

# 'I am an environmentalist'



President Donald Trump skipped a session devoted to climate change at the G7 summit here, a snub aides wrote off as a scheduling conflict but nonetheless reflects Trump's isolation on the issue. Photo: Getty Images.

- August media attention to climate change and global warming was up **20%** throughout the world from the previous month of July, and up almost **83%** from August 2018.
- At the country level, of note Australian coverage was up nearly **62%**, Canadian coverage was up nearly **38%**, United States (US) coverage was up over **32%** and New Zealand coverage was up slightly by just over **3%**.

At the regional level, from the previous month of July 2019 coverage in Asia was up nearly 14%, the European Union was up nearly 6%, North American coverage was up just over 32%, Latin American coverage was up almost 53%, African

coverage was up over 8% and Oceania coverage was up approximately 33%.

Figure 1 shows trends in newspaper media coverage at the global scale - organized into

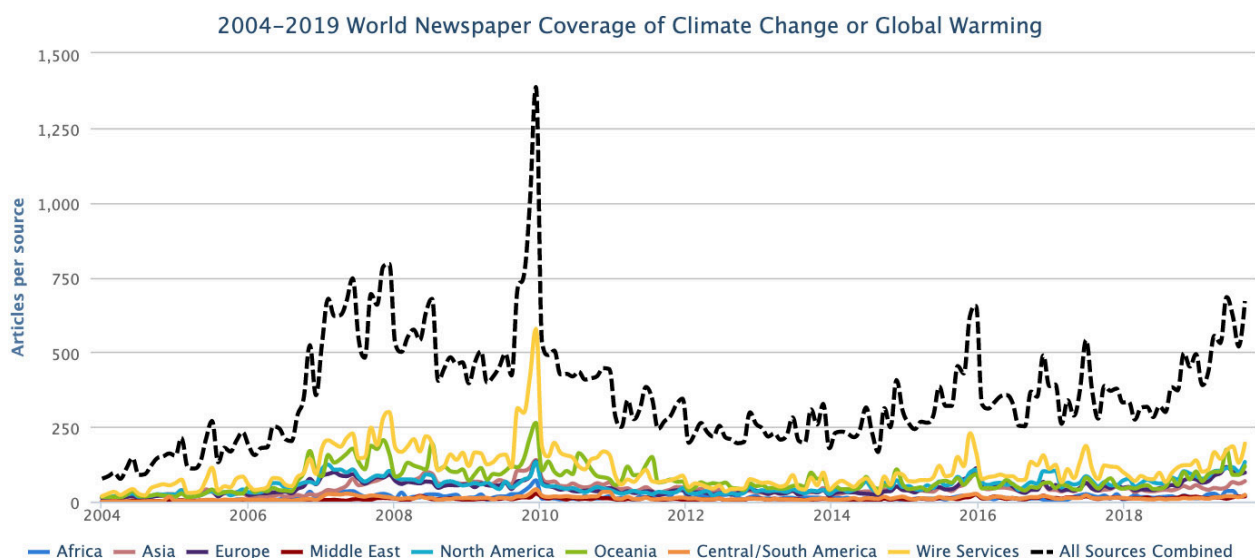
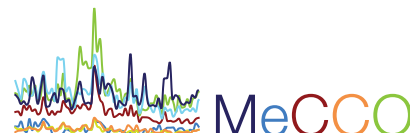


Figure 1. Newspaper media coverage of climate change or global warming in eight-five sources in seven different regions around the world, from January 2004 through July 2019.



# MECCO MONTHLY SUMMARIES

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seven geographical regions around the world – from January 2004 through July 2019.

