

DIGITAL LANDSCAPE OF CLIMATE MIS- & DISINFORMATION IN THE UK

Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of key false and misleading narratives relating to climate science, solutions and policy, as relevant to the UK on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and the encrypted messaging app Telegram. It aims to unpack how such ‘anti-climate’ content is served to UK audiences by platforms’ curation and amplification systems, and how this might shape public discussion and perception of key climate policies.

Key Findings

- Researchers identified **partisan backlash and spikes in anti-climate activity online in response to key policy announcements and the news cycles**. The two main spikes occurred around PM [Rishi Sunak’s announcement of revised Net Zero targets](#) on 20 September 2023, and [Tata Steel’s announcement of layoffs](#) in Port Talbot in January 2024.
- Key narratives **attacked the government’s Net Zero targets and called for an end to any climate commitments in the UK**. High traction posts frequently linked Net Zero to polarising societal issues, including immigration and LGBTQ+ rights.
- CAAD research has shown how outright climate denial has morphed into a more diverse playbook of ‘[denying](#), [deceiving](#) and [delaying](#)’ the need for mitigation or adaptation efforts. Nonetheless, **overt attacks on climate science** remain rife, with popular posts frequently citing the so-called ‘climate scam’ and/or describing climate science as a ‘cult’.
- **Ad hominem attacks and calls to violence** targeting climate activists or public figures featured prominently in our dataset. Posts with high engagement attempted to smear those involved in climate legislation or activism using ‘anti-elite’ [conspiracy theories](#).
- Viral posts were produced by a range of actors, from average platform users to public figures and political parties, as well as climate denying groups and industry lobbyists. Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party was notable within the dataset with numerous high-engagement posts, often responding to major news moments or as part of the electoral cycle.
- **Some actors in our dataset were observed monetising anti-climate views and building their audience by posting regular content on this issue**. These actors often play an outsized role in online conversation and help drive a consistent baseline of anti-climate mobilisation. One user accounted for over half the 1.5m+ shares on X during the period of study, posting frequent anti-climate video clips and incentivising users to purchase merchandise.

Methodology and Limitations

Researchers from the Climate Action Against Disinformation coalition (CAAD) collected publicly available posts mentioning anti-climate language over a 1-year-period between 1 July 2023 and 31 July 2024 on X and Facebook, using Brandwatch and the Meta-owned CrowdTangle tool respectively. To ensure the relevance of content, we selected terminology conveying overt climate denial and conspiratorial narratives (e.g. ‘climate scam’, ‘climate hoax’, ‘net zero cult’, ‘global cooling’, ‘climate extremism’, ‘glaciers not melting’), as well as content referencing broad opposition to renewable energies such as wind, solar or Electric Vehicles (e.g. ‘toxic renewables’, ‘unreliable renewables’, ‘renewables blackout’).

Using the same keywords and time period, we also collected data from 31 UK-focused Telegram channels, compiled during previous research and encompassing a range of conspiracy-focused and [extremist](#) communities. The resulting dataset comprised:

- **14,023 posts on X from 4,628 accounts**
- **29,032 posts on Facebook from 7,800 accounts**
- **762 relevant Telegram posts.**

CAAD qualitatively analysed a sample of high traction posts from each platform, manually reviewing those which received the most engagement – this was defined as most shared messages on X, most liked messages on Facebook, and most viewed messages on Telegram. In addition, we identified salient topics of conversation within the dataset using Natural Language Processing (NLP), based on the specific language employed by social media users.

While this briefing aims to provide a broad overview of narratives in the UK, it has several constraints beyond researchers’ control. Due to restrictions in API access applied by X, CAAD could only collect a representative sample of posts from the platform – this makes a full assessment of the scope and nature of harmful anti-climate content functionally impossible to establish. The [deprecation of CrowdTangle by Meta](#) in August 2024 has also severely limited our ability to study platform harms at the scale of recent years. As a result of these [data access limitations](#), the numbers cited below will not reflect the overall volume of anti-climate activity or posts relevant to our keyword filters.

