

Briefing: Canadian Wildfire Disinformation June 2025



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Report Summary

The ongoing 2025 Canadian wildfire season began with over 160 wildfires active across the country in mid-May 2025 primarily in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Monitoring from April 21-June 20, 2025 showed wildfire-related disinformation has emerged, particularly on the platform X. Disinformation is consistently spread by climate denier networks during Canadian wildfire season – and this season is no exception, with many overlapping narratives that play off of one another.

- Arson: Right-wing discourse around wildfires often emphasizes arson as the primary cause, using arrest statistics and mocking commentary deflecting attention from climate change. In more extreme cases, conspiracy theories allege that activists—or even governments and green-backed corporations—are deliberately setting fires to fabricate a climate crisis and push environmental agendas. While these theories gain some traction, the more widespread narrative continues to center on blaming government inaction on arson rather than acknowledging climate change as a contributing factor.
- **Government Failures:** A common thread in wildfire-related disinformation blames the government for mismanaging resources—citing poor forest management, a lack of firefighters, and delayed deployment of water bombers. Critics claim officials are prioritizing climate agendas and foreign aid over effective fire prevention and response. These narratives reinforce the broader conspiracy theory that governments are more invested in promoting a climate change 'agenda' than addressing purported 'actual causes' and consequences of wildfires.
- Fearmongering: Building on perceptions of government failure, right-wing voices have used the wildfires to double down on claims including during the Canadian election that climate activists and leaders are using 'fearmongering' to push a radical green agenda. Right-wing media outlets amplify these narratives by accusing officials of using 'alarmism' to deflect from wildfire mismanagement. These pieces often rely on junk science that is, spurious or fraudulent data intended to discredit widely accepted, peer-reviewed climate data and



undermine, or "debunk" the legitimacy of environmental narratives. This rhetoric circulates widely on social media, blending outright climate denial with skepticism aimed at undermining environmental policy and the seriousness of climate change.



Volume Over Time Analysis

Utilizing the Brandwatch social media monitoring tool, we pulled volume for specific keywords ["Canada" AND ("wildfires" OR "fires" OR "arson")] within our wider, ongoing climate disinformation data query¹.

While not a perfect measurement, as Brandwatch reports disproportionately from X and online news, it does give a sense of where online conversation was largest, spikes in engagement, and the overall volume of mentions.

Below is April 21-June 20 2025, capturing the entire conversation around the Canadian wildfires, not just disinformation. Online news had a small jump in activity overall after the fires started in mid-May, while discourse on X had much more severe spikes, showing it was a topic of interest on this platform. Other platforms likely followed a similar pattern.



Figure 1: Total online conversation on Canadian wildfires, April 21st to June 20th 2025. Data from Brandwatch.

¹ This data set represents an ongoing, flexible, Boolean search query using the most dominant climate disinformation keywords. The full search string is in the Methodology section



Top Narratives

Arsonist with Climate Change Agenda

Much of the discourse around arson suggests that wildfires are primarily human-caused rather than the much more nuanced reality, which is that they are primarily the result of natural phenomena, exacerbated by human-caused climate change. When right-wing headlines or social media posts highlight arrests or cite statistics—such as false claims that "90% of forest fires are caused by humans [committing arson]"— other right-wing commentators are quick to pick up on this, arguing that climate change is thus not to blame. The posts are often mocking in nature, with one <u>TikTok video</u> joking that they're "arresting climate change."

Other narratives argue that wildfires would be far less frequent if governments imposed harsher penalties on arsonists and prioritized enforcement over environmental policy.

On top of these familiar narratives on arson, a more troubling narrative has been gaining traction in the English-language – particularly in North America – in the last couple of years. Right-wing figures, particularly in Canada and the United States—regions recently devastated by wildfires—are promoting a conspiracy theory that suggests arsonists are deliberately setting fires to advance a hidden climate change agenda. Essentially, the claim is that activists are unable to produce sufficient evidence to support their climate change narrative, so instead are orchestrating disasters to create the appearance of a climate crisis.

At times, the narrative goes even further, with some posts suggesting government involvement—claiming that climate change serves as a persuasive political tool to influence progressive voters. Others speculate that corporations aligned with environmental interests would stand to benefit from climate policies, and could therefore have a hand in orchestrating these events.

