Climate Action Against Disinformation

A 2,900% Increase in Greenwash: Big Oil Targeted Brazil With Google Ads To Undermine COP30

Summary

This briefing analyses digital greenwashing by major oil companies, focusing on their use of Google Ads in the months leading up to COP30.

Globally, oil company ads on Google spiked by 218% in October 2025, while ads targeting Brazil increased by 2,900%. The oil sector's biggest users of Google Ads saw particularly large increases: Saudi Aramco expanded its adverts by 469.2% month-on-month in October, TotalEnergies by 106.5%, and ExxonMobil by 156.3%. BP made the biggest jump in adverts bought at 1,369.2%, from a low base.

For adverts shown in Brazil, Petrobras stands out, accounting for almost 70% of total Google Ads, with 665 published in 2025, a considerable increase from the four months before the COP30.

To combat the oil industry's disinformation strategy, it is essential to increase regulatory intervention, including a potential ban on fossil fuel advertising, as well as enhance enforcement and improve transparency and data on digital greenwashing.

Background

Transitioning away from fossil fuels is a central point of discussion at COP30, where the integrity of information is, for the first time, on the official agenda. Recent action shows how important it is to discuss and combat digital climate misinformation, especially around genuine efforts to foster energy transition.

Although it is necessary to halt investments in fossil fuel exploration to mitigate the effects of climate change, current research shows that oil companies have continued to invest in these activities, while devoting very little to the energy transition.

In the ten years since the signing of the Paris Agreement, US$8.7 trillion has been invested in the global oil and gas sector, and only about US$113 billion has been allocated to renewable energy, CCUS and storage, equivalent to 1.4% of total investment. Furthermore, the net-zero carbon strategies put forth by fossil fuel companies have, in some cases, been discontinued.

Despite this, many oil and gas companies present themselves publicly in much more responsible ways, using subtle, often indirect messaging to secure a social licence to continue to operate in the same way as always, despite the known environmental risks.

This document analyzes data on digital greenwashing, focusing on advertisements published on Google Ads[1] in the first 10 months of 2025. The research was conducted in partnership with Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), Centre for Climate Communication and Data Science at the University of Exeter (C3DS), and Climainfo Institute. The database provides information on Google Ads from 42 companies[2] across extractive and heavy industrial sectors, and includes 24 oil companies.

The research evaluates Google Ad campaigns by eight oil companies with the most considerable advertising presence on the platforms, especially in Brazil: BP, Equinor, ExxonMobil, Petrobras, Repsol, Saudi Aramco, Shell, and TotalEnergies.[3]

[1] Google Ads is Google's online advertising program designed to target ads at people according to a set of criteria such as their location, preferences or other characteristics.

[2] The full list is in the Appendix.

[3] The Center for Climate Communication and Data Science (C3DS) at the University of Exeter developed custom software to harvest and search advertisements made available through the Google Ads Transparency Center. Using InfluenceMap's Carbon Majors database of 180 entities, C3DS researchers identified 42 entities actively advertising using Google Ads. These entities include

The goal is to understand how companies use Google Ads' targeted advertising to promote their brand, especially in the run-up to the 30th UN Climate Change Conference in Brazil.

Digital greenwashing is a key plank in PR plans

Oil companies invest in public relations (PR) strategies across multiple platforms in a coordinated effort to shape public perceptions of their operations as positive, clean, and responsible. Marketing on digital platforms can take a number of forms, including "native" advertising that, while paid for, looks to viewers as if it is part of the programming, and more explicit, non-native adverts.

One example of native digital content delivery is sponsorship of digital influencers that present themselves as supporters of the energy transition, including science influencers. Tactics here have shifted from denying climate science, as they did in the past,[4] to instead present fossil fuel companies as modern and efficient sustainability actors. In Brazil, Agência Pública found that the state-owned Brazilian petroleum firm Petrobras hired influencers, especially those aligned with the environmental agenda, to produce content targeting a younger audience. Through this activity, the company aims to convince people that it is on the "green" path, while continuing to drill for fossil fuels. Petrobras plans to invest USD 111 billion in its operations between 2025 and 2029, 90% in fossil fuels.