Key Trends

Anti-climate content: a (partly) reactive phenomenon

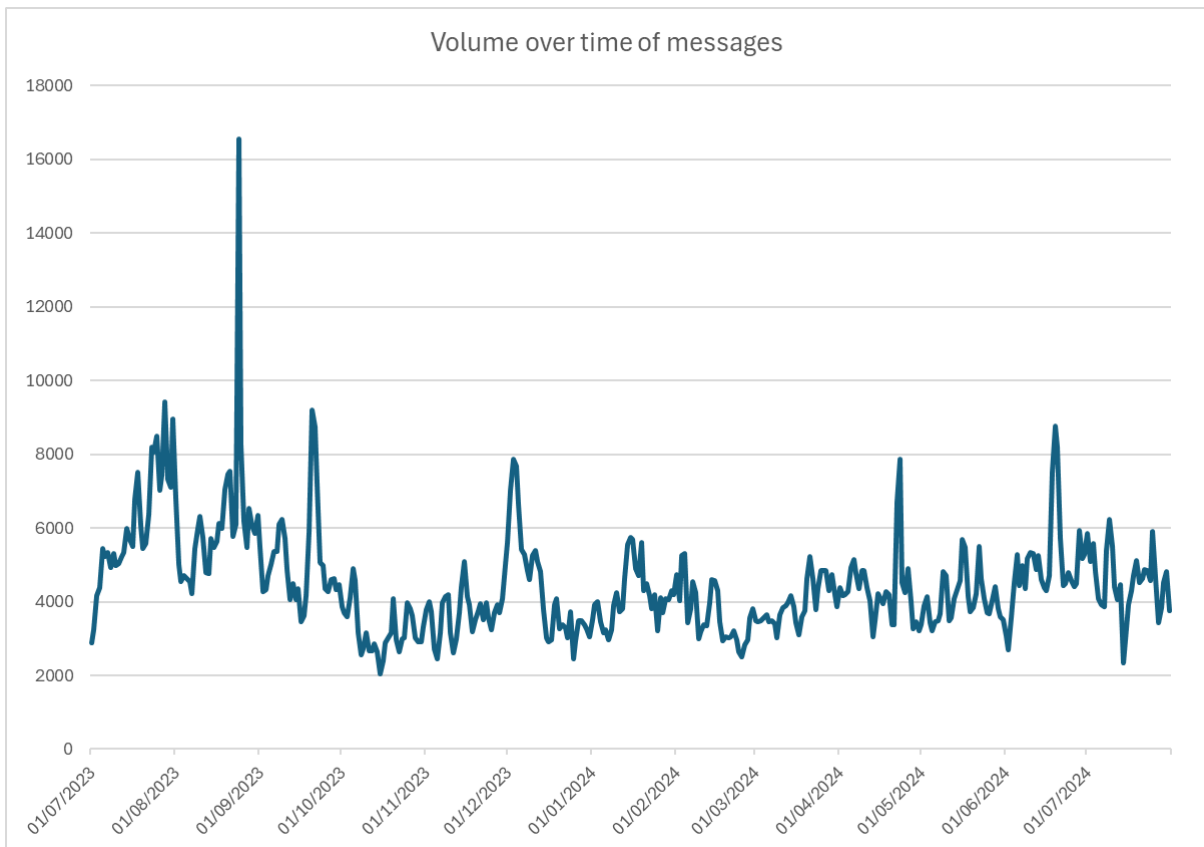


Fig. 1: Volume over time of posts containing our anti-climate keywords from 1 July 2023 to 31 July 2024 on X, with filters applied to geolocate data to the UK

CAAD analysis found a notable amount of anti-climate content circulating each day, with some accounts producing large volumes and cultivating an audience in the process. Over the year-long period of study, we also found that external events, such as policy announcements, drove online mobilisation.

