across radio, television and newspaper outlets. For example, [USA Today](#) journalists Dinah Voyles Pulver and Doyle Rice reported, “Life in some locations on the planet is rapidly reaching the point where it will be too hot for the species that live there to survive, international climate experts said in a report Monday...The report assesses scientific literature documenting the devastating effects of human-caused climate change on society and ecosystems worldwide. The group studied

the vulnerability of people and ecosystems to the changing climate and how adaptation could help reduce the risks, said Pörtner and co-chair Deborah Roberts of South Africa". Meanwhile, [Guardian correspondent Fiona Harvey noted](#), "Climate breakdown is accelerating rapidly, many of the impacts will be more severe than predicted and there is only a narrow chance left of avoiding its worst ravages, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said. Even at current levels, human actions in heating the climate are causing dangerous and widespread disruption, threatening devastation to swathes of the natural world and rendering many areas unlivable, according to the landmark report published on Monday. "The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet," said Hans-Otto Pörtner, a co-chair of working group 2 of the IPCC. "Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future".

Next, several [political](#) and [economic](#) themed media stories about climate change or global warming continued in February. To begin, news of the European Commission's announcement of a proposal to classify some nuclear and gas-fired power plants as 'climate friendly' circulated widely. For example, [Wall Street Journal reporter Joe Wallace wrote](#), "Hopes are rising that Europe will avoid a winter energy crisis that some feared would play to Russian President Vladimir Putin's advantage as Moscow prepares for a possible invasion of Ukraine. A record influx of liquefied natural gas, combined with mild and windy weather, has slowed withdrawals from the region's heavily depleted underground gas-storage caverns. A boost to flows of gas from Russia via Ukraine is helping, too". Meanwhile, [CNN journalists Ivana Kottasová and Angela Dewan reported](#), "The European Commission is coming under criticism after unveiling a long-delayed proposal to designate natural gas and nuclear power "sustainable" sources of energy Wednesday. Including the energy sources on the EU's green list could unlock a wave of private investment into new nuclear and gas projects. But the plans have angered climate activists and could still be blocked by European lawmakers,

who are also deeply divided over the issue along national and political lines. EU Financial Services Commissioner Mairead McGuinness, presenting the proposal to journalists in Brussels after more than a year of horse-trading between member states, was forced to deflect accusations of EU "greenwashing" and concede that the proposal was 'imperfect'. And [El País journalist Bernardo de Miguel noted](#), "Nuclear, yes, why not. And the gas too. After months of hesitation and consultations with the capitals, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, managed to approve this Wednesday the draft regulation that will classify nuclear and gas as energies that can contribute to the fight against change climate and, therefore, deserving of a green label that can attract multi-million dollar investments. Von der Leyen has assumed the controversial decision knowing that it contradicts the opinion of the majority of the technicians consulted and that it exposes itself to a complaint by several EU partners before the European Court of Justice".

Also, the increasingly covered US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission generated news interest in early February as it adopted a proposal to now consider gas infrastructure's impacts on climate change on affected BIPOC and low-income communities. For example, [Washington Post journalist Maxine Joselow reported](#), "The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will now consider how pipelines and related natural gas projects affect climate change and environmental justice communities, the commission ruled in a 3-to-2 vote on Thursday. The ruling marks the first time that FERC, an independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, oil, and natural gas, has updated its policy for reviewing gas projects since 1999. Environmental advocates hailed the move, saying it will provide a crucial new avenue for blocking new fossil fuel infrastructure and staving off the worst effects of the climate crisis. But conservatives and industry groups slammed the decision, asserting that it will prevent millions of Americans from accessing affordable energy".

Meanwhile, news of the European Renewable Energy Index increases - relating to the European Commission's strategy to reduce dependence

on Russian oil and gas imports – circulated in February. For example, *Washington Post* journalists [Michael Birnbaum](#) and [Steven Mufson](#) reported, “For years, Europe’s dependence on Russian energy has held it back from taking powerful action against Kremlin mischief. But now, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is forcing a change unlike any before, driving the European Union to make plans for a permanent, far-reaching break from Russian oil and gas, European policymakers said. The strategy to split from Russian energy – in the works before the invasion of Ukraine and expected to be announced by the European Commission next week – would give Europe a freer political hand against Russia than it has had in the past. It would take years and come with a hefty bill for European taxpayers. And it comes with the crucial backing of Germany, a nation so entangled with Russia that one of its former chancellors, Gerhard Schröder, is the chairman of Rosneft, Russia’s biggest oil company... Longer term, Russian energy officials have already been trying to sell more gas to China, since they acknowledged that Europe’s climate plans have set it on a path toward buying less Russian fossil fuel”. Similarly, concerns about the price of energy in February generated various news about the energy transition. For example, the journalist [Pilar Blázquez](#) wrote in *La Vanguardia*, “Brussels predicts that the price of electricity will remain high beyond spring. Energy prices are still at an unprecedented level and are responsible for half of the eurozone’s inflation”. As a second example, [journalist Camilla Hodgson](#) noted in *Financial Times*, “The gas crisis casts a shadow over the road to COP27 in Egypt. Rising energy prices may work against climate leaders developing green policies in time for the upcoming November summit in Sharm el-Sheikh”.