For a second straight month, *ecological* and *meteorological* content significantly shaped overall media coverage. Of note, in early August *The Washington Post* published a set of analyses of how climate change has impacted communities and counties around the United States (US). *Washington Post* journalists Steven Mufson, Chris Mooney, Juliet Eilperin and John Muyskens reported, “Over the past two decades, the 2 degrees Celsius number has emerged as a critical threshold for global warming. In the 2015 Paris accord, international leaders agreed that the world should act urgently to keep the Earth’s average temperature increases “well below” 2 degrees Celsius by the year 2100 to avoid a host of catastrophic changes. The potential consequences are daunting. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that if Earth heats up by an average of 2 degrees Celsius, virtually all the world’s coral reefs will die; retreating ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica could unleash massive sea level rise; and summertime Arctic sea ice, a shield against further warming, would begin to disappear. But global warming does not heat the world

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An Indian boy tries to cool off by dousing himself with water in New Delhi on May 29, 2019 during a heatwave.

evenly. A *Washington Post* analysis of more than a century of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration temperature data across the Lower 48 states and 3,107 counties has found that major areas are nearing or have already crossed the 2-degree Celsius mark. Today, more than 1 in 10 Americans – 34 million people – are living in rapidly heating regions, including

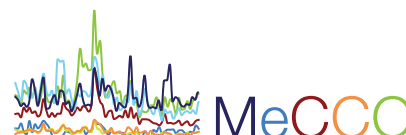


Figure 2. Word cloud showing frequency of words invoked in media coverage of climate change or global warming in United States newspaper sources in August (top left) - from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* - Canadian sources (top right) - from *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, and *National Post*, as well as Australian sources (bottom left) - from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Courier Mail* & *Sunday Mail*, *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph* & *Sunday Telegraph*, and *The Age*, and New Zealand sources (bottom right) - from *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion Post*, and *The Press*.



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New York City and Los Angeles. Seventy-one counties have already hit the 2-degree Celsius mark. Alaska is the fastest-warming state in the country, but Rhode Island is the first state in the Lower 48 whose average temperature rise has eclipsed 2 degrees Celsius. Other parts of the Northeast – New Jersey, Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts – trail close behind. While many people associate global warming with summer's melting glaciers, forest fires and disastrous flooding, it is higher winter temperatures that have made New Jersey and nearby Rhode Island the fastest warming of the Lower 48 states".<sup>1</sup>

In August, media coverage also focused on the record-breaking heat from the month before. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) confirmed<sup>2</sup> that July 2019 was the hottest month of any month on record on planet Earth. NOAA also reported that June 2019 was the hottest June on record. Many news stories covered these milestones. For example, journalist Sophie Lewis from CBS News reported, "This summer hasn't just felt like the hottest ever – it actually has been. July 2019 is now officially the hottest month on record, since record-keeping began 140 years ago. The average global temperature last month was 1.71 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th-century average, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced Thursday. It follows the hottest June ever recorded, marking one of the hottest summers in recent history. Previously, July 2016 held the record for the hottest month ever. As of now, 2019 is tied with 2017 as the second-warmest year on record"<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, journalist Robert Lee Hotz from *The Wall Street Journal* wrote "This past July was the hottest month world-wide in more than a century of global record-keeping, with severe heat waves in Europe, Africa and parts of the U.S. boosting the overall global average temperature".<sup>4</sup>

1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/climate-environment/climate-change-america/>

2 <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/global-climate-201907>

3 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/july-was-the-hottest-month-ever-recorded-on-earth/>

4 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/july-was-hottest-on-record-11565902904>

"This summer hasn't just felt like the hottest ever – it actually has been. July 2019 is now officially the hottest month on record, since record-keeping began 140 years ago."



People stuck in a traffic jam in Somerset, UK, leave their cars during a heatwave. Photo: Timothy Large, Alamy Stock Photo.

Also in August, wildfires in the Amazon – and their links to a changing climate – generated global media attention. An increase of 83% from the previous year had many asking questions and connecting the dots between Brazilian forest management and climate change. For example, *BBC* reported, "Brazil's Amazon rainforest has seen a record number of fires this year, new space agency data suggests. The National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) said its satellite data showed an 84% increase on the same period in 2018. It comes weeks after President Jair Bolsonaro sacked the head of the agency amid rows over its deforestation data. The largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming. It is also home to about three million species of plants and animals, and one million indigenous people"<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, journalist N'dea Yancey-Bragg from the *USA Today* wrote, "Forest fires in the Amazon are generating smoke that can be seen from space and may have caused a daytime blackout more than 1,700 miles away in the country's largest city. In the middle of the day Monday, the sky above

