

The logo for CAAD, consisting of the letters 'CAAD' in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a dark blue rectangular background.

# DATA MONITOR

ISSUE 3 | OCTOBER 2023

Hello! You are receiving the [CAAD](#) Data Monitor having previously subscribed to outputs from our coalition, including the COP Intelligence Unit. 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 the 'CAAD Tipline' at [contact@caad.info](mailto:contact@caad.info).

---

## PragerU's Digital Empire: What impact are they having online in 2023?

Prager University (PragerU) is capturing headlines with a new strategy of engagement in formal education. Although [not an official university](#), the conservative non-profit targets [younger demographics](#) with its “edutainment” content, and is now [accredited for use in schools across Florida and Oklahoma](#). By their own description, such outputs aim to challenge “[dominant left-wing ideology in culture, media and education](#).”

Alongside an array of topics (e.g. trans rights, religion, or the transatlantic slave trade), PragerU regularly covers climate change and the energy transition. The organisation has [well-documented ties to the fracking billionaire Wilks brothers](#) and its content has [repeatedly](#) been found to contain [misleading](#) or [incorrect](#) claims on climate issues. In their latest school resources, one video [compares doubting climate change to fighting Nazi oppression](#), and could now supplement social studies or civics classes for students aged 5-18 (K-12).

---

## PragerU's Digital Footprint: Key Findings

- **On average, Facebook posts related to climate are shared more than other PragerU content.** However, climate is not overrepresented among 'viral posts' (i.e. those achieving 1000+ shares).
- **PragerU content is not generally anchored to the news cycle.** Unlike much mis- and disinformation we track - which is highly opportunistic - PragerU tends to riff on common themes all year round. In fact, their channels gain substantial reach by recycling videos, many of which are several years old and have been extensively fact-checked or debunked.
- **YouTube comments reveal how conspiracism is a key frame for climate discourse online.** Although PragerU's videos may only allude to such ideas, their audience continually links climate action to 'globalist agendas' or figures like WEF Chairman Klaus Schwab.

- **PragerU's traction on Facebook is not dependent on 'blue tick' or high-follower accounts.** Rather than relying on influencers, posts seem to achieve engagement (likes, shares, comments) through a diverse audience. This bucks the trend mapped in much of our research to date (e.g. 'Deny, Deceive, Delay' 1 and 2), where amplification of content relied on 'super-spreaders' with organic reach in the 000s or even millions.

**An Engagement Conundrum!** One outstanding question is the role that **PragerU's intensive advertising** plays in boosting content. The Meta Ad Library shows around **8.6k individual ads** posted by the organisation from 1 January to 10 September 2023 alone. In the absence of 'celebrity' amplifiers or an extensive proxy network, **is this the key to their success?**

## PragerU's Climate Content

We collected all original content posted by PragerU throughout 2023 on its three largest channels - [Facebook](#) (4.5m followers), [YouTube](#) (3.16m subscribers) and [Instagram](#) (2.2m followers) – and sorted the data into 'climate' or 'non-climate' based on a range of keywords and manual coding.

## Youtube

PragerU's Top 5 most watched videos on climate in 2023:

### Key Themes:

- Fossil fuels make us safer from the impacts of climate change.
- Anti-fossil fuel policies have caused our current energy crisis.
- Many will die, 'sacrificed on the altar of a climate crisis that doesn't exist'

Over 2.3m views / 1.9k comments / 14k likes



### Key Themes:

- Renewable energy is unscalable, inefficient and uses too much land.
- States and countries that have doubled down on renewable sources of power face energy rationing and power blackouts

Over 993k views / 1k comments / 8k likes

### Key Themes:

- The world needs more fossil fuels because the benefits outweigh the downsides.
- Fossil fuels are uniquely cost effective.
- Fossil fuel energy neutralizes climate danger.
- The greenhouse effect is diminishing.
- Warmer temperatures will save lives.

Over 589k views / 1.2k comments / 4.5 likes





**Key Themes:**

- ESG sounds good but, in reality, is a means to attack representative democracy and economic freedom.
- ESG compels CEOs to pursue broader 'leftist' policies.
- The World Economic Forum is 'communism in disguise'.

Over 443k views / 80 comments / 663 likes

**Key Themes:**

- The issues surrounding nuclear waste management are a myth.
- Spent fuel is dangerous if you get close to or ingest it, but the same is true for ammonia, chlorine or mercury.
- Someday, spent fuel could be a convenient source of affordable, climate-friendly fuel.