Another digital avenue is paid advertising on social networks. Research by Netlab at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro analyzed more than 2,800 LinkedIn ads published between 2023 and 2025 from 917 international companies across sectors, including oil companies, and found that more than 52.7% contained evidence of greenwashing. Petrobras was identified as the worst offender in this metric, by a significant margin.[5]

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a sample of the world's largest oil, gas, coal, and cement producers, and includes both investor-owned and state-owned entities. The C3DS system collects data for all countries and regions where these 42 entities advertise, and tracks information for all available advertising formats (text, image, and video).

[4] Oreskes, N. and Conway, E. "Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming". 2011.

[5] See page 16 of the Netlab report.

Google Ads as a greenwashing tool

Google Ads is another key channel for delivering digital messaging, holding 80.2% of the pay-per-click market. It is particularly important as Google Ads can appear at the top of the page on Google Search, which consistently holds a 73%+ share of the market for search engines. Google has profited from oil company ads for many years, including those that promote fake news and disinformation about climate. Between 2020 and 2022, the company earned USD 23.7 million from ads for big oil.

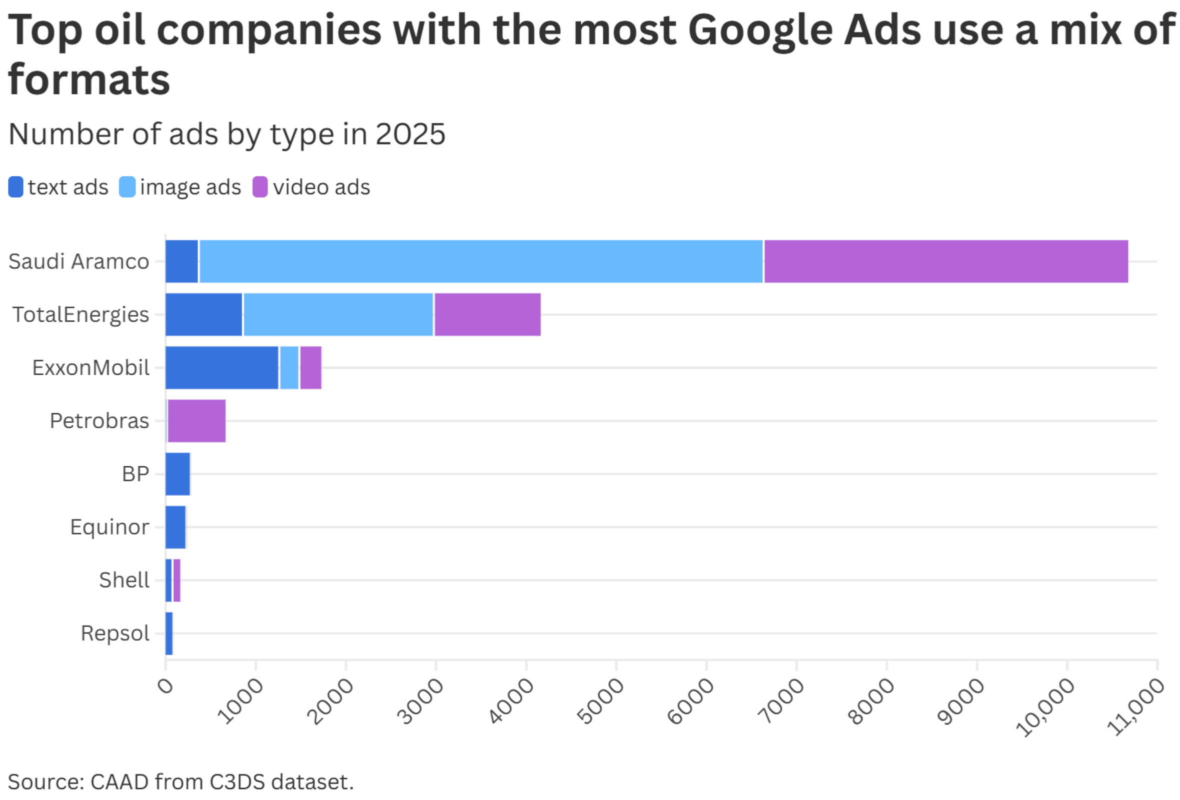
Google Ads comprise a highly strategic communication ecosystem in which oil companies attempt to expand their political and social influence and maintain their social licence to continue operating. Because of Google's ubiquiteness as a search engine and pay-per-click advertising provider, these adverts are particularly powerful tools to influence perceptions about oil company operations and their role in the energy transition.

Oil company ads in detail

The eight oil companies selected for this study accounted for just over 70% of total oil company ads on Google Ads worldwide from January to October 2025.