Relatedly, the then-impending Russian invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves through the international oil and gas industry. This generated many media accounts. For example, *New York Times* journalist [Hiroko Tabuchi](#) reported, “Russian troops hadn’t yet begun their full-on assault on Ukraine late Wednesday when the rallying cry came from the American oil and gas industry. “As crisis looms in Ukraine, U.S. energy leadership is more important than ever,” the American Petroleum Institute, the

powerful industry lobby group, wrote on Twitter with a photo that read: “Let’s unleash American energy. Protect our energy security.” The crux of the industry’s argument is that any effort to restrain drilling in America makes a world already reeling from high oil prices more dependent on oil and gas from Russia, a rival and belligerent fossil fuel superpower. The industry’s demands have focused on reversing steps the Biden administration has taken to start reining in the production of fossil fuels, the main driver of climate change”.

February media accounts also featured *cultural* stories relating to climate change or global warming. For example, connections between climate change and the winter Olympics (that took place in Beijing in February) were made in several news stories. For example, *CNN* journalist [Amy Woodyatt](#) reported, “Although the Summer Games are often heralded as a melting pot – 11,417 athletes from 206 countries and regions across 33 sports participated in Tokyo 2020 – the Winter Games are nowhere near as diverse, with 91 delegations taking part at Beijing 2022. That’s five times more than the number of teams represented in the first Winter Games in Chamonix, France in 1924. But athletes from Africa, South Asia, as well as those from smaller island nations still find themselves struggling to qualify for competition in the Winter Olympics due to warmer climates, the prohibitively high cost of equipment, lack of infrastructure and limited opportunities to practice and compete”. Meanwhile, *US National Public Radio* reporter [Jaclyn Diaz](#) noted, “Outside of the window of a passing train from Beijing to Yanqing are rows and rows and rows of trees. This succession of perfectly arranged seedlings and saplings stretches for acres. Some look hardly more than three twigs tied together on the ground – and at serious risk of falling victim to a gust of wind. But at the base of each tree is a system of ropes and wood keeping them standing. Much of this obviously recent tree planting is tied to the 2022 Winter Olympics. Authorities in Beijing and Zhangjiakou (locations for the Games’ venues) said before the Games that they had planted more than 80,000 hectares (about 198,000 acres) of forest and green areas combined. China is also in the midst of a years-long “greening” effort.

Trees are being planted in and around Beijing to cut down on choking sandstorms from the Gobi Desert. Put together, the Chinese government and Olympic officials paint the tree planting as a win for the environment and one that offsets climate change and carbon emissions from these Games. The reality is much different, researchers and environmental experts say”.

Last, February media accounts about climate change or global warming with *ecological* and *meteorological* themes proliferated. For instance, news of endangered Australian koalas due to climate change appeared in a number of media accounts. For example, *The Associated Press* reported, “Koalas were declared officially endangered Friday in eastern Australia as they fall prey to disease, lost habitat and other threats. Federal Environment Minister Susan Ley downgraded their conservation status across the country’s east coast, in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, on a recommendation by the government’s Threatened Species Scientific Committee...” There have been many pressures on the koala. The Black Summer fires, of course, was a tipping point. But we know the koala is vulnerable to climate change and to disease,” Ley told reporters”. Meanwhile, *New York Times* journalist Manan Luthra added, “The announcement, by the country’s environment minister, came two years after a parliamentary inquiry predicted that koalas could be extinct by 2050 without urgent government intervention”.

In mid-February, mudslides from torrential rains near Rio de Janeiro – with links made to a changing climate – appeared in media accounts. For example, *BBC* journalist Katy Watson reported, “More than 100 people have died in landslides and flash flooding in the Brazilian city of Petrópolis, officials say. The city, which is located in the mountains north of Rio de Janeiro, was hit by torrential rainfall. Houses in hillside neighbourhoods were destroyed and cars swept away as floodwaters raced through the city’s streets. Search and rescue teams are combing the mud for survivors...It is the latest in a series of heavy rains to hit Brazil in the past three months, which scientists say are being made worse by climate change”.



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**

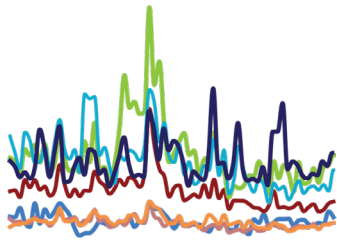
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Last, media stories of drought in continental Europe appeared in February. For example, in Spain an editorial in the newspaper *La Vanguardia* noted, “Spain is a traditionally dry country. The impact of climate change accelerates this dryness with the progressive increase in temperatures and the decrease in rainfall. The result is less water available for further consumption. But there is still no awareness of the seriousness of this situation and the need to adopt urgent measures to improve efficiency in water consumption”. This issue was also addressed in another editorial in the newspaper *El País*, which commented, “Water restrictions are the last remedy in a severe drought situation like the current one and no expert rules it out today for spring. Nor do the meteorologists have any indication that the situation will change. The hydrological year started very badly in October and continues badly. After an autumn with very low rainfall, winter has not brought the amount of rain and snow that would be necessary, so it is not expected that the aquifers will be filled in spring with melting ice. In the last four months it has rained 36% less than the average for the same period between 1981 and 2010 and the reserves of the swamps are dangerously close to the levels of the extreme drought of 2017-2018.”

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

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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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