Flashpoint 1

Former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s speech on [20 September 2023](#), in which he announced a U-turn on several climate commitments, generated the largest spike in user activity within our sample - nearly 400 Facebook posts and 250 tweets geolocated to the UK. High traction posts from this flashpoint overtly condemned the speech for not going far enough and called on the government to ‘scrap all of Net Zero,’ with [several](#) examples from accounts connected to Reform UK. Posts which urged the scrapping of all climate targets used a range of misinformative claims. One example by [Turning Point UK](#), pictured below, used well-established tactics [to deflect responsibility](#) for climate change action onto China and India. Conservative commentator [Darren Grimes](#) [falsely argued](#) that commitments to Net Zero are responsible for soaring energy prices, using an AI-generated picture of an elderly woman to illustrate an argument about the impact this will have on elderly consumers.



Fig. 2&3: Examples of high traction posts condemning the government’s Net Zero commitments – one from Darren Grimes on X (390.7k followers), the other from Turning Point UK on Facebook (185k followers).

On Telegram, [top posts](#) around this event described Net Zero as an attempt to ‘criminalise ordinary citizens’. The most viewed posts in our sample came from the channel of far-right activist [Tommy Robinson](#), while others encouraged channel members to contact their MPs and protest the country’s [Energy Bill](#). Conspiracy theorist and far-right influencer [Paul Joseph Watson](#), who has described climate change as a [‘neo-feudal scam’](#), argued that under the government’s planned legislation *‘energy companies, backed by police, will have ‘reasonable force’ power of entry to invade people’s homes to install smart meters.’* Other posts falsely claimed that the government will ‘criminalise opposition to Net Zero’, with at least one example citing Agenda 2021: a non-binding UN sustainability scheme which [became the centre of conspiracy theories](#) in 2015 and continues to serve as a reference point for mobilisation online.

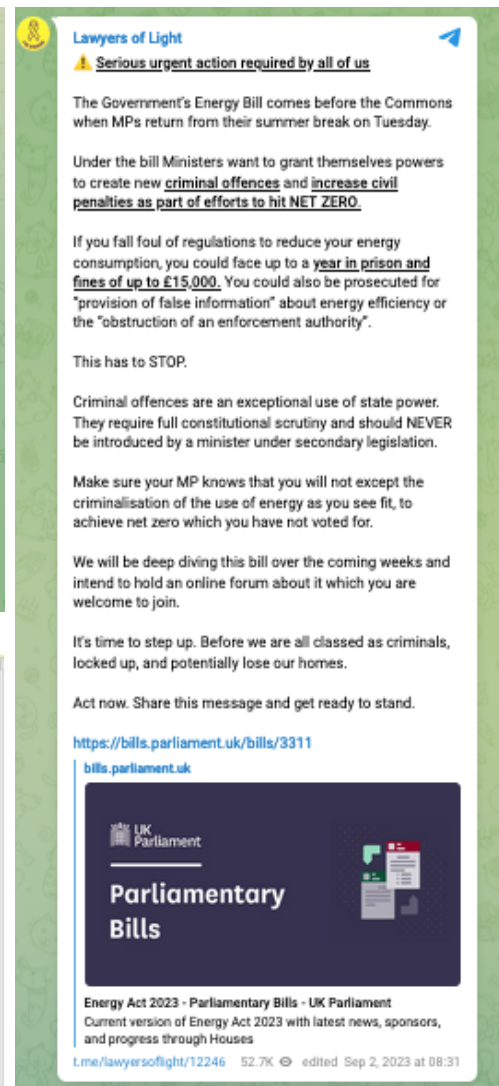
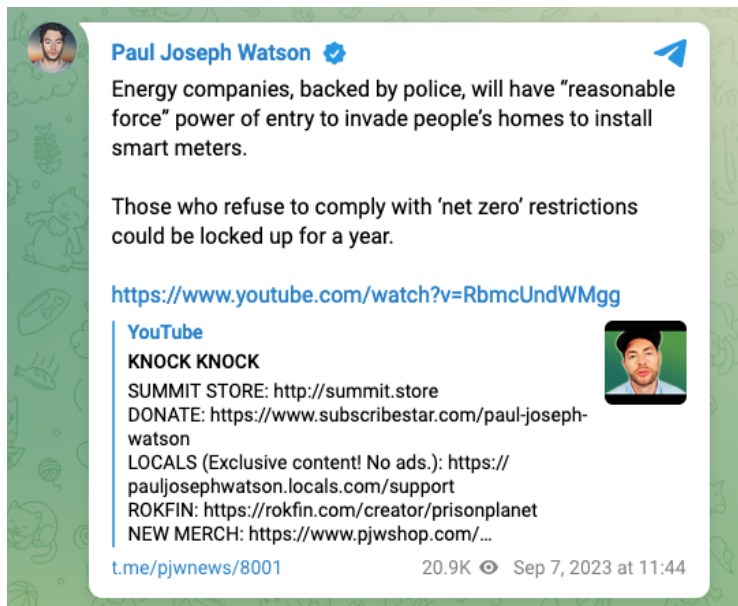
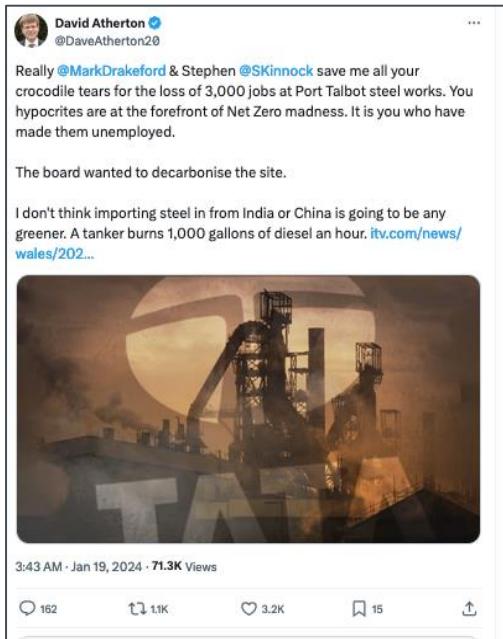


