

FOR EMBARGOED RELEASE: 11:00 AM CEST, JUNE 9, 2022

**DENY, DECEIVE, DELAY: DOCUMENTING AND RESPONDING TO CLIMATE
DISINFORMATION AT COP26 AND BEYOND**

*Report documents main tactics used to weaponize doubt and deceive the public on social
media in relation to climate change*

BONN, GERMANY - A new report released today by the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#) and the 20+ member coalition [Climate Action Against Disinformation \(CAAD\)](#) documents the extent and diverse nature of climate disinformation around last year's international climate conference in Glasgow, COP26. The report, the most comprehensive of its type to date, offers seven key policy recommendations to stop disinformation from jeopardising future climate action and policy-making, such as the UN's next climate summit set to take place in Egypt this November.

The report ([embargoed executive summary here](#)) is the result of an unprecedented effort to monitor and respond to climate disinformation at a COP event and beyond. Analysts from ISD and 8 partner organisations found that strategies enacted by Big Tech companies and media organisations were ineffective in combatting viral disinformation and systems remain overwhelmed by greenwashing advertising and other high-traction denial.

Across social media, high-traction disinformation was found to originate primarily from a select number of pundits and political actors, who merge climate and "Culture Wars" narratives to violate multiple content moderation policies in tandem. **Twitter carried the most false content by volume, while Facebook's algorithm drove greater exposure to climate disinformation than its own Climate Science Center, and its fact-checking policies remain woefully under-enforced.**

"Our analysis has shown that climate disinformation has become more complex, evolving from outright denial into identifiable 'Discourses of Delay' to exploit the gap between buy-in and action" said Jennie King, Head of Climate Disinformation at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. "Governments and social media platforms must learn the new strategies at play and understand that disinformation in the climate realm has increasing crossover with other harms, including electoral integrity, public health, hate speech and conspiracy theories. We've proposed seven concrete measures they can take to thwart the prominence and impact of this content, in order to build public mandates based on credible science and good-faith debate."

Based on the narratives and tactics identified by CAAD's bespoke monitoring system, the coalition recommends that policymakers formally recognise the threat, adopt a universal definition of climate disinformation and limit loopholes for traditional media outlets in tech regulation such as the EU's Digital Services Act - all of which will help mitigate the risk that false or misleading content hinders climate negotiations and legislative agendas at this critical juncture.

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Member of the European Parliament Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield praised the report as "a timely and important exploration of the state of play on climate disinformation," stating that ISD and CASM Technology's "ground-breaking dashboard gave us new, worrying insights about the extent to which malicious actors go to distort and discredit climate science".

Delbos-Cornfield, who also sits on the [INGE2 Special Committee](#) responsible for mitigating disinformation threats in the European Union, added: "this shows that far from addressing the problem, [social media] platforms are amplifying the voices of a small community of actors spreading climate disinformation....We must do more to address climate disinformation at the European level. If urgent steps are not taken to tackle [it] head on, our collective work towards reaching the climate goals is at risk of being undermined."

The report also identifies concrete actions that should be taken by Big Tech to improve their systematic approach for preventing climate disinformation:

- Improve transparency and data access to quantify disinformation trends at scale
- Adopt a definition of climate disinformation in Community Guidelines or Terms of Service
- Restrict misleading fossil fuel advocacy in paid advertising and sponsored content
- Enforce or introduce policies against repeat offenders spreading disinformation on their products and services
- Better label old or misleading content to prevent re-circulation of disinformation
- Enable image-based searches via APIs to better track viral disinformation in meme, video and image format

These policy guidelines are each based on a body of evidence generated over the past 18 months, and especially during and in the aftermath of COP26. The report offers exhaustive examples of who is spreading which kinds of disinformation across various online spaces and for what types of audiences.

"We will not be able to stop climate change if all conversations are flooded with disinformation," said Michael Khoo, co-chair of the Climate Disinformation Coalition at Friends of the Earth U.S., who provided US expertise in partnership with CAAD. "Governments must require social media companies to be transparent and accountable about the harms their products create, as they do with every other industry from airlines to cars to food processing. We should not continue this endless game of climate denial whack-a-mole."

CAAD is calling on the IPCC, UN, EU and other science bodies, social media companies and policymakers to address climate disinformation with concrete steps ahead of the COP27 negotiations.

