ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY COUNTRY FREQUENCY STUDY

Country Representation in the Global News Agenda

1 January – 31 July 2026

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NATURE OF THIS STUDY

This is a sample-based (pilot) study, not a full census of the global news stream. 135 verified events were manually coded and deduplicated at the event level. Findings should be read as relative rankings, not as absolute counts.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 2
1. Executive Summary 3
2. Methodology 3
2.1 Unit of Count 3
2.2 Scoring Rule 3
2.3 Attributing Bloc-Level and Global Events to Countries 3
2.4 Scope 4
3. Global Coverage: How Many of the 193 Countries Entered the Agenda? 5
4. The Ten Most-Covered Countries 6
4.1 Top Ten Adjusted for EU Legislative Effect 6
5. Complete Country Ranking 8
6. Category Distribution 11
7. Continental and Regional Distribution 12
8. Monthly Trend 13
9. Limitations and Caveats 15
10. Conclusion 15

1. Executive Summary

News items entering the ESG and sustainability agenda between 1 January and 31 July 2026 were deduplicated at the event level and coded against the countries they concern. Across the seven-month period, 135 unique events were identified, generating a total of 579 country-points.

- There are 193 United Nations member states. Only 70 of them (36.3%) appeared in the ESG news agenda during the study period.
- 123 UN member states (63.7%) generated no ESG or sustainability coverage at all during the seven months.
- The United States leads by a wide margin with 34 points. Germany and France follow with 22 points each.
- Europe accounts for 77.4% of all country-points. However, most of this share reflects not genuine news interest but the distribution of 14 EU-level regulations across 27 member states.
- Once EU-derived points are stripped out, the ranking changes entirely, leaving the United States (33) and the United Kingdom (13) at the top.
- By category, disasters lead in event count (46 events, 34.1%), while regulation and policy dominate in country-points (303).
- 60% of all events carry a negative polarity.

2. Methodology

2.1 Unit of Count

The unit of count is the unique event, not the news article. When several outlets report the same event, it is recorded once. For example, the July 2026 Assam flood disaster appeared separately in Reuters, the Associated Press and the Washington Post; it is coded here as a single event. This approach measures event density rather than media density.

2.2 Scoring Rule

Each event awards one point to every country it concerns. The nationality of the reporting outlet is disregarded; only the country the news is about is counted.

> **Scoring examples**
>
> TotalEnergies (France) invests USD 1.2 billion in wind power in Kazakhstan → France 1, Kazakhstan 1
>
> Bushfire in the state of Victoria → Australia 1
>
> North American winter storm → United States 1, Canada 1, Mexico 1
>
> European heat dome (records broken in 13 countries) → 1 point to each of 13 countries

2.3 Attributing Bloc-Level and Global Events to Countries

Every EU-level regulation was distributed as one point to each of the 27 member states. For global announcements, the headquarters country of the issuing organisation was used: United Nations (New York) →

United States; UNFCCC Secretariat (Bonn) → Germany; IEA and OECD (Paris) → France; WMO and the World Health Organization (Geneva) → Switzerland; SBTi, NZAM and NZFSPA (London) → United Kingdom; Moody's (New York) → United States; Wood Mackenzie (Edinburgh) → United Kingdom.

2.4 Scope

The environmental dimension covers climate, emissions, renewable energy, biodiversity, water, waste and deforestation; the social dimension covers occupational safety, community impact, just transition, food security and displacement; the governance dimension covers reporting regulation, greenwashing litigation and ESG ratings. Extraordinary events such as earthquakes, fires, floods, storms, heatwaves and landslides are included.

3. Global Coverage: How Many of the 193 Countries Entered the Agenda?

The United Nations has 193 member states. Adding the Holy See and Palestine as observer states brings the figure to 195; counting entities of contested recognition such as Taiwan and Kosovo raises it to roughly 197. This study uses the 193 UN member states as its baseline.

