COP, LOOK, LISTEN

ISSUE 8 | Friday 18 November

Hi,

Welcome to the eighth 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. Previous editions are available in PDF via https://caad.info/reports/cop27-bulletin/.

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.

Denialism makes a comeback on social media, with #climatescam among the top three results for climate in Twitter's search bar. Sign CAAD's Open Letter to push for a coordinated response at COP and beyond.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

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

With Republicans' performance in the US midterms failing to meet expectations, right-wing actors and groups are scrambling to find a coherent voice. The result is a mosaic of disinformation narratives, ranging from climate denial to election fraud.

HEADLINES

DENIALISM: THE COMEBACK TOUR

OUR VERDICT:

Outright climate denial is still endemic across social media, not to mention the 'softer' tactics neatly summarised in this piece on 'Discourses of Delay'. Such content serves to mislead users about the reality, impacts of, and viable responses to climate change. Without a basic foundation of facts, citizens cannot engage meaningfully with their policymakers or build a public mandate for action.

To shift the dial we need a working, commonly held definition of climate mis- and disinformation recognised by key scientific and multilateral bodies. This will create a precedent for both private and third sector entities and remove the pressure for Big Tech to act as sole 'arbiters of truth', which is an increasingly contentious issue. If the IPCC or UNFCCC formally created the framework for response, it could galvanise action not only across social media platforms, but other key institutions such as advertising standards agencies, financial services and media regulators and electoral commissions.

CAAD has co-developed a definition as a starting base, available in our Open Letter.

Earlier this year, the European Parliament's INGE Committee was the first body to propose such language, albeit without the remit for implementation (see clauses 59 and 148). **The following clause could serve as the basis for text in a COP Negotiated Outcome**:

148. Emphasises the urgent need to address climate mis- and disinformation; welcomes the efforts at COP26 to adopt a universal definition of climate mis- and disinformation and to outline actions to address the matter; calls for models such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to be built on to create a global code of conduct on disinformation, a process that would provide the basis for a Paris Agreement on Disinformation;

Our Ground Team in Sharm continues to push for language at COP27, although the cover decision is in chaos as we enter the final 24 (48...72?) hours - **if you know any delegations who may want to champion this agenda, propose text within negotiations, and/ or begin laying the groundwork for such an inclusion at**

COP28, please contact Devin Bahceci (devin.bahceci@gsccnetwork.org) **and Jennie King** (jk@isdglobal.org).

In the wake of COP26, climate denialism appeared to be outpaced by subtler forms of scepticism, 'discourses of delay' and attacks on climate action. Sadly, 2022 has seen a resurgence of denialist content, including #ClimateScam and other explicit references from verified accounts.

PeterSweden
@PeterSweden7

Retweet if you think climate change is a scam 👍

2:08 PM · Nov 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

27.5K Retweets **633** Quote Tweets **39.5K** Likes

Peter Clack
@PeterDClack

Islands aren't sinking. Temperatures aren't rising. Greatest hoax of modern times pushed by crooked, socialist United Nations. Australia's dishonest anti-Australia ABC trots out the debunked climate scam. COP27 narcissists guzzle, eat, fly 1st class.

youtube.com
Global warming the 'latest excuse' by socialists who 'hate' ...
Sky News host Andrew Bolt says global warming is not just a "religion of the west's ruling class" but is also the "latest ...

11:48 AM · Nov 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

2,149 Retweets **100** Quote Tweets **5,630** Likes

There has been a noteworthy uptick in content referencing "#ClimateScam", "climate scam," or "climate is a scam" since July 2022, as shown in the graph below. After this point we not only found substantial individual spikes, but overall the use of related terminology rarely drops below 1,000 retweets daily.