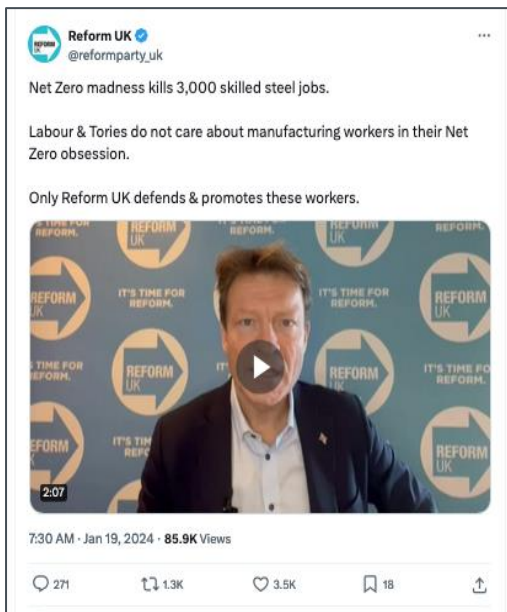
Fig. 3, 4 & 5: Examples of high traction posts on Telegram discussing UK legislation on climate, including the 2023 Energy Bill.

Flashpoint 2:



Tata Steel announcing nearly 3,000 layoffs from their Port Talbot factory in January 2024 caused the second major spike on X. Several prominent actors, including those connected to Reform UK, [repeated Tata's claim](#) that the redundancies were caused by a move to 'green steel' - excluding [well-documented](#) evidence from the UK Climate Change Committee around the potential of green energy to generate jobs. (Local trade unions had presented a joint plan to save all jobs at the factory, which [Tata rejected in 2023](#).)

Fig. 6 (top left): X post from David Atherton on X (227.5k followers), a journalist for The European Conservative



Figs. 7 & 8: Examples of high traction posts relating to the Tata Steel layoffs in Port Talbot (the right-hand post achieved some of the highest engagement but has been anonymised by CAAD as the user is neither a 'blue-tick' or high-follower account)

'Sticky' vs. emergent themes

CAAD conducted an analysis of language most commonly found in the dataset using NLP technology. In the process, we identified 'clusters' of online users gathering around specific topics of interest. We found that opposition to Net Zero targets lay at the centre of several anti-climate conversations. Overt denial featured prominently, as reflected in the [debunked](#) 'global cooling' theory and clusters built around the terms 'climate scam' and 'climate alarmism'. The data also showed several events-related clusters, showing how the news cycle is weaponised to spread opposition to climate action. Farmers' protests and the Port Talbot layoffs were two notable examples in this regard.

