# Climate denial shifts to online scepticism and misinformation backed by conservative funders



In recent years, the nature of climate change denial has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from outright dismissal of global warming to more nuanced forms of scepticism and misinformation. This trend is particularly evident in online media and social platforms, where influential figures propagate narratives that cast doubt on the effectiveness of climate solutions, suggest climate change may have beneficial effects, or frame environmental policies as mechanisms of government control.

A report by Yale Climate Connections highlights that new forms of climate denial accounted for 70% of such claims on YouTube in 2023, doubling from 35% in 2018, as per data from the U.S. Center for Countering Digital Hate. This shift comes amid growing public awareness of climate change's tangible impacts, such as extreme weather events and crop failures, which make outright denial less credible.

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions. According to Pew Research, about 20% of U.S. adults and 37% of adults under 30 regularly consume news from influencers, whose reach often eclipses that of traditional media. Among the ten most popular online shows, eight have been found to disseminate false or misleading climate information, a finding detailed in analyses by Yale Climate Connections and Media Matters for America, a journalistic watchdog.

The misinformation spread by these influencers often involves portraying climate concerns as akin to a "pseudo-religion" and questioning the validity or utility of climate action. Right-leaning figures such as Jordan Peterson and Charlie Kirk have been noted for promoting such views. Kirk, speaking to Fox Business, characterised climate activism as “the wrapper around Marxism,” referring to it as a “Trojan horse” for broader political control. Other hosts accuse climate science of being a hoax intended for governmental oppression.

The intersection of climate scepticism with other conspiracy narratives is also notable. British news site Tortoise Media observed an increasing convergence between COVID-19 scepticism and climate denial, with overlapping personalities and shared themes emphasising government control and mistrust. This "new denial" narrative is gaining traction even within political circles, including members of the Trump administration. Energy Secretary Chris Wright stated that there are “pluses to global warming,” while EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin dismissed climate change efforts as an attack on a “climate change religion.”

Financial backing significantly amplifies these messages. Media Matters' research found that approximately 60% of the most popular climate-related online shows are right-leaning, commanding five times the audience of left-leaning counterparts. Conservative media organisations invest heavily in marketing campaigns to ensure their reach. PragerU, for example, dedicates around half of its budget to promotional activities. Wealthy individuals and families such as the Kochs, Mercers, Thiels, Murdochs, and Uihleins have been identified as influential backers of media ventures that support climate scepticism.

The Daily Wire, co-founded by conservative commentator Ben Shapiro, exemplifies this expansion into multifaceted media operations funded by substantial investments, reportedly including $4.7 million from Texas fracking billionaires Dan and Farris Wilks. The platform produces a broad array of content, including films, children’s programming, and podcasts, all serving to reinforce its ideological message.

Meanwhile, efforts by proponents of climate action have not kept pace with such financial resources, allowing climate denial messages to gain a prominent foothold in digital spaces. The complexities of this media landscape reflect the evolving dynamics of public discourse around climate change, where scepticism is less about denying the phenomenon itself and more about contesting the narratives around its solutions and societal implications.

This analysis is part of The 89 Percent Project, an initiative under the global journalism collaboration Covering Climate Now. The Energy Mix is reporting on these developments in the context of a broad societal shift in how climate change is debated and understood online.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://counterhate.com/research/new-climate-denial/?ref=blog.terra.do> - This report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate details the evolution of climate denial tactics on YouTube, highlighting a shift from outright denial to undermining climate solutions and science, with 'New Denial' narratives constituting 70% of climate denial content in 2023.
* <https://e360.yale.edu/digest/youtube-climate-denial-solutions> - An analysis by Yale e360 discusses the decline in videos that outright deny climate change on YouTube, noting an increase in content questioning the practicality of renewable energy and impugning the credibility of climate experts.
* <https://counterhate.com/topic/climate-change-misinformation/> - The Center for Countering Digital Hate's page on climate change misinformation provides insights into the rise of 'New Denial' narratives on YouTube, emphasizing the need for updated policies to address this shift.
* <https://capeweather.com/how-youtubes-climate-deniers-turned-into-climate-doomers-yale-climate-connections/> - This article from Yale Climate Connections examines how climate deniers on YouTube have transitioned from denying climate change to promoting 'New Denial' narratives, such as questioning the effectiveness of climate solutions.
* <https://apnews.com/article/a7e2e3214abb4470dcb6e2837aa39c2e> - A report by the Associated Press discusses how misinformation about climate change has flourished on platforms like Twitter, especially after Elon Musk's acquisition, highlighting the spread of climate denial content.
* <https://time.com/6113396/greenwashing-on-facebook/> - Time magazine's article reveals how major polluting companies, including ExxonMobil, have used Facebook to spread misleading climate change information, employing greenwashing tactics to obfuscate their environmental impact.
* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMioAFBVV95cUxOVUdIRXFBUk01dDlKYmc2a2F3X2tUb1E2SmV3RTZrSFJ2Qm00dUVfSnJJSnI5Z2drOXUzT1BTRDFwcFBqWVpWMXluenlFZ3dIQURkX25PSHlrR1FleENuV0hINWlYb00tNmtGcjJMVWZOVGlyVzhtd3Itd3BCeDIwbDZYeHFETDI2TldNd1ZDWDBvLTE2bTVDTXZwaDdWcW5y?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data