These right-wing voices also frequently accuse the media of downplaying arson as the primary cause of the wildfires, arguing that outlets instead emphasize climate change narratives to <u>attract viewers</u> and advance a particular agenda.



These more extreme conspiracy theories tend to receive limited engagement. The dominant narrative remains focused on highlighting arson. This <u>cherry picking</u> or outright lying deflects attention away from climate change.

Examples of this narrative:









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Government Failures

Another recurring disinformation frame involves placing blame squarely on federal and provincial governments, with the former more common. They are blamed either for failing to prevent wildfires through proper forest management, for misrepresenting the success of relief efforts, or <u>prioritizing international funding</u> over domestic needs.

This frame takes several forms. Criticisms of inadequate forest management and a shortage of firefighters are common, but more recently, attention has turned to water bombers—an essential firefighting tool that <u>Canada has been a world leader</u> in designing and producing. Right-wing commentators claim these aircraft are either not being deployed, are <u>secretly being grounded</u>, or that production is being needlessly delayed. Such claims fuel the broader belief that the government is withholding critical resources or not being transparent about its mitigation and emergency response strategies.



In this context, government officials are often accused of prioritizing a net-zero climate agenda over more immediate actions, such as arresting arsonists or improving wildfire prevention. This feeds into the broader conspiracy theory that leaders are more interested in promoting a climate narrative than addressing the fires themselves.

Foreign aid also features prominently in this discourse, with critics arguing that if Canada were not <u>supporting efforts like the war in Ukraine</u>, it would have sufficient funding for domestic fire prevention and new water bomber programs.













Climate Fearmongering

Building on perceived government failures, right-wing voices have escalated their claims, alleging that climate activists and political leaders—such as Prime Minister Carney—are deliberately using fear-based messaging to link wildfires to climate change in order to advance a radical green agenda.

<u>Rebel News</u> reported at the end of May, that PM Carney would capitalise on the wildfire crisis, using "scaremongering" tactics at the G7 Summit.

On Thursday's Rebel Roundup livestream, hosts Sheila Gunn Reid and Lise Merle shared their thoughts on Carney's G7 announcement of the world leaders' wildfire discussion. "Are they going to talk about their own negligence and park mismanagement that make the forest fires exponentially worse?" asked Lise. "About their complicity? I bet not." Instead, G7 leaders will likely "blame it all on climate change and how using fossil fuels are making it worse," she said. The failure to protect Jasper was due to years of mismanagement, Sheila said, "resulting in a fire that they could not contain because they turned away firefighters, didn't manage the pine beetle-caused fuel load in the forest because it was unsightly to mechanically clear, and they put in the wrong fire hydrants."

In reality, the G7 statement on wildfires did not mention climate change once.

This kind of fearmongering rhetoric is a well-established tactic within climate denialist circles, where right-wing voices frequently accuse liberals, and mainstream media, of using 'climate alarmism' and 'doomerism' to justify green policy agendas, or deflect blame from their own mismanagement. In the past two months, several right-wing outlets have published articles arguing that government-driven climate messaging amounts to propaganda and manipulation. These pieces often rely on "junk science" - that is, spurious or fraudulent data - intended to discredit widely accepted climate data and <u>undermine, or "debunk,"</u> the legitimacy of environmental narratives.

On June 12, <u>The Heritage Foundation released a YouTube video</u> arguing that global wildfires are not on the rise. "NASA and European Space Agency data show global wildfire area burned has dropped by 24% since 1998." They claim it's a "truth climate change



doesn't want you to know." No source was provided for the claim - the closest we could find was <u>this report</u>, but it refers only to purposeful, controlled fires set for land clearing.

Bjørn Lomborg, <u>a frequent climate disinformer</u>, wrote a piece featured by The Fraser Institute titled: <u>Despite what activists say, the planet is not on fire.</u> He wrote:

Nearly half of young Canadians surveyed in a 2022 study said they believed humanity is doomed because of climate change, while more than three-quarters said they were frightened. No wonder. They have grown up bombarded both by footage of natural disasters, not just in Canada but around the world, and by activists' claims that climate change is making the planet unliveable. But that's just wrong.

