

Climate sceptics more prominent in UK and US media

October 4 2012

Climate sceptics are being given a more prominent, and sometimes uncontested, voice in UK and US newspapers in contrast to other countries around the world, new research suggests.

The findings have been published today, 5 October, in IOP Publishing's journal *Environmental Research Letters*, as part of a study looking at how climate [scepticism](#) manifested itself in the print media of the US, UK, Brazil, China, India and France during a 3-month period which included 'Climategate' in 2009/10 and a second period which covered the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report in 2007.

In an audit of over 2,064 newspaper articles from the six countries during the first period, the authors, from the University of Oxford and University of London, found that around one in nine articles contained a sceptical voice.

In the US, 34 per cent of all [climate change](#) stories appearing in the [New York Times](#) and [Wall Street Journal](#) during this time had a sceptical voice. Of the 511 climate change articles appearing in the Guardian/Observer and the Daily/Sunday Telegraph during this time, 19 per cent contained a sceptical voice.

Chinese newspapers came next with seven per cent of stories containing sceptical voices. India and France followed with around six per cent each and Brazil was last with three per cent.

The researchers also examined whether there was any correspondence between the political leaning of a [newspaper](#) and its tendency to give a voice to climate sceptics. Excluding China – their right and left splits are not relevant – the researchers found that there were slightly more articles containing sceptical voices in the left-leaning newspapers than in the centrist or right-leaning newspapers.

This was surprising considering the strong association of climate scepticism with the political right, especially in the US, and previous studies showing that right-wing newspapers were more inclined to question [climate science](#).

On closer inspection of the figures, however, it was found that in the US and UK, a significant amount of the sceptical voices appeared in opinion pieces and that in the right-leaning newspapers these views were uncontested.

In the UK, the Guardian/Observer ran 14 opinion pieces containing sceptical voices during the two periods, all of which were countered or balanced by mainstream scientists. The Daily/Sunday Telegraph on the other hand ran 34 opinion pieces, more than half of which were not contested. The New York Times ran 14 opinion pieces that included sceptical voices, all of which were contested. In contrast, the Wall Street Journal ran 17 opinion pieces, all but one of which was left uncontested.

The researchers also chose to look at the type of climate sceptics that were being quoted in these stories. The types of sceptics who question whether global temperatures are warming at all appear almost exclusively in the UK and US newspapers. These two countries also give a very strong presence to the type of sceptic who challenges the need for robust action against climate change.

Even though 'Climategate' was a UK-based scandal, the researchers

picked a period which included this event to sample data as they believed the story was big enough to spark international reporting. A further 1,263 articles were analysed between 1 February and 30 April 2007 at the time when the [IPCC](#) released their Fourth Assessment Report as this was a period in which scepticism wasn't the central issue.

Lead author of the study, James Painter, said: "These results are significant because they do seem to support those who argue that climate scepticism is much stronger in 'Anglo-Saxon' countries, such as the USA, UK, Canada and Australia, as measured by its presence in the media.

"The data would also suggest a lot of the uncontested [climate](#) scepticism is found not so much in the news reports but in the opinion pages of right-leaning newspapers in the USA and the UK."

The newspapers chosen for analysis were Folha de São Paulo and Estado de São Paulo in Brazil, People's Daily and Beijing Evening News in China, Le Monde and Le Figaro in France, The Hindu and Times of India in India, the Guardian/Observer and the Daily/Sunday Telegraph in the UK, and the New York Times and Wall Street Journal in the USA.

From Friday 5 October, this paper can be downloaded from <http://iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/7/4/044005/article>

More information: 'Cross-national comparison of the presence of climate scepticism in the print media in six countries, 2007, James Painter and Teresa Ashe 2012 *Environ. Res. Lett.* 7 044005. iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/7/4/044005/article

Provided by Institute of Physics

Citation: Climate sceptics more prominent in UK and US media (2012, October 4) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-climate-sceptics-prominent-uk-media.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.