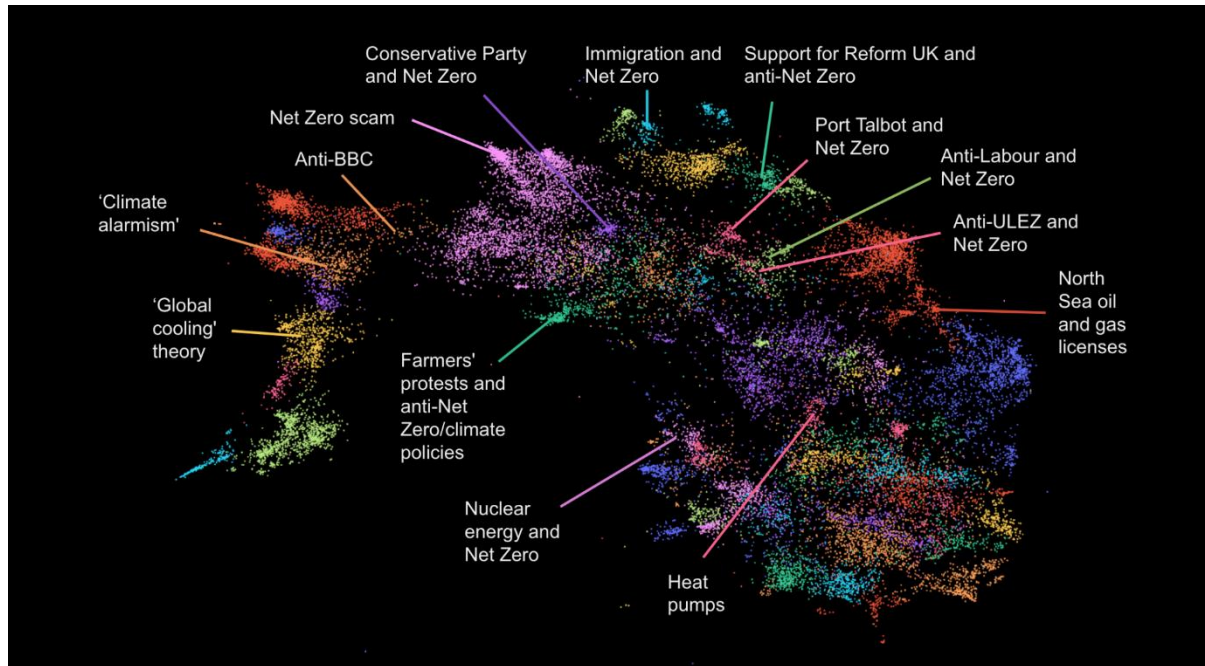


Fig. 9: Overview of key topics of conversation produced using topic modelling techniques. Each cluster (represented by a colour) stands for one topic. Clusters are spatially distributed based on language similarities.

Climate as a ‘culture wars’ issue

Top posts further emphasise how opposition to climate can be linked to broader ‘culture wars’ framing - a topic [explored in depth by CAAD and its members](#). Actors in the dataset were found to weaponise other polarising issues to engage a wider audience, sow confusion about climate science and impacts, and ultimately weaken the public mandate for action. This often takes the form of content describing climate goals and environmental policies as ‘woke’, as well as linking them to polarised debates around immigration, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ rights.



Among top posts on X (i.e. most retweeted), many framed anti-climate themes within pushback on broadly progressive or liberal agendas. In many cases, this included a generic list format covering a range of topics and optimised to ‘go viral’ (see screenshots). Such content stemmed from accounts across the Anglosphere and appears to exploit the ‘outrage economy’ to embed anti-climate talking points in broader anti-liberal content. Posts also referenced various international news events. For example, right-wing [influencer](#) Peter Sweden hailed results of the European Parliamentary elections (which saw significant gains for far-right parties), as a rejection of ‘the woke agenda, Net Zero and mass migration’.

