

COP, LOOK, LISTEN

ISSUE 6 | Tuesday 15 November

Hi,

Welcome to the sixth edition of **COP, LOOK, LISTEN**, a bulletin covering information attacks and anti-climate trends in and around COP27.

We welcome requests from journalists, civil society and policymakers to provide evidence where relevant. If you have a lead regarding climate mis-/disinformation, malign influence operations or other suspicious activity, please email contact@caad.info. All requests will be reviewed from both an ethical and technical perspective, ensuring data is used responsibly to map and counter these threats.

To subscribe to the 'COP, Look, Listen' bulletins, please register [here](#).



HEADLINES

An overview of top opposition content across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, Telegram and mainstream media – includes active disinformation, malign influence campaigns and broader adversarial messaging around climate, which may require an immediate response from the sector.

A viral trend condemning '400 private jets' has resurfaced at COP27, condemning climate negotiations as elitist and illegitimate.



UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

A deeper look at anti-climate actors or phenomena impacting the public debate, who reveal something important about the disinformation playbook.

Contrarians are branding climate activists as mentally ill extremists, and shrouding explicit calls for violence in 'internet humour'.

ON OUR RADAR

Emerging trends that have not yet reached a critical mass, but may prove a bellwether for anti-climate campaigns and messaging.

Climate denial is back in a big way - AI scanned thousands of posts from the CAAD dashboard and found that the most popular claims, by far, were those attacking climate science and activists or deeming climate change a 'hoax'.

HEADLINES

PRIVATE JET DISINFO TAKES FLIGHT (AGAIN)

OUR VERDICT:

Expose this as loudly as possible!

During COP26 last year, one of the biggest viral falsehoods was that "400 private jets" flew into negotiations in Glasgow, with a picture from a [past Super Bowl, presented](#) as though it were COP. This year the same disinfo claim has returned- but with a twist!

While in 2021 claims were shared nearly exclusively by right-wing pundits, this year the top-engaged post came from a progressive source that referenced the "the world's elite" and their "hundreds of private jets" - significantly outperforming any of the over 177 k tweets, RTs and QTs from over 135k accounts referring to the "400 private jets" claim.

It is certainly fair game to criticise hypocrisy and hold the climate sector, world leaders and other public figures to account for poor practice. That said, COP is the main platform for developing robust climate policy at a global level, and cannot be deemed 'illegitimate' because a handful of delegates use less-than-optimal transport (especially when the numbers are falsely inflated). COPs are necessary specifically *because* no amount of personal sacrifice can address the international, systemic dependence on fossil fuels.

Those who are supportive of climate action should feel empowered to call out greenwashing and the outsized responsibility of the wealthy for driving the climate crisis. However they should also be aware that opposition groups and individuals will likely echo those critiques, using them to brand climate action as elitist and invalid (see also: 'wokewashing' by Russia and China and the supposed endorsement of Greta's COP critiques covered in last week's bulletins).

Progressive activists should be attuned to this bad-faith tactic, especially when the claims are not substantiated by facts. Disinformation is largely a game of opportunism and outrage, as documented in the '[Deny, Deceive, Delay](#)' report (p. 9-12). Arguments can look similar to 'pro-green' groups (or even co-opt their messaging) but conclude that COP as a process is corrupt, irrelevant and/or has no public mandate, and as such the negotiated outcomes should be

discounted. In many instances, a similar line of reasoning is applied to environmental agendas writ large, beyond the summit event itself. Tread carefully!

The narrative generating the most overall activity around COP26 last year centred on themes of wealth, power and legitimacy. Content in this category portrayed the summit as elitist, highlighting alleged double standards for delegates and, in some cases, referencing wider conspiracies around globalism or the ‘New World Order’.

With a world in flux, it is comforting to know some things never change. **The ‘400 private jets’ claim that originally hit headlines around Glasgow, alongside a [misleading photo](#), has made a swift comeback at COP27.** In 2021 our analysts determined that the meme was first published by a [Libertarian page](#) on Instagram and Facebook, and that posts containing it were interacted with more than 220,000 times (185,081 Facebook, 40,719 Instagram) across 300+ posts. Full analysis of the original disinformation can be found on p.105 of CAAD’s [‘Deny, Deceive, Delay’](#) report.