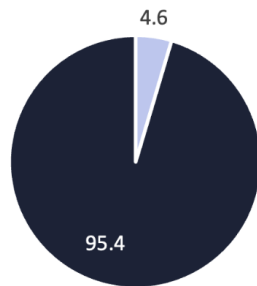
Over 336k views / 814 comments / 5.1k likes



**Facebook and Instagram**

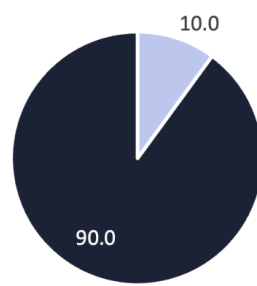
Climate only accounts for a small fraction of PragerU content, but on Facebook these posts gain more shares comparative to other topics. Interestingly, this does not equate to greater 'virality' writ large - out of 347 posts with over 1k shares, climate only made up 4.6% (i.e. the same as its overall prevalence within PragerU output).

Facebook: 3,156 total posts



■ Climate ■ non-Climate

Instagram: 229 total posts



■ Climate ■ non-Climate

Fig. 1: Share of climate content within all PragerU original posts between 1 January and 10 September 2023

	Average Shares per Post	Average Likes per Post	Average Comments per Post
Climate Posts	718.5	2,473.5	468.5
Non-Climate Posts	503	2,700.1	870.8
All posts	512.9	2,689.7	852.3

Fig. 2: Average number of shares, likes and comments of climate-related, non-climate and all Facebook posts by PragerU between 1 January and 10 September 2023.



Fig. 3: Volume over time comparing all PragerU posts on Facebook with climate-relevant posts per day from 1 January 2023 to 10 September 2023.

## High-traction Content

PragerU generally uses Facebook and Instagram to signpost its longer-form content – in particular videos hosted on YouTube or its website.

Their **most successful climate posts on Facebook** were mainly short anti-EV (electric vehicle) or anti-renewables **statements** - relying on pithy catchphrases and claims that can be recycled at any time.

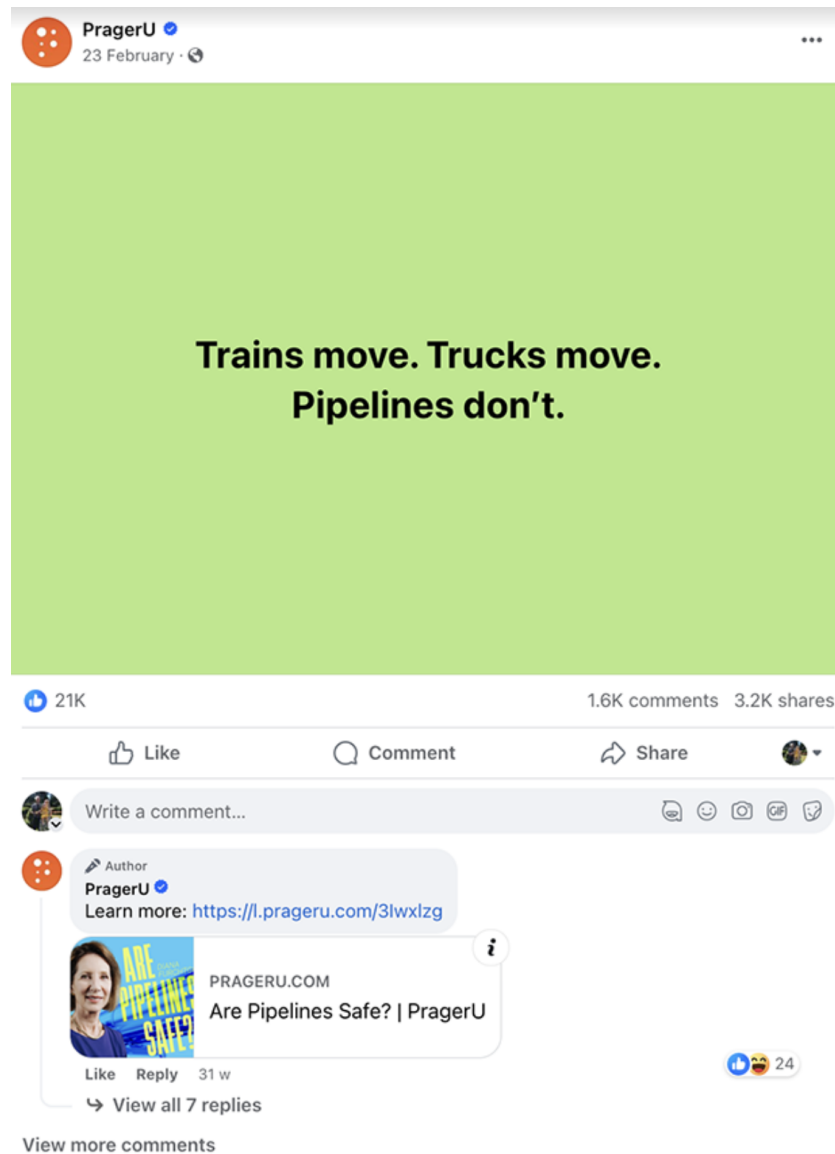


Fig. 4: Example of a popular Facebook post from PragerU official page

On Instagram, the most popular climate posts were two screenshots of Elon Musk tweets in which he criticises [ESG](#) (Environmental, Social and Governance) investing, gaining 71k and 59k likes respectively. [ICYMI: during COP27, CAAD and Graphika published [a special briefing](#) on how ESG has been subsumed into the ‘anti-woke’ agenda, merging climate denialists with right-wing influencers online.]