Fig. 10: Example of posts framing climate action as a culture wars issue from Gunther Eagleman on X (924k followers). Eagleman’s bio describes him ‘America First-MAGA-Trump 2024-Unfiltered’



Figs 11 & 12: Indicative posts combining anti-climate narratives with culture wars rhetoric, from David Kurten (161k followers) and Peter Sweden (767k followers) on X

Most-shared URLs

Our data collection aimed to narrow content to UK-based sources – however, social media users face no such restriction. Platforms connect groups who are geographically distant but ideologically aligned, and this enables actors based overseas to covertly or openly influence climate discourse in the UK. Prior CAAD research has shown how online networks [adapted false and misleading claims](#) about COVID-19 to oppose climate action. These narratives have been broadcast with the help, at least in part, of [vested interests](#) in the fossil fuel industry, as well as [Kremlin-backed infrastructure for spreading disinformation](#) abroad. Both serve to bolster a [larger political assault](#) on the principles of multilateralism and international cooperation.

‘Issue-stacking’ of this nature is not unique to the climate space or the UK. To take one example: [Canadian](#) influencer Jordan Peterson gained initial fame through discussions on gender and LGBTQ+ rights, but has since [generated millions of views](#) for [climate misinformation](#). Peterson boasts 5.5m followers on X alone, with an organic reach in the tens of millions across his social media accounts. [He also collaborates](#) with the Daily Wire, [funded by petroleum industry billionaires](#) the Wilks Brother and the [Alliance for Responsible Citizenship](#) (ARC).

CAAD has [previously identified](#) Peterson as a key node for popularising climate misinformation, including [the much-debunked “World Climate Declaration”](#) from CLINTEL. Support for this sign-on letter featured in three of the most-shared URLs in our dataset - there was no comparable traction for [multiple international fact checks](#) and [debunks](#) relating to the declaration. Other viral links were also non-UK-specific, such as a YouTube video of [Ian Plimer](#) presenting [fact-checked](#) misinformation to [CPAC Australia in 2022](#). Another led to a video featuring [Judith Curry](#) and [John Stossel](#), the latter an American former journalist whose activity is [referenced](#) in various [CAAD reports](#).

Ad hominem attacks, conspiracy theories and calls for violence

Attacks on climate activists, politicians and journalists featured prominently in our dataset, remaining a key tactic for anti-climate opposition. Popular posts targeted a range of public figures by name, often adopting a broad ‘anti-elite’ frame. Such posts frequently connect pushback on climate action with prominent conspiracy theories, including the [Great Reset](#).

The most-liked post on X from our sample (27.5k likes and 1.7 million views) [falsely claimed](#) that activist Greta Thunberg received a \$10 million inheritance from her grandparents ‘from selling stolen art and antiques to Nazi Germans’ and that she owns nine cars and six houses. In more extreme examples, high traction posts appear to condone, celebrate or encourage violence towards activists. This included a post by Wide Awake Media (558k followers) condemning the so-called ‘climate cult’ and describing ‘drivers [...] now just ploughing through their asinine road blockades’ – a reference to motorists who are running over protesters in various countries including the UK, Germany and US.

Thinking Slow @ThinkingSlow1

The living standards and liberties of 67 million 🇬🇧 citizens will likely be crushed due to pointless Net Zero tyranny, espoused by Saint Greta and her globalist handlers.

Have a good look at this photo and tell me what you see 🤔👁️



8:31 AM · Sep 26, 2023 · 25.6K Views

137 110 431 7

Net Zero Watch @NetZeroWatch

"Greta Thunberg is an end stage product of the climate religion. As renewables come into crisis everywhere in the world because of local community opposition to the land use impacts, as well as the high associated costs, the bloom is coming off the rose for climate activists."

#CostOfNetZero

telegraph.co.uk/news/0/greta-t...