5 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-49415973>





São Paulo was blanketed by smoke from the wildfires raging in the Amazon region, according to local media reports. The smoke resulting from some of these wildfires was also captured in satellite images released by NASA last week".<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, as the fires continued through August, media reports covered how Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was mishandling the ongoing situation. Among numerous stories, journalist Marcelo Silva de Sousa, reporting for the *Associated Press*, wrote, "Amid global concern about raging fires in the Amazon, Brazil's government complained Thursday that it is being targeted in smear campaign by critics who contend President Jair Bolsonaro is not doing enough to curb widespread deforestation. The threat to what some call "the lungs of the planet" has ignited a bitter dispute about who is to blame during the tenure of a leader who has described Brazil's rainforest protections as an obstacle to economic development and who traded Twitter jabs on Thursday with France's president over the fires. French President Emmanuel Macron called the wildfires an international crisis and said the leaders of the Group of 7 nations should hold urgent discussions about them at their summit ..."<sup>7</sup> Journalist Erik Ortiz from *NBC News* reported, "Environmental groups have blamed the policies of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who took office in January, for rolling back environmental protections that have paved the way for the illegal clearing of forests in favor of cattle farming and agriculture. On Wednesday, Bolsonaro posted a video to Facebook blaming nongovernmental organizations for setting the blazes as a tactic to malign him, although he provided no evidence for the claim".<sup>8</sup>

At the end of August, news of an approaching hurricane (Dorian) to Florida's eastern coastline rang alarms. With expected landfall in the early days of September, some stories at the end of

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/08/20/amazon-rainforest-fires-smoke-seen-space/2067220001/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apnews.com/e1b052a0ffb34217aef47d20e960a410>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/climate-change-oxygen-biodiversity-amazon-rainforest-fires-leave-plenty-stake-n1045446>

the month drew links between hurricanes and climate change. For example, journalist David Greene from *National Public Radio* spoke to Virgin Islands Representative Stacey Plaskett about how Hurricane Dorian's wind and rain affected the area. In the interview, she made links to a changing climate. She said, "Our population, of course, has declined after Irma and Maria hit St. Thomas and St. John as a Category 5. My family has been here, both sides of my family, almost 300 years, and we're going to deal with this. A lot of the damage to our public infrastructure was due in part to the neglect of the federal government over the years to supporting us in terms of federal dollars and percentages in the same manner that they did the mainland. And so, they've given us funding not just to rebuild but to rebuild better than it was before. And so we're putting in - hardening our infrastructure - composite poles instead of wooden poles on - for utilities, putting things underground to ensure that we're able to deal with climate change, which is affecting us greatly".<sup>9</sup>

In addition to ecological and meteorological stories in August, media also ran numerous stories addressing *political* and *economic* connections with climate issues around the world. For example, in early August a Pacific Islands summit negotiated a communique about threats from climate change. With Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison taking up an adversarial stance from the other member nations' leaders, the interactions garnered media attention. For example, *Guardian* journalist Kate Lyons reported, "It was always going to be a showdown on the climate crisis. As leaders from the Pacific gathered in Tuvalu for their annual Pacific Islands Forum, there was one subject destined to dwarf all others and which pitted Australia, with its increasing emissions and plans for new coalmines, against its small island neighbours. And PIF 2019 turned out to be exactly that: a reckoning on the climate emergency confronting the Pacific. There were moving speeches from young Pasifika speaking of their fears for their future, tears in the leaders'

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/29/755347290/virgin-islands-rep-stacey-plaskett-on-hurricane-dorian>



On August 22nd Senator Bernie Sanders released a \$16.3 trillion Green New Deal plan to combat climate change.



Bernie Sanders speaks to striking telecommunications workers in Louisville, KY. Photo: Bruce Schreiner/AP.

retreat, and accusations that Australia's prime minister, Scott Morrison, had shown such disrespect toward his counterparts during their marathon 12-hour meeting, that the Fijian prime minister said Pacific countries may be driven further into the arms of China".<sup>10</sup> As another example, an *Agence France Press* article that ran in *The Straights Times* note, "New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday backed Pacific leaders' calls for urgent action on climate change, ramping up pressure on Australia to overhaul its stance on global warming. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison arrived at a meeting of Pacific Island leaders in Tuvalu with Canberra's regional leadership in question amid scrutiny of his government's climate change policies. Australia has long dominated the Pacific Islands Forum, an 18-member grouping consisting mainly of small atoll nations dotted around the vast Pacific Ocean. But its role is in doubt after leaders of the low-lying nations questioned in recent days whether Australia's climate-sceptic leader is committed to curbing a problem they see as a fundamental threat to their survival".<sup>11</sup> And getting further into the intricacies of the conflicts, journalist Tom McIlroy from *The Australian* wrote,

10 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/18/our-people-are-dying-australias-climate-confrontation-in-the-pacific>

11 <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/ardern-backs-pacific-leaders-on-climate-puts-heat-on-australia>

"Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack has apologised for suggesting Pacific island nations could withstand the damaging effects of climate change by continuing to pick Australian fruit. Last week the Nationals leader said he was annoyed at countries at the Pacific Islands Forum meeting calling on Australia to shut down the domestic coal industry, saying they received large amounts of aid from Australia and "many of their workers come here and pick our fruit". The comments followed Prime Minister Scott Morrison's clash with Pacific island leaders at the summit in Tuvalu over the inclusion of coal and temperature increases in a joint declaration from leaders".<sup>12</sup>

In the US, coverage of candidates' climate plans as well as their departure from the US presidential primary along with actions from the Democratic National Committee to block a debate on climate change generated news associated with climate change.

As one example of media coverage of climate plans, on August 22nd Senator Bernie Sanders released a \$16.3 trillion Green New Deal plan<sup>13</sup> to combat climate change. Journalist Lisa Friedman from *The New York Times* wrote, "Senator Bernie Sanders on Thursday released a \$16.3 trillion blueprint to fight climate change, the latest and most expensive proposal from the field of Democratic presidential candidates aimed at reining in planet-warming greenhouse gases...Mr. Sanders was an early supporter of the Green New Deal, an ambitious but nonbinding congressional plan for tackling global warming and economic inequality. He is bestowing that same name upon his new plan, which calls for the United States to eliminate fossil fuel use by 2050. It declares climate change a national emergency; envisions building new solar, wind and geothermal power sources across the country; and commits \$200 billion to help poor nations cope with climate change".<sup>14</sup> As another example, on August 26th entrepreneur

12 <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/deputy-pm-apologises-for-pacific-fruit-picker-comments-20190822-p52jnm>

13 <https://berniesanders.com/issues/the-green-new-deal/>

14 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/climate/bernie-sanders-climate-change.html>



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Andrew Yang released his plan<sup>15</sup> to address climate change. *USA Today* journalist Savannah Behrmann reported, "Calling the planet "a mess," 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang released a climate change plan on Monday. His plan comes amid growing national and international concern about wildfires burning in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil -- and after President Donald Trump skipped a session of the G-7 meeting focused on climate, saying that his first priority is to maintain America's wealth, not trade away that prosperity for climate initiatives that he described as amounting to "dreams and windmills." The new plan also comes as Yang's upstart White House campaign appears to be picking up steam. He has qualified for next month's Democratic primary debate and a poll out Monday had the entrepreneur at 3% in the party's 2020 field".<sup>16</sup>

As an example of a candidate leaving the race, on August 21 Washington Governor Jay Inslee earned media attention when he announced the end of his campaign for US President. Among the many news stories, *National Public Radio* journalist Amita Kelly reported, "Inslee made climate change a top issue as a candidate. He proposed a 10-year action plan to, according to his campaign website, "achieve 100% clean electricity, 100% zero-emission new vehicles and 100% zero-carbon new buildings".<sup>17</sup>

Further attention was paid in the political sphere to the ongoing resistance from the Democratic National Committee to host a climate change-centered Democratic primary debate. For example, *CBS News* reporters Aaron Navarro and Eleanor Watson noted, "Democrats and activists hoping to stage a presidential primary debate on climate change were dealt a significant blow on Thursday, when a party committee rejected a resolution that would have allowed candidates to participate. Washington State Democratic Chair Tina Powdowlaski authored the resolution,

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.yang2020.com/blog/climate-change/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2019/08/26/2020-democrats-andrew-yang-introduces-plan-tackle-climate-change/2126827001/>  
<sup>17</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/21/753294631/washington-gov-jay-inslee-withdraws-from-presidential-race>

"U.S. President Donald Trump skipped a discussion on climate with other world leaders at the Group of Seven summit in France — then claimed to "know more about the environment than anyone." Trump left an empty chair as global power brokers debated Monday how to help the fire-stricken Amazon and reduce carbon emissions. "I'm an environmentalist."



which called on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to let candidates appear on stage simultaneously in a debate focused on the issue. The proposal, presented to the party's resolution committee at the DNC's summer meeting in San Francisco, was defeated by a vote of 17 to 8".<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, *Fox News* journalist Greg Re focused on the reactions, reporting, "The Democratic National Committee's summer meeting in San Francisco erupted into a hail of protests on Thursday, as unruly environmentalist activists condemned the party's decision not to hold a presidential primary debate focused exclusively on climate change — a demand long sought by left-wing activists".<sup>19</sup>

And at the end of August, G7 leaders met in Biarritz, France and numerous media stories noted US President Donald Trump's absence at a climate change meeting. For example, journalist Kevin Liptak from *CNN* reported "President Donald Trump skipped a session devoted to climate change at the G7 summit here, a snub

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-debate-dnc-rejects-resolution-calling-for-2020-debate-focused-on-climate-crisis/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/protests-dnc-kibosh-on-climate-change-debate>



aides wrote off as a scheduling conflict but nonetheless reflects Trump's isolation on the issue. As other leaders were taking their seats around a large round table, the chair reserved for Trump sat empty. The summit's host, French President Emmanuel Macron, gavelled the meeting to order anyway and launched into an explanation of a wrist watch made from recycled plastic. Later, the White House said Trump's schedule prevented his attendance".<sup>20</sup> As another example, *Associated Press* journalists Sylvie Corbet and Darlene Superville wrote, "U.S. President Donald Trump skipped a discussion on climate with other world leaders at the Group of Seven summit in France – then claimed to "know more about the environment than anyone." Trump left an empty chair as global power brokers debated Monday how to help the fire-stricken Amazon and reduce carbon emissions. "I'm an environmentalist," Trump told reporters, even as he celebrated America's oil and gas wealth. Environmental activists declared the summit a failure, marching to demand tougher global emissions rules and more aid for the Amazon. Trump was scheduled to attend Monday's session on climate, biodiversity and oceans at the G-7 summit in Biarritz, but didn't. French President Emmanuel Macron, the summit host, shrugged off the absence, noting that Trump's aides were there instead. Trump is a climate change skeptic who once had claimed it's a hoax that was invented by the Chinese. His decision to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris climate accord has severely damaged global efforts to reduce emissions. Trump started the morning behind schedule, and held one-on-one meetings while others were in the climate discussions. However, his interlocutors, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, managed to make it to the climate meeting. Asked about attending the climate session, Trump said it would be his next stop and that he wants clean air and water. But he never showed up."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/26/politics/donald-trump-g7-climate-summit/index.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.apnews.com/d2b71b0bde44b45a8987d31ee031dfe>

In August, *cultural* dimensions of climate change and global warming were picked up by media stories. For example, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg's two-week journey across the Atlantic and arrival in New York City generated global news attention.

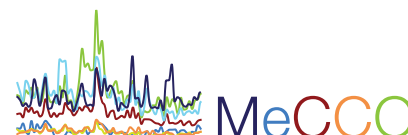


Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, 16, arrive in the U.S. after a 15-day journey crossing the Atlantic on a zero-carbon yacht. Photo: AFP/Getty.

In August, *cultural* dimensions of climate change and global warming were picked up by media stories. For example, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg's two-week journey across the Atlantic and arrival in New York City generated global news attention. For example, *National Public Radio* journalist Jeff Brady reported, "After a two-week journey sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg arrived in New York on Wednesday at a marina in Lower Manhattan. Thunberg stepped off the emission-free racing yacht that brought her and held a news conference a few minutes later, saying, "The ground is still shaking for me".<sup>22</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, *Guardian* journalist Oliver Millman wrote, "Unprecedented pressure exerted by young activists will push world leaders to address the unfolding climate crisis, even with a recalcitrant US under Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg has told the Guardian. Thunberg,

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/28/754818342/teen-climate-activist-greta-thunberg-arrives-in-new-york-after-sailing-the-atlan>





the teenager whose school climate strikes have ignited a global youth-led movement, said that her journey to New York on a solar-powered yacht was symbolic of the lengths young people will take to confront the climate crisis... Thunberg's vessel emerged from the mist of an unseasonably drizzly day to be met by a throng of supporters and media at a marina near the southern tip of Manhattan on Wednesday. Her arrival was heralded by a flotilla of 17 sailboats, charted by the UN, that intercepted her vessel near the Statue of Liberty".<sup>23</sup>

It was also the case that many news stories in August focused on *scientific* themes. Among them, a research product from the World Resources Institute examining countries around the world facing "extremely high" water stress earned media attention. Journalist Emily Holder from *The Guardian* wrote, "Worldwide, at the top of the list are Qatar, Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Iran. A total of 17 countries are facing "extremely high" risks and another 27 are facing "high" risks. Scientists have also linked the violence and civil war in Syria to a drought driven by rising temperatures and massive water withdrawals. In the African Sahel, a semi-arid region that stretches coast to coast across northern Africa below the Sahara, they have documented similar water stresses as millions have migrated out of the countryside. WRI's experts explained that water stress is different from drought. But places where people are using water at a faster rate than it is replaced could see serious problems if they hit a drought – or a prolonged period without enough rain".<sup>24</sup> Focusing on the US context, *Washington Post* journalists Bonnie Berkowitz and Adrian Blanco reported, "The United States has enough water to satisfy the demand, but newly released data from the World Resources Institute shows some areas are out of balance. The WRI's Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas researchers used hydrological models and more than 50 years of data to estimate the

typical water supply of 189 countries compared to their demand. The result was a scale of "water stress" – how close a country comes to draining its annual water stores in a typical year...he United States ranked 71st of 189 countries, and low-medium on the stress scale, meaning we are pulling out just under 20 percent of our available water".<sup>25</sup>

Also, an IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land<sup>26</sup> generated significant media attention. Stories ran on this report around the globe. As a few examples, *Los Angeles Times* journalists Julia Rosen and Anna M. Phillips wrote, "Slashing greenhouse gas emissions from cars and power plants won't be enough to avoid the worst effects of climate change. To meet the goals of the Paris climate accord, experts say, humanity also needs a new approach to managing the land beneath its feet. A sweeping new report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlights the myriad ways that rising temperatures have impacted agriculture, wildfire risk, soil health and biodiversity. The report also examines how land and its uses can exacerbate the effects of global warming – or help mitigate them".<sup>27</sup> Moreover, journalist Roger Harrabin from *BBC* reported, "A major report on land use and climate change says the West's high consumption of meat and dairy produce is fuelling global warming. But scientists and officials stopped short of explicitly calling on everyone to become vegan or vegetarian. They said that more people could be fed using less land if individuals cut down on eating meat".<sup>28</sup>

We in MeCCO are unyielding on our efforts to make available our monitoring and analyses of political, economic, scientific, cultural, ecological and meteorological stories as they unfold. Stayed tuned for more.

**- report prepared by Max Boykoff, Jennifer Katzung and Ami Nacu-Schmidt**

23 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/29/greta-thunberg-young-activists-push-leaders-climate-crisis>

24 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/aug/06/us-states-water-stress-new-mexico-california-arizona-colorado>

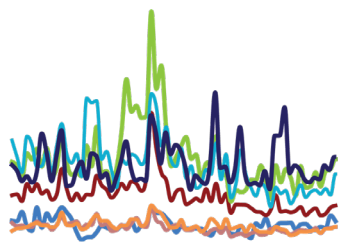
25 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2019/08/06/mapping-strain-our-water/>

26 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/srcc/>

27 <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2019-08-08/ipcc-land-use-global-warming>

28 <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49238749>





MeCCO

Media and Climate Change Observatory

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MeCCO monitors 96 sources (across newspapers, radio and TV) in 43 countries in seven different regions around the world. MeCCO assembles the data by accessing archives through the Lexis Nexis, 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://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media\\_coverage](http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/media_coverage)