# New online climate scepticism shifts from denial to misinformation and political influence



In recent years, the landscape of climate change discourse has seen a significant shift in the nature of denialism, with new forms of scepticism gaining momentum online. According to a report covered by The Energy Mix, the traditional outright denial of global warming as a phenomenon has largely given way to more nuanced forms of misinformation. These include claims that climate solutions are ineffective, that climate change may have certain benefits, and that policies aimed at reducing pollution are primarily tools for governmental control.

Data from the U.S. Center for Countering Digital Hate indicates that in 2023, 70% of climate misinformation on YouTube fell into these new categories, a notable increase from 35% in 2018. This shift coincides with a changing media consumption pattern, particularly among younger demographics. Pew research shows that about 20% of U.S. adults and 37% of those under 30 regularly receive their news from social media influencers, many of whom have become prominent voices in spreading these narratives.

An analysis by Yale Climate Connections further reveals that among the ten most popular online shows, eight have disseminated false or misleading climate information. Many of these programs, heavily right-leaning in orientation, amplify the idea that climate change concerns resemble a "pseudo-religion," a viewpoint promoted by figures such as Jordan Peterson and Charlie Kirk. Kirk notably described climate activism as “the wrapper around Marxism,” telling Yale Climate Connections, “You have Marxism at its core and you have climate change on the exterior. Climate change activism, environmentalism, pseudo-paganism—we call it a Trojan horse.”

Climate scepticism broadcasted by these influencers often frames climate change as a hoax or conspiracy aimed at population control, a theme that echoes conspiracy theories seen around COVID-19 responses. The British news outlet Tortoise Media highlighted how climate denial narratives have merged with COVID skepticism, frequently propagated by the same online personalities across platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube.

This wave of new denialism has also found resonance among prominent figures in the U.S. government under the current Trump administration. Energy Secretary Chris Wright stated to Fox Business that “There’s pluses to global warming,” while EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin referred to efforts against climate change as “driving a dagger straight into the heart of the climate change religion.”

Financial investments have played a significant role in amplifying the reach of these climate-sceptic voices. According to Media Matters for America, right-leaning digital media platforms dominate online discourse with followers far outnumbering those of left-leaning shows, partly due to substantial advertising budgets. For instance, PragerU, a conservative media company known for promoting new climate denial narratives, reportedly allocates about half of its budget to marketing.

Journalist Parker Molloy noted the political power that underpins such media ventures: “The Kochs, the Mercers, the Thiels, the Murdochs, the Uihleins—these aren’t just wealthy families; they’re kingmakers who understand that investing in media is investing in political power.” A prominent example is The Daily Wire, co-founded by Ben Shapiro, which has evolved from a modest website to a multimedia empire supported by significant financial backing from Texas fracking billionaires Dan and Farris Wilks, who reportedly invested $4.7 million in its early stages.

Despite the growing presence and influence of these voices, surveys consistently demonstrate that most people worldwide, including in the United States, recognise the reality and dangers of climate change. The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that a majority of Americans believe climate change is happening, poses serious risks, and warrants urgent action, with similar sentiments reaching as high as 89% in global surveys.

This article is part of The 89 Percent Project, an initiative within the global journalism collaboration Covering Climate Now, aiming to highlight the perspectives of the majority who acknowledge the climate crisis.

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

## References

* <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/16/climate/climate-denial-misinformation-youtube> - This article discusses the shift in climate change denialism on YouTube, highlighting the rise of 'new denial' narratives that focus on undermining climate solutions and portraying climate change as beneficial, aligning with the claim that traditional outright denial has given way to more nuanced forms of misinformation.
* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1449125/climate-change-denialist-claims-youtube/> - This source provides statistical data showing that in 2023, 70% of climate denialist claims on YouTube were categorized as 'new denial,' which includes claims that climate solutions are ineffective and that climate change may have certain benefits, supporting the assertion of a significant shift in climate change discourse.
* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/07/teens-social-media-usage-2021/> - This Pew Research Center report indicates that about 20% of U.S. adults and 37% of those under 30 regularly receive their news from social media influencers, many of whom have become prominent voices in spreading climate change narratives, corroborating the claim about changing media consumption patterns among younger demographics.
* <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/16/climate/climate-denial-misinformation-youtube> - This article highlights how climate denial narratives have merged with COVID skepticism, frequently propagated by the same online personalities across platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, supporting the claim about the convergence of climate denial and COVID-19 conspiracy theories.
* <https://www.axios.com/2018/12/02/climate-change-trump-administration-influencers> - This source discusses how climate skepticism has found resonance among prominent figures in the U.S. government under the Trump administration, including statements from Energy Secretary Chris Wright and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, aligning with the claim about the influence of these voices in the current administration.
* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1449163/increase-climate-change-denialism-sub-claims/> - This data shows a 10.8% increase in the usage of the claim that clean energy does not work from climate change denialists on YouTube between 2018 and 2023, supporting the assertion that financial investments have played a significant role in amplifying the reach of these climate-skeptic voices.
* <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