Saudi Aramco is the top oil company investing in Google Ads, with over 10k ads reaching up to 77 million people. Total Energies and ExxonMobil take the second and third spots as top oil advertisers using Google Ads (Fig. 1).

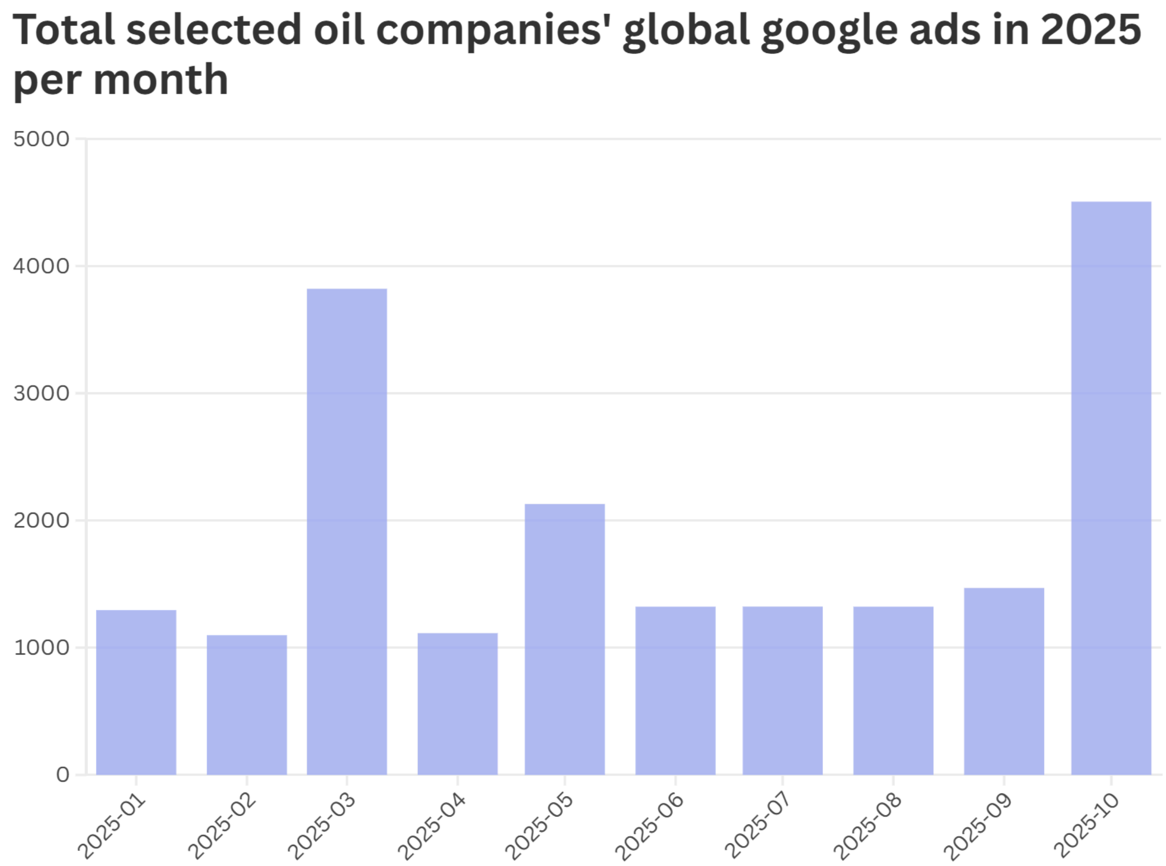
Fig. 1



Breaking the data down over time, there is a noticeable spike in Google Ads in October, ahead of COP30 in November 2025. The number of adverts from oil companies jumped by some 218% compared to September. This took the total number of Google Ads promoting oil company brands from 1,939, an average of 64.6 per day, to 6,384, an average of 205.9 (Fig. 2).

