



CAAD

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Hello! You are receiving the [CAAD](#) Data Monitor having previously subscribed to outputs from our coalition, including the COP Intelligence Unit. This new monthly bulletin will share original research, anchored in current events, to ensure the most up-to-date intel on climate mis- and disinformation, greenwashing and wider influence operations around the world. If you do not wish to receive these emails, kindly respond with 'unsubscribe'. New subscribers can sign up [here](#), and any investigative leads or feedback for future editions can be sent to contact@caad.info.

More than 15-minutes of fame: A new, all-encompassing conspiracy takes hold worldwide

Nearly three years after COVID-19 first made headlines, the public health crisis has largely receded from view. Whilst more stringent health measures have been phased out, the “lockdown” legacy persists in the form of conspiracy theories and mistrust, with many viewing the policy as a ‘test bed’ for enacting state control. In this ‘post-pandemic’ space, climate change is often singled out as the pretext to justify future forms of oppression, tyranny and surveillance. The backlash surrounding [15-minute cities](#) is a recent and particularly acute example, which we examine for this debut edition of the CAAD Data Monitor.

From ‘Climate Lockdowns’ to 15-Minute Cities

In late 2022, news emerged that Oxfordshire City Council in the UK was planning to implement a [traffic management scheme](#), part of which would split the city into walkable neighbourhoods. Though the scheme had no relationship to COVID-19 lockdowns, it was soon conflated with the idea of ‘[15-minute cities](#)’ (15mc) and linked to authoritarianism by bloggers including [Vision News](#), [Daily Sceptic](#) and [WattsUpWithThat](#). Content described 15mc as a form of ‘communism’ and a ‘plan for Command and Control’ (Vision News); illustrated a story about Oxford with black-and-white pictures of a crowd giving the Nazi salute (DailySceptic); and stated that the scheme was symbolic of Britain ‘edging closer to naked communism’ (WattsUpWithThat).



Twitter references to '15-minute cities' and 'climate lockdowns' respectively from August 2022 to May 2023

- From December 2022 to May 2023, '15-minute cities' (15mc) usurped 'climate lockdowns' (CL) on Twitter as **a new, but considerably more mainstream, conspiracy** pushing themes of insidious 'Big State' agendas.
- The connection between these two concepts was seeded in late 2022, with 15mc as an emerging idea situated in the context of CL. However, by January 2023 15mc was on a rapid upwards trajectory while CL has flatlined at <1k mentions per day on Twitter.
- **Three blogs appear central in driving and amplifying the initial controversy** about 15mc in late 2022: [Vision News](#), [WattsUpWithThat](#) and [Daily Sceptic](#). In posts mentioning either 15mc or CL, links to these sites were tweeted 8,236, 11,931 and 12,285 times respectively. This indicates that relatively fringe sites can **play an outsized role in fuelling the spread of climate misinformation** and exert significant influence on social media discussions around public policy.
- The **most widely shared URL from a mainstream media outlet** was a Daily Mail piece about traffic calming in Canterbury, which sparked controversy but was only linked to 3,944 times.
- In February 2023, pushback on 15mc assumed more **transnational dimensions** - this includes references to other towns and cities in the UK (e.g. Canterbury, Swindon, Leeds, Colchester, Glastonbury, London or York) and increased attention across the Anglosphere. The spike in activity (see graph above) coincided particularly with content around Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa in Canada, as well as Melbourne and Newcastle in Australia. The US - where the concept of 15mc is **less widely applied** in urban planning - was not regularly cited, save for individual high-traction posts around San Francisco and Cleveland.
- Unlike smaller CL spikes that occurred throughout 2022, **references to 15mc have become a permanent fixture of online discourse** in 2023 and continue to generate thousands of original posts. The term itself is arguably more neutral than 'climate lockdown', allowing it to gain traction and penetrate beyond more niche or issue-specific communities online.