Alexis Poulin 
@Poulin2012

Pas moins de 400 jets privés de dirigeants mondiaux vont se rendre au sommet sur le climat de la COP27. Pour expliquer aux pauvres comment rouler en vélo ou en trottinette et arrêter de se chauffer l’hiver pour “sauver le climat”.

Translated from French by Google

No less than 400 private jets of world leaders will travel to the COP27 climate summit. To explain to the poor how to ride a bicycle or scooter and stop heating up in winter to “save the climate”.

9:19 AM · Nov 4, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

13.8K Retweets 535 Quote Tweets 33.2K Likes



Catturd 
@catturd2

I love it when 400 private jets fly to Egypt for the UN Climate Conference to tell the peasants to ride bikes and live in tents.

3:32 PM · Nov 12, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

24.8K Retweets 819 Quote Tweets 95.4K Likes



PeterSweden
@PeterSweden7

The global elite just used 400 private jets to travel to the UN climate change conference to lecture you on how to save the planet 🤡🤡🤡

5:07 PM · Nov 12, 2022 · Twitter for Android

5,497 Retweets 172 Quote Tweets 19K Likes

This year, our team collected all posts containing keywords around this claim (‘400’ + ‘private’ + ‘jets’) from 18 October 2021 until 13 November 2022 to assess its re-emergence, amplifiers and penetration into the mainstream. Given that our wider COP monitoring has highlighted high-traction content in French and Spanish, the query also included posts combining “400” with terms like “aviones privados” or “jets privés”. In fact, **the two most widely shared examples from the overall timeframe are a [French post](#) from the beginning of COP27 and a [Spanish-language post](#) from COP26.**

Overall, we collected over 177k tweets, retweets and quote tweets from over 135k unique users - some content was unrelated, e.g. referencing a ‘\$400m private jet’ owned by a Russian oligarch, but the vast majority falls within scope of our analysis. The graph below clearly shows that these keywords, despite excluding explicit reference to either COP26 or COP27, coalesced around both climate summits.

Initially, the circulation of such claims this year was substantially lower than at the start of COP26. This changed last Friday (11 November), seemingly in the wake of a [Daily Mail](#) story published that day which has been cited by many of the high-engagement posts since. Content continued to gain traction over the weekend (12-13 November), almost matching the spike in November 2021. The Daily Mail has a reputation for publishing climate disinformation (see ‘Deny, Deceive, Delay’ for a full profile) - a survey being launched by CAAD today found that readers of the outlet are more likely to believe such



Larry Elder @larryelder

Over 400 private jets have landed in Egypt for a UN Climate Change Conference attended by 33,000 people who are determining how to reduce carbon footprints and save the planet.

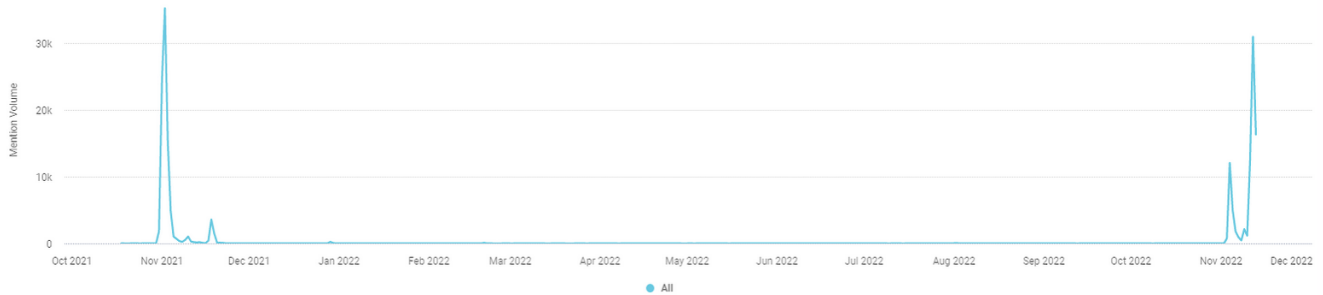
5:11 AM · Nov 13, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

2,353 Retweets 199 Quote Tweets 11.3K Likes

falsehoods than other UK media consumers. Stay tuned for more details!

The weekend spike came from promotion by widely followed accounts like [Catturd](#) and [Disclose.tv](#), both of whom boast over 1m followers on Twitter. Other high-engagement posts originated from right-wing influencer [Peter Sweden](#) (407k followers), [anti-lockdown campaigner Bernie Spofforth](#) (149k followers), conservative talk-radio host [Larry Elder](#) (1.1m followers) and right-wing pundit [Dominique Samuels](#) (159k followers).

Ironically, the Daily Mail story that sparked the disinfo trend cites, but does not link to, both an AfP debunk of the ‘400 private jets’ claim and CAAD’s own report on how hypocrisy and elitism are key opposition narratives. The Mail story then reiterates the claim, with alleged corroboration that 300-400 private jets landed for COP27 from "a talk-show host close to the Egyptian leadership" and an unnamed source "close to the Egyptian aviation authorities." They do note that other media cited much lower numbers, based on public services that track private jet flight paths.



Volume over time graph for claims around ‘400 private jets’ from 18 October 2021 to 9 November 2022

Notably in the case of COP27, high-traction content on this issue is stemming from both climate sceptic or delayist accounts and progressive organisations arguing for stronger climate action. The left-wing political movement Diem25, founded by former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, [tweeted](#) a screenshot from a flight tracking app pointing to ‘hundreds of planes’, as well as condemning Coca-Cola’s sponsorship of the summit (31k retweets, 90k likes). A similar [example](#) from COP26 came from the account of UK Labour MP Nadia Whittome.

Among public pages, groups and verified profiles on Facebook, the trends were somewhat different. We could identify over 1,800 public posts, however the popularity of this claim around COP26 has dwindled in 2022. Unlike on Twitter, there was no initial spike for the opening of COP27 and only a much smaller spike after 11 November.



UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

CLIMATE ACTIVISM ‘PRESCRIBED’ BY THE RIGHT-WING

OUR VERDICT:

While the content identified has yet to go viral, endorsing calls for violence against climate activists should not be ignored - such trends pose a potential threat to those involved in frontline activity (e.g. Fridays for Future, Just Stop Oil), as well as figures more broadly connected to climate action (e.g. scientists, institutional personnel). The escalation of violence in recent years, including [lethally running over protestors](#), shows how hostility on fringe platforms can snowball into real-world harm. In the wake of contentious elections in Australia, Brazil, Sweden, Italy, the US and other contexts, the ability to weaponise division is arguably more acute and may well be directed towards climate movements - not least as the topic becomes ever-more enmeshed in a 'culture wars' and conspiracist worldview.

Digital platforms must be held accountable for the violent harassment amplified by their algorithms and the toxic communities who spread hate with impunity via their products and services.

An Increasingly Hostile Climate

As activist groups such as Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion increase the visibility of nonviolent direct action, opposition rhetoric across social media is becoming more extreme. Right-wing media on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as malign actors online, are deploying abusive language towards those involved, calling for punitive measures against them and sometimes endorsing calls for violence.

The broader context here matters. Recent months have seen attempts to suppress [free speech](#), with both law enforcement and policymakers appearing to silence activists and journalists covering climate protests. In October, UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman introduced a new bill to [expand police powers and create "new criminal offenses](#) punishable with jail time and unlimited fines for activism". On 8 November, in a widely-shared [tweet thread](#), LBC reporter Charlotte Lynch reported being arrested while covering a Just Stop Oil protest (despite showing her press card) and being detained in a cell for 5 hours.