Fig. 5: Instagram post from PragerU official page

PragerU’s video content is designed for classroom lectures, and their posts rarely rely on topical content or controversies in the news cycle, with two notable exceptions:

Climate-related content spiked on Facebook in the week of **Earth Day** (23 April 2023), although only one post explicitly mentioned the event.

They extolled the virtues of pipelines in comparison to rail and road transport after the **Ohio train derailment** (February 2023) – [an event already rife with false claims and conspiracies](#). The post linked to a video on pipeline safety from December 2021 in the comments.

## PragerU's Footsoliders: who is sharing their climate content?

Despite occasional references to US policy, PragerU's climate output is generally less US-centric than its other content – in theory, this could increase its virality and impact at a transnational level. We searched public Facebook pages and groups for links to PragerU climate posts, as well as the 13 YouTube videos it has uploaded on this topic in 2023. While data on Facebook is largely private, this method can help surface large amplifiers and international reach.

Notably, **we did not find any influencers or major public accounts amplifying PragerU content who were not working directly with the organisation. This could suggest that their continually high engagement on the platform is largely organic.** Prominent figures who record videos for PragerU are likely to promote these on their own channels – however, because the organisation recycles content years after its original creation, even these contributors tend not to engage with every new repost.

**Alex Epstein** (22k followers) reflects this dynamic - he directly posts clips from his more recent videos repeatedly on Facebook, funnelling his audience to PragerU's YouTube channel. His videos are among their best performing climate content this year.



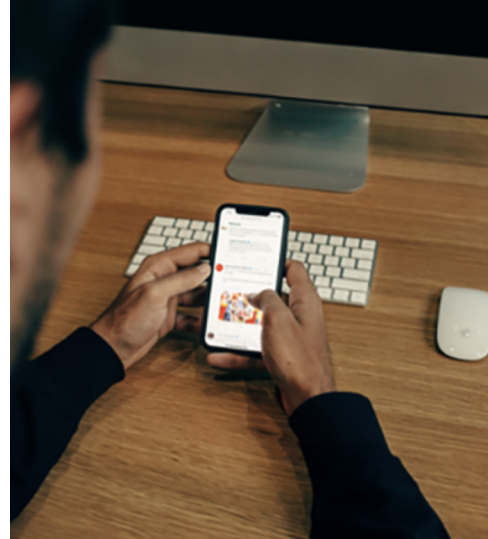
Fig. 6: Example post of Alex Epstein sharing a clip of his Prager U content on Facebook.

**A handful of smaller public groups and pages also share links to PragerU content**, including those focused on climate denial or offering a space for 'fed up' citizens to trade conspiracies on topics like lockdowns, vaccines and [15-minute cities](#). Among these, we found some traces of wider geographic reach. **Several appear to be based in Canada or the UK, with one in Australia, Denmark and Norway respectively** (based on their names or Facebook's Page Transparency data).

## PragerU's Fanbase: how do they engage?

We analysed **8,911 comments posted under PragerU's 13 climate-related videos on YouTube in 2023** (Jan-Sept). Using automated text analysis, we could identify phrases that appeared with surprising regularity, compared to a background 'universe' of text. This helps to surface distinct topics discussed by PragerU's audience.

'[Culture wars' responses to climate change](#) (e.g. linking climate action to "wokeness") were common, as was language around the **materials needed for renewable technologies**. In addition, **terminology related to the World Economic Forum**, "[eating bugs](#)" and [the so-called Great Reset](#) featured regularly in comments.



In itself this is unsurprising, since two videos are explicitly titled "[Will Eating Bugs Save The Planet?](#)" and "[Yes, the WEF Really Wants You to... Eat Bugs!](#)". However, **conspiratorial comments also appear unprompted under other videos on fossil fuels, car ownership and Poland's energy crisis**. This highlights how conspiracy thinking has become central to climate opposition online, a trend [we previously highlighted](#) in the context of 15-minute cities.

[Subscribe here](#)



Climate Action  
Against Disinformation



[Unsubscribe](#)