Adverts over the year were largely stable aside from the October spike and two other jumps in March and May, both driven almost exclusively by Saudi Aramco (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2



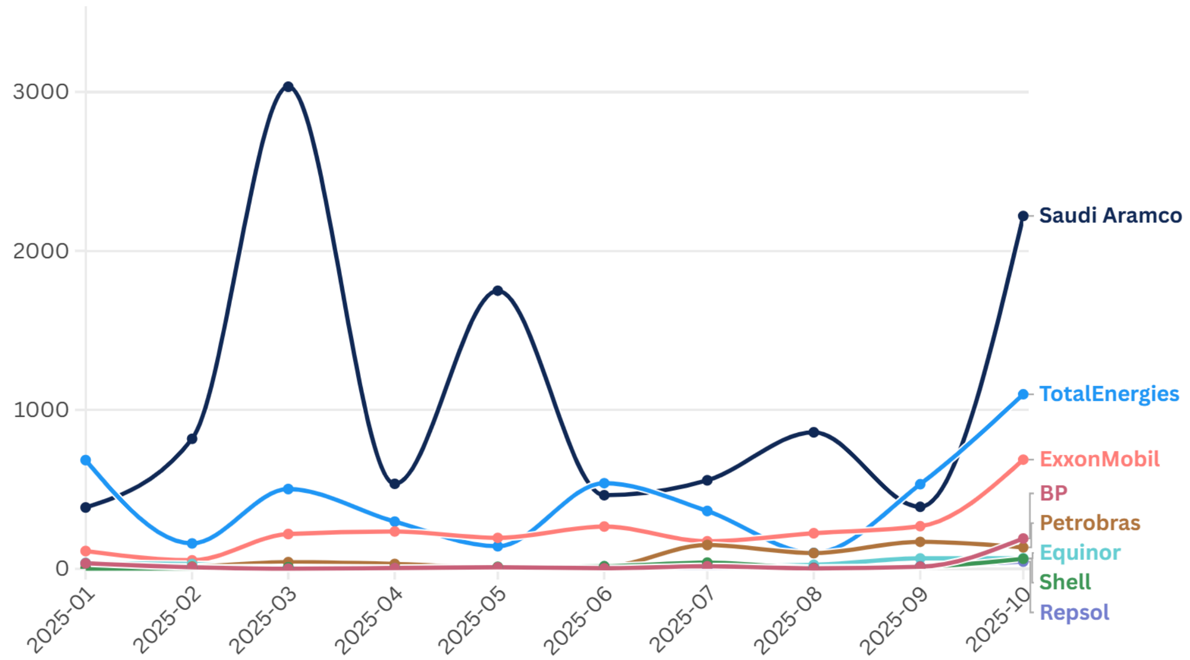
Source: CAAD from C3DS dataset.

At a company level, there were upticks in October nearly across the board. The top three global advertisers saw particularly large increases: Saudi Aramco expanded its adverts by 469.2% month-on-month in October, TotalEnergies by 106.5%, and ExxonMobil by 156.3%. BP made the biggest jump in adverts bought at 1,369.2%, from a low base (Fig. 3).

While these companies were investing more in global ads, Petrobras registered a 20.6% decrease between September and October. The following section shows that Brazil data indicate Petrobras reduced its focus on global ads to prioritize ads in Brazil (Fig. 3).

Fig 3.

Nearly all top oil advertisers bought significantly more Google Ads in October 2025



Source: CAAD from C3DS dataset.

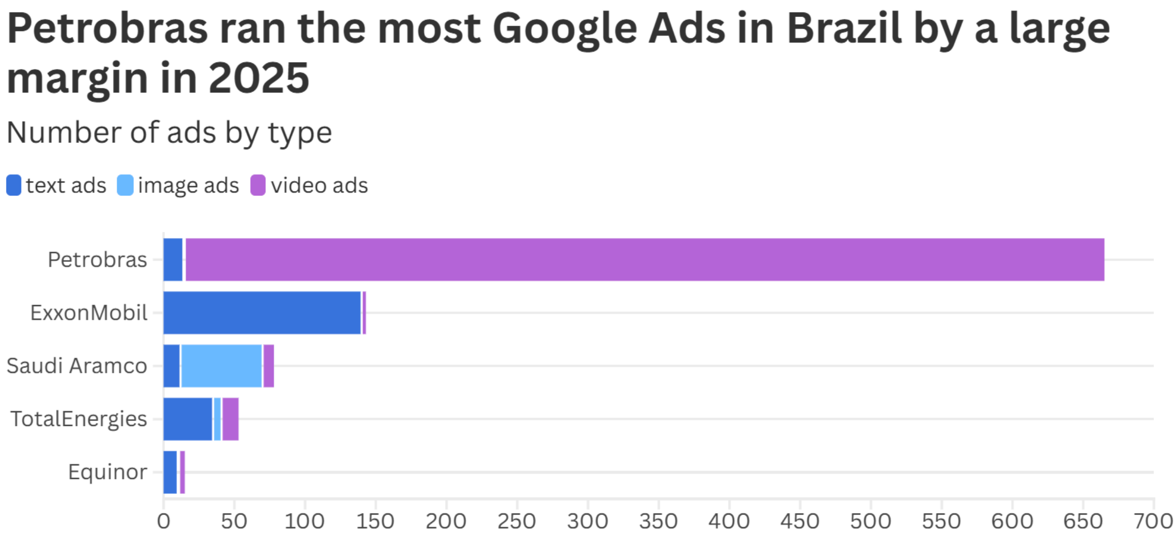
The increased placement of advertisements around strategic multilateral events is not new. Companies in the agribusiness, mining, and fossil fuel sectors operating in Brazil have been intensifying their narratives on climate and sustainability ahead of key moments. A 2024 study by CAAD found that Petrobras, Vale, Ambev, and Shell relied on [targeted digital advertising and influencer partnerships]() to broaden the reach of these messages during COP29 in 2024. Petrobras was found to have significantly increased the volume of advertisements promoting its environmental goals, with a special focus on young audiences.