Lomborg's write-up made its way into other right-wing outlets as well, namely <u>Climate</u> <u>Change Dispatch</u>. But most of these statistics that allegedly debunk climate change came from The Daily Skeptic, who published back at the end of February, <u>Sensational</u> <u>Findings Published in Nature Blow Politicised Wildfire Climate Scam Out of the Water</u>

In a conclusion that should (but it won't) destroy the non-stop mainstream wildfire fearmongering, the scientists found that based on the fire scar record, the NAFSN sites would have been expected to burn 4,346 times from 1984-2022, yet they burnt only 989 times, a figure that is just 23% of what would have been expected under the historical fire regime.

This, yet again, appears to be a misrepresentation of the <u>same report cited above</u>, which refers to controlled fires. This narrative also spreads widely across social media, where right-wing figures frequently share these articles and question the level of public concern over climate change. Within these discussions, there is both outright denialism alongside more tempered skepticism from voices like Bjorn Lomborg, who argue that the impacts of climate change are exaggerated by the media and climate activists. This allows for both conspiracy theories to swarm and environmental priorities to be questioned.











New/Emerging Trends

Canada Using Fires to Harm America?

All of the above narratives have been prominent across climate disinformation spaces, often overlapping to form a broader storyline around the causes and consequences of wildfires. While variations and offshoots have emerged within these overarching themes, no significantly new or distinct narratives have appeared in response to the most recent fires.

That said, one minor outlier did surface on TikTok, where a couple of users suggested that rising tensions between Canada and the United States could be putting the northern border at risk. Specifically, these posts floated the idea that Canada's wildfires were being deliberately set to worsen air quality in the U.S. While these videos appear largely satirical or designed to attract attention, they are worth noting as another potential form of wildfire-related misinformation.





Conclusions

- Disinformation is consistently spread by climate denier networks during Canadian wildfire season and this season is no exception.
- Research shows that these narratives, and networks, have been generally consistent.
- Wildfire disinformation is documented most on the social media platform X, and on right-wing online outlets that are not subject to the factchecking standards of traditional news outlets.

Practical Ways to Turn Off the Firehose of Disinformation

This research shows what <u>previous studies of Canadian climate disinformation</u> have also shown: a small group of highly networked and highly opaque online actors – many <u>directly financed by fossil fuel companies</u>– have conspired to push false narratives about climate change.

To preserve the integrity of its information ecosystem, Canadian policy makers need to enact strong laws to reduce disinformation and greenwashing and empower the people of Canada, including:

- Acknowledging fossil fuel industry-backed climate disinformation as a major threat damaging the information ecosystem, hindering climate action and policy, risking public safety and health, the global economy, and further widening societal and political divides.
- b. Preventing greenwashing in advertisements through enforcing <u>Canada's</u> <u>recently revised Competition Act, which requires businesses to substantiate</u> <u>environmental claims</u>.



- c. Adopting a scientific and robust definition of climate disinformation,in line with the <u>United Nations and UNESCO's Global Initiative for Information</u> <u>Integrity</u>.
- d. Denouncing the monetization of climate disinformation, to discourage tech companies and climate-denying content creators from profiting or amplifying such content, weakening the financial incentive for disinformer networks.
- e. Requiring that large online platforms produce and resource transparent plans to mitigate climate disinformation, including these elements:
 - i. Community content standards with accompanying monitoring and evaluation indicators.
 - ii. An enforcement mechanism for violation of these standards, including downranking.
 - iii. A plan to monitor and respond in all languages in which the company hosts content.
 - iv. An up-to-date, publicly accessible, and functional ad library that captures all paid ads, including political and issue-based ads.
 - v. An explanation of any fact-checking processes.
 - vi. A user-support system for flagging content that violates community content standards
 - vii. A commitment to a transparent dispute resolution mechanism to respond to users, and
 - viii. Strong labor standards for content moderation work.
- f. Requiring reporting from large online platforms on the prevalence of climate disinformation, including (but not limited to) coordinated information operations, including those orchestrated by or affiliated with



the fossil fuel lobby; fossil-fuel backed media outlets, and state-sponsored influence efforts.

g. Allowing researchers access to all data needed to conduct research that contributes to the detection, identification, and understanding of systemic climate disinformation risks, as well as to the assessment of adequacy, efficiency, and impacts of risk mitigation measures taken.



Methodology

We utilised our database of known disinformation sites and actors, as well as an open search of keywords related to Canadian wildfires on Brandwatch. This information helped us to gauge climate disinformation narratives, monitor where trends occurred, who the top disinformers were and where they coordinated.