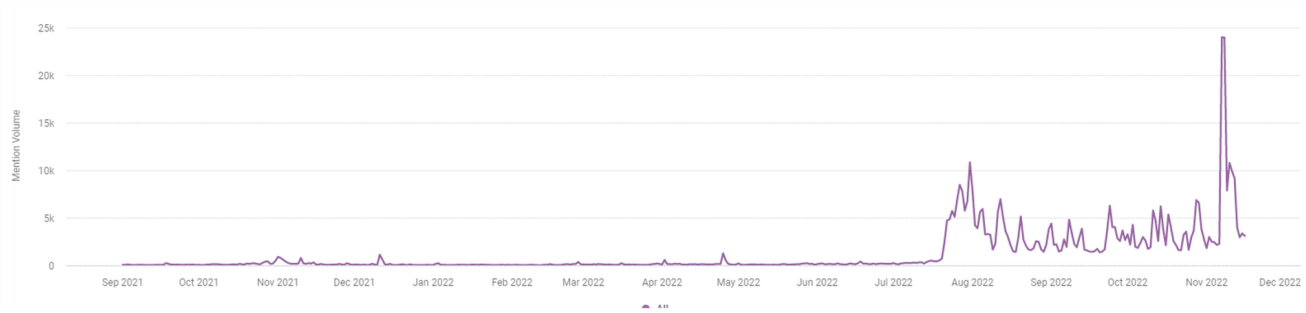
Overall, we have recorded over 509k mentions (including retweets) of any of the three terms, originating from over 146k unique users. Having analysed the drivers, it appears there is no clear culprit but rather several open questions that highlight the issues with untransparent algorithmic amplification.

Prominent posts during the summit have claimed that global elites or specific national leaders are using climate action as a pretext for authoritarianism or to destroy the livelihood of 'ordinary citizens.'

Recent posts include right-wing influencer **Peter Sweden** (411.8k followers), who has made such claims a main part of his daily - if not hourly - content (see p.64 of 'Deny, Deceive, Delay' for a full profile). His most successful post on Day 1 of COP27 obtained more than 39k likes and 27k retweets, but he regularly achieves thousands of shares and interactions for climate-

related content.

Other prominent examples include retired author **Peter Clack** (69.3k followers), accusing Australia's public broadcaster of being in cahoots with the 'crooked, socialist United Nations,' and conservative activist **Tom Fitton** (1.7m followers) attacking President Biden's climate action as a threat to civilisation.



Volume-over-time graph for "#ClimateScam", "climate scam," or "climate is a scam" from September 2021 to November 2022

'Climate Scam' - Peaks in Activity

Earlier this year, widespread political unrest in Sri Lanka was distorted by climate sceptics blaming green policies, but mentions of the country constitute less than 400 tweets across our whole collection, including retweets. The first notable posts on 20 and 21 July target a wide array of subjects, including well-worn denialist claims around atmospheric CO2, heat waves and attacks on wind power - **the accounts in question boast between 69k and 264k followers and two remain verified**.

In the following days, popular posts focussed on Canada and attacks on Prime Minister Trudeau, including from more obscure accounts self-describing as 'conservative' or 'patriots'.

Since then our data shows small but regular spikes in activity, including posts noting that the hashtag (#climatescam) is trending.

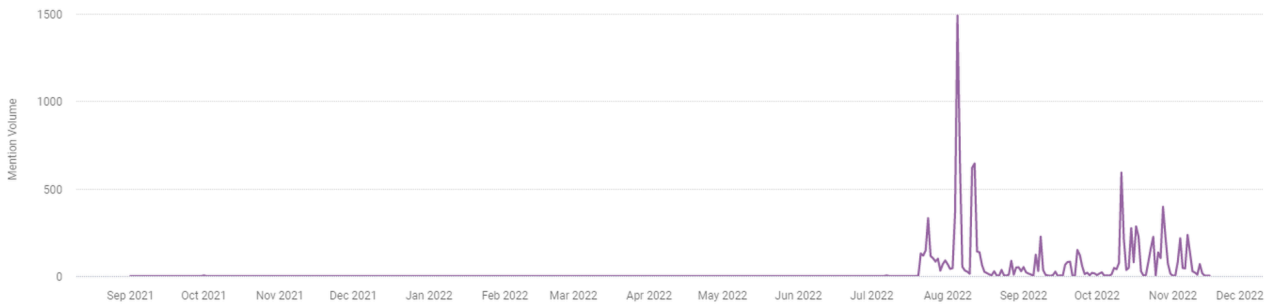
😤 ...Carbon Taxes do not reduce Carbon.