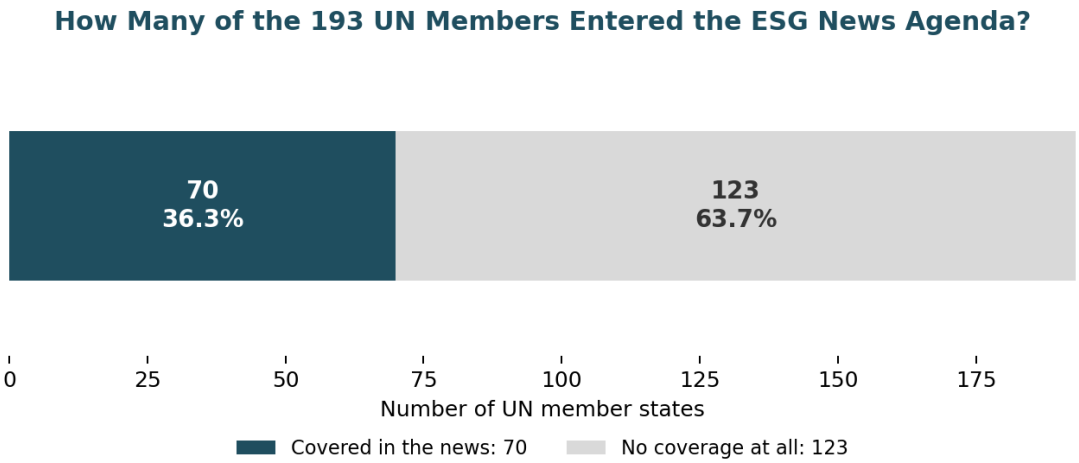


Figure 1 — UN member states that did and did not appear in the ESG news agenda

Indicator	Count	Share
UN member states	193	100%
Entities scoring in the study	71	—
Of which UN members (excluding Taiwan)	70	36.3%
UN member states with no coverage at all	**123**	**63.7%**

This is the study's most striking finding: roughly two-thirds of the world's countries were entirely absent from the global ESG news stream over seven months. This does not mean those countries face no sustainability problems. It means the international news infrastructure does not cover them.

Several of the absent countries are significant by population or economic weight: Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Argentina, Thailand, Peru, Algeria, Tanzania and Norway among them. Geographically, the largest gaps are in sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific island states.

> **Interpretive note**
>
> This ratio partly reflects the sampling structure of the study. A full census would raise the number of covered countries. The direction of the structural inequality, however, would not change: international ESG journalism concentrates around a specific group of countries.