Finally, we used the Brandwatch tool to pull volume numbers, highest engagement, and metric analysis. We also pulled content from our most engaged users, particularly from X, to help gauge conversation, disinformation spread, and top disinformers.

Combining these lists and tools our human analyst, with expertise in the climate disinformation space, was able to determine key narratives, voices, and trends.

Our current climate disinformation general query uses the following search string:

"climate OR climatechange OR climatecrisis OR "global warming" OR "global temperature" OR thunberg OR "extinction rebellion" OR extinctionrebellion OR "climate action network" OR cop29 OR "cop 29" OR (global NEAR/2 (warming OR cooling)) OR climatehoax OR climatecult OR climategate OR climatescam OR ((carbon OR co2) AND ("land use" OR deforestation OR "alternative protein" OR meat OR burger OR beef OR diet OR steak OR agriculture OR farm OR vegan OR vegetarian OR pasture OR cattle OR CCS OR sequester OR sequestration OR removal OR storage)) OR ((gas OR oil OR petroleum) AND (sustainable OR transition OR green OR clean OR fired OR fossil)) OR "net zero" OR netzero OR (energy NEAR/5 (renewable OR solar OR clean OR wind OR turbine)) OR fossilgas OR Ing OR "zero emissions" OR "carbon capture" OR agroecology



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Top Disinformers

Media

The Daily Skeptic	31,500 (X/Twitter)	Blog created by British commentator Toby Young. It regularly publishes misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and climate change denial.
<u>Rebel News</u>	634,900 <u>(X/Twitter)</u>	This website calls itself as a "trusted source for global news and information you won't see anywhere else". In actuality, Rebel News is a <u>right-wing</u> outlet <u>whose founder has</u> <u>multiple ties to fossil fuel money</u> and is one of Canada's " <u>most internationally</u> <u>recognized far right voices</u> " championing Conservatives, constantly criticizing Liberals and Liberal-led policies. In this report, they claimed PM Carney is using scare tactics surrounding wildfires at the G7 Summit.



Social Media Personalities

<u>Bjorn Lomborg</u>	262,400 (X/Twitter)	Danish political scientist, author, and the president of the think tank Copenhagen Consensus Center. He became internationally known for his best-selling book The Skeptical Environmentalist, whose main thesis is that many of the most-publicized claims and predictions on environmental issues are wrong. While he is not a complete climate change denialist, he often argues the science and serious impact. He recently wrote a piece, featured by The Fraser Institute, <u>Despite what</u> <u>activists say, the planet is not on fire.</u>
<u>Jasmin Laine</u>	54,400 (<u>X/Twitter</u>) 154,000 (<u>YouTube</u>)	Canadian media personality and content creator, who recently left her radio show to pursue podcasting. Her show "Over Opinionated," is mostly focused on ultra-conservative topics. Many of the videos strongly favor Donald Trump and criticise Canada's liberal leaders. She posted to her podcast and other social media accounts claiming the wildfires are not due to climate change, but government failures.
<u>Marc Nixon</u>	65,000 (X/Twitter) 30,500 <u>(YouTube)</u>	Canadian content creator and social media figure. His YouTube channel is full of right-wing propaganda and anti-Carney content. He routinely pops up in climate disinformation narratives, usually to argue against the Liberal green agenda.



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Think Tanks

<u>The Fraser Institute</u>	40,000 (<u>Facebook</u>) 355,800 (<u>X/Twitter</u>)	Claims to be an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank. It has links to think tanks worldwide through the Economic Freedom Network and ties to the Koch family. MediaBias Fact Check labels the Fraser Institute strongly right-leaning when it comes to policy and business decisions and "mixed for factual reporting due to false and misleading claims regarding global warming." The Fraser Institute has actively published opinion pieces and reports against climate policy, including a cap on oil and gas emissions and a carbon tax. Recently, the featured Lomborg's report that claims incidents of wildfires, and other naturally occurring events, are not increasing and should not
<u>The Heritage</u> <u>Foundation</u>	1,900,000 (Facebook) 741,700 (X/Twitter) 455,000 (YouTube)	be considered in policy decisions. American conservative think tank based in Washington, D.C. The Heritage Foundation has had significant influence in U.S. public policy making, and has historically been ranked among the most influential public policy organizations in the United States. The foundation is one of many climate change denial organizations that have been <u>funded by ExxonMobil</u> . It recently posted to YouTube a video denying that wildfires are increasing across the globe.