

“The sobering realization that we’re going completely in the wrong direction”



Deforestation next to a palm oil plantation after fires in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. Land clearing is a major source of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, a driver of climate change. Photo: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters.

October media attention to climate change or global warming in newspapers around the globe reached its second highest levels on record (behind December 2009). Coverage increased 22% from the previous month of September, and coverage increased 114% from a year before (October 2020). Meanwhile, October 2021 global radio coverage of climate change or global warming was up 29% from September 2021, while coverage in international wire

services increased 11% from the previous month. Compared to the previous month coverage was up in all regions except North America (-2%): Africa (+6%), Europe (+26%), Asia (+29%), Latin America (+39%), Oceania (+58), and the Middle East (+114%). Of note, coverage in Europe and Latin America are at record high levels. Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale - organized into seven geographical regions around the world - from January 2004 through October 2021.

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

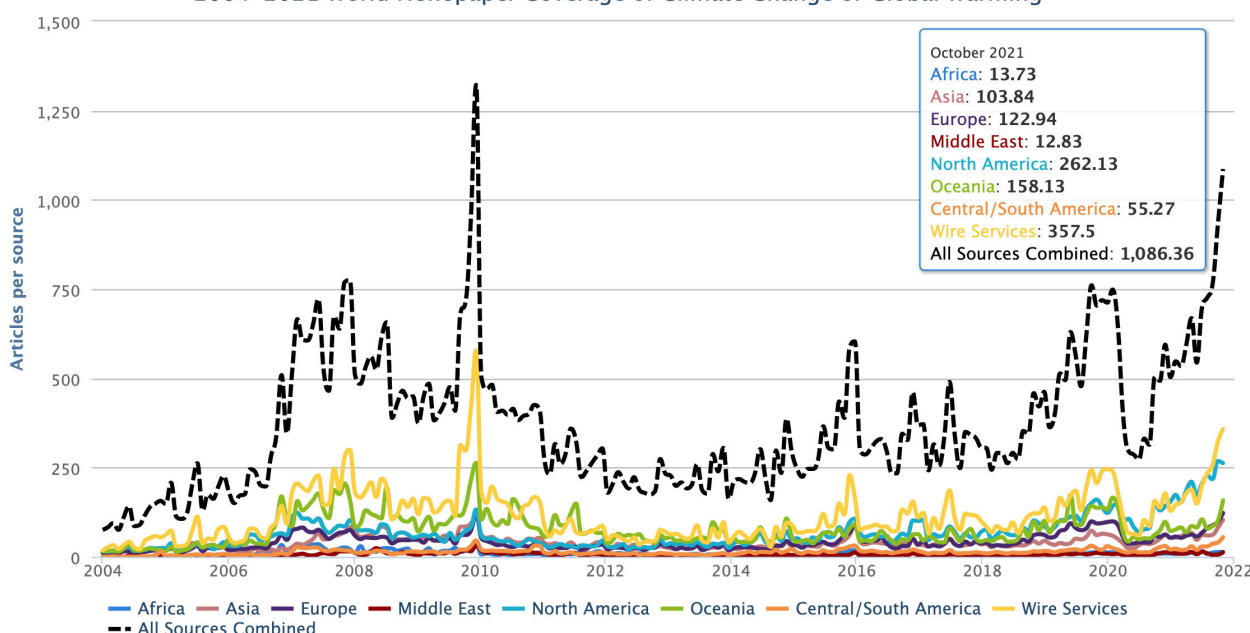


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through October 2021.

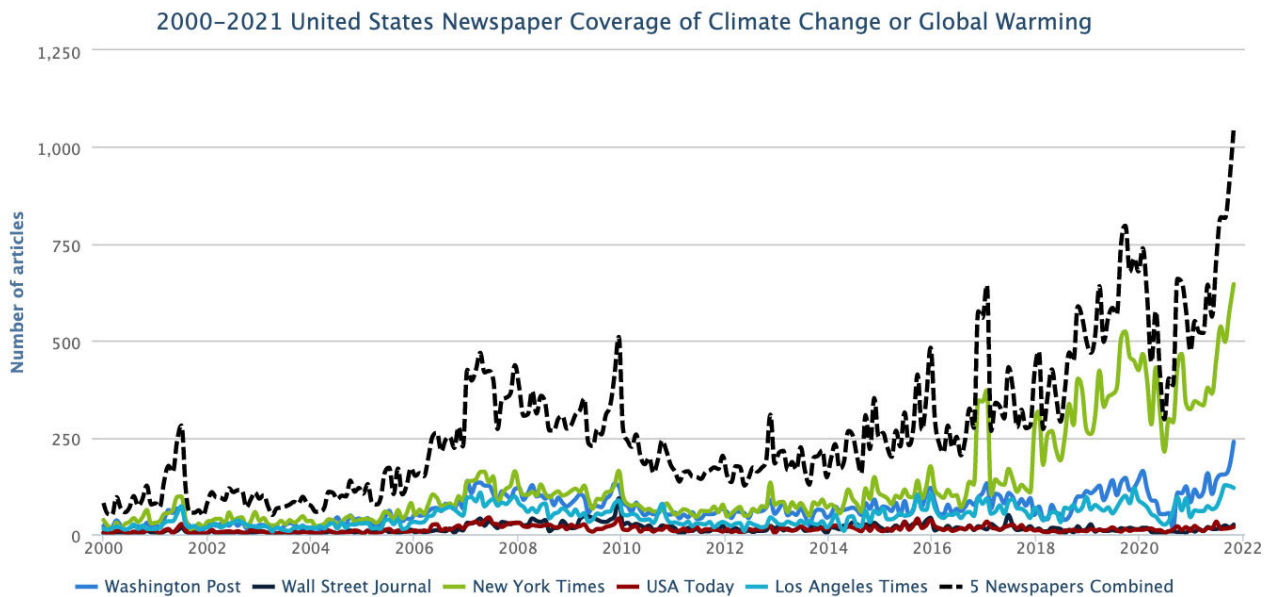


Figure 2. US print coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through October 2021.

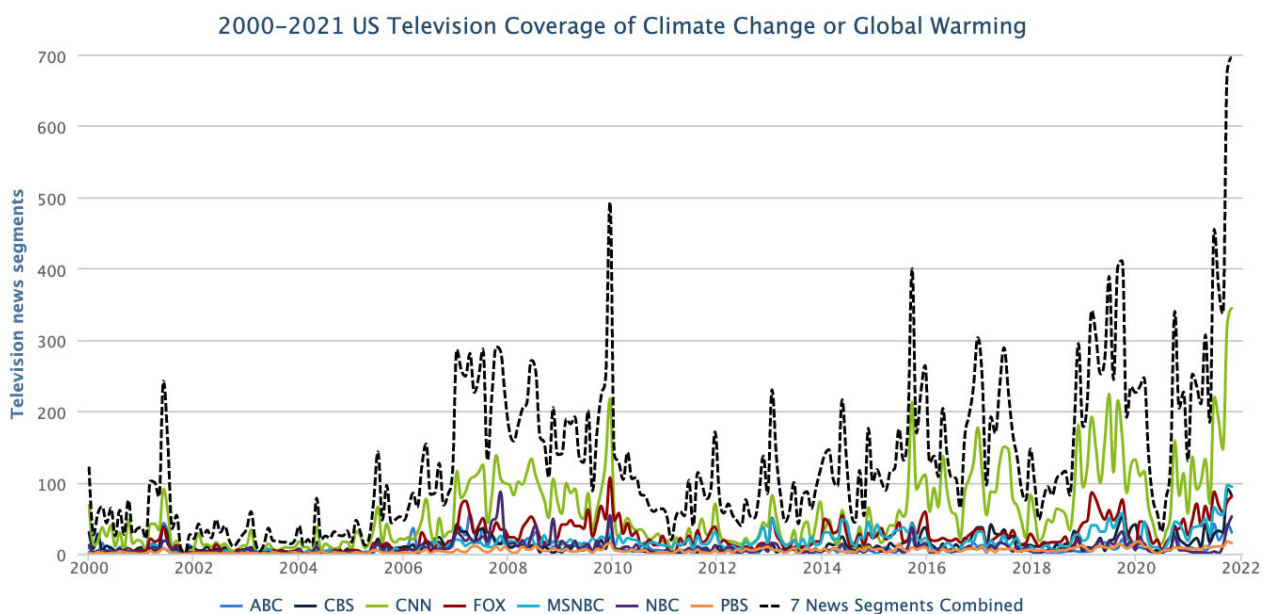


Figure 3. US television coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through October 2021.

At the country level, United States (US) print coverage increased 16% while television coverage increased 3% from the previous month (see Figures 2 & 3). These are the highest levels of coverage on record to date.

Meanwhile, compared to the previous month, coverage decreased in Canada (-15%), Spain (-7%), and Germany (-26%), but rose in all the other countries that we at the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) monitor: Denmark (+5%), Norway (+12%), Sweden (+13%), India (+14%), New Zealand (+20%), Russia

(+21%), Finland (+39%), the United Kingdom (UK) (+48%), Japan (62%), and Australia (+75%) in October 2021. Of note, this is a record high level of coverage in the UK as well (see Figure 4).

In October, there were many *political* and *economic* themed media stories about climate change or global warming. To start, policy efforts to cut methane emissions - with more than 30 countries signing a pledge and with philanthropic support - influenced news coverage at the beginning of the month. For example, *New York Times* journalist Lisa Friedman reported, “32

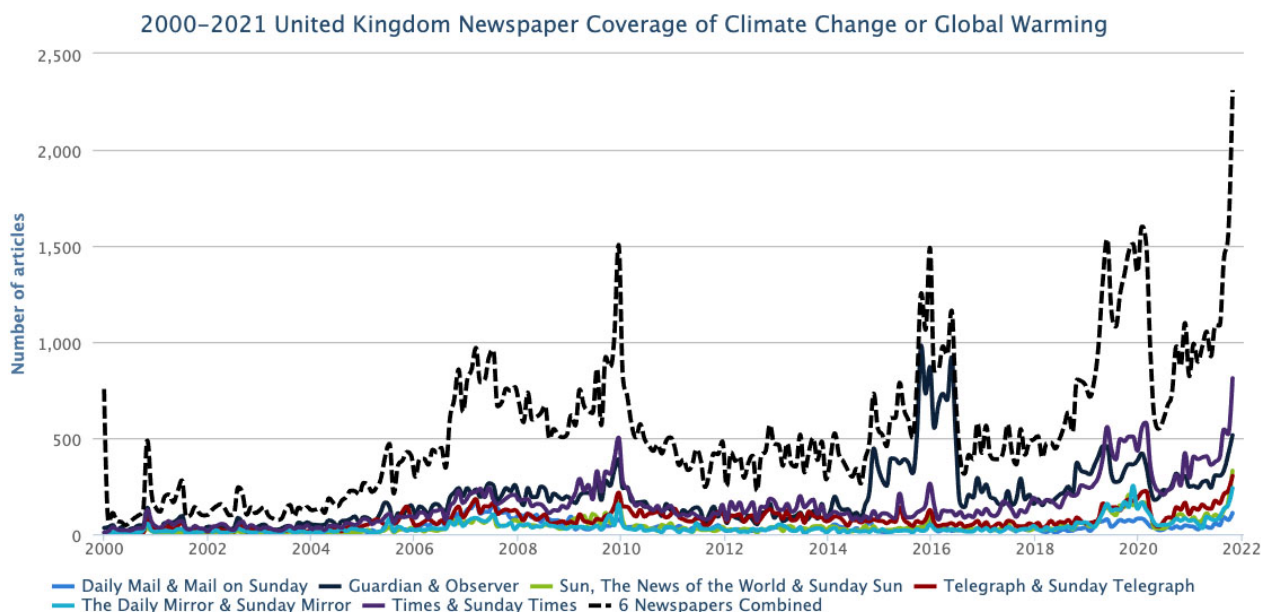


Figure 4. UK newspaper coverage of climate change or global warming from January 2000 through October 2021.

countries ha[ve] joined the United States in a pledge to reduce methane emissions, part of an effort to set new targets to slow global warming before a major United Nations climate summit in Glasgow next month. Methane is the second-most prevalent greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide but much more potent in the short term in its ability to heat the planet. It is the main component of natural gas and is also released into the atmosphere from landfills, livestock and thawing permafrost. The pledge, developed with the European Union, commits nations to cut emissions from methane 30 percent by 2030. While the four heaviest emitters of methane – China, India, Russia and Brazil – have not joined the pledge, the administration announced that nine of the world’s top 20 methane polluters had signed on. In addition to the United States and the European Union, they are Canada, Indonesia, Pakistan, Mexico, Nigeria, Argentina and Iraq”.

October was also punctuated with anticipation of the United Nations (UN) Conference of Parties (COP) meeting negotiating how to address climate change, taking place in Glasgow, Scotland October 31-November 12. For example, *Wall Street Journal* reporters [Max Colchester](#) and [Mike Cherney](#) noted, “The U.K. called on countries including India and China to update their plans to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, ratcheting up pressure on a handful

of states as preparations for a United Nations climate summit in Glasgow accelerate...A key foundation of the talks, aimed at limiting global warming, is individual countries’ own technical plans to cut emissions. Several major economies including the U.K., the U.S. and the EU have recently updated their plans to pivot from fossil fuels. Some major polluters, including China and India, haven’t yet made public their own fresh commitments ahead of the meeting. Other countries, such as Australia, Indonesia and South Africa, have updated climate targets or are considering revisions, though some environmental groups are concerned policy makers aren’t moving fast enough. In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has moved to give priority to fossil fuel on the national grid over renewable energy sources, which environmentalists say will hurt Mexico’s emission-reduction goals”. As a second example, [in an article entitled ‘Earth gets hotter, deadlier during decades of climate talks’ Associated Press journalist Seth Borenstein reported](#), “World leaders have been meeting for 29 years to try to curb global warming, and in that time Earth has become a much hotter and deadlier planet. Trillions of tons of ice have disappeared over that period, the burning of fossil fuels has spewed billions of tons of heat-trapping gases into the air, and hundreds of thousands of people have died

from heat and other weather disasters stoked by climate change, statistics show". Furthermore, [journalist Anne-Laure Frémont, from *Le Figaro*](#) noted, "At the moment, the world is still far from a path to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, a prerequisite, albeit essential, to hope to limit warming below this 1.5 ° C threshold".

Meanwhile, a UN report finding that fossil fuel extraction has been out of step with climate policy plans generated media attention in mid-October. For example, [CNN journalist Rachel Ramirez reported](#), "Ahead of a critical global climate conference in November, a UN report released Wednesday shows that many of the world's largest fossil fuel producers are still planning to ramp up production in the coming years, and will be burning far more fossil fuels in 2030 than what is consistent with global climate pledges. The UN Environment Programme analysis shows that 15 major fossil fuel-generating countries will produce roughly 110% more coal, oil, and gas in 2030 than what would be necessary to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and 45% more than what would be consistent with 2 degrees. Scientists have said limiting warming to those thresholds is critical to avoid the worst consequences of the climate crisis. Researchers call this disconnect between government plans and international climate commitments the "production gap," which they conclude remains "largely unchanged" compared to previous assessments since the annual report first launched in 2019. The latest analysis found that the production gap is widest for coal, of which governments plan to produce roughly 240% more in 2030. They are also planning to produce 57% more oil and 71% more natural gas than what is in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement".

In later October, the US Financial Stability Oversight Council issued a report about economic instability resulting from unchecked climate change and this generated US media coverage as well as some international media attention. For example, [New York Times journalists Alan Rappeport and Chris Flavelle reported](#), "Climate change is an "emerging threat" to the stability of the U.S. financial system, top federal regulators



Figure 5. Front page print coverage in *The Observer* (UK) capturing initial anticipation of the UN COP climate negotiations.

warned in a report on Thursday, setting the stage for the Biden administration to take more aggressive regulatory action to prevent climate change from upending global markets and the economy. The report, produced by the Financial Stability Oversight Council, is the clearest expression of alarm to date about the risks that rising temperatures and seas pose to the economy and could herald sweeping changes to the kinds of investments made by banks and other financial institutions...The report by the Financial Stability Oversight Council, which is led by the Treasury secretary and includes leaders from the major financial regulatory agencies, portrayed the financial threat of climate change in stark terms. Higher temperatures are leading to more natural disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires and floods. These, in turn, are resulting in damaged property, lost income and disruptions to business activity that threaten to alter how assets, such as real estate, are valued. At the same time, the move away from fossil fuels could cause a sudden drop in the price of stocks and other assets tied to oil, gas, coal and other energy companies, or sectors

that rely on them such as carmakers and heavy manufacturing. Such a shift could hurt the stock market, retirement savings and other parts of the financial sector”.

And despite the Chinese government’s absence at the UN COP negotiations, their updated pledge for emissions reductions generated media coverage in October. For example, [South China Morning Post](#) journalist [Echo Xie reported](#), “China submitted its updated emissions reduction commitment, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), to the United Nations on Thursday, just days ahead of the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. But climate observers described it as modest and said it failed to improve China’s ambition by much. The updated document includes President Xi Jinping’s pledge last September that China will reach peak carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve neutrality – also known as net zero – before 2060. Compared with China’s previous NDC, submitted in 2016, there are also higher commitments to reducing emissions by 2030. The previous goal to increase China’s share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption has been raised from 20 per cent to 25 per cent. China also aims to reduce carbon intensity – measured as emissions per unit of GDP – by 65 per cent on 2005 levels, another 5 per cent increase on its 2016 pledge. The country also aims to increase its forest stock volume by 6 billion cubic metres, up from its previous target of around 4.5 billion. Installed wind and solar capacity will more than double, from last year’s 535 gigawatts to 1,200GW by 2030, according to the documents published on the website of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)”.

Finally, in political and economic coverage to round out the month of October, the Group of 20 (G20) meeting in Rome, Italy – which brings together 80% of world GDP and greenhouse gas emissions – garnered media attention as world leaders discussed climate policy initiatives. For example, [New York Times](#) journalists [Somini Sengupta](#) and [Jason Horowitz reported](#), “Leaders of the Group of 20 nations sent a symbolic message on Sunday as one of

the most important climate conferences began, pledging to “pursue efforts” to keep the average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. While the mention of the number, seen as a critical threshold for limiting the severest effects of climate change, is a step forward, the leaders did not say how their countries would reduce their emissions more aggressively to achieve that goal...At the moment, however, achieving a 1.5-degree cap is a highly ambitious goal. Even if all countries achieve the targets they set for themselves in the Paris Agreement, average global temperatures are on track to rise by 2.7 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Reaching the target would require big polluting countries to strengthen those targets, or Nationally Determined Contributions, as they are known, by committing to reduce emissions much faster between now and 2030. The leaders committed “to take further action this decade” and to update their plans as necessary”. Furthermore, [journalist Giovanni Spinazzola, from Corriere della Sera](#), titled it “United against the virus and climate change” on the cover of October 30th and [La Repubblica](#) also dedicated the cover of the 31st to him, whose headline was “Climate, the road is uphill”. The subtitle noted that “emissions reduction negotiations were difficult in the G20. China, Russia and India are holding back, and there is Anglo-Italian mediation. Mattarella’s appeal: the world looks to us to agree on a global minimum tax and for vaccines for the poorest countries”.

In addition, many climate change or global warming stories in October remained focused on [scientific](#) themes. Among them, a new International Energy Agency’s World Energy Outlook publication documenting clean energy growth generated media attention. For example, [Guardian](#) journalist [Rob Davies noted](#), “Current plans to cut global carbon emissions will fall 60% short of their 2050 net zero target, the International Energy Agency has said, as it urged leaders to use the upcoming Cop26 climate conference to send an “unmistakable signal” with concrete policy plans. In its annual World Energy Outlook, redesigned this year as a “guidebook” for world leaders attending the summit in Glasgow, the IEA predicted that



Figure 6. Front page print coverage in *Corriere Della Sera* (Italy), *La Vanguardia* (Spain), *Le Figaro* (France), and *La Repubblica* (Italy) discussing the G20 summit in Rome, Italy.

carbon emissions would decrease by just 40% by the middle of the century if countries stick to their climate pledges. The organisation said the difference between current plans and the change necessary to reach the net zero target was “stark”, requiring up to \$4tn (£2.94tn) in investment over the next decade alone to bridge the divide”. Yet, *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Jinjoo Lee reported, “The International Energy Agency’s closely watched World Energy Outlook confirms what the world is starting to feel in its bones: The coming energy transition could be painful and expensive. Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA, in a statement accompanying the report lamented the failure to invest enough to meet future energy needs, saying the situation is “setting the stage for a volatile period ahead.” Worth noting in the report, which was released Wednesday, is that the agency for the first time forecasts an eventual decline in oil demand in all three of its scenarios—from the most status quo assumption to the most ambitiously green (net-zero emissions by 2050). Under its most conservative “stated policies scenario,” which is based on climate policies that are already in place and those that are under development, the IEA expects oil demand to peak in the mid-2030s at roughly 104 million barrels a day from almost 100 million today, with a slow decline through 2050”.

Also, an [open-access study](#) in the journal *Environmental Research Letters* that found a vanishingly small number of publications that

questioned human’s role in a changing climate earned media attention. For example, *Guardian* journalist Jonathan Watts reported, “The scientific consensus that humans are altering the climate has passed 99.9%, according to research that strengthens the case for global action at the Cop26 summit in Glasgow. The degree of scientific certainty about the impact of greenhouse gases is now similar to the level of agreement on evolution and plate tectonics, the authors say, based on a survey of nearly 90,000 climate-related studies. This means there is practically no doubt among experts that burning fossil fuels, such as oil, gas, coal, peat and trees, is heating the planet and causing more extreme weather. A previous survey in 2013 showed 97% of studies published between 1991 and 2012 supported the idea that human activities are altering Earth’s climate. This has been updated and expanded by the study by Cornell University that shows the tiny minority of sceptical voices has diminished to almost nothing as evidence mounts of the link between fossil-fuel burning and climate disruption. The latest survey of peer-reviewed literature published from 2012 to November 2020 was conducted in two stages. First, the researchers examined a random sample of 3,000 studies, in which they found only found four papers that were sceptical that the climate crisis was caused by humans. Second, they searched the full database of 88,125 studies for keywords linked to climate scepticism such as “natural cycles” and “cosmic rays”, which yielded 28 papers, all published in minor journals”.



In October, the annual [Lancet Countdown report](#) (to which two members of the MeCCO team – Lucy McAllister and Olivia Pearman contributed – grabbed media attention around the world. For example, [Washington Post correspondent Sarah Kaplan wrote](#), “Climate change is set to become the “defining narrative of human health,” a top medical journal warned Wednesday – triggering food shortages, deadly disasters and disease outbreaks that would dwarf the toll of the coronavirus. But aggressive efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions from human activities could avert millions of unnecessary deaths, according to the analysis from more than 100 doctors and health experts. In its annual “Countdown on health and climate change,” the Lancet provides a sobering assessment of the dangers posed by a warming planet. More than a dozen measures of humanity’s exposure to health-threatening weather extremes have climbed since last year’s report”. As a second example, [Associated Press correspondent Seth Borenstein reported](#), “Health problems tied to climate change are all getting worse... The annual reports commissioned by the medical journal Lancet tracked 44 global health indicators connected to climate change, including heat deaths, infectious diseases and hunger. All of them are getting grimmer, said Lancet Countdown project research director Marina Romanello, a biochemist...Vulnerable populations – older people and very young – were subject to more time with dangerous heat last year. For people over 65, the researchers calculated there were 3 billion more “person-day” exposures to extreme heat than the average from 1986 to 2005. More people were in places where climate-sensitive diseases can flourish. Coastline areas warm enough for the nasty *Vibrio* bacteria increased in the Baltics, the U.S. Northeast and the Pacific Northwest in the past decade. In some poorer nations, the season for malaria-spreading mosquitoes has expanded since the 1950s. “Code Red is not even a hot enough color for this report, ” said Stanford University tropical medicine professor Dr. Michele Barry, who wasn’t part of the study team. Compared to the last Lancet report, “this one is the sobering realization that we’re going completely in the wrong direction.”

Also in October, a [new paper in Science](#) documented how land dispossession from native peoples in the US has also increased their vulnerability to climate change. This work generated news. For example, [New York Times journalist Christopher Flavelle reported](#), “Centuries of land loss and forced relocation have left Native Americans significantly more exposed to the effects of climate change, new data show, adding to the debate over how to address climate change and racial inequity in the United States. The findings, which took seven years to compile and were published Thursday in the journal *Science*, mark the first time that researchers have been able to quantify on a large scale what Native Americans have long believed to be true: That European settlers, and later the United States government, pushed Indigenous peoples onto marginal lands”.

October media accounts were punctuated by [cultural](#) stories relating to climate change or global warming. For example, protesters demonstrating outside the G20 summit that commenced at the end of the month earned media coverage. For example, [New York Times journalists Elisabetta Povoledo and Emma Bubola reported](#), “Several thousand protesters marched in Rome on Saturday afternoon, dancing, drumming and singing “Bella Ciao,” a song identified with the resistance movement during World War II. And they vented their rage and disenchantment with the current world order: “You are the G20, we are the future,” they chanted, as they wound down a Rome avenue, setting off red and green flares. At least 5,000 people joined the march, according to police officials, though organizers said the number was more than twice that. This year is the 20th anniversary of the Group of 8 summit that Italy hosted in the northern city of Genoa that was marred by rioting. It is also a moment of tension between the authorities and opponents of the Italian government’s coronavirus vaccination requirements, which have resulted in violent clashes”.

Meanwhile, in Glasgow and Edinburgh – Scotland’s largest two cities – demonstrators also drew attention through media accounts.



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:**

<https://giving.cu.edu/fund/media-and-climate-change-observatory-mecco>

For example, *Guardian* reporter [Matthew Taylor observed](#), “Climate justice campaigners held events in Scotland’s two biggest cities on Sunday as world leaders arrived in Glasgow for the start of the Cop26 summit. Hundreds of activists in Halloween costumes marched through Edinburgh and held a rally outside the Scottish parliament. Meanwhile the Cop26 Coalition, which includes civil society groups, indigenous communities, anti-racist groups and frontline activists from the global south, launched its campaign just a few hundred metres from the official conference venue in Glasgow”.

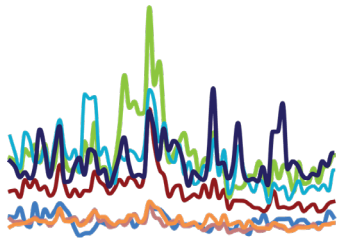
Last, October media accounts about climate change or global warming were also populated by [ecological](#) and [meteorological](#) stories. To begin, vanishing glaciers and extreme precipitation events – as they relate to a changing climate – earned media coverage. For example, *USA Today* reporter [Jordan Mendoza noted](#), “The last three mountain glaciers in Africa are receding so much that they may disappear in the next 20 years, according to a recent United Nations report that outlines the many issues facing the continent due to global warming. Ahead of the United Nations’ climate change conference on Oct. 31, the World Meteorological Organization released a report on the state of Africa’s climate in 2020, detailing how much the continent’s estimated 1.3 billion people will be affected in the coming years. The three mountain glaciers remaining – Mount Kenya in Kenya, the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda and the famous Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania – aren’t big enough to provide water resources, but have become tourist attractions. Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, is one of the most popular climbs in the

world. However, the glaciers on the mountains are receding higher than the global average. If they continue to do so, they will be completely gone by the 2040s, the report says. Mount Kenya is on pace to deglacierate by 2030”.

Also, news of increasing concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere – after a slowdown during the coronavirus pandemic – was prevalent. For example, *US National Public Radio* [Scott Neuman reported](#), “Despite a world economy that slowed significantly because of COVID-19, the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reached a new record last year, putting the goal of slowing the rise of global temperatures “way off track,” according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The United Nations body said Monday that carbon dioxide had risen by more than the 10-year average in 2020 to 413.2 parts per million, despite a slight decrease in emissions due to the coronavirus pandemic. Methane and nitrous oxide, two other potent greenhouse gases, also showed increases”.

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

ISSUE 58, OCTOBER 2021



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**

Media and Climate Change Observatory, University of Colorado Boulder

<http://mecco.colorado.edu>