

“The climate emergency is here. The media need to act like it”



April was a busy month of media attention to climate change or global warming around the world. At the global level, coverage increased 9% from March 2021. Media coverage of climate change in April 2021 compared to April 2020 – when the world’s news outlets were largely focused on the emergent COVID-19 pandemic in a finite news hole – is at higher levels just about everywhere: globally, the levels are about

double that from a year ago. Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale – organized into seven geographical regions around the world – from January 2004 through April 2021.

Climate change media coverage in March 2021 was down in Oceania (-17%) and Africa (-10%) but up in all other regions: +6% in Central/South America.

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

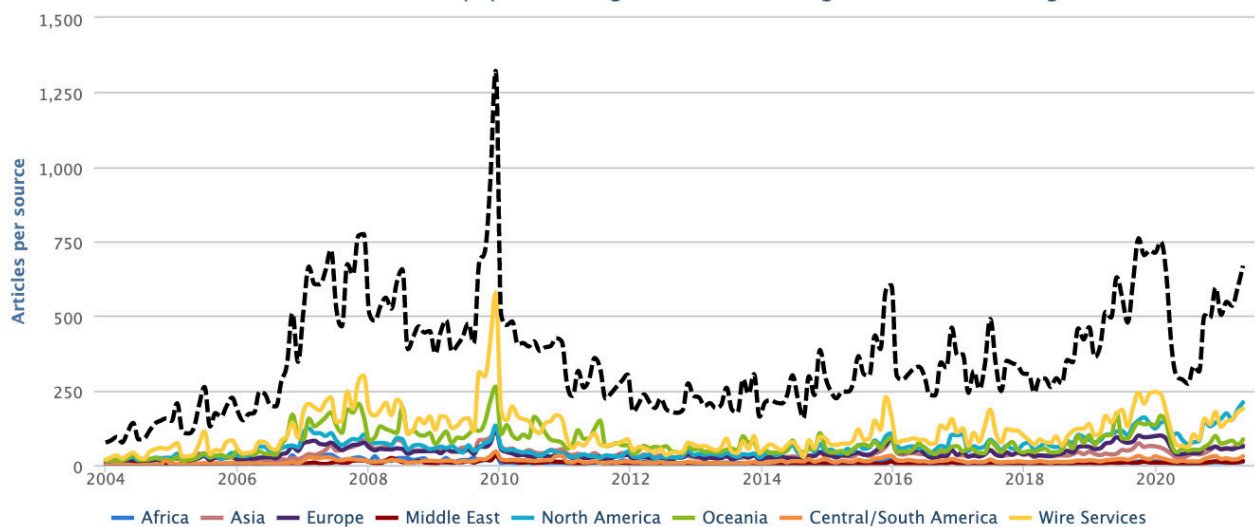


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in print sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through April 2021.

2000–2021 Indian Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change or Global Warming