They make Globalists richer.

#ClimateScam

3:21 PM · Jul 22, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

953 Retweets **65** Quote Tweets **2,270** Likes



Mentions (incl.retweets) of posts on Twitter referring to one of "#ClimateScam", "climate scam," or "climate is a scam" combined with the word "trending" from September 2021 to November 2022

The first notably high-traction content came on 30 July from a **non-verified account that includes the bio 'God's soldier' and has 17.3k followers - it featured a clip of Alan Jones, conservative Australian broadcaster with a long history of climate denialism, and has over 23k likes, 10k retweets and 467k views.** (See p. 21 of 'Deny' Deceive, Delay' and the wider profile on Sky News Australia for further detail)**.** By that time the hashtag had already been spiking for 9 days and has continued in a similar vein ever since.

Question Mark: We found some evidence of suspicious activity, for example one account being responsible for over 50k of the 'climate scam' posts - it appeared to automatically retweet certain anti-climate hashtags over the collection period, but we could not ascertain its origins or affiliations.

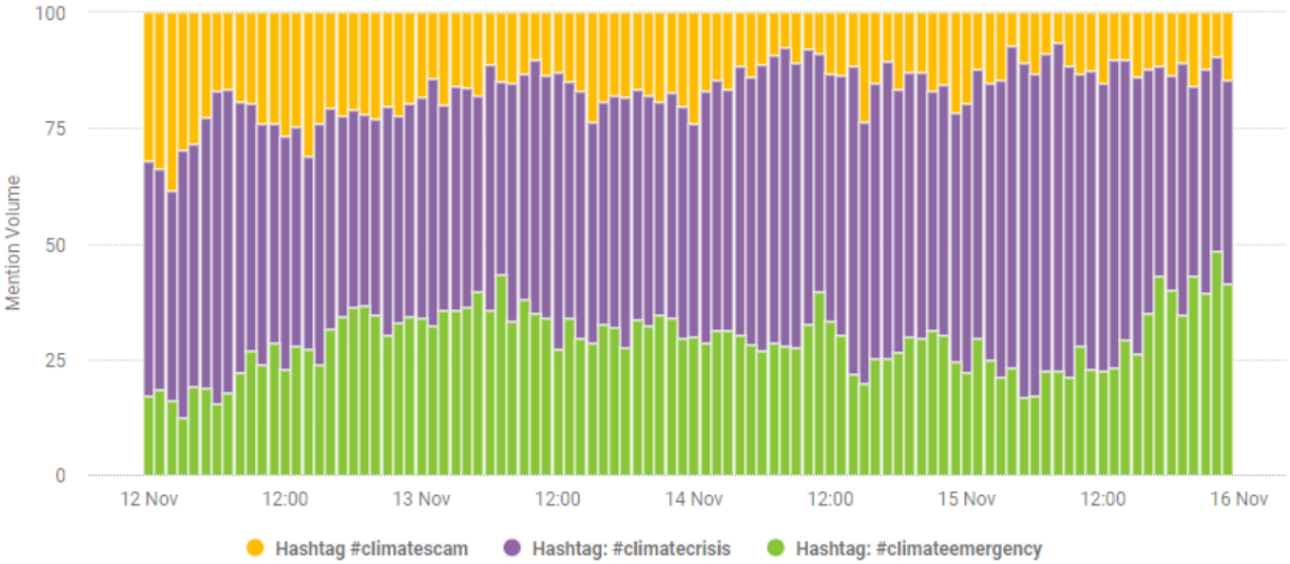
Confusion Abounds at Twitter

During COP27, our analysts noticed that an organic Twitter search for the word "climate" was returning #ClimateScam ahead of two other hashtags (#ClimateEmergency and #ClimateCrisis). Recommendation systems are complex and the factors producing these outcomes could vary based on previous user behaviour. However, we subsequently tried the search on different devices, across different geographies and using tools like Incognito Mode or VPNs. While these are limited controls, they produced consistent results from Sunday 13 November to Tuesday 15 November.