Brazil hosts COP amid spike in oil advertising

Oil companies intensified their visibility campaigns in Brazil, including through Google Ads, ahead of COP30 being held in Belém in November 2025.

The data show that most of the major oil companies in this study purchased Google Ads space in Brazil, but Petrobras stands out, representing almost 70% of the total – 665 ads (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4



Source: CAAD from C3DS data.

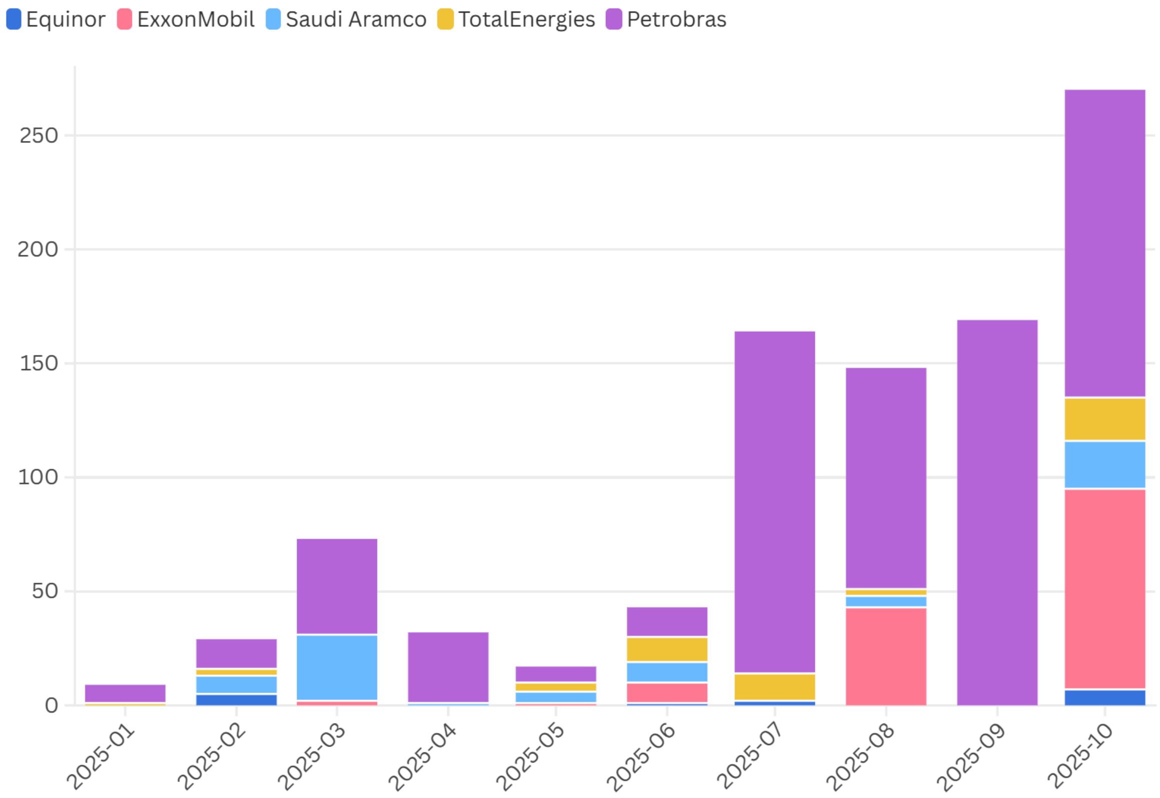
On a month-by-month basis, Petrobras maintained a much higher ad volume than its international competitors, prioritizing video ads, throughout 2025.