4. The Ten Most-Covered Countries

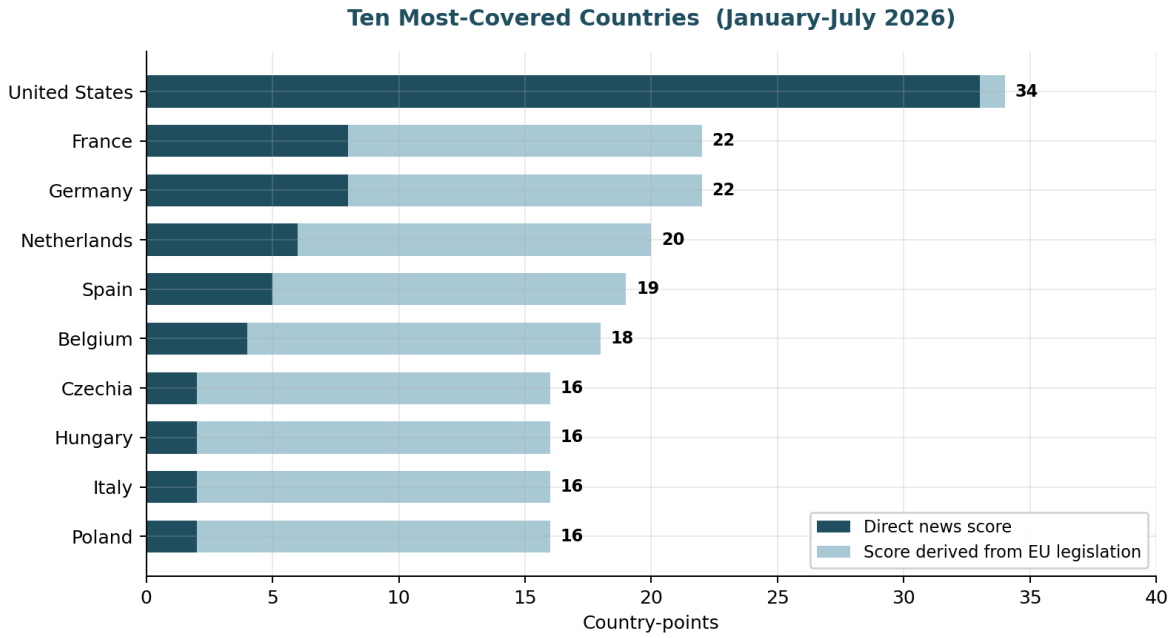


Figure 2 — Top ten countries, broken down by source of points

#	Country	Region	Total	Negative	Positive	Share	EU-derived	Ex-EU
1	United States	North America	34	23	6	5.87%	1	33
2	France	Europe	22	9	4	3.8%	14	8
3	Germany	Europe	22	11	3	3.8%	14	8
4	Netherlands	Europe	20	9	3	3.45%	14	6
5	Spain	Europe	19	9	2	3.28%	14	5
6	Belgium	Europe	18	7	2	3.11%	14	4
7	Czechia	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	14	2
8	Hungary	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	14	2
9	Italy	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	14	2
10	Poland	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	14	2

The United States' first place is meaningful in its own right: only 1 of its 34 points derives from EU legislation. Drought across the western states, wildfires along the Canadian border, the SEC's proposal to rescind its climate disclosure rules and a large volume of climate litigation account for the rest. With 23 negative records, it also carries the highest density of negative coverage of any country.

Nine of the top ten are European. Yet for Czechia, Hungary, Italy and Poland, 14 of their 16 points reflect EU regulation. The number of items written directly about these countries is two. Reading the ranking at face value would therefore be misleading.

4.1 Top Ten Adjusted for EU Legislative Effect

Removing the points generated by the 14 EU-level regulations reveals how often each country was the direct subject of news coverage:

#	Country	Region	Ex-EU points	Total points
1	United States	North America	33	34
2	United Kingdom	Europe	13	14
3	France	Europe	8	22
4	Germany	Europe	8	22
5	Netherlands	Europe	6	20
6	Brazil	Latin America	6	7
7	Canada	North America	6	6
8	China	Asia-Pacific	6	6
9	Japan	Asia-Pacific	6	6
10	Spain	Europe	5	19

The appearance of Switzerland and Turkiye in this table is a methodological artefact worth naming. Three of Switzerland's five points stem from the WMO and the World Health Organization being headquartered in Geneva. Turkiye's five points come from COP31 preparations, the YEKA renewable energy tenders and the OECD Critical Minerals Forum held in Istanbul. Turkiye is the only country in the top fifteen with no negative records at all.

5. Complete Country Ranking

All 71 entities that scored during the period are listed below. Countries on equal points are ordered alphabetically.