Big Tent Opposition

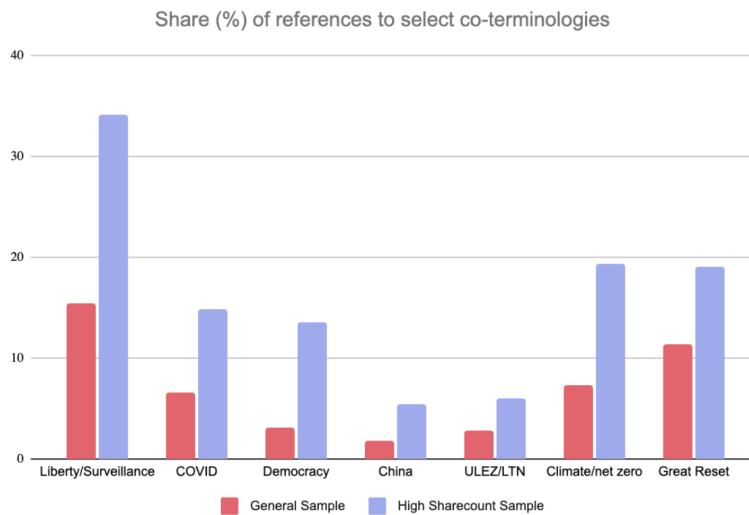
- [Steve Milloy](#) - a **prominent climate sceptic** and **key amplifier of the term 'climate lockdown'** - is among those posting about 15mc who has regularly shared content opposing climate action or refuting the scientific consensus.
- The initial bloggers that drove online engagement around 15mc have a history of sharing **climate denial or delayist content** on their sites. However, linking these ideas to 15mc now plays a less prominent role across social media. Top posts on Twitter and Facebook in recent months tend to focus on **alleged government control and surveillance**, painting 15mc as a 'totalitarian' project rather than climate tyranny per se (see linked tables at end of bulletin).
- **Anti-lockdown influencers** such as [Bernie Spofforth](#) or [Chris Saccoccia](#) have been particularly prominent posters (see linked tables below), while **politicians from smaller right-wing parties** in the UK and Australia have also attacked the concept of 15mc. The latter includes figures like [David Kurten](#) (UK Heritage Party), [Laurence Fox](#) and [Martin Daubney](#) (UK Reclaim Party), [Richard Tice](#) (Reform UK), and Senator [Ralph Babet](#) (United Australia Party).
- Many high-traction posts came from **relatively small or mid-sized accounts** (i.e. followers in the thousands or tens of thousands). These accounts generally post across a spectrum of **'anti-woke' content, COVID/vaccine scepticism, and**

conservative or libertarian politics.

- **Public Facebook groups** continue to play a big role on the platform - 13,776 out of 17,736 mentions for 15mc identified were in such groups. Two particularly worth noting are "Smart Cities Exposed" (UK focus, 15k members) and "Rejecting the 15 Minute City" (Canada focus, 28k members). Both were created in February 2023 and the administrators appear to be newly launched accounts - we could find no evidence that the creators have a wider digital footprint (i.e. presence on other platforms) using OSINT methods, which is unusual.



Come-One, Come-All Conspiracism



Prevalence of seven narratives among 174,228 Twitter posts that contained the term '15-minute cities' - the pink data refers to a general sample from the dataset, while the grey data looked specifically at posts with 500+ retweets. The overall dataset included content from 81,919 unique authors.

- There is a clear trend towards language opposing 15mc on the grounds of 'personal freedom' and concerns about 'surveillance', with much content grounded in debunked claims or unprovable conspiracies. At the 'softer' end of the scale was content focused on a perceived lack of democratic legitimacy, while the most extreme content equated 15mc with 'Nazi prisons' and wider globalist plots.
- Discourse around 15-minute cities is now frequently linked to:

1. The [Great Reset](#) conspiracy theory, including the repeated phrase “[you will own nothing](#)”
 2. Claims that the World Economic Forum is instigating [population controls](#) and [imprisonment of citizens](#)
 3. Conspiracy theories involving the United Nations and [Agenda 2030](#).
- High traction posts that do mention climate or Net Zero in the context of 15mc explicitly frame them as a [pretext](#) for elites to exert [authoritarian control](#). Users also make linkages between 15mc and Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) or Ultra-Low Emission Zones (ULEZ).
 - A similar trend applies to terms used previously by COVID sceptics and subsequently in content around ‘[climate lockdowns](#)’, including reference to [Digital IDs](#), [social credit](#) or [digital currency](#).

How to fight back

The phrase “15-minute cities” has now been co-opted at a transnational level. Any institution using it should expect pushback from conspiracy theorists, more extreme political movements and well-meaning members of the public. Policymakers may want to consider alternative language, while journalists should be vigilant in outlining what policies do and do not entail for any related story. Alternatively, a concerted effort will be needed to reclaim the phrase and compete with a conspiratorial frame that has resonated across borders, issues sets and communities.

When misinformation is embedded into the social media zeitgeist - let alone traditional broadcast and print media - responding with fact checks can only go so far. Instead, it is worth highlighting the [overwhelming popularity](#) of neighbourhood schemes and the process of public consultation involved. [Simple visuals](#), [personal stories](#) and trusted messengers (such as [opposition politicians](#) or [former conspiracy theorists](#)) can also go far in shifting more emotional pushback on these topics.

Finally, it is important to avoid paternalism when describing 15mc or other forms of urban planning (e.g. “studies show reducing traffic is good for you”). Instead, explore the impact from the perspectives of those affected (e.g. “my child is finally breathing clean air on the walk to school”) and acknowledge any legitimate grievances or concerns about the policy which may exist. Mis- and disinformation thrive in ambiguity, especially where there is a perception of downsides being shielded from the public - it is better for institutions to address these head-on, while also educating people about the intended objectives and benefits.

TOP 10 TWITTER AND FACEBOOK POSTS (RANKED BY ENGAGEMENT FROM 1 DEC - 21 MAY 2023) CAN BE [ACCESSED HERE](#).