8:44 AM · Nov 24, 2023 · 15.9K Views

37 151 418 6

Darren Grimes @darrengrimes

The Government's new Net Zero Zealot. Ed thinks the planet is in such emergency that he's travelling by chauffeur driven Range Rovers and private jets. My contempt for these people, who hypocritically immerse the very poorest, knows no bounds.




Last edited 6:40 AM · Jul 7, 2024 · 127.5K Views

419 2.2K 6.3K 48

Wide Awake Media @wideawake_media

"Rules for thee, but not for me."

The mantra of globalist, climate cult con artists.



Greta Thunberg Net Worth

Net Worth	\$18 Million
Annual Income	\$2 Million
Height	5' 4" (1.63 m)
Inheritance	\$10 Million
Grandparents made this from selling stolen art and antiques to Nazi Germans.	
Cars	9
House Properties	6
Monthly Spends	\$100,000

Last edited 6:59 AM · Jan 12, 2024 · 1.7M Views

1.4K 10K 27K 1.7K

Dr. Eli David @DrEliDavid

Breaking: Fake climate activist @GretaThunberg gets fake arrested by Dutch police, who stop for a photo op 📸

It's all staged 🤡



7:13 PM · Jul 6, 2024 · 485.3K Views

Figs. 13-17: High traction posts attacking public figures and activists on X, including Greta Thunberg. Thunberg is not the sole target for abuse or conspiracies but remains among the most popular, particularly for highest-traction content of this type. Accounts cited clockwise from top-left: Thinking Slow (16.4k), Net Zero Watch (60.5k), Wide Awake Media (558k followers), Dr. Eli David (672k followers), and Darren Grimes (391k followers)

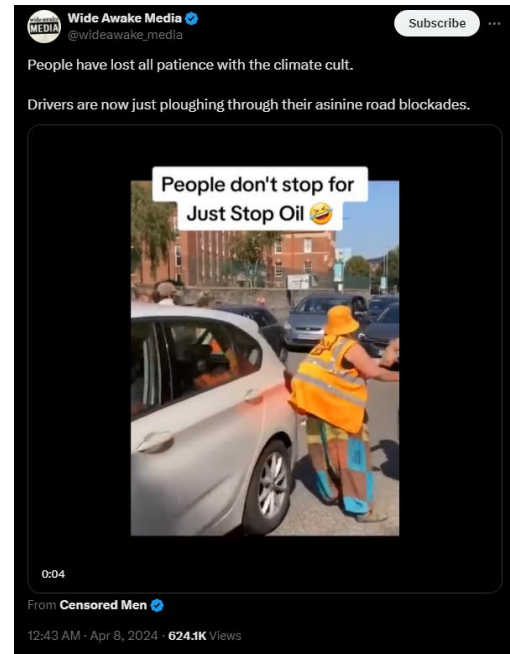
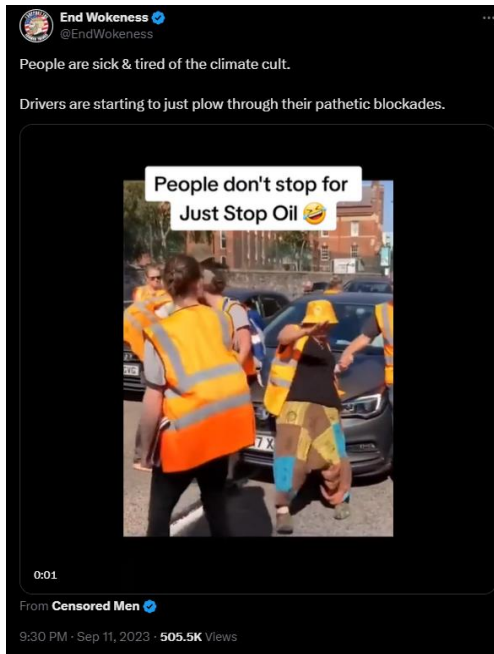


Fig. 18 & 19: Accounts on X sharing a video from 'Censored Men' that shows cars driving into climate activists.

Such content fits a pattern whereby violence against social justice and environmental movements is normalised, as documented by [CAAD](#) and [other organisations](#) in recent years. Extremist groups have increasingly used the celebration of violence as a [means to build their digital audience](#), most notably since the 2017 Charlottesville protest in the US when a protestor was killed after being hit by a car [driven into the crowd](#). In 2023, [images of a man who shot environmental protesters went viral](#) and highlighted the continuum between online rhetoric and real-world violence.

[Riots across the UK](#) in July and August 2024 are a stark example of how quickly false content online can trigger offline harm. As [a recent report from CAAD demonstrated](#), many actors who instigated or amplified calls to violence also frequently post climate mis- and disinformation. Whilst anti-climate outputs are not directly correlated with the events that unfolded following the Southport attack, the overlap of actors producing content on both subjects underlines the growing crossover between efforts to block climate action and wider ideological platforms, including far-right and extremist communities online.

Online saturation and monetisation of anti-climate content

Despite certain notable spikes, CAAD found that a handful of accounts in the dataset were highly organised, consistently active and able to monetise climate mis-and-disinformation. These accounts, which focus heavily on sharing anti-climate content, effectively co-opt public controversies to push outrage against climate action. They are often transnational in outlook and provide commentary on developments relevant to the Anglosphere and beyond.

One such account is **Wide Awake Media (558k followers)**, the most active in our sampled dataset from X. The account is linked to a website selling merchandise with anti-climate slogans and messages that promote the [Great Reset](#) conspiracy. CAAD analysis found that Wide Awake Media:

- Produced 59 of the most retweeted messages in the top 100, while the 41 remaining were spread out between 23 accounts.
- Accounted for over half of the 1.5 million retweets on X over the studied period.
- Achieved this by regularly reposting old clips, thereby 'recycling' harmful content to maintain subscribers and merchandise sales.

Implications and calls to action

CAAD's research shows how malign actors use a growing tactical playbook to spread their ideas and cultivate support for anti-climate ideas in the UK. Mobilisation around key policy moments takes place against a background of broader climate denial, conspiracy theories, attacks on public figures, and a normalisation of violence. Opposing Net Zero is a central narrative for multiple anti-climate communities online, with various actors additionally using anti-elite and anti-establishment sentiment to engage their audience. Such content is closely associated with 'culture wars' rhetoric, as polarising moments in the news cycle are weaponised in an effort to weaken public understanding and buy-in for climate action.

Further research is needed to understand how platform architecture enables the sharing and potential monetisation of climate denial content. Pathways to monetise include direct merchandise sales, as well as indirect "attention economy" advertising or [revenue-sharing](#) schemes where platforms pay users for high-traction posts and engagement.

In light of these findings, CAAD calls for:

- Greater political action to protect data access for researchers who are documenting online harms. Data access is being [severely curtailed](#), making false, polarising and in some cases illegal or criminal content harder to track at scale. Recent months have seen [political](#) and legal [attacks](#) to [intimidate](#) disinformation [researchers](#) and the closure of key research [organisations](#).
- Increasing tech companies' accountability for the monetisation of anti-climate content. This should include transparent information about steps taken to disrupt the economic model of disinformation on their products and services.

The key principle of these efforts should be to **remove perverse incentives** on digital platforms and make creating or spreading disinformation unprofitable. Debates around content moderation on climate (i.e. litigating individual posts) often obscure more systemic issues around how content is presented and amplified to users. As it stands, the barrier to entry is lower than ever to create conspiracist or misleading content that can go viral across social media – a dynamic only compounded by mass-market tools for AI-generated imagery and text. This makes a crude, removal-based approach both impractical and often unhelpful. It remains crucial to recognise that social media platforms are not free speech environments, but *curated* speech environments; yet our understanding of (and choice over) what information is promoted remains a black box, even when the harms appear obvious.

Efforts on this front generally tinker around the margins without ever broaching the core issues – above all, why false and polarising content is continually recommended to users. More work must be done to understand why such content is repeatedly monetised, creating a business model for those spreading mis- and disinformation and facilitating the abuse of public figures like scientists and policymakers.