Over the year, a significant rise in advertisements is observed in Brazil, led by Petrobras. From January to October, the number of ads increased by 2,900% – from 9 to 270. The increase in advertising ramped up in the second half of the year, with almost 80% of ads published between July and October. The increase from Petrobras is particularly notable in the four months leading up to COP30 (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5

Leading oil advertisers grew their Brazil placements by 2.900% in 2025

Petrobras leads the number of Google Ads, especially from July.



Source: CAAD from C3DS data.

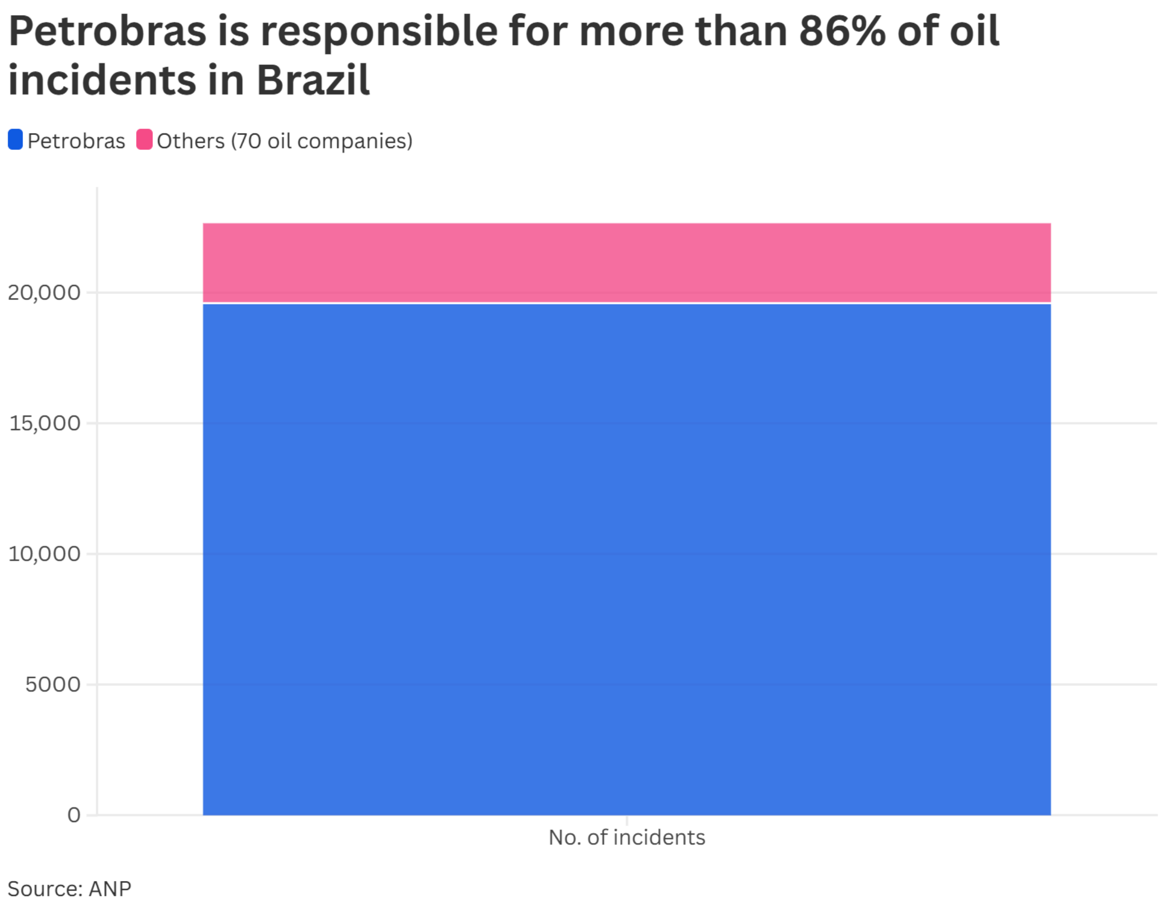
Google Ads are part of a wider push by Petrobras to claim green credentials

This intensification is not accidental. In 2025, Petrobras sought to influence public opinion and political debate to position itself as a leader in the country's energy transition. The escalation coincides with the launch, in July 2025, of a new multi-channel advertising campaign in which the company claims to have an active role in the just energy transition. The campaign, which includes digital adverts as well as more traditional outlets, drew public criticism, accusing the company of greenwashing.