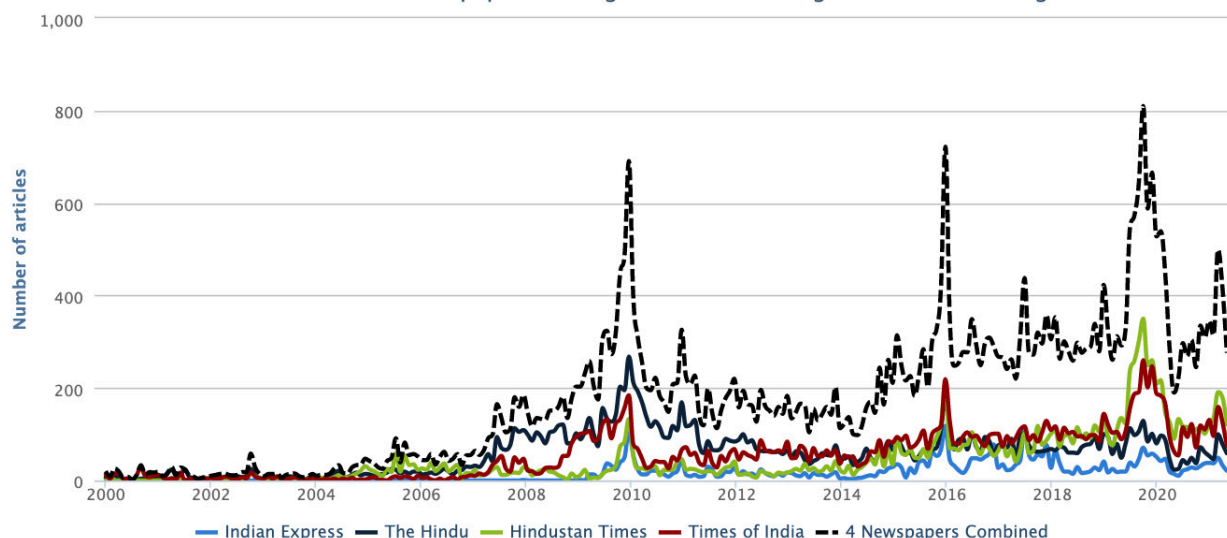


Figure 2. Indian media coverage of climate change or global warming in *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Times of India* from January 2000 through April 2021.

While these increases are found consistently at the regional and country-level assessment, there is a notable exception in India. Across coverage in *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Times of India* - with a national focus on the rapid spread of COVID-19 across the country - there has been a notable 32% decrease from March 2021 (yet still a 45% increase from April 2020).

Globally in April 2021, radio coverage of climate change or global warming increased 33% from March 2021, while also increasing 6% across international wires services. Regionally, compared to the previous month coverage was up in Europe (+5%), North America (+13%), Oceania (+21%), Africa (+32%), the Middle East (+37%) and Latin America (+48%). At the country level, United States (US) print coverage increased 24% and television coverage was up 46% from the previous month. Meanwhile, compared to the previous month coverage rose in Finland (+3%), Spain (+5%), Canada (+7%), the United Kingdom (UK) (+8%), Norway (+22%), New Zealand (+25%), Australia (+27%), Denmark (+28%) and Russia (+62%) in April 2021. Coverage was down in Sweden (-9%) and Germany (-18%) in addition to India (mentioned above) in April 2021 from March 2021.

With this month’s monitoring and analysis we are delighted to add a new country profile in Finland, focusing on the two print sources *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Ilta-Sanomat*. Thanks to the work of new Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) team members Jari Lyytimäki and Erkki Mervaala at the Finnish Environment Institute and University of Helsinki, we now track media attention in these sources with the search terms ‘ilmastonmuutos’ or ‘ilmaston lämpeneminen’.

Also, thanks to the work of ongoing MeCCO team members Rogelio Fernández Reyes and Isidro Jiménez-Gomez, we are now monitoring a new print source in Algeria (*El Watan*) in French with the search terms ‘changement climatique’ or ‘réchauffement climatique’. We also have begun monitoring new print sources in Egypt (*Al Masry Al-Youm*), Saudi Arabia (*Al Riyadh*), Iraq (*Al Sabah*) and Lebanon (*Annahar*) with the Arabic search terms

“خير ارجل سابت حالاً” OR “خانم لاريغت”

We now monitor 127 sources (across newspapers, TV and radio) in 59 countries and in 13 languages.

To begin, April was a month where several prominent **political** and **economic** themed media stories about climate change or global



Figure 3. The front pages of *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* one April 1, 2021, following the plan's release.

warming pervaded the airwaves, broadcasts and newsprint. For example, in the United States (US) there was abundant media attention on the Biden administration's infrastructure plan - with numerous connections made to confronting climate change.

For example, writing in *The New York Times* journalists Brad Plumer and Nadja Popovich noted, "If America is dominated by car culture and the call of the open road, there is a big reason for that: Over the past 65 years, the United States has spent nearly \$10 trillion in public funds on highways and roads, and just a quarter of that on subways, buses and passenger rail. But President Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan, unveiled this week, represents one of the most ambitious efforts yet to challenge the centrality of the automobile in American life, by proposing to tilt federal spending far more toward public transportation and coax more people out of their cars. Experts say that transformation is necessary to tackle climate change, but could prove extremely difficult in practice...Transportation now accounts for one-third of America's planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, with most of that from hundreds of millions of gasoline-burning cars and S.U.V.s. And, while Mr. Biden is proposing \$174 billion to promote cleaner electric vehicles, experts have said that helping

Americans drive less will be crucial to meeting the administration's climate goals".

