



A Storm of Silence

Media Coverage of Climate Change and Hurricane Harvey

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Only 43 percent of Americans report hearing about climate change in the media at least once a month.¹ Only 19 percent report hearing people they know talk about global warming once a month or more,² and 28 percent say they *never* hear people they know talk about it.³ In the words of Yale and George Mason University researchers, there is a “spiral of silence” on climate change in which “even people who care about the issue shy away from discussing it because they so infrequently hear other people talking about it—reinforcing the spiral.”⁴

One barrier to reducing this silence and mitigating climate change is that the U.S. media cover the issue far less than it merits. On our present path, climate change poses grave, potentially even existential threats to the U.S. as soon as the second half of this century.⁵ At the same time, it is possible to prevent the worst of the harm with fast, assertive action.⁶ Although the issue is sometimes described as remote, there are many relevant, newsworthy developments each week, and often many in a single day. These include the results of new studies, the setting of new climate-related records (temperature, precipitation, water, and ice levels), climate-related extreme weather events, innovations in renewable energy, as well as policy and political stories. Given the importance of the issue and the abundance of source material, one would expect major media to report on it multiple times each week, if not daily. For most media, that is plainly not the case.

This report examines media coverage of climate change in the context of a major event—Hurricane Harvey—starting on the day it first made landfall, Friday, August 25, 2017, and ending the following Friday, September 1, 2017. It considers eighteen sources: ten major newspapers, three weekly news magazines, and national programming from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News Network. The relevance of climate change to events like Hurricane Harvey is clear in multiple respects: (1) warmer ocean temperatures lead to stronger winds; (2) warmer air leads to more rain (and therefore flooding); and (3) higher sea levels worsen storm surges.⁷

This analysis first counts the number of articles that simply raise climate change in the context of Harvey. It then considers whether each piece generally accepts or denies the role climate change (or, if news reporting, gives a platform to deniers) and whether it covers any of seven aspects of the climate issue in the context of disasters like Harvey, for example by explaining the science or discussing possibilities for adaptation or mitigation. A single news item would rarely be expected to

¹ YALE PROG. ON CLIMATE CHANGE COMM. & GEORGE MASON CTR. FOR CLIMATE CHANGE COMM., CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE AMERICAN MIND 18 (May 2017).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.* This report uses “climate change” and “global warming” interchangeably.

⁴ Ed Maibach et al., *Is There a Climate “Spiral of Silence” in America?* 1 (2016), <http://pubc.it/2vK0q5r>.

⁵ See, e.g., JOE ROMM, CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW (2015); David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, NEW YORK, July 9, 2017, <http://pubc.it/2vKM1mh>.

⁶ For example, researchers agree that at a minimum we can reach nearly 100 percent renewable energy in just a few decades with existing technology, and some argue we can reach 100 percent. See, e.g., Joe Romm, *Dear Scientists: Stop Bickering About a 100% Renewable Power Grid and Start Making It Happen*, THINKPROGRESS, June 20, 2017, <http://pubc.it/2gRWcTQ>.

⁷ See, e.g., Climate Signals, *Hurricane Harvey, 2017*, <http://pubc.it/2wNP9z2>; Michael E. Mann, *It’s a Fact: Climate Change Made Hurricane Harvey More Deadly*, THE GUARDIAN, Aug. 28, 2017.

touch on all seven. More instructive is whether an outlet discussed all of them over the course of eight days' worth of Harvey coverage.

A few conclusions stand out:

- ABC and NBC did not mention climate change in the context of Harvey at all.⁸ Only one other news source, *The New York Post*, failed to clear that minimal hurdle.
- Climate coverage was highly concentrated among a handful of outlets. The top four outlets by volume of pieces that mention climate (*The Washington Post*, CNN, *The Houston Chronicle*, and *The New York Times*) produced 72 percent of pieces that mention it (98 pieces). The remaining 28 percent of coverage, 38 pieces, was scattered across 10 sources. That figure includes three pieces that deny any connection between climate change and Harvey, as well as two more that give voice to deniers or skeptics. (Again, three sources failed to mention climate change at all.)
- Only five outlets covered all seven aspects of the climate issue that this analysis considered: CNN, *The Houston Chronicle*, *The L.A. Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. *The Denver Post*, *Time*, and *USA Today* covered six of seven. *The Chicago Tribune* covered just two. Despite running five pieces that mentioned climate change, *The Wall Street Journal* covered only one aspect of the issue that this analysis considered.

Climate Change Discussion Concentrated Among Few Outlets

Across all eighteen sources, there were 136 mentions of climate in more than 2,000 thousand items that discussed Harvey.⁹ One expects only a fraction of Harvey coverage to mention climate change. At the same time, sound reporting should engage with the issue. As *Vox's* David Roberts writes, "Climate is not central, but by the same token it is grossly irresponsible to leave climate out of the story."¹⁰

For purposes of this analysis, the standard for a "mention" of climate change is minimal. The issue need only be mentioned in any way that appears somehow connected to a discussion of Harvey or its effects. Later, this report discusses whether stories address seven particular aspects of the climate issue in the context of Harvey. But more casual or superficial mentions are not to be

⁸ We also considered ABC or NBC mentioned climate change in the context of Harvey after the period covered in this report. As of this writing, they still had not mentioned it.

⁹ This analysis did not produce a precise count of Harvey pieces. Fifteen of the sources were researched using LexisNexis. Among those sources, 107 pieces mentioned climate change out of roughly 2,178 that discussed Hurricane Harvey. We did not examine the 2,178 results closely for false positives, although that figure reflects some filtering out of obvious ones. The four sources not included in LexisNexis (*The Houston Chronicle*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *US News & World Report*) were researched using Google. Search results from Google included such a high volume of false positives that it was not worth generating even a rough count of total Harvey stories. However, the total number from all eighteen sources is almost certainly over 2,000.

¹⁰ David Roberts, *Climate Change Did Not "Cause" Harvey, But It's a Huge Part of the Story*, *Vox*, Aug. 29, 2017.

Table 1: Outlets by Pieces Mentioning Climate

Outlet	Mentions
CNN	30
Washington Post	28
Houston Chronicle	22
New York Times	18
Los Angeles Times	6
Boston Globe	5
Wall Street Journal	5
Fox News Network	4
Chicago Tribune	3
Denver Post	3
USA Today	3
US News	3
CBS	2
Newsweek	2
Time	2
ABC	0
NBC	0
New York Post	0

discounted. They can still remind people of the issue’s existence, reinforce that it is real and problematic, and connect it to relevant other topics.¹¹

The outlet that produced the most pieces mentioning climate change was CNN (30), followed by *The Washington Post* (28), *The Houston Chronicle* (22), and *The New York Times* (18). Together, these four sources were responsible for 72 percent of the pieces that mentioned climate change. Table 1 lists all sources in order of volume.

Five pieces expressed denial that climate change contributes to events like Hurricane Harvey: three opinion pieces in *The Wall Street Journal* and two segments from Fox News Network. Additionally, those sources each featured one piece of reporting that gave voice to climate skeptics or deniers.¹²

Amidst generally sound coverage, CNN ran two segments in which interviewees disputed the connection to climate change without any challenge or follow-up. In one, John King asks Rep. Pete Olson (R-Tex.) whether Harvey signals that government officials “need to have a bigger conversation” about climate change or whether it is “just a fact of life.” Olson responds, “It’s a fact of life” and moves on.¹³ In another segment, John Berman asks whether climate change has something to do with the amount of rain or the intensity of Harvey. His interviewee, a

former director of the National Hurricane Center, says he “probably wouldn’t attribute” it to climate.¹⁴ All nine of these pieces—the seven from Fox News Network and *The Wall Street Journal*, and these two from CNN—are included in the total count of 136 climate mentions.

Although the judgment is somewhat subjective, a total of 95 pieces, or 70 percent, at a minimum give the correct impression that climate change affects events like Harvey (19) if not clearly link climate change to events like Harvey (46) or clearly link climate change to Harvey itself (30).

¹¹ Cf. Amy Harder, *Harvey and Climate Change: Why It Won’t Change Minds*, AXIOS, Sept. 5, 2017 (“[George Mason University Professor Ed] Maibach distinguishes between experiential learning and analytically learning. Seeing daffodils bloom early because of warmer temperatures is a type of experiential learning that is likely to have a lasting impact on a person’s mindset. He contrasts that with analytical learning that people do when a scientist talks on TV about how climate change probably made Harvey a little worse than it would have been otherwise. That’s less likely to leave an impact, Maibach says, because it takes more brainpower.”).

¹² See discussion below on pages 6–8.

¹³ CNN, *Inside Politics*, Aug. 28, 2017.

¹⁴ CNN, *CNN Newsroom*, Aug. 25, 2017 (BERMAN: Why there is so much water associated with this storm? One of the things we’ve heard from scientists over the last 10 years is that climate change does impact the intensity of many of the storm the that we see. READ: I’m not -- I probably wouldn’t attribute what we’re looking at here. This is not an uncommon occurrence to see storms grow and intensify rapidly in the western Gulf of Mexico. . . . The why for the big rain is the stationarity. The fact that the storm is going to come inland and not move. That’s, while it has happened in some cases, had a really big storm come and stall like this is really rare.).

ABC, NBC, and *The New York Post* did not mention climate change at all in their Harvey coverage. For the networks, this analysis includes morning shows, evening news, and Sunday shows. CBS, by contrast, had two mentions. In one, Dana Jacobson raised the issue on CBS *This Morning*.¹⁵ In another, Manuel Bojorquez prompted an interviewee to discuss climate change's relevance to Harvey for the CBS *Evening News*.¹⁶

A few other minor points are worth mentioning: For all sources, identical or highly similar pieces that appeared in multiple formats (for example both in print and online) were counted only once. The bulk of *The Washington Post's* climate mentions appeared solely in blogs (22). Just one was exclusively in print. Of CNN's mentions, 17 were solely on television and 10 solely on CNN.com. Fifteen of *The Houston Chronicle's* 22 mentions, or 68 percent, were reprinted or adapted from other sources. All three of *The Denver Post's* pieces originated from *The Washington Post*.

Denial from Expected Quarters, But Occasional Mixed Messages and Denial-type Rhetoric Elsewhere

Fox News Network. Fox News Network raised climate change quickly, on the evening Harvey first hit Texas, but for the purpose of criticizing CNN for discussing the issue. On *The Five*, Lisa Boothe introduces the subject by asking, "Who didn't see this coming? CNN didn't wait long to bring up climate change in Hurricane Harvey coverage." She then asks Juan Williams, "[W]hy is CNN using this crisis to drive a political narrative?" and the panel engages in a flurry of denial messaging.¹⁷

In two of Fox's four total segments that mention climate change, the network's commentators or newsmen treat it as an unseemly or inappropriate topic.¹⁸ In a third, the reporter intimates that other people or news outlets have raised the subject prematurely.¹⁹ In the one remaining Fox

¹⁵ CBS, *This Morning*, Aug. 26, 2017 (MICHIO KAKU (CBS science contributor): Just remember that the-- the Gulf of Mexico is two degrees warmer than normal . . . because of the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, this hurricane season . . . could be one of the worst in memory . . . JACOBSON: And that's the theory that climate change is impacting all of this.).

¹⁶ CBS, *Evening News*, Aug. 30, 2017 (BOJORQUEZ: Was this just a natural disaster? JIM BLACKBURN (guest): No. No, this was a climate-influenced storm. There's no question.).

¹⁷ Fox News Network, *The Five*, Aug. 25, 2017. Williams notes that it's "hard to politicize the weather," and claims it is "premature" to "know exactly why this is happening or attribute the intensity of the storm to climate change." Jesse Watters adds that "[s]torms have been happening since the beginning of time," and there were hurricanes "before the industrial revolution." She concludes, "These things just happen. It's called the weather." Kimberly Guilfoyle says, "The theory isn't really holding up to try to blame it on global warming and climate change. If they could, they would. The facts just don't warrant and substantiate it." Dana Perino adds that it's "not true" that climate change is causing more rainfall from Harvey.

¹⁸ Fox News Network, *The Five*, Aug. 25, 2017; Fox News Network, *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, Aug. 31, 2017 (JOE CONCHA: Obviously, it was an unbecoming question because there are still search and rescue going on.); *id.* (TUCKER CARLSON: You are saying that Science is complicated? You know what it is not complicated, moral preening. It is very simple. That is why they like it so much.).

¹⁹ Fox News Network, *Fox Special Report with Brett Baier*, Sept. 1, 2017 ("Up next, on some channels it started days ago—the inevitable debate about Hurricane Harvey and the role of climate change.").

segment, a guest briefly mentions that “climate change is real” and flood-prone areas need resources to be prepared. Others ignore the statement and move on.²⁰

The substance of the denial on Fox includes a mix of arguments. One commenter argues it is “premature” to “attribute the intensity of the storm to climate change,”²¹ while others make precisely that type of judgment and say it’s simply “not true” that climate change is causing more rainfall from Harvey;²² that the “facts just don’t warrant and substantiate” “blam[ing] Harvey on global warming”; or that “It’s called the weather.”²³

Notably, one Fox news segment presents multiple voices supportive of a connection between climate change and events like Harvey. It also includes Fox reporter James Rosen stating accurately, “The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officially lists extreme weather events as one of several phenomena occurring more frequently because of climate change.” The report ends by quoting the well-known climate skeptic Myron Ebell, but only for the notion that “global warming alarmists” are wrong to suggest spending “trillions of dollars to try and reduce greenhouse gas emissions” instead of “billions of dollars” to “upgrade infrastructure.”²⁴ Overall, this segment may leave viewers with the impression that climate change does in fact contribute to the severity of events like Hurricane Harvey.

The Wall Street Journal. Three of *The Wall Street Journal’s* five mentions of climate change are opinion pieces that deny the connection between global warming and events like Harvey. One criticizes a liberal commentator for “[t]urning away from empirical science” and then claims in the same paragraph that “bigger disasters are coming” not because of climate change, but because we have had “good fortune recently” and therefore “are due.”²⁵ Another piece, published the same day, compares the connection of climate change and Harvey by “progressives” to religious belief and says that the “link between global warming and recent hurricanes and extreme weather events” is “unsupportable based on research and evidence.”²⁶ Another flatly claims that Harvey has “nothing to do with climate change.”²⁷

Some of these pieces purport to rely on respected sources of climate science, but they mangle the facts. For example, one claims that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the latest U.S. National Climate Assessment (NCA) “indicate no long-term increases in the frequency or strength of hurricanes in the U.S.”²⁸ But the IPCC says “it is virtually certain” that “intense tropical

²⁰ Fox News Network, *The Fox News Specialists*, Aug. 28, 2017 (JAMILA BEY (guest): Climate change is real. We need to make sure that our policies absolutely recognize this and say how do we make sure that other areas that are prone to flooding get the resources that they need. How do we make sure that we are certainly supporting our government agencies that need to be doing this kind of work? Now is the time to get real.).

²¹ Fox News Network, *The Five*, Aug. 25, 2017; Fox News Network, *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, Aug. 31, 2017.

²² Fox News Network, *The Five*, Aug. 25, 2017.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Fox News Network, *Fox Special Report with Brett Baier*, Sept. 1, 2017.

²⁵ Roger Pielke Jr., *The Hurricane Lull Couldn’t Last*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 31, 2017.

²⁶ *Texas, Thou Hast Sinned; Progressives Blame Houston’s Success for the Hurricane Disaster*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 31, 2017.

²⁷ Holman W. Jenkins, Jr., *First Houston’s Resilience, Then Washington’s Boondoggle*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 29, 2017.

²⁸ Roger Pielke Jr., *The Hurricane Lull Couldn’t Last*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 31, 2017.

cyclone activity has increased in the North Atlantic since 1970.”²⁹ And the NCA says that “[t]he intensity, frequency, and duration of North Atlantic hurricanes, as well as the frequency of the strongest (Category 4 and 5) hurricanes, have all increased since the early 1980s.”³⁰ Apparently, the opinion writer does not believe that a 40- to 50-year trend qualifies as “long-term.”

The Wall Street Journal also mentioned climate change in two other pieces. One is a news article under the title, “Scientists Explain Why Harvey Was So Devastating.” It gives voice to Judith Curry, who has been criticized extensively by climate scientists,³¹ and relies on her claim, based solely on a ranking of storms by barometric pressure, that “[a]nyone blaming Harvey on global warming doesn’t have a leg to stand on.”³² To its credit, however, the article then relates climatologist Michael E. Mann’s explanation why climate change likely worsened Harvey’s rainfall and flooding; discusses information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on above-average ocean temperatures and their effect on storms; and quotes NASA scientist Dalia Kirschbaum agreeing that warmer air temperatures can lead to more extreme rainfall.³³

The remaining mention in *The Wall Street Journal* is only tangential. In a long, detailed article about the National Flood Insurance Program, the authors simply list climate change as one of multiple factors that a 2015 FEMA advisory committee report said would increase flood damages.³⁴

Confusing, mixed, and denier-type messages from other sources. *USA Today* sent mixed messages on climate change. Five days after Harvey first hit Texas, the paper ran a news article largely devoted to the notion that it was inappropriate to discuss climate change so soon. The same article also gave a misleading account of one aspect of climate science.³⁵

The piece’s first 170 words (38 percent of its content) give voice to skepticism whether it is even appropriate to discuss climate change. For example, it quotes a meteorologist who calls raising climate change “while floodwaters are continuing to rise” “opportunism,” implies that doing so reflects bad “personal values,” and implies that the people raising the issue do not favor “informed, reasonable, intellectual debate on climate change and extreme events.” Next, the piece explains that “there is no evidence that the number of tropical cyclones (tropical storms, hurricanes and typhoons) has increased in recent decades as the planet has warmed,” a fact that sounds as though climate models are mistaken. But the very study on which the article relies states that climate models predict a *decrease* in hurricane activity overall (despite an increase in intensity).³⁶ The piece then accurately notes some aspects of the climate science before concluding with a quote that implies Harvey was no more than “a natural occurrence.”³⁷

²⁹ IPCC, CLIMATE CHANGE 2014: SYNTHESIS REPORT 53 (2015).

³⁰ U.S. NATIONAL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS IN THE UNITED STATES, 20 (2014).

³¹ Judith Curry, SourceWatch, http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Judith_Curry.

³² Daniela Hernandez, *Scientists Explain Why Harvey Was So Devastating*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 30, 2017.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ Ruth Simon & Cameron McWhirter, *Harvey’s Test: Businesses Struggle With Flawed Insurance as Floods Multiply*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Aug. 29, 2017.

³⁵ See Doyle Rice, *Experts Postpone Arguing Climate Change*, USA TODAY, Aug. 30, 2017.

³⁶ NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE, ATTRIBUTION OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE 110 (2016).

³⁷ Doyle Rice, *Experts Postpone Arguing Climate Change*, USA TODAY, Aug. 30, 2017.

Second, *USA Today* ran a strong editorial supportive of connecting climate change to Harvey. But even that editorial begins by dignifying the notion that there is a serious debate over whether climate change influences events like Harvey and by suggesting it is arguably inappropriate to discuss climate change at all. It opens, “Even as floodwaters raged this week in Texas and Louisiana, so did the debate over the possible link between Hurricane Harvey and man-made climate change.” And it notes, “In some ways, the question is premature, even unseemly, while search and rescue efforts continue.”³⁸

The Chicago Tribune adapted an informative article from Bloomberg on climate science and edited it in a manner that rendered it confusing at best and misleading at worst. The Bloomberg piece makes clear that there are points of widespread agreement on climate change’s role in events like Harvey before it moves on to discuss a newer, developing area where there is disagreement—whether and how climate change might have contributed to Harvey’s stalling in place.³⁹ *The Chicago Tribune* edited the piece so that it focuses almost exclusively on the contested question, likely leaving readers with the overall impression that scientists disagree whether climate change has any effect on events like Harvey.⁴⁰

Uneven Breadth of Coverage

This analysis also considered the thoroughness of climate coverage by looking at whether, over the course of the period studied, each outlet covered seven aspects of climate change in the context of disasters like Hurricane Harvey. Namely, we examined whether pieces:

- clearly connected climate change to Hurricane Harvey (or to events like it);
- framed questions regarding the role of climate change as whether it contributes to or intensifies the damage from events like Harvey rather than whether it “causes” them;
- discussed relevant science accurately;⁴¹

Table 2: Aspects of Climate Issue Covered

Outlet	Aspects of Issue
CNN	7/7
Los Angeles Times	7/7
New York Times	7/7
Washington Post	7/7
Houston Chronicle	7/7
Denver Post	6/7
USA Today	6/7
Time	6/7
Boston Globe	5/7
US News	5/7
CBS	4/7
Fox News Network	4/7
Newsweek	4/7
Chicago Tribune	2/7
Wall Street Journal	1/7
ABC	0/7
NBC	0/7
New York Post	0/7

³⁸ *Did Climate Change intensify Harvey?*, USA TODAY, Aug. 31, 2017.

³⁹ Eric Roston, *Why Harvey Is Stuck Near Texas*, Bloomberg, Aug. 30, 2017, <http://pubc.it/2wNC6h5>.

⁴⁰ Eric Roston, *Scientists Find Harvey’s Idling a Sticky Issue*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Aug. 31, 2017. In a 731-word piece, one sentence reflects the settled science, in vague and colloquial language: “Climate change didn’t cause the hurricane, though today’s warmer water and more humid air provided it with rocket fuel, making it more intense.”

⁴¹ Regarding the science, we considered whether pieces mentioned that (1) warmer ocean temperatures lead to stronger winds; (2) warmer air leads to more rain (and therefore flooding); or (3) sea-level rise worsens storm surges. See *Climate Signals, Hurricane Harvey, 2017*, <http://pubc.it/2wNP9z2>; Michael E. Mann, *It’s a Fact: Climate Change Made Hurricane Harvey More Deadly*, THE GUARDIAN, Aug. 28, 2017.

- noted ways to adapt to climate change (for example with better disaster preparedness or zoning or building policies);
- noted ways to mitigate climate change (for example by reducing greenhouse gas pollution and switching to renewable sources of energy);
- noted specific relevant policies or actions that have been or could be taken at the local or state level; and
- noted specific relevant policies or actions that have been or could be taken at the federal level.

A single news report would rarely be expected to touch on all these points, as the range of subjects is too broad. For that reason, this analysis considers whether outlets addressed these aspects of the issue over eight days' worth of Harvey reporting. Also, because it was sometimes difficult to judge whether a piece touched on a given topic, we were generous in awarding credit.

Only five outlets addressed all seven aspects of the issue: CNN, *The Houston Chronicle*, *The L.A. Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. *The Denver Post*, *Time*, and *USA Today* hit six of seven. Notably, *The L.A. Times* achieved its broad coverage despite running only six pieces that mentioned climate. In fact, it touched on all seven aspects of the issue in a single editorial.⁴² *The Denver Post* and *USA Today* each covered six of seven in just three pieces.

Seventy-six pieces, or 56 percent of the 136 that mentioned climate change, clearly linked it to Harvey or events like Harvey. Another 19 (14 percent) at least gave the impression that climate change affects events like Harvey.

Eighty pieces discussed climate change's role properly by addressing whether it contributes to or intensifies events like Harvey rather than simply causes them. That figure represents 88 percent of stories that could be viewed as discussing climate's role as an intensifier or cause at all. Two pieces exclusively framed the question erroneously as whether climate change causes events like Harvey. Nine stories were mixed in their framing, and two were unclear. Forty-four did not touch on the question.

Of all the topics considered, mitigation was discussed the least. Only 16 of 136 pieces (12 percent) touched on the possibility of mitigating climate change by reducing greenhouse gas pollution or switching to renewable energy sources.

Finally, 27 pieces, or 20 percent, noted in some way that climate change is caused by human activity.

Table 3: Number of Pieces Covering Each Aspect of Climate Issue

Aspect of Issue	No. of Pieces
Connect	76
Contribute (Not Cause)	80
Science	45
Adapt	51
Mitigate	16
Local Policy	30
Federal Policy	38

⁴² *Harvey Should be a Warning to Trump That Climate Change Is a Global Threat*, L.A. TIMES, Aug. 30, 2017.

Conclusion

The problem of climate denial in the media has received a good deal of attention, as has the elevation of climate skeptics and deniers in a manner that gives the impression of real debate where the science is settled. Far less attention has been paid to the problem of silence—underreporting on climate change directly, failures to connect it to other relevant stories, and failures to cover it with the breadth and depth it merits.

This analysis considers climate coverage in the context of one instance of localized, catastrophic harm that global warming is making more severe and more common. It found that good coverage was highly concentrated among just a few outlets. Many failed to discuss the issue much or failed to cover important aspects of it. One major newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, covered only one of seven aspects of climate change that this analysis examined, giving an accurate account of some of the climate science in a news article that also featured spurious claims by a skeptic. Two of three major broadcast networks, ABC and NBC, did not mention climate change at all in the context of Hurricane Harvey.