Screenshot of Twitter search bar on 15.11.22

One possible explanation could be a rapid increase and/or very high volumes of content containing the respective hashtags. We thus compared volumes for #climatescam, #climateemergency and #climatecrisis over time from 12-16 November inclusive. Overall, we collected 66.5K messages including one of the three hashtags - 39.7K tweets included #climatecrisis, 22.3K contained #climateemergency and "only" 12.6K cited #climatescam.

Another possible reason is the presence of significantly high traction posts for one specific hashtag - we checked that too, and the most retweeted hashtags in the timeframe were #climatecrisis or #climateemergency, not #climatescam (see graph below). **This adds additional confusion as to why #climatescam would be surfaced at the top of search results, especially during COP27 when platforms are usually more attuned to promoting verified climate science.** The discrepancy has since disappeared (at least for now), but raises some serious questions about Twitter's algorithms and the content it actively recommends to users.



UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

MIDTERMS AFTERMATH

OUR VERDICT:

The relative underperformance by Republicans in the US Midterms has left right-wing conspiracy theorists scrambling to converge on a message and explain the absence of the predicted 'Red Wave'. Attacks are currently varied and fragmented, seeming to take a 'throw things at the wall and see what sticks' approach laced with disinformation.

As described at length in Policy Ask 2 of 'Deny, Deceive, Delay', taking action on Repeat Offender accounts is a key measure to curb the impact of climate denial and delayism in public life (e.g. through downranking, fact-checking labels, demonetisation etc.). Our research shows that a small group of accounts create the majority of anti-climate content, originate or amplify new lines of attack, and have disproportionate influence on the public debate across social media (see also CCDH's report on the 'Toxic Ten'). Many of these accounts have been labelled by fact-checkers as sharing false or misleading content, yet remain live even after repeated flags by our coalition directly to platforms' internal teams.

Such disinformation is often not limited to climate issues, but runs the gamut of 'culture wars' talking points: from anti-vaxx rhetoric and COVID-19 scepticism to conspiracies like the New World Order, unsubstantiated claims of 'voter fraud', or even Holocaust denial. This should provide an even greater incentive for platforms to act, since an effective response against such accounts could have a 'force multiplier' effect and mitigate harm in multiple area.

We know that sensational content fuels the 'outrage economy', and therefore serves the current business model of most platforms, and climate is no exception - whether outright denial or other forms of disinformation, this content is often high

engagement, which increases the value proposition for advertisers on social media. As such, efforts like Facebook's much-touted Climate Science Center become somewhat moot - organic content from known 'super-spreaders' of disinformation gains vastly more reach and visibility. Rather than fixate on individual posts, accounts which consistently distort, undermine or refute scientific consensus should be addressed in line with Terms of Service, Community Guidelines and a clear definition.

Republicans' repeated and misleading messaging on US "energy independence", as well as blaming President Biden's green policies for high gas prices and outright climate change denial, did not yield electoral gains in the Senate, and a supposed landslide in the House is now projected as a knife-edge win. Right-wing media has struggled to create cohesive messaging around climate change and energy in the days since, both in the context of Biden's trip to COP27 and meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Indonesia.

PICK-YOUR-OWN-ADVENTURE CONSPIRACISM

God has called us to be good stewards of the environment. Liberals have used this platform to funnel money into the pockets of politicia...

Like Comment Share 674 · 51 comments · 6.1K views

Blake Masters
@bgmasters
US Senate candidate, AZ

(1) Energy: We traded energy independence for climate change activism. Europe especially let itself become dependent on Russia for oil and gas. Germany even closed its nuclear power plants. This gave Putin leverage.

9:43 PM · Mar 1, 2022 · Twitter for iPad

237 Retweets **15** Quote Tweets **2,334** Likes

Dinesh D'Souza
@DineshDSouza

I keep hearing that on climate change the science is “settled,” but there’s no such thing as “settled science.” Even Einstein’s relativity—one of the most tested theories in physics—is not “settled.” Free and open debate—not censorship—is the pathway to scientific progress

1:35 PM · Jul 6, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

2,536 Retweets **102** Quote Tweets **11.5K** Likes

Radical, election-denying candidates who have also opposed climate action, such as Kari Lake (715k followers on Twitter), Doug Mastriano (121k followers on FB), Blake Masters (253k followers on Twitter), and Joe Kent (143k followers on Twitter), lost their respective races. Other known figures such as convicted fraudster and conspiracist Dinesh D'Souza (2.6m followers on Twitter) or pundit Jack Posobiec (1.8m followers on Twitter) have been **supplementing their election messaging misinformation with pro-fossil fuel, anti-scientific and conspiratorial claims leading up to and during COP27**.

In October 2022, D'Souza made the claim that "climate fanatics" would help "the GOP sweep the midterm elections", and as recently as July argued that the science of climate change was "not settled". These tweets received over 15k Likes and 3k Retweets. Before the midterms, Jack Posobiec bemoaned coal plant closures in an apparent appeal to Pennsylvania voters. Featuring a video from Townhall.com, this tweet received over 47k Likes and 23k Retweets. Both are prime examples of how, as noted in CAAD's 'Deny, Deceive, Delay' report, **climate narratives are becoming ever-more enmeshed in broader identity and grievance politics.**

Post-Midterms, US right-wing media has turned its focus to Biden's actions abroad. Fox News *Outnumbered* host Dagen McDowell expressed **outrage over the fact that Biden focused on climate action during his meeting with Xi Jinping in Bali instead of interrogating him about the COVID-19 lab leak conspiracy theory**. In addition,

McDowell cited Michael Shellenberger to **claim the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) would make China richer** - this is despite the fact that the IRA explicitly encourages domestic clean energy competition with China, as have other moves by the Biden administration.

Congressman Dan Crewnshaw (1.2m followers) had three recent posts criticising the Democratic Party for their failure to combat the US "energy crisis". On November 7, he tweeted that Democrats were "obsessed with climate radicalism and woke ideology", and that they do not care about basic energy, economic and border security. Three days later, Crenshaw criticised Nancy Pelosi's discourse supporting ESG and diversity at COP27, arguing that lowering gas prices and "giving people basic energy reliability and security" were the real priorities.

On November 11, he shared a video of his participation at the summit, claiming that his motivation to attend was to "advocate for real solutions to America's energy crisis". In the clip Crenshaw **uses China's position in solar manufacturing as an argument against investment in renewable energy sources for the US**. This echoes misleading IRA attacks and is more broadly reminiscent of arguments that fossil fuels are necessary to defeat China made, for example, by Republican lawmakers in last year's Big Oil Congressional hearings.

In the past, the Congressman has railed against ESG, claiming that corporate climate commitments are to blame for the energy crisis and high energy prices. He was also among the many right-wing figures that falsely stated renewable energy was to blame for widespread blackouts in Texas in 2021. Crenshaw currently sits on the House Energy & Commerce Committee and boasts a social media following of over 2 million across Twitter and Facebook. He also hosts a podcast where he invited a fossil gas producer to attack "radical environmentalism" and ESG standards, and according to FEC reports has received $841,917 from the Oil & Gas industry since 2017.

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.

Climate Action Against Disinformation

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