The campaign's narrative seeks to promote the company's image in a politically sensitive year, marked by debates over decarbonization, Amazonia, and Brazil's international credibility ahead of the UN Climate Summit in Belém. At the same time, Petrobras has been seeking approval for oil exploration in the Amazon, which it received in October, despite survey findings in September showing that a majority of the population opposed it. However, after the licence was awarded, the percentage of the Brazilian population supporting oil exploration in the region had risen to 42% (up from 26% a month before).

While Petrobras has reinforced its advertising presence to advance its role in Brazil's just transition, government records detail the extent to which oil exploration is a dirty business. According to records maintained by the National Agency of Petroleum, Natural Gas and Biofuels (ANP), Petrobras has historically been – and remains – responsible for most oil incidents in Brazil, a contrast to the "just transition" and "climate leadership" messages promoted in the advertisements (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6



Potential pathways to reduce digital greenwashing by oil companies

Big tech companies, including Google, like to claim they can play a key role in combating climate misinformation. However, despite announcing in 2021 that it would ban the monetization of climate change denialist content on its platforms, Google continued to run ads on YouTube videos containing climate misinformation, and only a small percentage were demonetized, demonstrating that Big Tech platforms can not be trusted to self-regulate when it comes to climate disinformation

Greater transparency in how companies address greenwashing is becoming a central expectation across global markets. Firms are increasingly being called on by actors such as the UN to stop accepting "toxic" digital content on climate issues.

This shift is driven by growing scrutiny from regulators, consumers, investors, and civil society demanding reliable, comparable, and transparent information. As a result, companies face mounting pressure to adopt rigorous reporting standards and make their data available in accessible formats that enable external monitoring and accountability.

One way to encourage further action is to improve regulatory definitions and enforcement of greenwashing. There is a strong and growing precedent for litigating companies that breach advertising standards with misleading or false campaigns.

As well as regulating the use of vague and unsubstantial terms for oil operations at large—such as "clean" or "green"—it is also crucial to prohibit product or campaign names that suggest environmental advantages without a scientific basis. Terms such as "Eco-Friendly Gas" or "Green Diesel" create misleading perceptions about fossil fuels being part of the energy transition, which they are not.

Furthermore, governments need to increase funding and mandate that advertising standards agencies and consumer protection bodies proactively monitor and penalize the use of misleading language. These penalties should include substantial fines, sufficient to create a real deterrent and prevent greenwashing from continuing as a low-cost, high-reputation-return strategy.

Ultimately, the only way to completely protect the public from the lies of the fossil fuel industry is to treat it like we've treated another industry proven to lie about the harms its products cause: Big Tobacco. A ban on fossil fuel advertising, modeled after the ban on tobacco ads, would be an effective and publicly popular way to start cleaning up the information environment.

Appendix: List of companies in C3DS dataset

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ArcelorMittal, BASF (Badische Anilin- und Soda-Fabrik), BP (British Petroleum), Cenovus Energy, Cemex (Cementos Mexicanos), Chevron Corporation, ConocoPhillips, Equinor, ExxonMobil (Exxon Mobil Corporation), Gazprom (Gazovaya Promyshlennost), Glencore, Heidelberg Materials, Hess Corporation, Holcim Group, INPEX Corporation, JSW (Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa), Kiewit Mining Group, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Lukoil (Lukoil Oil Company), Mitsubishi Corporation, Mubadala Investment Company, Murphy Oil Corporation, Nextera Energy, OMV (Österreichische Mineralölverwaltung), Orlen (Polski Koncern Naftowy Orlen S.A.), PGE Group (Polska Grupa Energetyczna), Petrobras (Petróleo Brasileiro S.A.), PetroEcuador (Empresa Pública de Hidrocarburos del Ecuador), Repsol, RWE (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk AG), Sasol (South African Synthetic Oil Limited), Saudi Aramco (Saudi Arabian Oil Company), Shandong Energy Group, Shell (Royal Dutch Shell), Suncor Energy, Teck Resources, TotalEnergies, UltraTech Cement, Vistra Corp., Woodside Energy, YPF (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales).