

2021

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS NARRATIVE TRENDS



CONSPIRE
FOR GOOD



Commissioned by: The Solutions Project
Developed by: Conspire for Good



Conspire for Good is a strategy and communications collaborative committed to helping progressive organizations, entrepreneurs, and social ventures achieve their goals and scale their impact. Through research, strategic planning, and messaging and branding, we help clients build and refine the foundation they need to succeed.

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The Solutions Project is a national nonprofit organization that promotes climate justice through grantmaking and amplifying the stories of frontline community leaders in the media. The organization seeks to accelerate the transition to 100% renewable energy and equitable access to healthy air, water and land by supporting climate justice organizations, especially those led by women of color.

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A letter from Gloria Walton, CEO of The Solutions Project



When it comes to solving the climate crisis, solutions-oriented storytelling that centers people and equity is imperative. We are in a moment where the doom and gloom narrative is shared on media and social platforms to bring awareness, but this isn't cutting it. In a time where systemic injustices are exacerbated by a global pandemic, a racial reckoning, and the climate crisis, people are looking for stories of climate action and solutions. And many of these stories of hope and justice come from the intergenerational power-building work led by frontline communities.

Since 2018, we've been following media coverage to see where the gaps are when it comes to renewable energy stories and how the energy narrative reflects people and communities. We've also explored how funding gaps in climate philanthropy correlate with a lack in media coverage. In the last few years, we saw progress—our 2021 Climate Solutions Narrative Trends Report shows that there is momentum happening. Over the years, we've seen more journalists ensuring that renewable energy stories also center people, acknowledging that communities of color play a leading role in intersectional climate justice solutions. This year's report also examines coverage of food and water systems, issues that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, immigrant and People of Color communities, but still lack sufficient coverage.

We are seeing a new generation of solutions-focused reporters and outlets focusing on frontline communities, women's leadership, and grassroots organizations that are leading and creating lasting transformational change. There is also increased conversation around equity and justice, bringing awareness that the climate crisis is more than just the environment; it's a racial, economic, and social justice issue.

While we celebrate the active shift in the climate movement, more must and can be done. There are opportunities for journalists, aspiring journalists, content creators, and storytellers to amplify climate justice solutions and focus on grassroots movement leaders and their respective communities. We need to share their stories and celebrate successes that have been historically excluded from mainstream media to show the global community what's possible and radically reimagine what an equitable and sustainable future looks like—for all people and the places we call home.

GLORIA WALTON
CEO The Solutions Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Native Renewables
Photo credit: Maya Lilly

Introduction

Last year, families across the country and around the world were hoping for respite from 2020's COVID-19 outbreak, economic fallout, and sociopolitical breakdowns. In the context of so much turmoil, how we see and understand our lives and social order, what we believe to be possible—all are shaped in large part by our information diet: the news we read, and the channels we do or don't tune into. 2021 was difficult: in the United States, more people died of COVID in 2021 than in the previous year. Institutionalized economic, racial, and gender inequities were exacerbated by lockdowns and natural disasters. Our country was hit with floods, drought, extreme cold, extreme heat, superstorms, fires, and hurricanes. And 2021 started with a violent insurrection to contest the outcomes of a fair election while republican governors in many states moved to make it more difficult for people, especially people of color, to vote in the future.

In the face of this difficulty, sensationalist reporting remains the status quo, but a new generation of holistic and solutions-focused reporters, outlets, and programs are making a dent in the overall narrative. We found this to be true in reporting about climate change and our collective future: many stories elevated conversations around equity, justice, deep and lasting solutions, and the transformative leadership of frontline communities.

In 2021, we analyzed over 7,000 news and opinion articles and 3,900 top-engagement social media posts focused on climate solutions, where we found seeds of hope and inspiration among the obvious challenges of our time. Our analysis spanned three issue areas related to climate solutions:

Renewable energy: Articles covering renewable energy, emphasizing reporting on renewable energy viability, solutions, and implementation. We also looked for articles focused on leadership by frontline communities and how renewable energy can transform those most affected by climate change.

Water: Coverage of water systems, including access, safety, and efficiency in drinking water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure. We paid particular attention to how these issues relate to climate change and emphasized coverage of how water infrastructure and policy affect communities—especially communities of color.

Food systems: A broad view of the intersecting structures that affect agricultural sustainability and food production, including issues like soil health, land use, and uptake of regenerative agriculture strategies and practices. We also tracked food systems policies, including food access, food safety, and policies affecting farmers and agriculture workers.



Honor the Earth



Key Findings



Honor the Earth

OVERALL

- Coverage of climate solutions in 2021 reflected and reinforced a pervasive and **interrelated sense of social, environmental, and public health crises**.
- Coverage seems to accurately describe the origin of the many natural disasters that marked the year: of 1,431 instances of messaging about natural disasters, **65% linked the cause to climate change**.
- Across coverage of renewable energy, water, and food systems, when a person was referenced or quoted in an article, it's **more likely that person was a woman**. This suggests that media covering climate solutions is equitably reflecting women spokespeople.
- Across the issue areas covered in this report, **articles that mentioned communities of color were slightly more likely to focus on solutions** than articles that did not. In 1,418 articles that referenced communities of color, 50% focused on solutions; in 5,785 articles that did not mention communities of color, only 46% focused on solutions.
- Natural disasters, along with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, provided **opportunities for advocates and lawmakers to highlight needed policy and infrastructure changes**, especially because these crises disproportionately affect frontline communities, in particular, Black and Indigenous Americans.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

- Reporters covering renewable energy in 2021 set a **record for the number of articles that mention issues of equity and justice**: 30% of all articles in our sample. This rise in equity and justice messaging is attributable in part to the Movement for Black Lives' work to shift national narratives on race in 2020, and in part to the early 2021 commitments to environmental justice made by the Biden administration.
 - › Of the very highest-engagement posts on renewable energy, 9% referred to equity and justice. This is a limited data point, but it may suggest that traditional media is more explicitly addressing equity issues than social media.
- **67% of energy stories were positive or solutions-focused**, which is another record high. This momentum reflects years of movement work to build understanding that renewable energy solutions are **possible and within reach**.
- More than half the articles in our sample included messaging that positioned **government as a leader on climate solutions**. Additionally, the top-quoted women spokespeople across coverage almost exclusively represented government institutions, and the top-referenced institutions in energy coverage, and across verticals, were overwhelmingly government agencies.
- The year's many weather emergencies drove messaging, especially from government spokespeople, touting clean energy as **reliable** (298 messages) and **safe** (1016 messages).

WATER

- The coverage of water issues in climate solutions was **least likely to be positive or solutions-focused**. In more than 300 instances, an article's author or a quoted spokesperson highlighted the **lack of immediate solutions**. Many communities faced water access and flooding crises as a result of weather emergencies, which drove disaster coverage.
- PFA contamination, and the many bipartisan efforts to curb its effects, were key drivers of solutions-focused water in 2021. In 571 articles covering water contaminants, **79% contained messages attributing leadership in tackling PFAs to the government**, while **37% credited movement leaders**.
- Although movement leaders were the first to draw attention to water contamination issues in areas like Flint, during 2021, federal spokespeople drove further **coverage of the nation's "crumbling" water infrastructure** (767 messages) to gather support for the Build Back Better infrastructure plan.



FOOD SYSTEMS

- In our first year covering food systems, the proportion of coverage mentioning equity and justice—34.4%, nearly matched what was seen in energy coverage. This sets a strong baseline for food systems reporting. And based on trends we have observed over 5 years of tracking energy news, equity in **food systems coverage is likely to increase.**
- Of the 844 articles that positioned the government as the leader in food systems solutions, **27% also acknowledged the work of movements to push for policy change.**
- Where energy and water were covered extensively thanks to federal action in 2021, many advocates were disappointed that **food systems were deprioritized in the Build Back Better plan.** Other government-led actions met criticism from movement leaders for not addressing disproportionate impacts on frontline communities (259 messages).



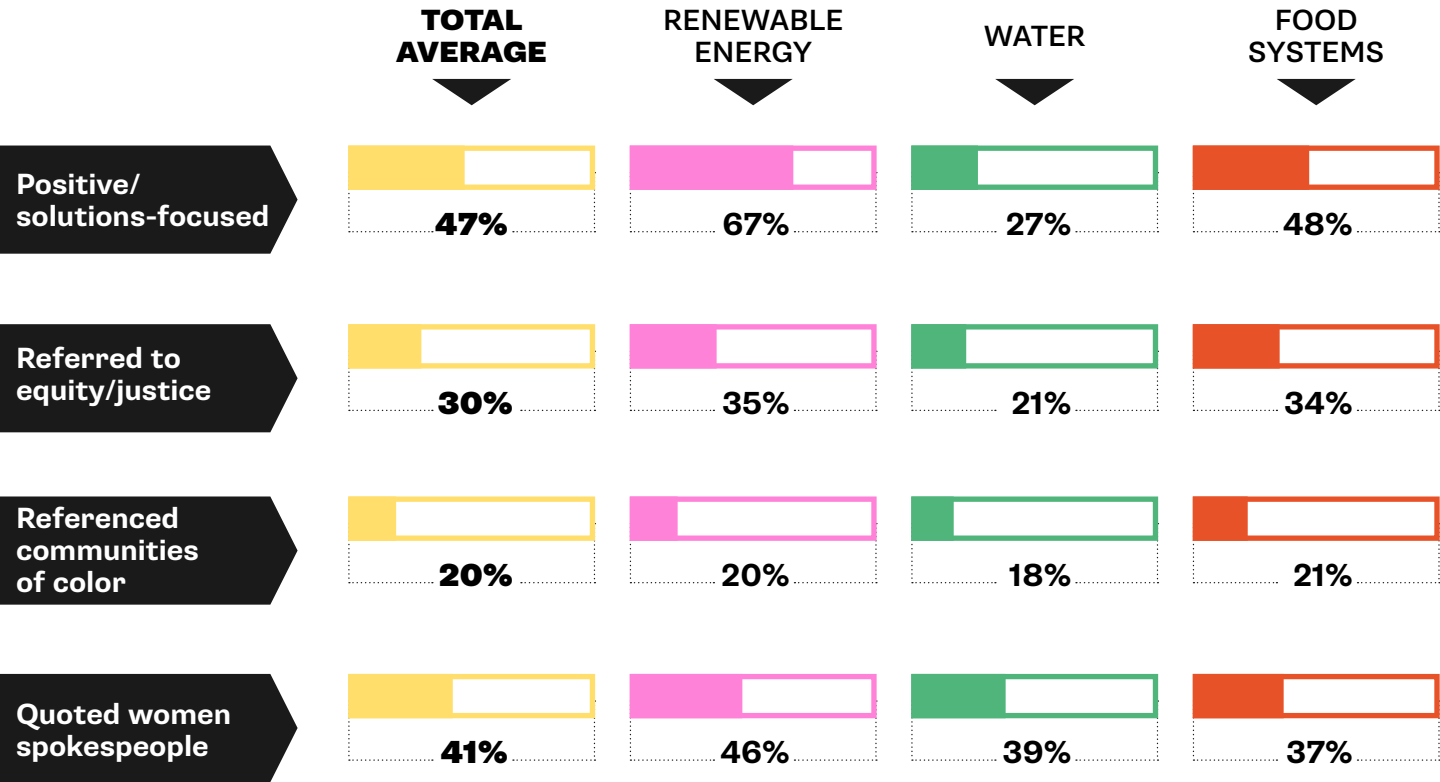


By the Numbers

TOTAL ARTICLES REVIEWED:

7,200 

(1,038 opinion or editorial)





Looking Ahead

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOURNALISTS

- **Highlight solutions, especially amid crisis.** Because of weather emergencies, 2021 was dominated by disaster coverage, especially in reporting on water and food systems. And we know this kind of extreme weather isn't going away. But as CNN's Rachel Ramirez put it, "the disaster is when the story begins." Rather than dwelling on the victimhood of those affected or the federal gridlock preventing sweeping reform, journalists have an opportunity to lift up the solutions, especially state and local action, being offered now.
- **Focus more on movement leaders, less on partisan fights.** The climate movement has seen a seismic shift from the Trump era, which was dominated by state and local initiatives, to the Biden era of more attention and opportunity for centralized, top-down policy changes. Still, as 2021 illustrated, partisan fighting can get in the way of sweeping reform. Against the backdrop of federal policy struggles, it's important to pay attention to policy successes in state and local governments—especially those championed by movement leaders. By telling the stories that aren't being told and by highlighting successes, journalists can help educate people about what's possible.



Black Votes Matter



KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVOCATES

- **Climate solutions in water and food systems need a vision and story as clear as the push for 100% renewable energy.** There is now a strong vision for the future of renewable energy, and its implementation has taken center stage during the past 5+ years. But the vision for advancing other key elements of climate solutions—related to water infrastructure, clean water, wastewater management, and food systems—is less accessible and cohesive. If advocates want to create a meme and movement around “climate solutions” as a whole, they will need to tell a better story overall and help educate about how these issues relate to each other and to solving the climate crisis.
- **Shift narratives in water and food systems toward solutions.** Research has established that coverage of crises has led to a bump in equitable coverage. But journalists still need advocates to support moving narratives beyond disproportionate impact toward empowerment and solutions. When pitching stories or serving as spokespeople, consider opportunities to share stories about what can be done—and what is being done—to change our systems and create sustainable solutions, especially solutions created by the most affected people, largely in communities of color.





COVERAGE TRENDS

Coverage trends measure what topics make the news and which media outlets are most likely to cover climate solutions topics, and of those, which tend to publish stories that use equity frameworks.

Additionally, this section explores coverage of organizations and of women—who is covered most, and how often?



RENEWABLE ENERGY

Who's covering renewable energy? How equitably?

Based on our sample, outlets with the highest number of renewable energy-focused articles and percentage of articles containing equity and justice-focused messaging.

► Top 3 by equity proportion

► Bottom 3 by equity proportion

NATIONAL MEDIA

Outlet	Renewable energy articles	Equity %
1. The New York Times	142	29.6%
2. Bloomberg	133	21.8%
3. Houston Chronicle	127	14.2%
4. AP The Associated Press	95	30.5%
5. The Boston Globe	68	44.1%
6. Business Insider	62	17.7%
7. Reuters	59	25.4%
8. Politico	51	29.4%
9. San Diego Union-Tribune	45	33.3%
10. The Chicago Tribune	45	31.1%



▶ Top 3 by equity proportion

▶ Bottom 3 by equity proportion

INDUSTRY & TRADE

Outlet	Renewable energy articles	Equity %
1. The Hill	153	41.3%
2. Grist	79	59.5%
2. CleanTechnica	79	41.8%
3. Utility DIVE	72	33.3%
4. EcoWatch	49	36.7%
5. GreenBiz	41	58.5%
5. Climatewire	41	46.3%
6. Greenwire	34	47.1%
7. Energy News Network	30	53.3%
8. Environment and Energy Daily	23	56.5%

Where is renewable energy covered?

STATES MENTIONED

Based on our sample of state and local renewable energy coverage, number of times each state was mentioned.

1. New York	196
2. California	162
2. Texas	162
3. Illinois	69
4. Massachusetts	68
5. Virginia	57
6. Florida	53
7. Washington	52
8. Minnesota	36
9. Ohio	32

STATE/REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED

Of state and local coverage in our sample, number of times an organization located in each state was mentioned.

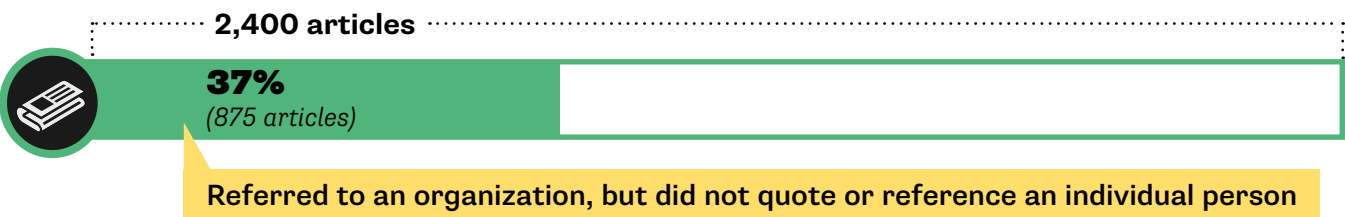
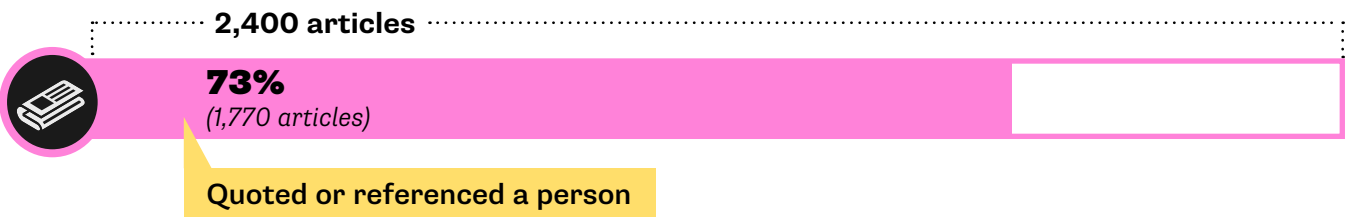
1. California organizations	587
2. New York organizations	232
3. D.C. organizations	210
4. Texas organizations	197
5. Michigan organizations	136
6. Massachusetts organizations	117
6. Colorado organizations	117
7. Washington organizations	115
8. Florida organizations	84
9. Virginia organizations	76



Who's speaking on renewable energy?

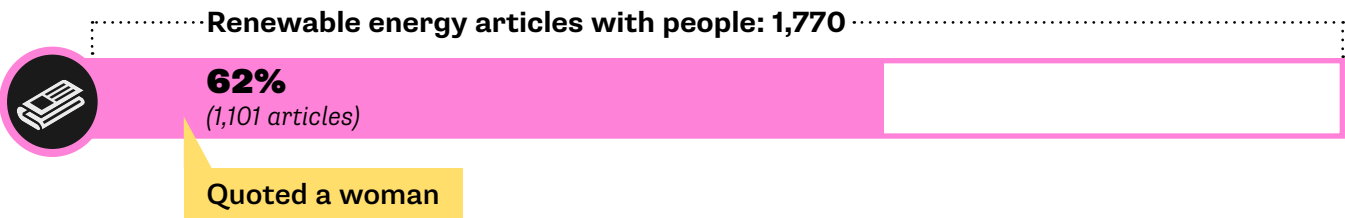
PEOPLE

Human-centered reporting is critical to honestly and equitably highlighting the effects of climate change and the solutions to tackle these intersecting problems. However, not all articles covering renewable energy quoted or referenced a person. 2021 data represents a slight decline in human centered reporting: in 2020, 1988 articles (83%) quoted or referenced a person.



WOMEN

For the second consecutive year, in articles that included a quote or reference from any person, women were more likely to be quoted than men.



Note: this analysis identifies 'women' as those with she/her pronouns in articles or otherwise evident online. In some cases, researchers made their best determination given the information available.

Most-referenced women by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each woman was mentioned or quoted in renewable energy coverage.

→ Out of 20 women, all but 4 are government affiliated. US Senators alone make up 40% of this list.

1.	Jennifer Granholm, Secretary of Energy	Government	76
2.	Gina McCarthy, White House Climate Advisor	Government	68
3.	Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior	Government	53
4.	Kyrsten Sinema, US Senator	Government	41
5.	Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House	Government	39
6.	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, US Representative	Government	36
7.	Kamala Harris, US Vice President	Government	26
8.	Lisa Murkowski, US Senator	Government	23
9.	Jen Psaki, White House Press Secretary	Government	20
10.	Shelley Moore Capito, US Senator	Government	19
11.	Mary Barra, CEO, General Motors	Industry	14
12.	Abigail Ross Hopper, President and CEO, Solar Energy Industries Association	Industry	13
12.	Tina Smith, US Senator	Government	13
12.	Greta Thunberg, Activist	Movement	13
12.	Janet Yellen, Federal Reserve Board Chair	Government	13
13.	Debbie Stabenow, US Senator	Government	12
13.	Susan Collins, US Senator	Government	12
13.	Elizabeth Warren, US Senator	Government	12
14.	Maria Cantwell, US Senator	Government	10
14.	Leah Stokes, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of California, Santa Barbara	Academia	10

Coverage of women by outlet

Based on our sample, outlets with the highest number of renewable energy articles that quoted or referenced a woman.

1.	The New York Times	87
2.	The Hill	67
3.	Houston Chronicle	58
4.	AP The Associated Press	57
5.	Bloomberg	56
6.	Grist	53
7.	Politico	41
8.	Utility DIVE	37
9.	CleanTechnica	27
10.	Reuters	26



Faith In The Valley



INSTITUTIONS

Most-referenced institutions by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each institution was mentioned or a spokesperson from that institution was quoted.

1.	US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Government	207
2.	US Department of Energy	Government	158
3.	Tesla	Industry	96
4.	General Motors	Industry	91
5.	Ford Motor Company	Industry	65
6.	United Nations (UN)	Government	61
7.	US Department of the Interior	Government	60
8.	US Energy Information Administration (EIA)	Government	56
9.	International Energy Agency	Government	55
10.	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)	Government	54
10.	Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)	Movement	54
11.	BP	Industry	52
12.	ExxonMobil	Industry	51
13.	Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)	Movement	49
14.	Amazon	Industry	48
15.	Sierra Club	Movement	44
16.	Royal Dutch Shell (Shell)	Industry	38
17.	Chevron	Industry	37
18.	American Petroleum Institute (API)	Industry	36
19.	Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA)	Industry	35



WATER

Who's covering water? How equitably?

Based on our sample, the outlets with highest number of water-focused articles and the number of water articles containing equity and justice-focused messaging.

► Top 3 by equity proportion
► Bottom 3 by equity proportion

NATIONAL MEDIA

Outlet	Water articles	Equity %
1. AP The Associated Press	103	31.1%
2. San Francisco Chronicle	98	9.2%
3. San Jose Mercury News	77	13.0%
4. The New York Times	74	18.9%
5. Houston Chronicle	62	12.9%
6. Arkansas Democrat Gazette	51	21.6%
7. Detroit Free Press	49	32.7%
8. Honolulu Star Advertiser	48	8.3%
9. San Diego Union-Tribune	45	13.3%
10. Arizona Republic	44	13.6%



► Top 3 by equity proportion

► Bottom 3 by equity proportion

INDUSTRY & TRADE

Outlet	Water articles	Equity %
1. Greenwire	246	22.0%
2. The Hill	160	20.6%
3. Grist	68	45.6%
4. Environment and Energy Daily	57	24.6%
5. EcoWatch	43	30.2%
6. E&E News PM	39	35.9%
7. Climatewire	38	5.3%
8. Treehugger	26	23.1%
9. GreenBiz	25	36.0%
10. Inside Cal/EPA	23	17.4%

Where is water covered?

STATES MENTIONED

Based on our sample of state and local water coverage, number of times each state was mentioned.

1. California	301
2. Texas	104
3. Florida	94
4. New York	81
5. Illinois	68
6. Arkansas	51
7. Michigan	49
8. Hawai'i	48
9. Arizona	46
10. Virginia	45

STATE/REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED

Of state and local coverage in our sample, number of times an organization located in each state was mentioned.

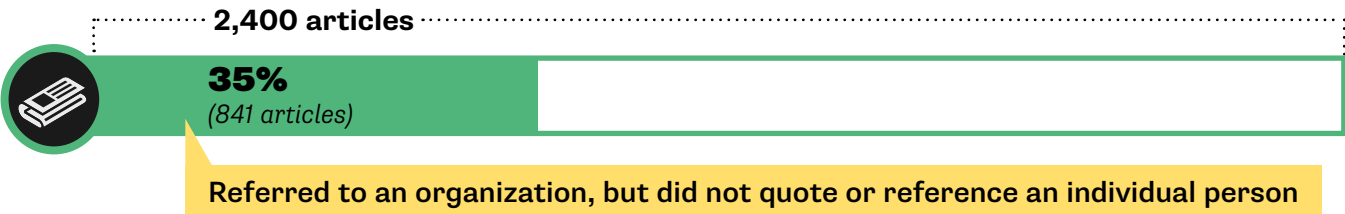
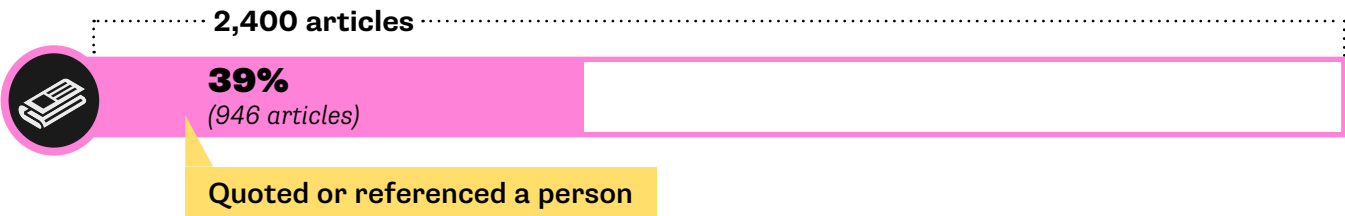
1. California organizations	579
2. Texas organizations	173
3. Florida organizations	136
4. Michigan organizations	96
5. Arizona organizations	85
6. Minnesota organizations	80
7. Colorado organizations	76
8. New York organizations	68
9. Regional organizations	66
10. Arkansas organizations	56



Who's speaking on water?

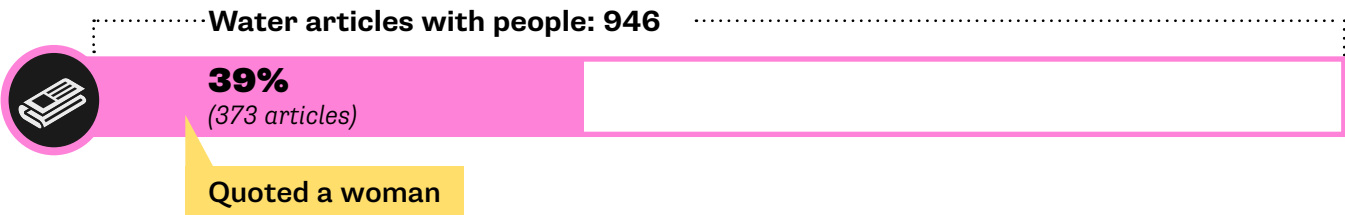
PEOPLE

Human-centered reporting is critical to honestly and equitably highlighting the effects of climate change and the solutions to tackle these intersecting problems. However, not all articles covering water quoted or referenced a person.



WOMEN

For the second consecutive year, in articles that included a quote or reference from any person, women were more likely to be quoted than men.



Note: this analysis identifies 'women' as those with she/her pronouns in articles or otherwise evident online. In some cases, researchers made their best determination given the information available.



Most-referenced women by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each woman was mentioned or quoted in water coverage.

→ Every top-referenced woman is government-affiliated. Movement leader Winona LaDuke was quoted six times, which would rank her in a 6-way tie for rank #10.

1.	Radhika Fox, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Government	28
2.	Shelley Moore Capito, US Senator	Government	26
3.	Gretchen Whitmer, Governor, Michigan	Government	25
4.	Karla Nemeth, Director, California Department of Water Resources	Government	16
5.	Debbie Dingell, US Representative	Government	13
5.	Jen Psaki, White House Press Secretary	Government	13
6.	Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior	Government	12
6.	Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House	Government	12
6.	Kyrsten Sinema, US Senator	Government	12
7.	LaToya Cantrell, Mayor, New Orleans	Government	10
7.	Kathy Hochul, Governor, New York	Government	10
8.	Lori Lightfoot, Mayor, Chicago	Government	9
9.	Kate Brown, Governor, Oregon	Government	8
9.	Kamala Harris, US Vice President	Government	8
9.	Toni Atkins, President Pro Tempore, CA State Senate	Government	8
9.	Tammy Duckworth, US Senator	Government	8
9.	Betsy Southerland, Former EPA Administrator	Government	8
10.	Jeanne Shaheen, US Senator	Government	7
10.	Lisa Murkowski, US Senator	Government	7
10.	Dianne Feinstein, US Senator	Government	7



Coverage of women by outlet

Based on our sample, the outlets with highest number of water articles that quoted or referenced a woman.

1.	Greenwire	112
2.	The Hill	55
3.	AP The Associated Press	50
4.	Grist	39
5.	Environment and Energy Daily	39
6.	San Francisco Chronicle	35
7.	The New York Times	31
8.	Detroit Free Press	30
9.	E&E News PM	21
10.	San Jose Mercury News	20



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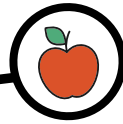


INSTITUTIONS

Most-referenced institutions by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each institution was mentioned or a spokesperson from that institution was quoted.

1.	US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Government	264
2.	US Army Corps of Engineers	Government	109
3.	National Weather Service (NWS)	Government	74
4.	Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	Government	70
5.	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)	Government	63
6.	US Bureau of Reclamation	Government	60
7.	US Drought Monitor	Government (partnership)	51
8.	Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)	Movement	45
9.	California State Water Resources Control Board (WRCB)	Government	40
10.	California Department of Water Resources	Government	35
11.	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	Government	32
12.	US Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Government	30
12.	US Department of the Interior	Government	30
13.	US Geological Survey	Government	28
13.	Environmental Working Group (EWG)	Movement	28
14.	Sierra Club	Movement	26
15.	Earthjustice	Movement	24
16.	US Department of Defense (DOD)	Government	21
17.	American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)	Industry	20
17.	National Hurricane Center (NHC)	Government	20



FOOD SYSTEMS

Who's covering food systems? How equitably?

Based on our sample, the outlets with highest number of food system-focused articles and the percentage of articles containing equity and justice-focused messaging.

► Top 3 by equity proportion
► Bottom 3 by equity proportion

NATIONAL MEDIA

Outlet	Food systems articles	Equity %
1. Arkansas Democrat Gazette	121	19.8%
2. Bloomberg	111	18.0%
3. The New York Times	100	32.0%
4. AP The Associated Press	81	32.1%
5. Houston Chronicle	72	43.1%
6. San Francisco Chronicle	66	18.2%
7. CBS News	54	42.6%
8. NBC News	51	56.9%
9. Minnesota Star Tribune	47	27.7%
10. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	45	23.0%

Note: the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette may seem an unlikely leader in food systems coverage, but its primacy is due in part to Arkansas Dewayne Goldmon, who was named senior adviser for racial equity to the Secretary of Agriculture in March.



► Top 3 by equity proportion

► Bottom 3 by equity proportion

INDUSTRY & TRADE

Outlet	Food systems articles	Equity %
1. The Hill	148	41.9%
2. GreenBiz	106	20.8%
3. Greenwire	90	21.1%
4. EcoWatch	61	26.2%
5. Grist	39	38.5%
6. Climatewire	39	7.7%
7. Treehugger	35	17.1%
8. Environment and Energy Daily	34	35.3%
9. E&E News PM	17	35.3%
10. Inside Cal/EPA	14	35.7%

Where are food systems covered?

STATES MENTIONED

Based on our sample of state and local food systems coverage, number of times each state was mentioned.

1. California	169
2. Arkansas	121
3. Texas	114
4. New York	110
5. Florida	100
6. Minnesota	59
7. Ohio	54
8. Wisconsin	49
9. Illinois	47
10. Virginia	40

STATE/REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED

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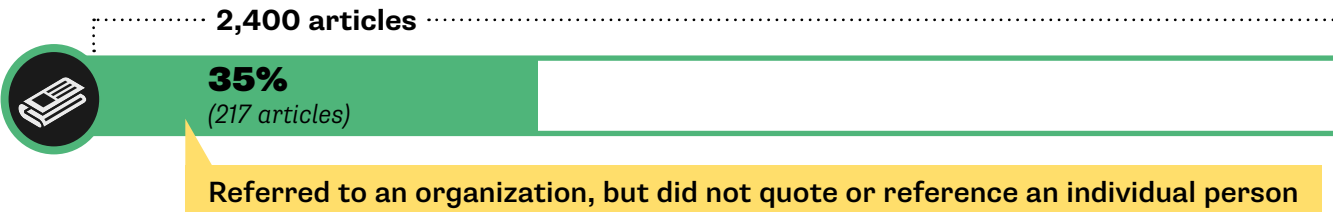
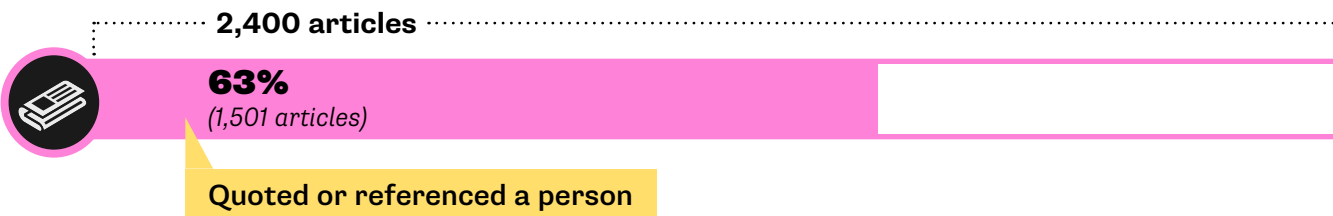
1. California organizations	472
2. Florida organizations	138
3. Minnesota organizations	123
4. New York organizations	121
5. Texas organizations	117
6. Washington organizations	115
7. Colorado organizations	114
8. Arkansas organizations	111
9. Illinois organizations	87
10. Ohio organizations	86



Who's speaking on food systems?

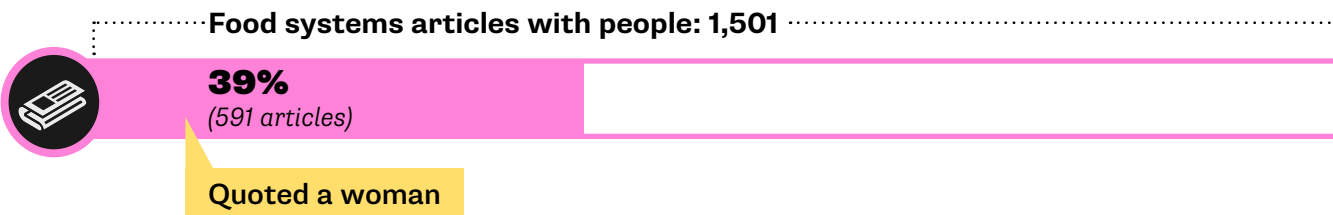
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Note: this analysis identifies 'women' as those with she/her pronouns in articles or otherwise evident online. In some cases, researchers made their best determination given the information available.



Most-referenced women by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each woman was mentioned or quoted in food systems coverage.

→ Of the top 20 women referenced, food systems is the vertical with the highest proportion of non-government spokespeople: 30%.

1.	Nikki Fried, Florida Agriculture Commissioner	Government	26
2.	Debbie Stabenow, US Senator	Government	24
3.	Stacy Dean, Deputy Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services	Government	13
4.	Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior	Government	12
4.	Karen Ross, California Agriculture Secretary	Government	12
5.	Abigail Spanberger, US Representative	Government	10
6.	Elizabeth Warren, US Senator	Government	7
6.	Jewel Bronaugh, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	Government	7
6.	Julie Anna Potts, President and CEO, North American Meat Institute (NAMI)	Industry	7
7.	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, US Representative	Government	6
7.	Amy Klobuchar, US Senator	Government	6
7.	Kamala Harris, Us Vice President	Government	6
7.	Joni Ernst, Us Senator	Government	6
7.	Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Economist, Northwestern University	Academia	6
7.	Elaine Waxman, Senior Fellow, Urban Institute	Senior Fellow	6
8.	Lauren Boebert, US Representative	Government	5
8.	Patty Murray, US Senator	Government	5
8.	Tracy Lloyd McCurty, Executive Director, Black Belt Justice Center	Movement	5
8.	Elizabeth Strater, Director, United Farm Workers (UFW)	Movement	5
8.	Sherrie Tussler, Executive Director, Hunger Task Force	Movement	5



Coverage of women by outlet

Based on our sample, the outlets with highest number of water articles that quoted or referenced a woman.

1.	AP The Associated Press	42
2.	The New York Times	39
3.	The Hill	37
4.	Greenwire	37
5.	GreenBiz	33
6.	Environment and Energy Daily	28
7.	San Francisco Chronicle	27
8.	Tampa Bay Times	24
8.	NBC News	24
9.	Houston Chronicle	23





INSTITUTIONS

Most-referenced institutions by sector

Based on our sample, the number of times each institution was mentioned or a spokesperson from that institution was quoted.

1.	US Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Government	530
2.	US Department of Agriculture	Government	193
3.	US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Government	110
4.	Tyson Foods	Industry	50
5.	US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	Government	44
6.	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	Government	41
7.	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	Government	40
8.	Cargill	Industry	36
9.	American Farm Bureau Federation	Industry	35
10.	US Forest Service	Government	32
11.	Feeding America	Movement	30
12.	Walmart	Industry	28
13.	California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)	Government	27
13.	JBS USA	Industry	27
14.	General Mills	Industry	26
14.	United Nations (UN)	Government	26
14.	US Department of Justice	Government	26
14.	Environmental Working Group (EWG)	Movement	26

An aerial photograph of a blue tractor working in a field with distinct rows of crops. The tractor is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a large, tilted green rectangle containing the text 'NARRATIVE TRENDS' in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters.

NARRATIVE TRENDS

Narrative trends measure the overall tone of the conversation and the performance of specific messages.

They also offer nuance—which is why you might see certain aspects of the same story in more than one narrative. For example, an article may mention a community of color but fail to use an equity lens, or vice versa.

Or an article may quote a woman spokesperson who is not positive or solutions-focused.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

Messaging by the Numbers

TOTAL ARTICLES REVIEWED:

2,400

20%

REFERENCED
COMMUNITIES
OF COLOR
473 articles

35%

REFERRED
TO EQUITY
& JUSTICE
833 articles

46%

QUOTED A WOMAN
SPOKESPERSON
OR LAWMAKER
1,101 articles

67%

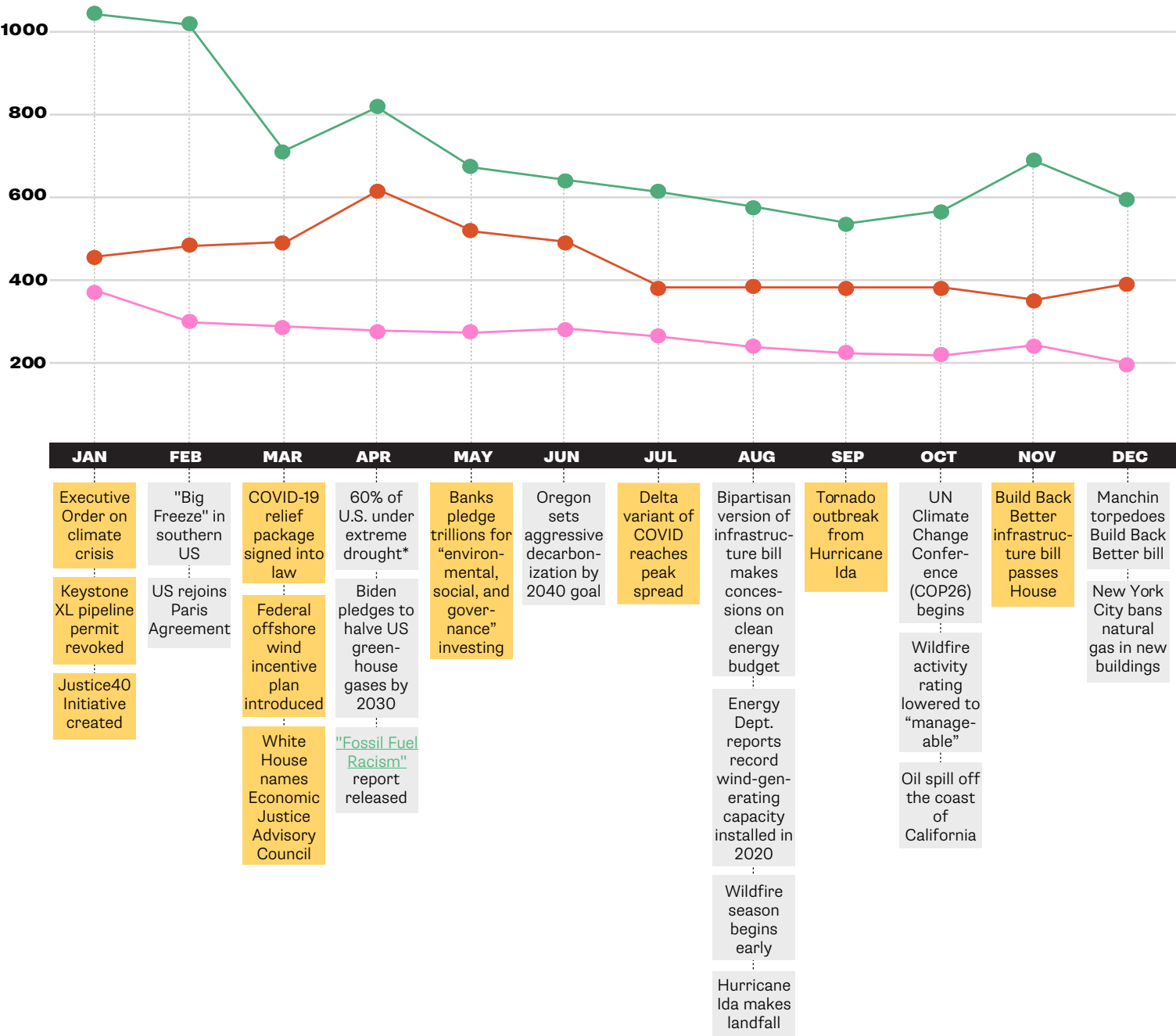
POSITIVE/
SOLUTIONS-
FOCUSED
1,599 articles



Groundswell



Key Headlines



*Extreme drought continues through September



Narrative Alignment

We have broken down the larger renewable energy narrative into three major sub-narratives:



POSITIVE

The positive narrative is shaped by stories and messages that endorse one or more aspects of the renewable energy movement's vision for the future: *100% is possible, 100% is happening, 100% is equitable.*

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Renewable energy growth is led by government policy.
- ✓ Renewable energy is growing.
- ✓ Renewable energy improves safety.
- ✓ Renewable energy is popular.
- ✓ Renewable energy promotes equity and justice.
- ✓ Renewable energy is healthy.
- ✓ Renewable energy change is led by communities/ movements.
- ✓ Renewable energy is affordable for consumers.
- ✓ Renewable energy is resilient and reliable.
- ✓ Carbon sequestration and carbon market are positive climate solutions.
- ✓ Renewable energy could provide a just transition from fossil fuels.
- ✓ Renewable energy projects are good for their immediate environments.
- ✓ We need more equitable energy policies.
- ✓ Renewable energy has bipartisan support.
- ✓ Renewable energy is cheap to produce.
- ✓ Energy policy should consider Indigenous Americans.
- ✓ The Green New Deal is good.
- ✓ Carbon sequestration is growing.
- ✓ Clean water and air are human rights.





Increasing federal investment spurs renewable energy growth

→ **Messages:** *Renewable energy is growing; led by government*

In 2020, according to a US Department of Energy [report](#), the US installed “a record amount of wind-generating capacity.” 2021 just might break that record, and growth messaging dominated coverage accordingly. Strong federal backing for infrastructure projects like new offshore [wind](#), electric vehicle charging stations, and job-producing projects in [solar](#), ensured renewable energy growth was consistently the #1 or #2 message in every month of 2021—approximately three in every five articles contained some reference to renewable energy expansion. Even in media markets like Texas, once an anomaly in the positive narrative, renewable energy is growing at a rate of 12,000% during the past 9 years, [according](#) to Environment Texas’s Lennis Barlow. And as *Clean Technica* [reported](#), 86% of new power capacity added in January–October was wind or solar, suggesting this coverage trend will continue into 2022.

Even as federal sources pushed pro-renewable energy messaging, pro-Green New Deal messaging waned significantly from 2020 (70 messages, which is down from 142), replaced with infrastructure-focused rhetoric in support of Build Back Better initiatives. One of the key reasons for this shift is likely the strong partisan reaction to the Green New Deal. As Republican Senator Tom Cotton [indicated](#) in a March interview, “any infrastructure bill pursued by Democrats would be a wish-list of progressive priorities, including programs related to the Green New Deal.”

Equity coverage continues historic rise

→ **Messages:** *Renewable energy promotes equity and justice; needs more equitable energy policies; led by government; led by movements*

In 2021, 20% of articles sampled mentioned communities of color, and 35% referenced equity and justice. This is a significant increase of coverage over 2020’s 13% and 21%, respectively, and a staggering increase from 2017, when these messages appeared in less than 5% of articles. Increasingly, equity and justice are lenses through which renewable energy stories are being reported.

With messaging around government-led solutions dominating the positive narrative (1,625 messages), one of the key reasons for the rise in equity reporting is federal adoption of environmental justice rhetoric and policy frameworks. This shift is due largely to the decades-long work of movements and advocates. The first section of Biden’s day-one Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities [reads](#) “our country faces converging economic, health, and climate crises that have exposed and exacerbated inequities, while a historic movement for justice has highlighted the unbearable human costs of systemic racism.”



During the past year, we noted 573 messages indicating renewable energy change is led by movements—this messaging was at its peak in January, coinciding with the executive order, and spiked again in April, amid Earth Day [features](#) and [pushback](#) against the Byhalia Connection pipeline. This is down slightly from 2020's 643 messages attributing change to movements and communities.

Federal equity messaging continued over the year, spiking when the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council [announced](#) its recommendations for the Justice40 Initiative, and [aggressive](#) environmental justice messaging by Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg at October's VERGE 21 event. Overall, equity messaging declined slightly over the year, perhaps due to more limited follow-through in this battery of federal environmental justice initiatives.

Year of natural disasters sparks safety and resilience messaging

→ **Messages:** *Renewable energy improves safety; is resilient and reliable*

During each season of 2021, some natural disaster or weather phenomenon made headlines: the “Big Freeze” in the southeastern US, “megadrought” and wildfires in the west, and the system of storms that included Hurricane Ida. With each, advocates and government spokespeople alike reinforced the need to transition to clean energy both for its reliability (298 messages) and as a safety and security measure (1,016 messages).

Even the *Houston Chronicle* editorial board [wrote](#) in September, “We must invest and prepare, from the federal infrastructure bill down to the city budget, for a new normal of frequent, extreme and overlapping disasters.”

Social listening insight

Social listening data also found that, of the top-engagement posts on renewable energy, 9% referred to equity and justice, suggesting that traditional media may be covering equity more effectively than social media.

California positions as vanguard of climate policy

As we settle into an era of stronger federal leadership on climate policy, state-level coverage remains dominated by California—with more than 500 mentions of California-based organizations and institutions and 162 energy-focused articles from California media outlets, 38% of which contained equity messaging. This continues a trend the state set during a time of weak federal leadership on renewable energy.

**NEUTRAL**

The neutral narrative contains messages that may support an aspect of the positive narrative but detract or could detract from another, e.g. corporate renewable energy commitments prove 100% is possible and happening, but may ignore or undermine equity.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Renewable energy is led by business.
- ✓ Renewable energy is a sound business investment/creates jobs.
- ✓ Renewable energy solutions are partisan.
- ✓ Nuclear energy is renewable/beneficial/good.
- ✓ Nuclear energy is not renewable/bad/dangerous.
- ✓ Climate change is creating environmental crises.
- ✓ Natural disasters are creating energy crises.

Bitter, partisan infrastructure bill fight tinges renewable coverage

→ **Message:** *Renewable energy solutions are partisan*

Last year began with a bold announcement of renewable energy measures in Biden’s infrastructure plan, but just as quickly, republicans pushed back, citing concerns with jobs and reliability. Reuters, in February, [called](#) the debate hyper-partisan,” and partisan messaging indeed peaked in Q1.

As negotiations continued into Q3, movement leaders expressed [disappointment](#) with the [major concessions](#) made by democrats in reaching a bipartisan version of the infrastructure bill—which *The New York Times* [called](#) “a substantial investment that falls short of the administration’s goals.” Further, movement leaders argued that the remaining policy approaches were short-sighted when it comes to equity and justice: Lew Daly and Elizabeth Yeampierre wrote in Grist, “A clean energy standard is a market-oriented policy in an economy that pervasively and persistently violates the human rights and needs of people of color.”



Come Q4, the fate of the infrastructure bill came down to Senator Joe Manchin, who drew, alone, 38 articles of coverage for torpedoing the bill, against the [urging](#) of such groups as the United Mine Workers of America. Gizmodo [summed up](#) the conclusion to this year of tangled, partisan energy talks: “outside Congressional Republicans and dirty energy CEOs, basically everyone is mad at Sen. Joe Manchin for announcing he was a ‘no’ on the Build Back Better Act.”

Natural disasters spark crisis coverage

→ **Messages:** *Natural disasters create crises; renewable energy is unreliable*

As mentioned above, 2021 saw a confluence of natural disasters or weather events that dominated coverage—out of the 1,431 total messages about natural disasters causing energy crises, 65% specified that those natural disasters were climate change-related. However, while this coverage focused on the crises themselves, most at least mentioned possible solutions that might mitigate their recurrence or build national preparedness: out of the 1,598 articles covering natural disasters, 65% contained positive or solutions-focused messaging.

Electric vehicle (EV) demand pushes renewable energy adoption

→ **Messages:** *Renewable Energy is led by business; good for the economy; creates jobs*

Over the year, EV demand soared, bolstered by friendly federal policies, such as the Biden administration’s goal for [50,000 charging stations by 2030](#). To meet this demand, auto manufacturers have [planned](#) new facilities and hired more workers, bolstering messaging around renewable energy’s job-creation potential (678 messages).



Dream Defenders



COMPETING

Competing message trends either oppose the positive, solutions-focused narrative or actively compete for attention and therefore dilute the positive and neutral narratives.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Renewable energy is unpopular.
- ✓ Renewable energy is expensive.
- ✓ Renewable energy is not growing.
- ✓ Carbon pricing is good.
- ✓ Renewable energy is unreliable or unstable.
- ✓ Renewable energy takes away jobs.
- ✓ Renewable energy is bad for the immediate environment .
- ✓ The Green New Deal is bad.
- ✓ Renewable energy causes economic stagnation.
- ✓ Renewable energy should compete in the free market.
- ✓ Renewable energy is unhealthy.
- ✓ Biofuels are a type of renewable energy.

Partisan opposition to Build Back Better

→ **Messages:** *Renewable energy is unpopular; expensive; takes away jobs; should compete in the free market*

In contrast to 2020 coverage, messaging making up the negative narrative outstripped the neutral narrative, which is attributable to partisan messaging around renewable energy viability, brought forth by infrastructure bill negotiations and weather emergencies. As touched on above, partisan opposition to climate and energy elements of the Build Back Better plan led to a related spike in negative messaging, especially from republican operatives who insist renewable energy is too expensive (527 messages) or a job-killer (185).



In the wake of the "Big Freeze," and spurred by the drawn-out partisan fight over infrastructure investment, republicans suggested renewable energy was to blame for many Texans being left without power. This same negative messaging about renewable energy reliability only grew during the year (228 total messages).

Objections to new projects: pro-wildlife or pro-fossil fuel?

→ **Messages:** *Renewable energy is bad for the immediate environment; unhealthy*

In 2021, the media covered several renewable energy projects that were blocked by local residents. Some objections were raised over aesthetics or quality of life issues, while others expressed concerns about local wildlife, like [whales](#) or [birds](#). However, as [Grist reported](#), these concerns may not be entirely above-board: the American Bird Conservancy “quietly accepted at least \$1 million from fossil fuel interests and welcomed board members tied to dirty energy companies.”



New York Renews



WATER

Messaging by the Numbers

TOTAL ARTICLES REVIEWED:

2,400

18%

REFERENCED
COMMUNITIES
OF COLOR
432 articles

21%

REFERRED
TO EQUITY
& JUSTICE
508 articles

27%

POSITIVE/
SOLUTIONS-
FOCUSED
652 articles

39%

QUOTED A WOMAN
SPOKESPERSON
OR LAWMAKER
946 articles





Key Headlines



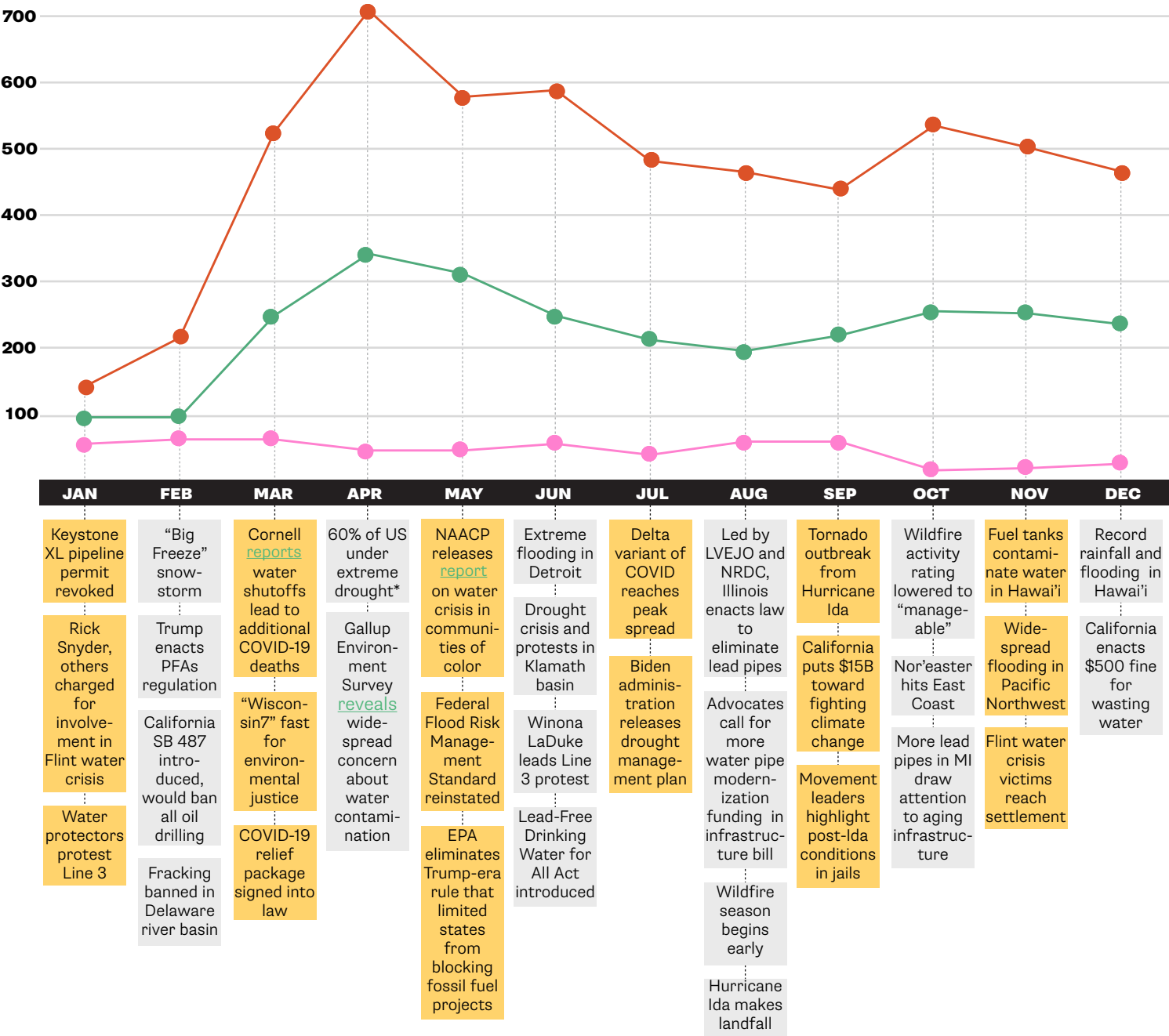
POSITIVE



NEUTRAL



COMPETING



*Extreme drought continues through September



Narrative Alignment

We have broken down the larger water narrative into three major sub-narratives:



POSITIVE

The positive narrative is shaped by stories and messages that focus on positive change for our water systems that's happening now: active projects, campaigns, and policy initiatives.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Water solutions are led by the government.
- ✓ Strong water systems improve safety and resilience.
- ✓ Policymakers, businesses, and advocates should focus on universal access to clean water.
- ✓ Water solutions are led by communities and movements.
- ✓ There are many ideas to solve water issues, like flooding, contamination, and access.
- ✓ Conserving our natural environment can help with water problems.
- ✓ Updated water infrastructure is a necessary and positive investment.
- ✓ Water solutions are good for the economy.
- ✓ Water solutions are growing.
- ✓ Water solutions are bipartisan.
- ✓ Water solutions are good for the environment.
- ✓ Clean water is a human right.



Felicia Davis



Infrastructure improvements necessary, possible

→ **Messages:** *Water solutions are led by the government; strong water systems improve safety and resilience; policymakers, businesses, and advocates should focus on universal access to clean water; water solutions are led by communities and movements; updated water infrastructure is a necessary and positive investment; water solutions are good for the economy; water solutions are growing*

Precipitated by crises including contaminated water, lead pipes, sewage spills, fire, flooding, and even algae, 2021 mustered political and popular will to update outdated and unhealthy water infrastructure. As natural disasters and weather events placed greater strain on water systems—and in some cases demonstrated how easily they can fail—that will for action grew, from January’s 15 messages about water infrastructure improving safety to 55 in April, and up to 70 by October (594 total messages in 2021).

Even against the backdrop of partisan fighting over elements of the infrastructure bill, the federal government was firmly positioned as the leader in water solutions (866 messages), with communities and movements next (314 messages). This is likely due to a series of federal policy successes over the year: the Senate’s April [passage](#) of the infrastructure bill, which contained \$35B for water modernization; an Energy Department [initiative](#) to purify “non-traditional” sources of drinking water; regional water projects with American Rescue Plan funding, such as [Ohio’s](#); and finally, the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021, which sponsor Senator Tammy Duckworth [called](#) “historic.”

Social listening insight

85 posts in 2021 contained a reference to Flint, MI. In total, they garnered **916,000** engagements. The top-engagement post was [this one](#):



Action against PFAs and contaminants

→ **Messages:** *Water solutions are led by the government; strong water systems improve safety and resilience; there are many ideas to solve water issues, like flooding, contamination, and access*

Second only to access issues in 2021 was coverage of drinking water contamination (571 messages about contaminated water): from infrastructural sources like wastewater, runoff, and lead pipe contamination, but also from PFAs. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, harmful “[forever chemicals](#),” were discovered in water samples from several states this year, and spurred rare bipartisan efforts at



greater regulation (23 bipartisan messages). Republican Shelley Moore Capito was [quoted](#) saying, “The bad news is this exists; the good news is it’s a bipartisan effort.” Of the articles that covered contaminants, 452 contained messages attributing leadership to the government, while 212 credited movement leaders, most of which were [mentioned](#) in a June piece in *The Hill*.

Social listening insight

Of **1300** total posts about water, **161 (12%)** referenced equity, while **199 (15%)** referenced a community of color.

Equity “baked in” to coverage

The national conversation about racial justice also manifested in narratives around water. More than 20% of articles referenced equity and justice, while 18% specifically mentioned a community of color. January’s trial of Rick Snyder in the Flint water crisis lent a renewed focus to infrastructure modernization—particularly in doing away with lead (“lead pipe” appeared in headlines 24 times). This coverage carried forward into the year, as equity was a key element of water modernization plans outlined in the federal infrastructure bill.

Of coverage that included focus on equity or communities of color, 20% contained messages attributing leadership to movements, while 45% attributed leadership to the government. However, a phenomenon may be happening in water coverage similar to that around renewable energy: most messages attributed a shift in equity focus to government leadership; however, the Biden Administration acknowledged this repositioning was ultimately due to movement leaders’ work.



Honor the Earth by Sarah Littleredfeather



The neutral narrative contains messages that may support an aspect of the positive narrative but detract or could detract from another. It also contains references to solutions that are hypothetical or controversial—not happening now.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Water issues disproportionately impact the most vulnerable.
- ✓ Water solutions are led by business.
- ✓ Conservation is an appropriate response to issues like droughts.
- ✓ Water policies need improvement.
- ✓ COVID-19 highlighted water access disparity.
- ✓ Fracking/mining contaminates our water.
- ✓ Water problems are business's fault.
- ✓ Water problems are government's fault.
- ✓ There is a clean water access crisis in the US.
- ✓ There is a water contamination crisis in the US.
- ✓ Climate change is driving water issues.
- ✓ Our current water infrastructure is not adequate.
- ✓ Natural disasters cause problems with our water.



“Crisis coverage” dominates narrative

→ **Message:** *Water issues disproportionately impact the most vulnerable*

2021's convergence of water access problems and water contamination issues (2,071 messages), compounded by natural disasters (1,420 messages) meant the bulk of the narrative was “crisis coverage,” alerting audiences to the existence of significant issues with water systems. Major national headlines included Hurricane Ida and resulting contamination, extreme drought and resulting wildfires in the west, and [PFAs](#). However, 2021 also saw a rash of locally-focused water issues, like [contamination in Hawai'i](#). Of all the state or regional publications we track, 83% ran at least one article about some type of water crisis.



COVID-19 worsens access gap

→ **Messages:** *Water solutions are expensive, COVID highlighted water access disparity*

More than 400 articles highlighted that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—and resultant changes in household income—across the country had profound effects on water access issues. As [Grist reported](#), “Shut-offs by local utilities, water laced with lead or other contaminants, and crushing water debt have left people across the country without access to a substance essential for survival.” In a pandemic where hand-washing is emphasized and movements—and therefore water access—can be restricted, access to clean water is more important than ever.

Social listening insight

772 posts about water (about **58%** of our sample) were not positive or solutions-focused.



Miami Climate Alliance



COMPETING

The competing narrative consists of messaging that opposes a future with safe, universal, equitable access to functional water systems, or don't think it is possible. It contains references to ongoing problems without explicit reference to possible solutions. It also contains trends that actively compete for attention and therefore dilute the positive and neutral narratives.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

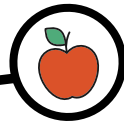
- ✓ Water solutions are expensive.
- ✓ There are no solutions being enacted to water problems.
- ✓ Conservation is an unsustainable drought response strategy.
- ✓ Water solutions are partisan.
- ✓ Water solutions are unpopular.
- ✓ Water solutions are not growing.
- ✓ Water management solutions are bad for the environment.

Problems without solutions

→ **Messages:** *Water issues disproportionately impact the most vulnerable; business's fault; government's fault*

Water coverage during 2021 was dominated by problems—natural disasters, disproportionate impacts, struggles to reverse Trump-era policies—but coverage of water solutions lagged behind both renewable energy and food systems reporting. Of the most-covered water topics this year—disaster, contamination, and access issues (669 articles)—just 129 (19%) also contained positive or solutions-focused messaging. In some instances, the lack of immediate solutions was itself called out as a message—we noted this 302 times.

And, as referenced above, coverage of water issues has, to a certain degree, equity angles “baked in.” Of that same 669-article pool, 102 (15%) contained messaging about equity or otherwise referenced disproportionate impact of natural disasters on certain communities. Of those, only 28 (4%) were positive or solutions-focused.



FOOD SYSTEMS

Messaging by the Numbers

TOTAL ARTICLES REVIEWED:

2,400

21%

REFERENCED
COMMUNITIES
OF COLOR
513 articles

34%

REFERRED
TO EQUITY
& JUSTICE
825 articles

37%

QUOTED A WOMAN
SPOKESPERSON
OR LAWMAKER
878 articles

48%

POSITIVE/
SOLUTIONS-
FOCUSED
1,162 articles





Key Headlines



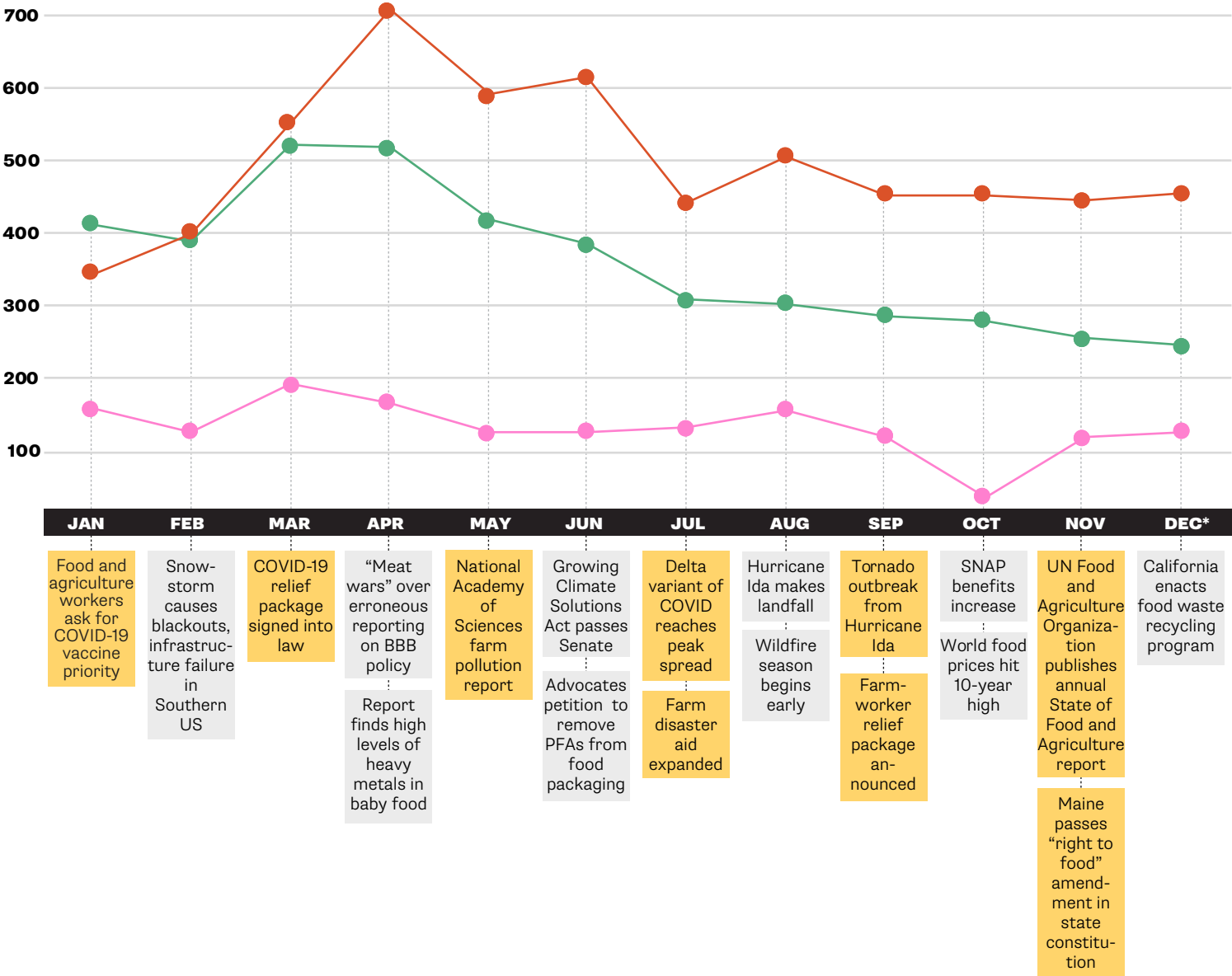
POSITIVE



NEUTRAL



COMPETING





Narrative Alignment

We have broken down the larger food systems narrative into three major sub-narratives:



POSITIVE

The positive narrative emphasizes the aspects of our food system that are working equitably and sustainably, along with active campaigns to improve soil quality and sustainability, agriculture, and access to healthy food.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Food systems solutions are led by government
- ✓ Food systems solutions are led by movements
- ✓ Everyone should have access to healthy food
- ✓ Food systems solutions are growing
- ✓ Land stewardship helps our food systems
- ✓ Food systems solutions can promote equity and justice
- ✓ There are many solutions to solve food systems issues
- ✓ Food systems solutions are popular
- ✓ Food systems solutions are good for environment/climate
- ✓ Food systems solutions are bipartisan
- ✓ Small farms are key to food solutions
- ✓ Healthy food is a human right

Federal solutions outside infrastructure

→ **Message:** Food systems solutions are led by government



Unlike energy and water coverage, the infrastructure bill was not the main driver of coverage around government-led solutions on food. The reason, as Theresa Lieb explained in GreenBiz, “The bill is using an old-school definition of infrastructure that doesn’t include agriculture.” However, enough federal initiatives drew coverage over the year to position the government as a solutions driver. In January, due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, one of the Biden Administration's first executive orders was [to increase](#) food assistance for low-income families. The plan was aggressively covered during the



year until its implementation on October 1. This was followed by [debt relief](#) for farmers, a [plan](#) to farmers and meat industry workers, who suffered disproportionately from the health impacts of COVID-19.

Many advocates were disappointed that food systems were deprioritized in Build Back Better improvements. [The Growing Climate Solutions Act](#), which was messaged as an “infrastructure bill,” met criticism from those who said it did not provide enough relief to front-line communities. Sen. Jeff Merkley was quoted saying, “I don’t believe that an offset system that subsidizes corporations’ continued pollution in frontline communities is the best strategy. Let’s set incentives that reduce pollution in both agriculture and frontline neighborhoods.”

Social listening insight

145 posts (about 11% of our sample) contained messaging around government-driven food systems solutions.

Government solutions enabled by successful advocacy campaigns

→ **Messages:** *Food systems solutions are led by government, Food systems solutions are led by movements*

Of the 844 articles that positioned the government as the leader in food systems solutions, 224 also contained messaging acknowledging the work of movements to push for policy change. This relationship between government action and grassroots advocacy is best illustrated by the issue of food contaminants. Contaminated food was a key public health issue affecting food systems coverage in 2021—albeit at a slightly lesser scale (110 messages) than was seen in Water coverage. As with water, PFAs arose as a particular concern, and movement leaders united over the summer by [pushing](#) lawmakers to ban PFAs from food packaging. Ultimately, by the fall, the EPA [released](#) a holistic strategy to curb the use of PFAs in multiple applications. Additional coalitions united to [address](#) levels of heavy metals in baby food and [urge](#) pesticide bans—another [successful](#) campaign.

Carbon sequestration: too expensive?

A generous proportion of coverage described natural carbon sequestration in carbon sinks as a positive climate solution (225 messages). As an [article in Greenbiz](#) pointed out, “soil stores about 80 percent of the world’s terrestrial carbon stock, so agricultural practices that keep and increase carbon in soil are critical.” This method of sequestration is popular among community leaders as well as with conservative groups, in contrast to so-called high-tech “solutions”—like factory farm gas digesters or corn-based ethanol—which research is showing have limited, or no, climate benefit. This positions it as a bipartisan policy strategy to reach net-zero emissions and reduce the negative impacts of climate change (13 articles contained pro-sequestration and bipartisan messaging). However, some noted that changing farming practices to prioritize sustainability is expensive, and therefore not feasible at scale (36 messages).



The neutral narrative contains messages that may support an aspect of the positive narrative but detract from another, or messages that reflect the status quo.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ Food systems solutions are led by businesses
- ✓ Food solutions are good for the economy
- ✓ State and local economies depend on agriculture
- ✓ Agricultural workers need better policies
- ✓ Food supply, contamination, and access issues disproportionately affect frontline communities
- ✓ Food solutions are partisan
- ✓ Climate change is driving problems with US food systems
- ✓ Natural disasters cause problems with US food systems (climate change not mentioned)
- ✓ Food is too expensive for consumers
- ✓ Food insecurity is a growing issue
- ✓ COVID negatively affects food systems
- ✓ Industrial/mainstream agriculture practices are bad for the environment, exploitative
- ✓ Meat production is a major contributor to unhealthy diets and climate change
- ✓ Food contamination is a growing issue
- ✓ Current food policies are functioning well
- ✓ There is not enough healthy food
- ✓ Food systems are not safe/resilient/reliable

Climate change-caused natural disasters damage agriculture, economies

→ **Messages:** *Climate change is driving problems with US food systems; natural disasters driving problems with US food systems; COVID-19 negatively affects food systems*

As noted in energy and water coverage, 2021's natural disasters, particularly when combined with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in an overwhelming proportion of “crisis coverage” in food systems reporting (985 articles, which is nearly half of all articles sampled). The largest segment of crisis coverage was devoted to disruptions caused by COVID-19 (642 messages): supply-chain problems, shortage of workers, and the rising cost of food (368 messages). And, following equity reporting trends in energy and water, of the 834 articles containing messaging about food cost or COVID-19, a majority— 437 messages—mentioned a community of color or issues of equity and justice.



Big agriculture harms environment

→ **Messages:** Agriculture practices are bad for the environment; meat production is a major contributor to unhealthy diets and climate change

We noted 394 articles with messaging around the health and environmental effects of agricultural emissions, runoff, and unsustainable farming practices. The National Academy of Sciences [reported](#) in a May publication that the pollutants emitted by farms are, in part, responsible for almost 18,000 deaths in the United States annually. Coverage on the heels of this report focused on one of its recommendations to reduce farm emissions: eat less meat.

“Meat Wars”

GreenBiz’s Jim Giles wrote in April, “as awareness of the climate impact of meat grows, a potential roadblock to cutting consumption is emerging: A culture war.” That month, a major media skirmish broke out after news outlets erroneously reported that Biden’s American Jobs Act would restrict or ban the consumption of meat, due to concerns by the emissions-causing industrial animal agriculture industry. Following May’s reports on how much of US agriculture’s air and water pollution comes from livestock factory farms, the issue only grew. And with each article containing recommendations that Americans eat less meat (16 in our sample), conservative media outlets and [politicians](#) alike reacted furiously, leading to almost 10% of Q2’s food coverage being wrapped up in the [so-called](#) “war over meat.”



Industry offers disjointed solutions

→ **Message:** Food systems solutions are led by businesses

Although the majority of coverage positioned the government as the vanguard of food systems solutions, 502 instances of messaging indicated that businesses were leading on solution development. However, each initiative was fragmented and addressed only one aspect of the system: a [regeneration goal](#) here, an [upcycled meal](#) there, but no connection between the specific solution and the larger issues at play.



COMPETING

The competing narrative calls attention to the manifold issues within our food systems without nuance or solutions, or actively competes for attention and therefore dilutes the positive and neutral narratives.

QUALIFYING MESSAGES

- ✓ There are no immediate solutions to current food systems problems
- ✓ Biofuels are a positive climate solution
- ✓ Food systems solutions are not growing

Social listening insight

640 posts about food systems (about **48%** of our sample) were not positive or solutions-focused.

Lack of solutions draws focus—but not completely

→ **Messages:** *Food systems issues disproportionately affect frontline communities; are not growing; Food insecurity is a growing issue; there are no immediate solutions to current food systems problems*

As similarly noted in water coverage, food systems faced manifold issues in 2021: rising prices, increasing instances of food contamination, growing food insecurity, and a lack of centralized action to address these issues. However, 110 articles in 2021 coverage did include references to these problems having disproportionate affects on low-income communities and communities of color—approaching the problem with an equity lens. However, these articles painted a grim picture without offering hope or any solutions. Interestingly, 247 messages focused on the lack of solutions—a comparable count to similar messages seen in water coverage. However, food systems had a far higher proportion of articles containing positive or solutions-focused messaging: 48% to water’s 27%.

Government not acting enough

→ **Messages:** *There are no immediate solutions to current food systems problems; solutions are not growing*

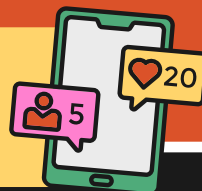
Although advocates were successful in garnering swift bipartisan support for increased PFA regulation, a proportion of messaging was devoted to the idea that, while contamination seems to be a growing concern, no policies are being enacted to address it—therefore driving the narrative that no solutions are being offered to expeditiously solve problems around food systems in the US.



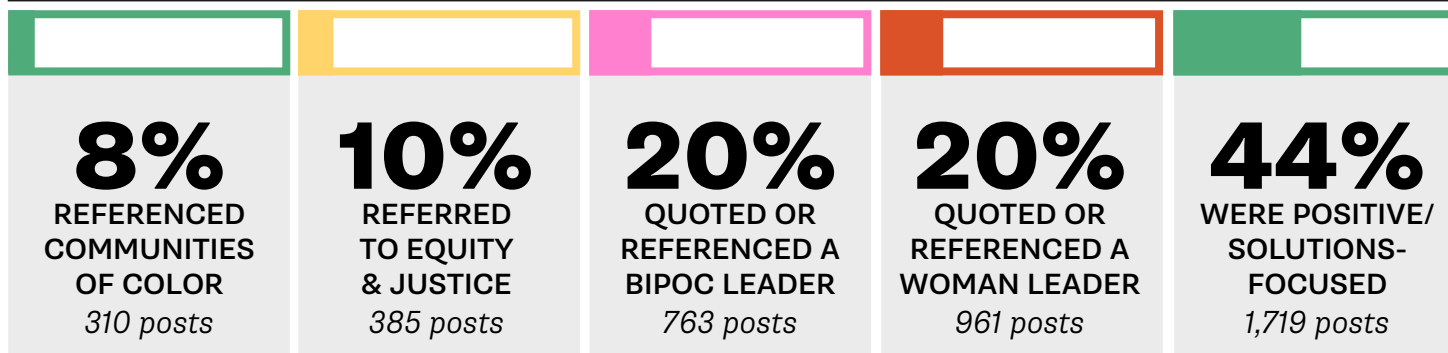
SOCIAL LISTENING

BY THE NUMBERS

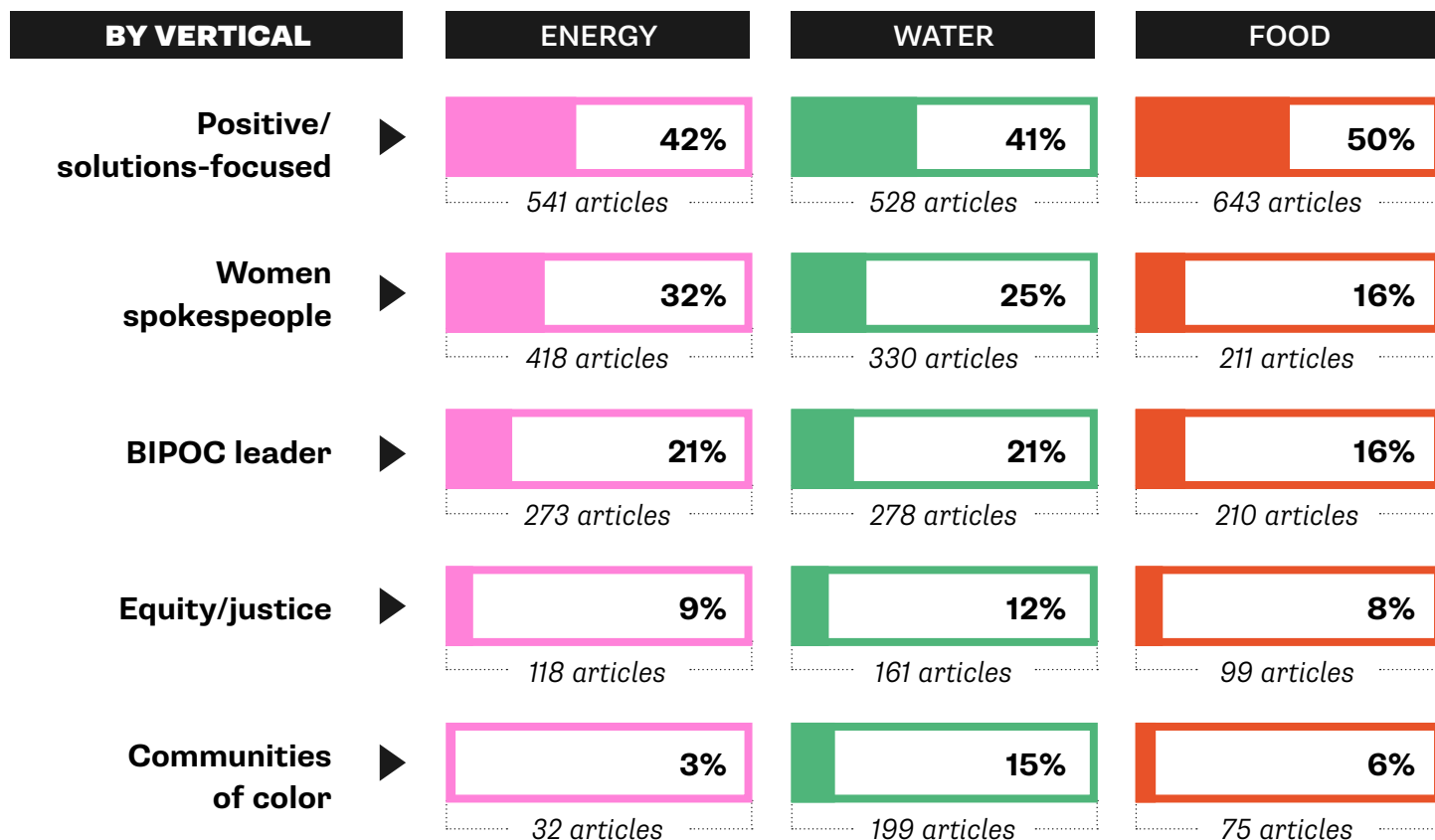
3,900



TOTAL POSTS ANALYZED



TOP WEEKLY POSTS BY ENGAGEMENT





Top Posters

All Twitter, unless otherwise specified.



ENERGY

TOP ENGAGEMENT POSTERS

1. Robert Reich @RBReich
2. President Biden @POTUS
3. Greta Thunberg @GretaThunberg
4. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez @AOC
5. Marjorie Taylor Greene @mtgreenee*
6. The White House @WhiteHouse
7. Bernie Sanders @BernieSanders
8. Kamala Harris @VP
9. Joe Biden @JoeBiden
10. Nina Turner @ninaturner

TOP ENGAGEMENT EQUITY & JUSTICE POSTERS

1. President Biden @POTUS
2. Greta Thunberg @GretaThunberg
3. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez @AOC
4. Robert Reich @RBReich
5. The White House @WhiteHouse
6. Kamala Harris @VP
7. Joe Biden @JoeBiden
8. Nina Turner @ninaturner
9. Youtube: Undecided with Matt Ferrell
10. Iberdrola Renewables @Iberdrola_En

Our methodology records any mention of equity, communities of color, positive or solutions-focused attitudes, and BIPOC or woman leaders, regardless of post sentiment. For example, about 20% of posts that reference women leaders also were tagged with metrics like 'conservative viewpoint,' or 'anti-renewable,' meaning the post likely expressed negative sentiment toward that woman leader.



WATER*

TOP ENGAGEMENT EQUITY & JUSTICE POSTERS

1. The White House @WhiteHouse
2. Joe Biden @POTUS
3. Rashida Tlaib @RashidaTlaib
4. Kamala Harris @VP
5. Mari Copeny @LittleMissFlint
6. Val Demings @RepValDemings
7. Kamala Harris @KamalaHarris
8. Pete Buttigieg @SecretaryPete
9. Joe Biden @JoeBiden
10. SDG2030 @SDG2030

All top posters were top equity and justice posters.



RISE

TOP ENGAGEMENT POSTERS

1.	Youtube: Larson Farms
2.	Youtube: Gold Shaw Farm
3.	Youtube: Sonne Farms
4.	NFL @NFL
5.	Youtube: Adler Farms
6.	Youtube: Cole The Cornstar
7.	Youtube: Just a Few Acres Farm
8.	Plant-based News @plantbasednews
9.	The Democratic Party @TheDemocrats
10.	Jose Andres @chefjoseandres

TOP ENGAGEMENT EQUITY & JUSTICE POSTERS

1.	Youtube: Gold Shaw Farm
2.	Youtube: Larson Farms
3.	Joe Biden @JoeBiden
4.	Youtube: Sonne Farms
5.	Kamala Harris @KamalaHarris
6.	Joe Biden @ POTUS
7.	Nancy Pelosi @TeamPelosi
8.	The White House @WhiteHouse
9.	Greta Thunberg @GretaThunberg
10.	Lakota Man @LakotaMan1





Top Posts

Trend analysis of highest-engagement posts

Of the posts we tracked, 48 had engagement over 100,000, of which:

EQUITY

33

were positive/solutions-focused, by a woman or BIPOC leader, or referenced equity or a community of color

TOPICS

34

 about energy

7

 about water

6

 about food systems

POSTERS

7

 by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

5

 by President Biden

MESSAGES

18

said or implied climate change is a big deal

15

said climate solutions are led by the government

4

contained a joke

TIMING

8

 were from the week of February 14, during the “Big Freeze”

4

 were from the week of June 27, a record heat wave in New York

3

 were from the week of April 18, the 7th anniversary of Flint, Michigan's water crisis, and the week we rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement

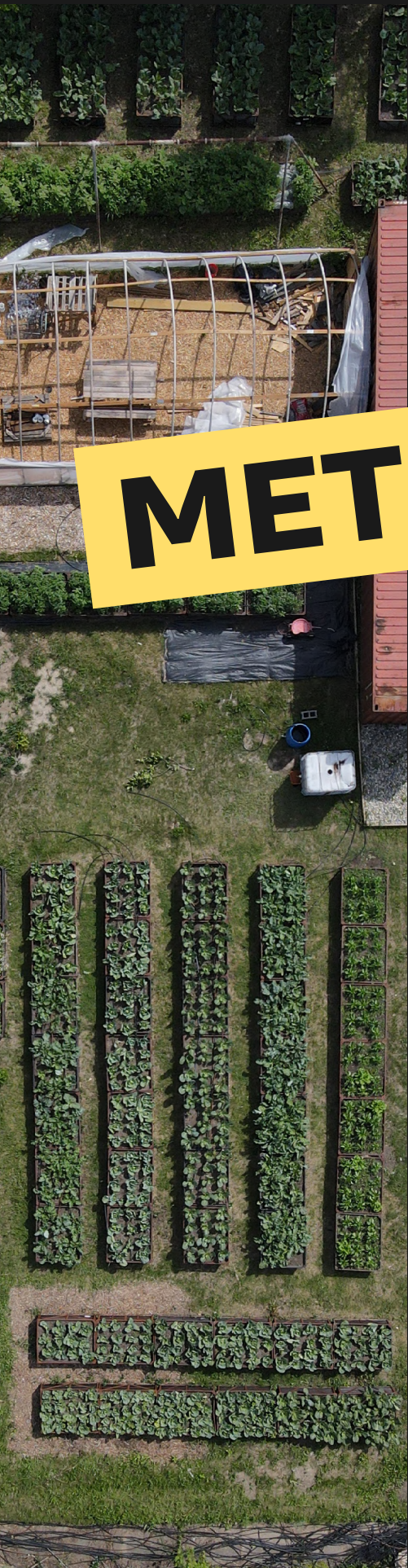
ENGAGEMENT

1

 had engagement over.....

2million

BTS ARMY performing at the UN General Assembly in support of Sustainable Development Goals goals. A significant proportion of these engagements were purely fans expressing support for BTS, but the top comment (11k upvotes), “Changing the world one song at a time!,” along with other similar examples—“today my reason of loving them is increased by one... applying their messages on their speech into our life for our future generations,” “I’m so proud of BTS and I hope I can help make the world a better place too!”—indicates some engagement with the purpose of the performance.



METHODOLOGY



MEDIA ANALYSIS

We source articles from LexisNexis, dividing our article pool into four categories: national, lifestyle/ magazine, trade, and alternative.

TOTAL OUTLETS:

131



- ▶ **68** National
- ▶ **19** Trade
- ▶ **17** Alternative
- ▶ **27** Lifestyle & Magazine

Our pool of articles does not represent an exhaustive list of all available articles, but a sample of high-circulation, high-value coverage. We take direction from The Solutions Project for local outlets and trade publications to follow for relevant topics, as well as search terms.





Search terms



ENERGY

Unique Terms	Energy Types	Boolean Searches	
energy burden	geothermal energy	ENERGY	
energy democracy	geothermal power	CLIMATE	
energy district	green energy	POLLUTION	
green economy	hydroelectric	AND	accessible
just transition	hydropower	OR	affordable
net metering	tidal energy	OR	asthma
renewables	tidal power	OR	BIPOC
	wind energy	OR	Black
	wind power	OR	clean
	solar energy	OR	communit* of color
	solar power	OR	contamination
		OR	coronavirus
		OR	COVID-19
		OR	crisis
		OR	disadvantaged
		OR	equity
		OR	fracking
		OR	gentrification
		OR	health
		OR	human rights
		OR	Indigenous
		OR	infrastructure
		OR	justice
		OR	Latin*
		OR	locally-owned
		OR	management
		OR	modernization
		OR	Native American
		OR	policy
		OR	polluted
		OR	pollution
		OR	poverty
		OR	refugee
		OR	shutoffs
		OR	solutions
		OR	underserved



WATER

Unique Terms	Boolean Searches			
storm surge	WATER		FLOOD	
			DROUGHT	
			SEWER	
	AND	accessible	AND	BIPOC
	OR	affordable	OR	Black
	OR	asbestos	OR	communities of color
	OR	BIPOC	OR	contamination
	OR	Black	OR	crisis
	OR	clean	OR	disadvantaged
	OR	closed loop	OR	equity
	OR	communit* of color	OR	fracking
	OR	contamination	OR	health
	OR	crisis	OR	human rights
	OR	equity	OR	Indigenous
	OR	fracking	OR	infrastructure
	OR	health	OR	justice
	OR	human rights	OR	Latin*
	OR	Indigenous	OR	management
	OR	infrastructure	OR	modernization
	OR	justice	OR	Native American
	OR	Latina	OR	policy
	OR	Latino	OR	pollut*
	OR	Latinx	OR	potable
	OR	lead	OR	poverty
	OR	management	OR	shutoffs
	OR	mercury	OR	solutions
	OR	modernization	OR	surge
	OR	Native American	OR	underserved
	OR	PFAs	OR	waste
	OR	policy		
	OR	pollut*		
	OR	potable		
	OR	poverty		
	OR	shutoffs		
	OR	solutions		
	OR	surge		
	OR	underserved		
	OR	waste		

**FOOD SYSTEMS**

Unique Terms	Boolean Searches	
land use		FOOD
vertical farming		FARM
rain garden		SOIL
		AGRICULTURE
	AND	accessible
	OR	affordable
	OR	BIPOC
	OR	Black
	OR	carbon sequestration
	OR	clean
	OR	climate
	OR	closed loop
	OR	communit* of color
	OR	contamination
	OR	cooperative
	OR	crisis
	OR	equity
	OR	fracking
	OR	health
	OR	human rights
	OR	Indigenous
	OR	infrastructure
	OR	justice
	OR	Latin*
	OR	management
	OR	modernization
	OR	Native American
	OR	native plant
	OR	policy
	OR	pollut*
	OR	poverty
	OR	regenerative
	OR	solutions
	OR	underserved
	OR	urban



Social Listening

We source social media posts related to climate solutions using the social listening functionality available in Sprout Social.


For each calendar week, we recorded and ranked the top 25 renewable energy posts by engagement. We aggregated, in our database, the post text, username, date, outlet, and URL of each post. We evaluated each post for key data points: whether it referred to a woman or BIPOC leader, it explicitly referenced a community of color, it referred to issues of equity and justice, and it was positive or solutions-focused.















Appendix

METRICS BY VERTICAL OVER 2021

 Percentage

 Number of articles

			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Positive/ solutions-focused	ENERGY		75%	67% ↓	62% ↓	62% ✓
			451	402 ↓	373 ↓	373 ✓
	WATER		28%	23% ↓	31% ↑	27% ↓
			170	135 ↓	187 ↑	160 ↓
	FOOD		60%	47% ↓	43% ↓	44% ↑
			359	280 ↓	258 ↓	265 ↑
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Equity & justice	ENERGY		42%	37% ↓	30% ↓	31% ↑
			250	221 ↓	177 ↓	185 ↑
	WATER		22%	23% ↑	18% ↓	22% ↑
			129	137 ↑	108 ↓	134 ↑
	FOOD		60%	35% ↓	30% ↓	32% ↑
			242	211 ↓	182 ↓	190 ↑



Percentage



Number of articles

Communities of color

ENERGY



Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

25%

25% ↗

15% ↘

14% ↘



149

150 ↗

92 ↘

82 ↘

WATER



17%

19% ↗

16% ↘

27% ↗



101

116 ↗

97 ↘

160 ↗

FOOD



25%

24% ↘

18% ↘

44% ↗



152

146 ↘

108 ↘

265 ↗

Women spokespeople

ENERGY



Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

59%

55% ↘

49% ↘

21% ↘



354

329 ↘

295 ↘

123 ↘

WATER



46%

50% ↗

48% ↘

15% ↘



273

300 ↗

286 ↘

87 ↘

FOOD



39%

44% ↗

47% ↗

17% ↘



232

262 ↗

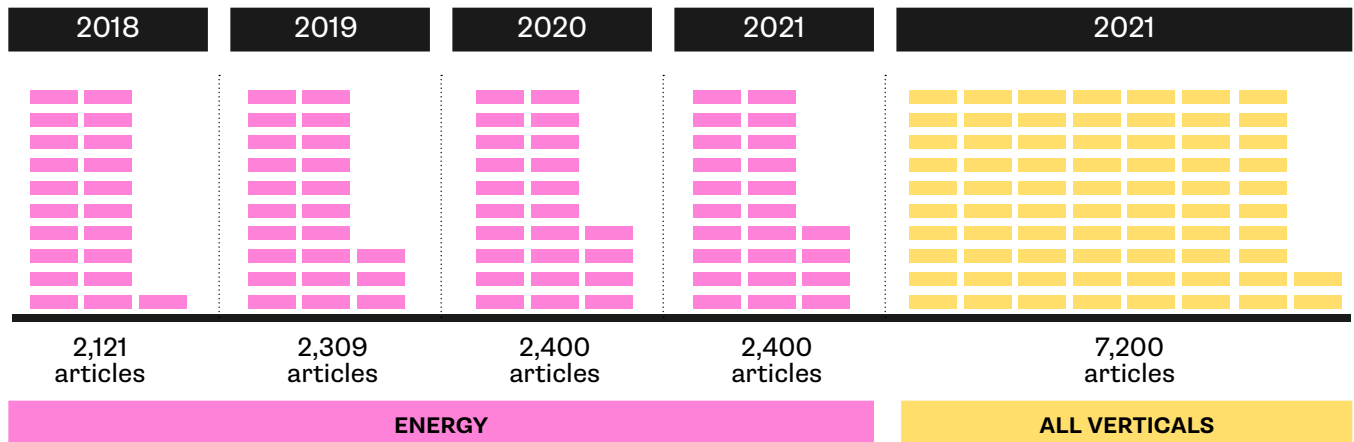
283 ↗

102 ↘

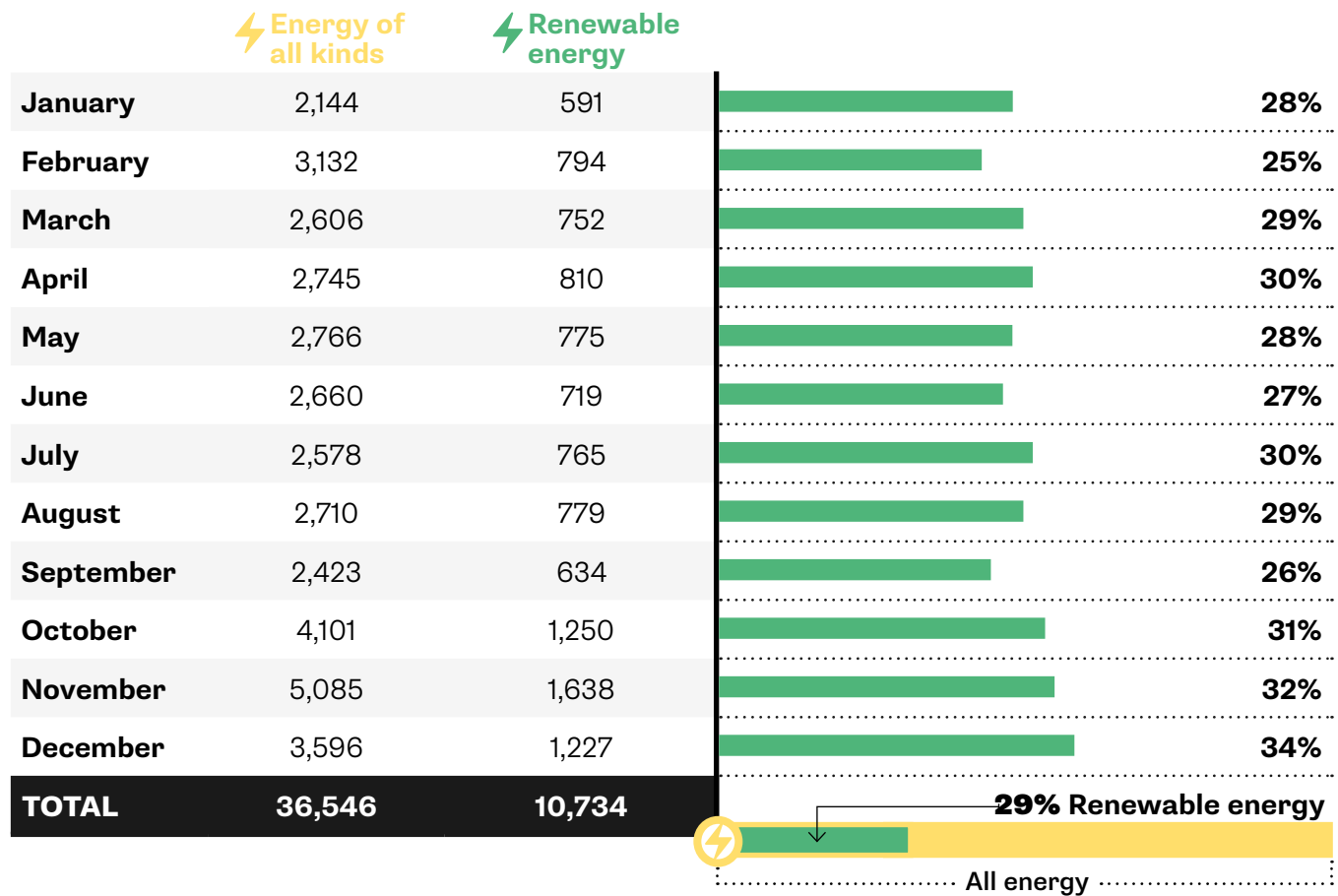


YEAR OVER YEAR KEY METRICS

Total articles reviewed:



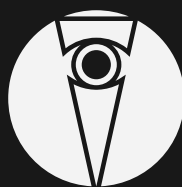
WHAT'S GETTING THE MOST COVERAGE?



LET'S CREATE THE FUTURE WE WANT.

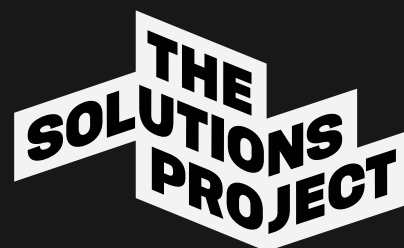


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