#	Country	Region	Total	Negative	Positive	Share	Ex-EU
1	United States	North America	34	23	6	5.87%	33
2	France	Europe	22	9	4	3.8%	8
3	Germany	Europe	22	11	3	3.8%	8
4	Netherlands	Europe	20	9	3	3.45%	6
5	Spain	Europe	19	9	2	3.28%	5
6	Belgium	Europe	18	7	2	3.11%	4
7	Czechia	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
8	Hungary	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
9	Italy	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
10	Poland	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
11	Portugal	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
12	Romania	Europe	16	6	2	2.76%	2
13	Sweden	Europe	16	5	3	2.76%	2
14	Austria	Europe	15	5	2	2.59%	1
15	Denmark	Europe	15	5	2	2.59%	1
16	Greece	Europe	15	5	2	2.59%	1
17	Ireland	Europe	15	5	2	2.59%	1
18	Bulgaria	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
19	Croatia	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
20	Cyprus	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
21	Estonia	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
22	Finland	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
23	Latvia	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
24	Lithuania	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
25	Luxembourg	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
26	Malta	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
27	Slovakia	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
28	Slovenia	Europe	14	4	2	2.42%	0
29	United Kingdom	Europe	14	7	6	2.42%	13
30	Brazil	Latin America	7	4	3	1.21%	6
31	Canada	North America	6	5	0	1.04%	6
32	China	Asia-Pacific	6	1	5	1.04%	6

#	Country	Region	Total	Negative	Positive	Share	Ex-EU
33	Japan	Asia-Pacific	6	2	2	1.04%	6
34	Switzerland	Europe	5	3	0	0.86%	5
35	Turkiye	Eurasia	5	0	4	0.86%	5
36	Australia	Asia-Pacific	4	3	1	0.69%	4
37	Indonesia	Asia-Pacific	4	3	0	0.69%	2
38	Kenya	Africa	4	1	2	0.69%	4
39	Philippines	Asia-Pacific	4	3	1	0.69%	4
40	Chile	Latin America	3	1	1	0.52%	3
41	Iran	Middle East	3	3	0	0.52%	3
42	Madagascar	Africa	3	3	0	0.52%	3
43	Mexico	North America	3	3	0	0.52%	3
44	Mozambique	Africa	3	3	0	0.52%	3
45	United Arab Emirates	Middle East	3	2	1	0.52%	3
46	Afghanistan	Asia-Pacific	2	2	0	0.35%	2
47	Ghana	Africa	2	1	0	0.35%	2
48	India	Asia-Pacific	2	1	1	0.35%	2
49	Kuwait	Middle East	2	2	0	0.35%	2
50	Malaysia	Asia-Pacific	2	1	1	0.35%	2
51	Morocco	Africa	2	1	0	0.35%	2
52	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	2	1	1	0.35%	2
53	South Korea	Asia-Pacific	2	0	1	0.35%	2
54	Taiwan	Asia-Pacific	2	2	0	0.35%	2
55	Colombia	Latin America	1	0	1	0.17%	1
56	DR Congo	Africa	1	1	0	0.17%	1
57	Ecuador	Latin America	1	0	0	0.17%	1
58	Iraq	Middle East	1	1	0	0.17%	1
59	Israel	Middle East	1	1	0	0.17%	1
60	Kazakhstan	Eurasia	1	0	1	0.17%	1
61	New Zealand	Asia-Pacific	1	1	0	0.17%	1
62	Pakistan	Asia-Pacific	1	1	0	0.17%	1
63	Qatar	Middle East	1	1	0	0.17%	1
64	Russia	Eurasia	1	1	0	0.17%	1
65	Serbia	Europe	1	1	0	0.17%	1
66	South Africa	Africa	1	1	0	0.17%	1
67	Tonga	Asia-Pacific	1	1	0	0.17%	1

#	Country	Region	Total	Negative	Positive	Share	Ex-EU
68	Ukraine	Europe	1	1	0	0.17%	1
69	Vanuatu	Asia-Pacific	1	1	0	0.17%	1
70	Venezuela	Latin America	1	1	0	0.17%	1
71	Vietnam	Asia-Pacific	1	0	1	0.17%	1