See below for further quotes from contributors, an executive summary of the policy asks can be found [here](#), and **the full report will launch on June 9, 2022, at 11:00 AM CEST at THIS LINK.**

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PARTNER QUOTES

In addition to the quotes below from co-authors, partners and other key stakeholders, the following individuals have received an advanced copy of the report and are willing to speak to press:

(Please note: these individuals were not direct contributors to the report but are climate science and disinformation experts in their own right, and can situate the research in its wider context)

John Cook, University of Monash and Skeptical Science: john.cook@monash.edu

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Andrew Dessler, Texas A&M Climate Scientist: adessler@tamu.edu

Gwendoline Delbos Cornfield, Member of the European Parliament and the [INGE 2 Special Committee](#): *“This report is a timely and important exploration of the state of play on climate disinformation. Climate disinformation and misinformation pose a very real threat to us all. Left unchecked, this disinformation could have a huge impact on our future and the future of our planet. Until now, there has been a real lack of information about how climate disinformation is spread, who is exposed to it and which actors perpetuate it. At COP 26, ISD and partners’ ground-breaking dashboard gave us new, worrying insights about the extent to which malicious actors go to distort and discredit climate science.*

This report shows that far from addressing the problem, the platforms are amplifying the voices of a small community of actors spreading climate disinformation. Climate disinformation spiked during COP26, but the problem is still there. Every day, more and more people are being exposed to harmful disinformation online that has not been flagged, debunked or taken down. We must do more to address climate disinformation at the European level. If urgent steps are not taken to tackle climate disinformation head on, our collective work towards reaching the climate goals is at risk of being undermined.”

Ben Blackwell, CEO, Global Wind Energy Council: *“Disinformation is a real threat to the energy transition and achieving our climate goals, as it aims to spread confusion and division among policymakers, communities and other actors, causing vital delays to key solutions such as the scaling up of wind and solar power. As this important report from ISD, CASM and CAAD shows, disinformation has shifted from outright climate denialism, to “discourses of delay” and discrediting solutions to the climate crisis, and spreading inertia and despondency. GWEC commends the continue work being carried out by ISD to monitor, analyse and expose these disinformation efforts.”*

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[CASM Technology](#) is dedicated to confronting online harms by bringing together researchers in foundational natural language processing and software developers with social scientists and experts in information threats to unlock the power of machine learning for linguists, activists, policy-makers and journalists, to inform important decision-making.

Carl Miller, Partner: *“We’re absolutely delighted to have worked with such extraordinary partners to confront climate disinformation. Information threats will never stop evolving and we have to ensure our responses remain just as dynamic. This report goes to show what is possible when you really mix together the best in climate research with new and innovative tech. These kinds of teams - this kind of work - is the future of protecting the consensus for climate action against the shadowy actors and threats ranged against it.”*

[Friends of the Earth U.S.](#) co-founded the U.S. Climate Disinformation Coalition in 2018. It has been built into a 35+ intersectional group coalition that has produced research documenting the spread of climate disinformation on social media platforms, including during the [2021 Texas blackout](#), and earlier the [marriage of QAnon and climate denialists](#).

Michael Khoo, Co-chair of the Climate Disinformation: *“We will not be able to stop climate change if all conversations are flooded with disinformation. Governments must require social media companies to be transparent and accountable about the harms their products create, as they do with every other industry from airlines to cars to food processing. We should not continue this endless game of climate denial whack-a-mole.”*

[Climate Nexus](#) is a non-profit climate and clean energy communications group, established to inspire, inform, and elevate constructive and equitable action on climate change.

Philip Newell, Associate Director of Science Defense: *“This was the most robust effort to monitor climate disinformation that I’ve seen in my decade of tracking Big Oil’s climate denial. While each industrial disinformation campaign is unique, the actors and their playbook remain the same, so if the lessons in this report are heeded by Big Tech and other policymakers, climate disinformation won’t still be an obstacle to climate action another ten years from now.”*

[Conscious Advertising Network \(CAN\)](#) is a voluntary coalition of over 150 organisations on a mission to ensure the ethics catches up with the technology of modern advertising. CAN exists to break the economic link between advertising and the harmful content that divides communities, excludes diverse voices, exploits children and undermines scientific consensus.

Jake Dubbins & Harriet Kingaby, Co-chairs: *“The work that ISD and partners have done to unearth and categorise climate misinformation in this report is incredible, and shows just what we are up against. Advertisers, their agencies and tech platforms must take these issues seriously - we have a short amount of time to solve climate change, and we can no longer justify bankrolling creators of disinformation and division or providing creative services to greenwash high carbon companies.”*

[Eco-Bot.Net](#) launched online during the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, UK to expose the scale of corporate greenwashing and climate change disinfo on social media. The network-based performance saw our system and bots expose, flag and visualise thousands of pieces of content from Facebook, Instagram & Twitter with public health warnings.

Robert del Naja, Co-Creator of Eco.Bot-Net and Founding Member of Massive Attack: *“The general public are very much aware of the harm caused by the disinformation that is propagated via social media platforms. Eco-bot.net and the CAAD coalition aims to show that social media companies in particular are responsible for most of the climate disinfo in current circulation and will also reveal the dimensions of the greenwash industrial complex - and the profits it generates for the platforms.”*

Bill Posters, Hacktivist and Co-Creator of Eco.Bot-Net: *“With so much trust and collective perceptions of truth being eroded due to the epidemic of corporate greenwashing and climate change disinformation on social media platforms, Eco-Bot’s AI systems and data visualisations attempt to make the scale of the issue visible; to give transparency; and to provide data-driven intelligence to support the aims of the CAAD coalition. We are thrilled that the CAAD report is now being published to further the reforms needed to social media platforms’ policies.”*

[Global Witness](#) has, for over 25 years, investigated and exposed environmental and human rights abuses in the oil, gas, mining, and timber sectors, and tracked ill-gotten money and influence through the global financial and political system. Today, they focus on abusive actors, misuse of power and financial flows, but have turned our focus on some of the most urgent issues facing humanity: the climate emergency and attacks on civic space.

Mai Rosner, Campaigner: *“The COP War Room demonstrated what can be achieved with shared understanding, cooperation, and a common sense of urgency. These are exactly the ingredients that we need to tackle the climate crisis but it is also these pillars that are being fatally undermined by climate disinformation and the polarizing information environment created by Big Tech. We cannot allow this toxic business model to derail climate action by eroding public trust, promoting division and encouraging inactivism”*

[ISD](#) - The Institute for Strategic Dialogue is a non-partisan think tank working across the areas of extremism, hate, and disinformation. It combines cutting-edge technology with subject matter expertise to combat threats to democracy and human rights worldwide.

Sasha Havlicek, CEO: *“Our analysis demonstrates in stark terms how a well-worn information and influence operations playbook is being applied to the climate context. This report clearly evidences the overlap in conspiracy, extremist and hostile state disinformation networks with climate sceptic influencers - and the failure of government and social media companies alike to check the harmful spread of climate disinformation.*

Social media companies and governments can begin by formally recognising the phenomenon and adopting a definition as a basis for curtailing the spread and potential algorithmic amplification of this content. We cannot allow climate to become yet another vector for hostile states and vested interests to sow division in our societies, undermining the possibility of meaningful debate on climate policy.”

[Media Matters for America](#) - is a nonprofit media watchdog dedicated to monitoring and exposing misinformation and combating lies, propaganda, and extremism. The Media Matters Climate and Energy Program tracks and combats new threats, threads, and channels of climate misinformation in order to slow their spread and curtail their influence.

Ilana Berger, Researcher, Climate & Energy Internet Disinformation: *"This report provides proof that social platforms are rife with harmful climate misinformation and, as Media Matters documents in its case study, that existing policies that are in place to curtail the spread of misinformation are not adequately enforced. Taken together, the problem of climate misinformation and the failed platform driven solutions to it - should compel governments to hold those responsible to account."*

Purpose - Purpose works at the intersection of public mobilization and storytelling to accelerate movements, engage unexpected partners, drive campaigning innovation, and unlock new solutions on the world's biggest issues.

Chris Cooper, Senior Campaign Director: *"Our opponents are well coordinated and well resourced - without collaborations like this that bring together the best of our wide range of capabilities we will never be able to effectively counter their disinformation. As the Australian partner in this work, it has been both shocking and motivating to see Australian media outlets and personalities making an outsized contribution to global climate disinformation. We're now better equipped to tackle this threat into the future"*

Stop Funding Heat is a group of citizens concerned at the way newspapers, news sites and online platforms spread climate misinformation in the pursuit of sales, clicks or vested interests. We connect brands to the misinformation they place adverts alongside; and in turn those advertisers are able to make better programmatic decisions, cutting the climate misinformation machine from a major revenue source.

Sean Buchan, Campaign Manager: *"This is a seminal report collecting together thousands upon thousands of hours of human research. By focusing the efforts of so many organisations during COP26 we have produced a report that is greater than the sum of our parts."*

While climate misinformation continues to evolve and undermine the work of well-meaning companies, NGOs and government bodies, those same institutions are often fighting against it like we are still in the 1990s. We need to catch up fast. We hope this report will help kickstart a step change in how we come together and fight this incredibly dangerous problem."

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