As the month of April unfolded, many media accounts focused on an [open letter](#) from 310 major corporations - from Adobe Inc. to Zurich Insurance group with others like Facebook and Philip Morris in between - that called on the Biden Administration to make even stronger commitments to greenhouse gas emissions reductions. For example, [Associated Press correspondent Matthew Daly](#) reported, "More than 300 businesses and investors, including such giants as Apple, Google, Microsoft and Coca-Cola, are calling on the Biden administration to set an ambitious climate change goal that would cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% below 2005 levels by 2030. The target would nearly double the nation's previous commitment and require dramatic changes in the power, transportation and other sectors. President Joe Biden is considering options for expected carbon reductions by 2030 ahead of a virtual climate summit the United States is hosting later this month. The so-called Nationally Determined Contribution is a key milestone as Biden moves toward his ultimate goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Biden has promised to reveal the nonbinding but symbolically important 2030 goal before the Earth Day summit opens April

22". Furthermore, [New York Times journalist Lisa Friedman noted](#), "Organizers of the business letter said they hoped such a message coming from the private sector – including electric utilities like Exelon and Pacific Gas & Electric, as well as dozens of companies based in Republican districts – would resonate strongly with Congress. Other signatories include Target, Verizon and Philip Morris, the tobacco giant once considered a firm ally of the Republican Party. The effort also underscores the delicate path corporate leaders are treading in the post-Trump era. Their decisions to break with Republicans on issues like voting rights and racial justice have rankled their traditional allies in the G.O.P. Pressing the Biden administration to aggressively combat climate change could further alienate Republicans, who have long fought emissions regulations as "job killers" that would make American business less competitive".

Then, the high-profile April 22 (Earth Day) summit of 40 world leaders at the US White House captured significant media attention as the focus was squarely on international climate policy action. As several countries released stronger and ratcheted-up Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions as part of the ongoing United Nations Paris Agreement process. For example, [Wall Street Journal correspondents Andrew Restuccia, Timothy Puko and Sha Hua reported](#), "President Biden is expected this week to call for cutting U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions roughly in half by 2030, according to people familiar with the matter, as he pushes to jump-start global efforts to tackle climate change. Mr. Biden will release the new goal during a virtual summit at the White House on Thursday and Friday, part of an effort to assert global leadership on climate issues amid tensions with China. The new target seeks to reduce over the next nine years emissions by 50% from levels in 2005. Emissions last year were already projected to be down 21% from that 2005 baseline, due in part to a slowdown related to the pandemic. But this year, emissions are tracking higher again as the economy recovers. Mr. Biden has invited 40 world leaders to the

event, a group that comprises European allies and some autocrats from U.S. rivals that are among the world's biggest emitters and fossil-fuel producers, including Russian President Vladimir Putin. The White House has noted that invitees include 17 countries responsible for about 80% of all global emissions, an effort to supercharge ambitions going into negotiations scheduled for November to raise targets for reducing emissions. Some developing countries are expected to use the summit to urge wealthier nations to help finance efforts to reduce emissions and to adapt to the effects of a warming planet. Brazil has asked the Biden administration for \$1 billion in exchange for it reducing deforestation by 40%. India, meantime, has also stressed to the U.S. the importance of industrialized countries making good on pledges to mobilize as much as \$100 billion a year in support of similar efforts."

In particular, the Biden administration commitments – cutting GHG pollution by 50-52% from 2005 levels by 2030 – garnered many media stories around the world about a new era of cooperation. For example, [CBS News reporter Cara Korte noted](#), "President Biden pledged that the U.S. will cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least half from 2005 levels by 2030, making the announcement Thursday at the virtual Leaders Climate Summit, a two-day global meeting of more than 40 world leaders hosted by the White House. In his opening remarks, Mr. Biden said the U.S. can reach the emissions target through his jobs plan – a \$3 trillion infrastructure package meant to revitalize the nation's energy grid and create a net-zero economy". As a second example, [Guardian environment correspondent Fiona Harvey reported](#) on UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's comments, noting that he said ""It's vital for all of us to show that this is not all about some expensive politically correct green act of 'bunny hugging' or however you want to put it," the prime minister told the possibly slightly puzzled leaders. "Nothing wrong with 'bunny hugging' but you know what I'm driving at...Cake have eat," he went on to suggest as an overriding motto, arguing that reducing carbon emissions could also be good for the economy".



Figure 4. Front pages from *La Nación* (Argentina), *Folha De Sao Paulo* (Brazil), *People's Daily* (China), *Makkah News* (Saudi Arabia) and *Gulf News* (United Arab Emirates) carrying front page coverage of the US White House climate summit on April 22 and associated emissions reductions announcement made there.

Meanwhile, reports of Canada's actual increase in GHG emissions in recent years also generated media attention. For example, *New York Times* correspondents [Ian Austen and Christopher Flavelle reported](#), "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada will arrive for President Biden's climate summit on Thursday with an outside reputation for being a warrior in the global fight against climate change. But one facet of Canada's economy complicates his record: the country's insistence on expanding output from its oil sands. Between Mr. Trudeau's election in 2015 and 2019, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions increased by 1 percent, despite decreases in other rich nations during the same period, according to government data released last week. In fact, Canada is the only Group of 7 country whose emissions have risen since the Paris climate agreement was signed six years ago...As one of the world's largest oil reserves, the oil sands are also among the most polluting, given the amount of energy required to extract it. But it's unlikely that Mr. Trudeau would end production there".

And in Europe, several April media stories discussed various national-level commitments. Among many examples, accounts appeared in countries like Spain, France, the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany:

- in Spain, a new Climate Law was approved. In an [Editorial in *El País*](#) entitled 'Important but insufficient step', the Editors noted that the law "sends an unequivocal signal: the

decarbonization process is irreversible and by 2050 the country will have to have almost completely eradicated greenhouse gas emissions".

- in France, it was announced that it will ban flights that can be made in two and a half hours by train. [Le Figaro reported](#), "The National Assembly voted this Saturday night in first reading to eliminate certain national airlines, in case of alternatives in the process of less than 2:30, after a lively debate and differences even in the most. This emblematic measure of the climate law aims to eliminate the links between Paris (Orly) and Nantes, Lyon or Bordeaux. The Citizen's Climate Convention had demanded that domestic flights be waived in the case of alternatives of less than 4 hours by train, and not 2:30".
- in the UK, [Guardian environment correspondent Fiona Harvey reported](#), on the commitment of 78% GHG emissions reductions from 1990 levels by 2035 that "aims to help promote new actions by other governments, before from the vital UN climate talks, called COP26, to be hosted by the UK in Glasgow in November".
- in Germany, [Associated Press correspondent Frank Jordans reported](#), "In a ruling hailed as groundbreaking, Germany's top court said Thursday the government must set clear goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2030, arguing that existing legislation risks

placing too much of a burden for curbing climate change on younger generations. The verdict was a victory for climate activists from Germany and elsewhere who – with the support of environmental groups – had filed four complaints to the Constitutional Court arguing that their rights were at risk by the lack of sufficient targets beyond the next decade”.

Relating to these political and economic themes, in many [cultural](#) stories circulated about climate change or global warming in the month of April. For example, associated with Earth Day (April 22) over 400 news organizations – with a combined audience of nearly 2 billion people – worked in coordination to raise attention to climate change. Led by the initiative [Covering Climate Now](#), the partnering media groups agreed to increase relevant coverage in the lead up to and through April 22 with a focus on the theme ‘Living through the Climate Emergency’. For example, [Guardian staff collectively noted](#), “The climate emergency is here. The media need to act like it”.

As a different example, in April some fake news became several real news stories about fake news, involving the [erroneous claims by Fox News host Larry Kudlow](#) that the US Biden administration’s commitments to reduce would force Americans to “stop eating meat, stop eating poultry and fish, seafood, eggs, dairy and animal-based fats”. This false claim was traced further back to [a baseless Daily Mail story written by Emily Crane](#). Yet, like red-winged blackbirds spotting a shiny object, many public figures discussed this as many news organizations then ended up covering the coverage. For example, [Guardian journalist Oliver Milman reported](#), “At a major summit hosted by Joe Biden last week, a procession of world leaders fretted over the spiraling dangers of the climate crisis, with some pledging further cuts to planet-heating emissions, others touting their embrace of electric cars and a few vowing the end of coal. In the US, however, Biden’s political opponents were focused on one pressing matter – meat. “Bye, bye burgers” screamed an on-screen graphic on Fox News, which ran the false claim that the US president would tyrannically allow Americans to

devour just one burger a month. Larry Kudlow, a former economic adviser to Donald Trump now Fox Business host, baselessly envisioned Fourth of July celebrations where people would only be allowed to “throw back a plant-based beer with your grilled Brussels sprouts” on the barbecue. Prominent Republicans seized upon the supposed Biden climate diktat – which does not exist. The Texas governor, Greg Abbott, retweeted a claim of a 4lb-a-year meat allocation with the comment: “Not gonna happen in Texas!” The far-right conspiracy theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican representative, called Biden the “Hamburglar” while Garret Graves, ostensibly a more moderate House Republican, said the president’s plan amounted to “dictatorship”. The unfounded claims, which appear to have somehow sprouted from a University of Michigan study on the impact of meat eating, do not reflect Biden’s actual proposals to tackle global heating, which make no mention of personal meat consumption. But they have dealt a hefty blow to Republicans’ latest efforts to present themselves as committed to taking on the climate crisis”.

Many [ecological](#) and [meteorological](#) dimensions of climate change and global warming were evident in media representations in April. For instance, tropical cyclone activities – and links to a changing climate – were discussed in several outlets around the globe. For example, [Washington Post journalist Rachel Pannet reported](#), “A tropical cyclone battered Australia’s west coast Sunday night and into Monday, destroying homes and leaving thousands without electricity. Severe wind gusts of up to 105 miles per hour tore houses apart and sent debris flying all over Kalbarri, a coastal tourist town of 1,350 people in Western Australia. Authorities estimated some 70 percent of the town’s buildings were damaged. Drone footage from the scene showed dozens of homes with their roofs ripped off. Power lines were down and roads were littered with shards of metal and other debris...These occurrences could become more common with climate change” (see [The Washington Post](#)).



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>

Also, ongoing drought conditions and connections to climate change in Africa generated news attention in April media account. For example, *BBC News* reporter [Mark Kinver](#) commented, "The worrying fact facing politicians, policymakers and civil society is that the continent is set to be hardest hit by climate change, yet the continent's capacity to adapt to the realities of a warming world are low. Areas of concern include water supplies, health, food security, droughts and floods, biodiversity. It is a list of concerns that is continuing to grow. Africa is on the front line of the battle against dangerous climate change".

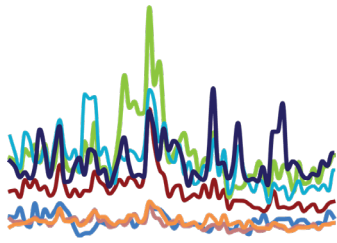
In April 2021, many media stories about climate change or global warming continued to focus on *scientific* themes. Among them, new records of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere - due to the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities - detected through ongoing monitoring led to many press accounts. For example, *Washington Post* [journalists Matthew Cappucci and Jason Samenow](#) wrote, "For the first time in recorded history, the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide, or CO₂, was measured at more than 420 parts per million at the Mauna Loa Observatory on the Big Island of Hawaii. It's a disconcerting milestone in the human-induced warming of the planet, around the halfway point on our path toward doubling preindustrial CO₂ levels...When the station began collecting CO₂ measurements in the late 1950s, atmospheric CO₂ concentration sat at around 315 parts per million. On Saturday, the daily average was pegged at 421.21 parts per million - the first time in human history that

number has been so high. Previously, it had never exceeded 420 parts per million".

Also in April, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [report](#) finding that atmospheric methane levels surged in 2020 attracted media attention. For example, *USA Today* reporter [Doyle Rice](#) wrote, "the level of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere is now higher than it's been in at least 3.6 million years, federal scientists announced Wednesday. At that time, sea levels were as much as 78 feet higher, the average temperature was 7 degrees Fahrenheit higher than in pre-industrial times, Greenland was mostly green, and Antarctica had trees. Overall, levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane - the two most important greenhouse gases - continued their unrelenting rise in 2020 despite the economic slowdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic, according to scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration...NOAA's analysis also showed the annual increase in atmospheric methane - a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide when it comes to global warming - for 2020 was 14.7 parts per billion, which is the largest annual increase recorded since measurements began in 1983".

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

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

ISSUE 52, APRIL 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**

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