6. Category Distribution

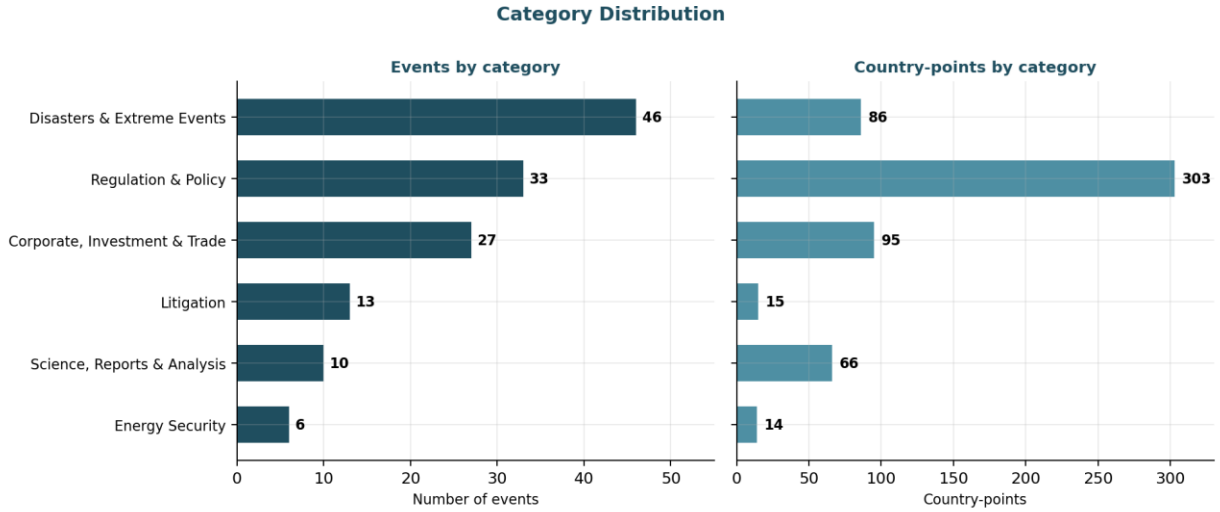


Figure 3 — Event count and country-points by category

Category	Events	Country-points	Share of events	Countries per event
Disasters & Extreme Events	46	86	34.1%	1.9
Regulation & Policy	33	303	24.4%	9.2
Corporate, Investment & Trade	27	95	20.0%	3.5
Litigation	13	15	9.6%	1.2
Science, Reports & Analysis	10	66	7.4%	6.6
Energy Security	6	14	4.4%	2.3

The gap between the two charts is the study's most instructive finding. Disasters rank first by event count (46 events) but fall to second by country-points (86). Regulation and policy, with 33 events, generate 303 points.

The reason lies in the number of countries per event. A wildfire concerns on average 1.9 countries; a regulatory event concerns 9.2. Disasters are geographically bounded; legislation is not. This points to two distinct propagation mechanisms in ESG news: physical impact and regulatory reach.

Litigation is the most local category of all: 13 events produced only 15 points, or 1.2 countries per event. Climate cases remain almost entirely within national judicial systems.

7. Continental and Regional Distribution

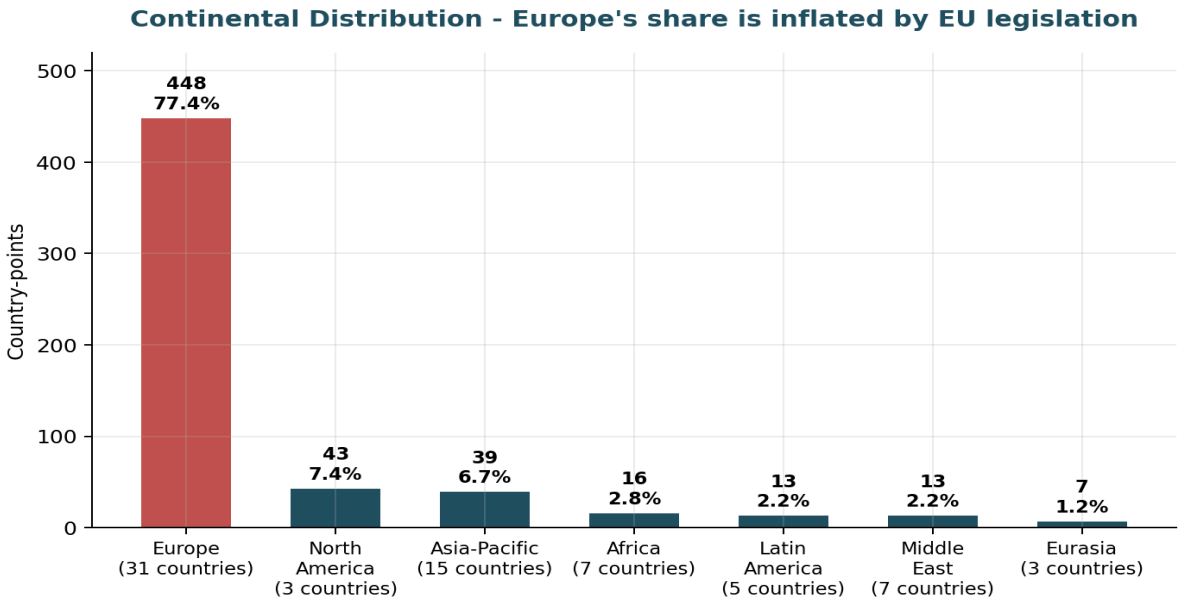


Figure 4 — Regional country-points and number of distinct countries per region

Region	Country-points	Distinct countries	Share
Europe	448	31	77.4%
North America	43	3	7.4%
Asia-Pacific	39	15	6.7%
Africa	16	7	2.8%
Latin America	13	5	2.2%
Middle East	13	7	2.2%
Eurasia	7	3	1.2%

Europe's 77.4% share should not be read at face value. Some 378 points of that share — 65% of all country-points — come from distributing 14 EU-level regulations across 27 member states. None of Malta's 14 points originates in an item written about Malta; all are automatic reflections of CSRD, CBAM, ESRS and taxonomy legislation.

With EU-derived points removed, Europe's share falls to roughly 35% and North America's rises towards 22%. Asia-Pacific, with 15 distinct countries, has the second-broadest country base; North America, with only 3, has the narrowest.

Africa is represented by 16 points across 7 countries. For a continent of 54 states this is a marked under-representation and the clearest indicator of the structural gap in news infrastructure.

8. Monthly Trend

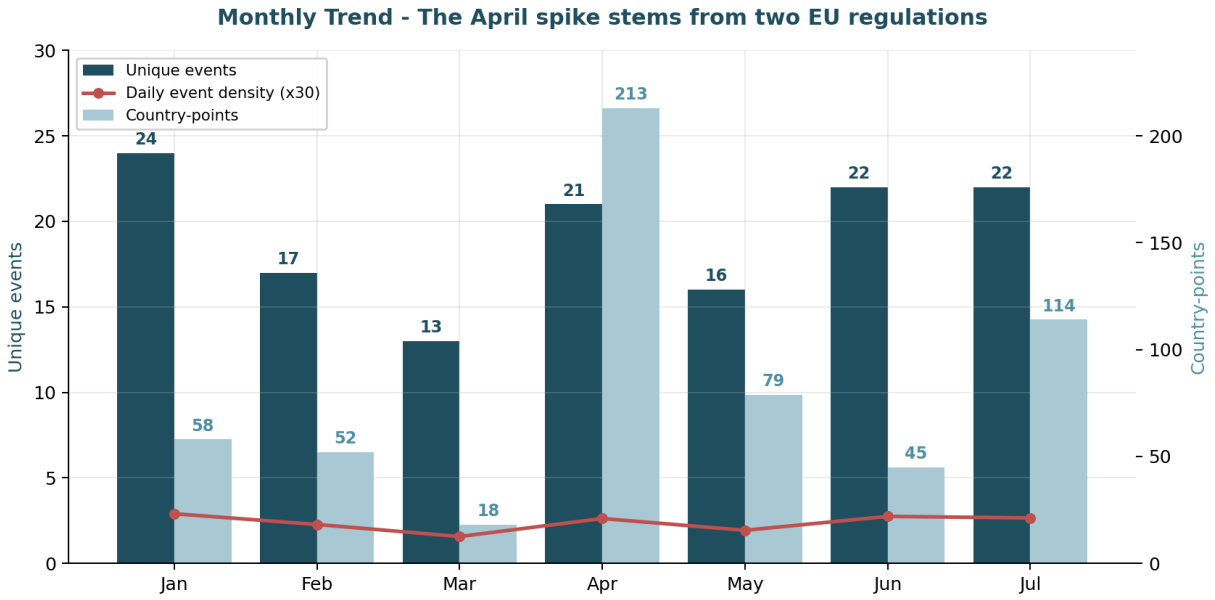


Figure 5 — Monthly event count, country-points and daily density

Month	Days	Events	Country-points	Events/day	Points/day
January	31	24	58	0.77	1.87
February	28	17	52	0.61	1.86
March	31	13	18	0.42	0.58
April	30	21	213	0.70	7.10
May	31	16	79	0.52	2.55
June	30	22	45	0.73	1.50
July	31	22	114	0.71	3.68

Event count is relatively stable across the seven months, ranging from 0.42 to 0.77 per day. March is the quietest period. Country-points are far more volatile, and that volatility reflects the type of events rather than any genuine shift in the agenda.

April's spike to 213 points is not a product of its 21 events. Two EU regulations — the postponement of the EUDR deforestation regulation and the publication of the first CBAM certificate price — account for 54 points on their own. July's 114 points arise similarly from the revised ESRS and the ESG Rating Regulation.

June is the exception to this pattern: most of its 45 points come from a single physical event, the heat dome that struck Europe between 22 and 29 June and broke temperature records in 13 countries. By early July the excess death toll from that event had passed 10,440.

August 2026 was excluded from scope because, at the time the study was compiled (4 August), only four days of data existed. Comparing a partial month against complete ones would have produced an artificial appearance of decline.

9. Limitations and Caveats

The following limitations must be reported alongside any use of these results. If they are omitted, the findings become open to misinterpretation.

- Sampling bias: the dataset was assembled through topic-driven searches rather than random sampling. The topics searched partly determine the outcome.
- Language bias: the predominance of English-language sources structurally favours the United States and Western Europe.
- Bloc effect: a single EU-level regulation generates 27 country-points while a national regulation generates one. This aggregates two different phenomena on the same scale.
- Headquarters effect: attributing global announcements to the issuing organisation's headquarters rewards countries hosting international bodies (Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom).
- Unassigned events: in two cases (Storm Harry and the North African heatwave) the affected countries could not be established from the sources, so no points were awarded.
- Under-representation: small island states, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are systematically under-represented.

> **Validation approach**
>
> This study can be validated by running the same methodology against a structured news database such as GDELT, which monitors more than 65,000 sources in over 100 languages and produces theme and location tags for each article. If a full census largely preserves the relative ranking presented here, that would indicate language and search bias did not determine the outcome.

10. Conclusion

The seven-month period shows that the ESG news agenda is concentrated within a strikingly narrow geography. Two-thirds of the world's countries sit entirely outside it.

Two distinct mechanisms drive the agenda. The first is physical impact: disasters, heatwaves, wildfires. Such items remain geographically bounded and concern about two countries on average. The second is regulatory reach: a single legislative item concerns dozens of countries at once. Europe's dominance in the ranking derives from the second mechanism, not the first.

This distinction means news frequency cannot serve on its own as an indicator in country-level ESG risk assessment. High frequency does not indicate that a country faces intense sustainability problems; it indicates that the country is visible within the news infrastructure. Low frequency does not indicate the absence of problems, but invisibility.