In parallel, Media Matters found that from 14-28 October 2022 programmes on Fox ran 32 segments on the 'escalating tactics' of climate activists, more than twice the combined segments of mainstream, left-leaning networks CNN and MSNBC. On October 24, Fox personality Ainsely Earhardt referred to such actions as a ["form of terrorism"](#), while Tucker Carlson [suggested](#) they should be on the FBI's radar. In this context, online attacks on climate activists can have a silencing effect and help normalise abusive and potentially violent rhetoric. With Republican bills in the US seeking to restrict the right to protest while [granting immunity to aggressors](#), this is a public safety concern that platforms could take immediate steps to address.

Calls for Violence

Social media posts with substantial traction contain abusive language towards activists, and sometimes implicit endorsement of or calls for violence. For instance, a meme joking about activists being flattened by a steamroller has achieved strong engagement in conservative Facebook groups in the UK and Australia. The meme has appeared on at least six Facebook pages and received 695 shares since November 3 2022.

While clearly a joke, humour is a common tool in online communities, often providing an 'innocent' entry point for more extremist or conspiracist rabbit holes. The leaked



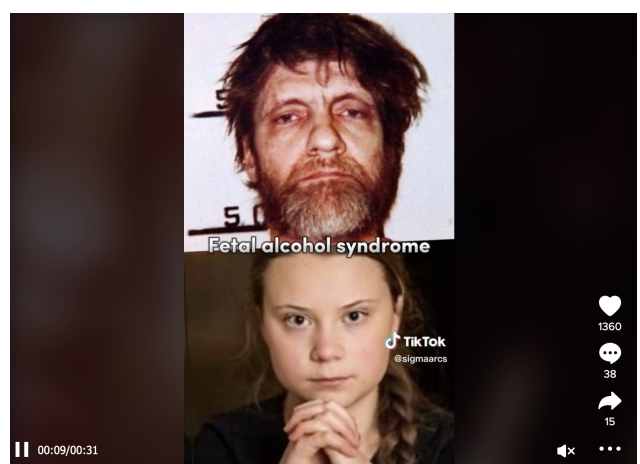
style guide for the Neo-Nazi Daily Stormer website was [explicit about hate speech and humor](#), saying: "the unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not" [before adding that](#) "this is obviously a ploy."

Please note: We have hyperlinked some posts below, both for transparency and to demonstrate the severity of the issue, but advise caution for those clicking through - the content therein is extreme and disturbing in nature

On fringe social media platforms such as [Gettr](#) and [4chan](#), more outwardly [violent rhetoric](#) targeting climate activists is thriving, including calls for **sexual assault and death threats**. Messages frequently use misogynistic, homophobic and ableist rhetoric alongside broader calls for violence, while by posts by far-right influencers implicitly condone such action. On Telegram, far-right activist and [anti-Islam extremist](#) Tommy Robinson [wrote](#): "there will be a day when someone snaps and starts throwing punches and kicks at these just stop oil lot". He also shared a video that seemingly shows a passerby [attacking](#) a climate activist with an approving message.

'Eco-Terrorists' and Mental Illness

Across social media platforms, CAAD's monitoring has found that malign actors are regularly casting climate activists as 'extremists' and calling for harsher punishments in response, including vigilante-type action and increased police crackdowns on protests. On 7 November, Newsmax's [Wendy Bell, host of Common Sense, compared](#) climate change activists to the January 6th insurrectionists. Her claim centred on the idea that "climate wackos" like Just Stop Oil (who in fact did zero long-term damage to artworks) are not "a smaller thing" than an attack by [militant extremists](#) and [white supremacists](#) on the election process, the latter of which targeted [politicians for assassination](#) and [led to seven deaths](#).



Shellenberger: Climate Fanatics Are Weaponizing Mental Illness

Another trend gaining traction across platforms

(including [TikTok](#)) describes climate activists as “[mentally ill](#)” or **impaired**. On November 7, Michael Shellenberger claimed that “Climate fanatics are [weaponizing mental illness](#)” (2,5k Retweets, 10.6K Likes). The tweet was shared by US climate influencers like [Tom Nelson](#) (291k followers) and [Chris Horner](#), as well as right-wing media figures such as Townhall [columnist Kurt Schlichter](#) (454k followers) and pundit [Ann Coulter](#) (2m followers). The denialist blog ZeroHedge [wrote up](#) Shellenberger’s argument which was shared in turn on Twitter by the conspiracist [Paul Joseph Watson](#) (1.3m followers). Disinformation hub [Gateway Pundit](#) also referred to Shellenberger’s thread in a separate article.

Another notable [tweet](#) came from Roger Pielke Jr. (39.1k followers) - a commentator at the University of Colorado Boulder (profiled [here](#) by DeSmog) - who suggested that “faux apocalypticism” makes climate activists “develop mental health issues”. His post was shared by other prominent accounts like Bjorn Lomborg (148.7k followers), Net Zero Watch (30.5k followers), and [CLINTEL](#). Both Pielke Jr. and Shellenberger have traditionally positioned themselves to the left of climate denialists and disinformers, as well as more ‘scientifically accurate’ in their acceptance of climate science - notably, they remain among the most common accounts cited by anti-climate actors, vested interests and sceptics.

Other people who have picked up this narrative include *The Five* host [Greg Gutfeld](#) (2.2m followers on Twitter), who described protesters as “mental patients”, and CFACT President Craig Rucker, who [wrote an op-ed](#) in the Daily Caller claiming that “climate extremism is making America mentally ill.” **Meanwhile [Breitbart](#) co-opted “extremist” language, often used to describe proscribed or terrorist groups:** “*The Extinction Rebellion (XR) splinter group, linked to climate extremist Roger Hallam, announced the blockade on Twitter, where it has been openly recruiting people to “[s]ign up for arrestable direct action” — i.e. to commit crimes — and soliciting public funding for its activities, apparently without consequence.*”. It also cited a **false claim that Just Stop Oil have ‘blood on their hands’ and are responsible for the deaths of two women who died in car crashes**, having been diverted from a bridge under blockade by the movement.

While [mental health issues like eco-anxiety](#) can be a real result of the climate crisis, they do not justify outright dismissal of activists’ concerns. More importantly, there is no legitimate pretext for Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms to serve as breeding grounds for violent extremism.

Unhinged Crackpot Shuts Down Major Highway in UK – Demands Immediate End of Fossil Fuels and Claims She Is the Victim (VIDEO)

By Jim Hoff
Published November 7, 2022 at 10:00am
836 Comments



Roger Pielke Jr. @RogerPielkeJr · 8 Nov

Journalists & scientists nod along (wink, wink) but young people take this hyperbole seriously

Some develop mental health issues
Some try to shut down highways, risking their lives & those of drivers

When are adults who know better going to push back on the faux apocalypticism?



Aruna Chandrasekhar @aruna_sekhar · 7 Nov

"The 1.5C goal is on life support and the machines are rattling. We're getting close to that point of no return. Humanity has a choice: cooperate or perish. It is either a climate solidarity pact or a collective suicide pact."

@antonioguterres #COP27

[Show this thread](#)



52 195 554

 ON OUR RADAR

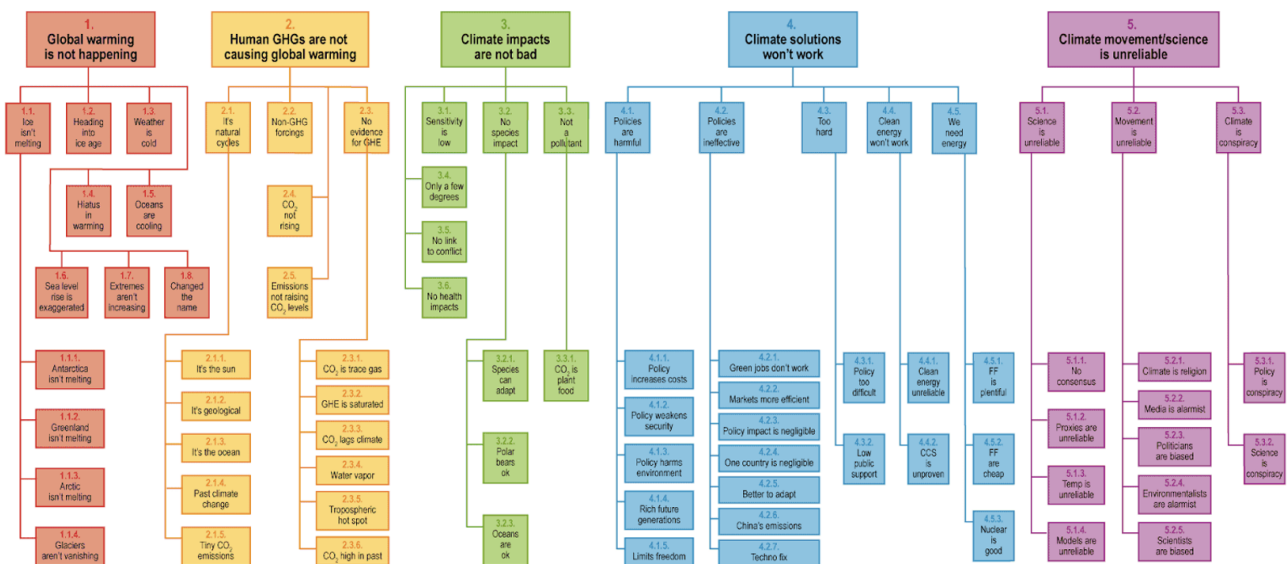
‘CLIMATE HOAX’ CONTENT MAKES A COMEBACK

OUR VERDICT:

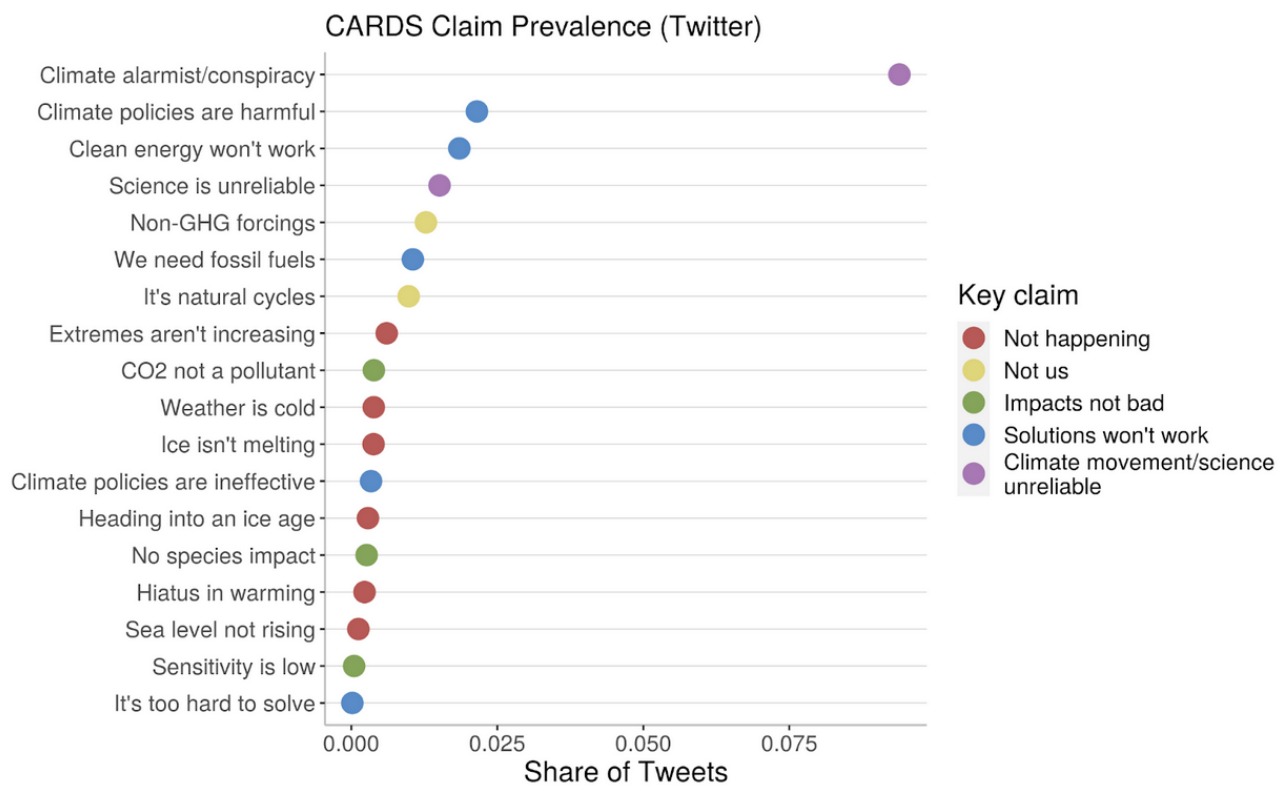
Accusations of ‘alarmism’ levied at activists, scientists and decision-makers, as well as conspiracies alleging a ‘climate hoax’, have become the most popular lines of attack on social media. This is despite the prevalence of (and continued investment in) greenwashing content and [efforts](#) to soften more ‘toxic’ climate denial. **On Tuesday 15 November CAAD will formally (re)launch its Open Letter to mount a proportionate, systemic response to climate mis- and disinformation across Big Tech - become a signatory [here!](#)**

CAAD has partnered with researchers in the [CARDS project](#), a joint initiative of University of Exeter, Trinity College Dublin and Monash University to dig deeper into findings on climate mis- and disinfo. Using their [peer-reviewed machine learning model](#), we have **classified key contrarian claims found in tweets from a sample of sceptical influencers between Monday 24 October to Sunday 6 November**. This provides us with an approximation on the prevalence of specific claims, complementing our broad monitoring of conversations around ‘battleground topics’ (see [linked paper](#) for methodology).

The Computer-assisted Recognition of Denial and Skepticism (“CARDS”) is an AI trained on over 25,000 hand-coded paragraphs from 20 prominent contrarian think tanks and 33 blogs. It classifies claims into the following five major categories, with 27 sub-claims and 49 sub-sub-claims:



The model found at least one of those claims in 22% of the dataset from climate contrarians. While this might appear low, it is worth bearing in mind that even these accounts regularly post on a variety of things, beyond climate. **Content criticising activists as alarmists and climate science as a hoax comprised 10.9% of the total, twice as much as the percentage undermining solutions (5.4%), or the aggregated number of tweets claiming ‘it’s not happening’, ‘not us’, or ‘not that bad’ (4.95%).**



These findings underline some of the broader trends we have highlighted in previous issues. **The conspiratorial approach to outright climate denial is flourishing on social media.** Tech platforms should also be far more alert to the critical (and seemingly increasing) role that personal attacks play in climate discourse. Big Tech must act on harassment at scale and at pace, rather than merely moderating for specific claims or relying on fact-checkers to protect users.

Much of the intel in this bulletin was powered by [Beam](#) - an award-winning system developed by CASM Technology and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to track and confront information threats online. The bespoke climate dashboards used by CAAD's Intelligence Unit collate, enrich, and visualise data from around 3000 actors across climate denial, political, media, industry, influencer and conspiracy ecosystems online, as well as over 250 media outlets worldwide. The system also analyses millions of posts across 4Chan, Facebook, Instagram, MediaCloud, Reddit, Telegram, Twitter and YouTube to capture content broadly related to COP27, alongside discussions around specific policy areas such as Loss and Damage. Complementary tools from Dewey Square Group, [CARDS](#), Graphika and the University of Exeter have provided invaluable analysis in tandem.

Media Requests

If you are a media outlet or a journalist with a data request, or in need of a spokesperson, please feel free to get in contact with our team at contact@caad.info, who will do their best to assist with any requests.





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