

VESTED INTERESTS FLOOD SOCIAL MEDIA WITH MISINFORMATION, MALINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

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KEY MESSAGES

1. Misinformation and disinformation on climate change are growing
2. Misinformation impacts the willingness of the public to take action
3. Misinformation and disinformation need to be countered

INTRODUCTION

The rise of misinformation is one of the leading causes of global insecurity according to the World Economic Forum. There are three types of incorrect information – misinformation (incorrect information or interpretation of facts that may not have intended to be misleading) (International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) et al., 2025), malinformation (incorrect information or interpretation of facts that intended to be misleading) (Carpenter, 2023) and disinformation (false information based on incorrect facts) (UN, 2024). While traditional climate denial persists, contemporary malinformation has evolved into more sophisticated “delay” tactics that undermine climate action without directly rejecting climate science (Liu & Lee, 2025). Much of the denial and delay tactics of the fossil fuel enterprise can be seen as malinformation or disinformation.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IS GROWING

In the past years we see a rise in misinformation and disinformation in major countries. The rise of AI and social media has exacerbated the dissemination of misinformation/disinformation, becoming one of the main global security risks (Islas-Carmona et al., 2024). Most mal- and disinformation examples arise from the USA where the fossil fuel sector is very dominant and the phase out of fossil fuels is still a debate. However, the speed with which such disinformation spreads (also due to the spread of bots and AI as mentioned) and the regularity with which it repeats itself, create an expanding brainwashing effect. Recently, forest fires in British Columbia (Canada) were attributed to arson and government incompetence rather than climate change (Climate Action Against Disinformation | Climate Information Integrity Summit Sets Stage for COP30 Action, 2025). The catastrophic event was followed by rumours and conspiracy theories like how climate change is used to destroy the oil and gas industry (CBC, 2023). In New Zealand, a paper shows how climate change is seen as a global conspiracy with narratives imported from US far-right discourse about UN Agenda 21 (Wilson, 2023). In Sweden, climate disinformation is integrated in the narratives of far-right populist discourses (Törnberg & Chueri, 2025). In Germany, AfD has denied climate change and Rassemblement Nationale in France links sovereignty to climate action (International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) et al., 2025). In Spain, a recent paper shows how climate misinformation discourse is spread through podcasts, particularly during events like COP27, which could similarly impact upcoming

COPs (Cisneros et al., 2025). The daily average of climate mis- and disinformation claims was 7.5 per day during COP27, significantly higher than during the regular period of broadcasting (2.9 per day). In the Global South, disinformation enables undermining progressive policies, for example, in Taiwan (Liu & Lee, 2025). The Bolsonaro government has also used this in relation to deforestation (Silva, 2022). Such disinformation is now spreading through transnational networks, through cross-issue (e.g., health) contamination and its uptake depends on how it is targeted and on trust of people in different sources of news. Billionaires fund extremist media platforms that amplify climate denial and extremist narratives; most major media platforms are owned or being influenced by the ultra-rich that can use the information platforms to defend their wealth and influence environmental policies (Monbiot 2025).

MISINFORMATION IMPACTS THE WILLINGNESS OF THE PUBLIC TO TAKE ACTION

Climate misinformation produced cascading effects across multiple domains that affected national and international climate action. The spread of misleading information obstructed and delayed human response to the climate crisis: even small amounts of misleading information could lower acceptance of climate change while larger campaigns confused the public and undermined support for urgent mitigating policies. The intentional spread of inaccurate narratives leads to a decline in public trust in science, media, and institutions. Traditional media's use of sensationalism and false balance amplified this effect by distorting scientific facts and impacting public understanding of the global situation, and shifted the discourse to other narratives, often creating conspiracy theories and overall distrust in movements and international action.

At the policy level, misinformation campaigns succeeded in diminishing policy coordination and blocking policies designed to reduce emissions. The campaigns created political inaction by maintaining confusion about climate science. Misinformation leads to rejection of mitigation policies, while values, ideologies, and political orientation served as strong predictors of climate change beliefs, suggesting that misinformation reinforced existing political divisions. The feedback loop between scientific denial and political inaction represented a critical downstream effect (Hornsey & Lewandowsky, 2022). This loop maintained ongoing obstruction of climate action by continuously supplying new misinformation to support inaction.

One major impact of climate disinformation is that it can significantly alter voting patterns, potentially driving voters away from parties that wish to tackle the climate issue. In a panel survey of 989 participants during the 2017 German parliamentary election it was found that believing disinformation specifically alienated voters from the governing party (CDU/CSU) and redirected them to right-wing populists (AfD) (Zimmermann & Kohring, 2020). It is also shown that individuals with low media trust are particularly vulnerable to disinformation, especially when it mimics “ordinary citizen” messaging (Hameleers et al., 2025). These misleading narratives create denialism that supports political inaction, distrust in knowledge, and undermines democracy (Monbiot 2025).

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Intervention strategies span technological, educational, and policy domains, including fact-checking platforms, prebunking and inoculation techniques, media literacy education, and collaborative approaches between scientists and journalists. Elisa Morgera's paper to the UN General Assembly calls for making fake news a criminal offence (Lakhani, 2025). Banning fossil fuel advertising could also play a role: The Hague has become the first city in the world to ban fossil fuel advertising but more such bans could help slow the fossil fuel PR machine.

Recognizing that misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are fuelling conflict, threatening democracy and human rights, the United Nations launched the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity, a set of recommendations designed to foster healthier and safer information spaces that champion human rights, peaceful societies and a sustainable future. Moreover, in November 2024, the Brazilian government, the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change, joining forces to strengthen research and measures to address disinformation campaigns that are delaying and derailing climate action.

CONCLUSION

In March 2025, the Climate Information Integrity Summit took place in Brasilia to tackle the issues of climate information integrity and its safeguarding leading to COP30. The event was attended by 120 key actors (including governments, multilateral organisations, and local and international non-profits). The need for this summit underlines the continuous spread of misinformation and disinformation on climate issues. The summit in particular identified COP30 as a "pivotal moment for significant progress" and Brazil (host of COP30) announced its commitment to prioritise information integrity specifically in the scenario of COP30 and its commitment on the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change (Climate Action Against Disinformation | Briefing, 2025). The summit tackled the role of policymakers in promoting transparency and accountability and adopting policies to preserve information integrity and prevent the spread of disinformation in the public discourse (The Climate Information Integrity Summit (CIIS), 2025). A Global Fund for Information Integrity on Climate Change has been proposed (UNFCCC, 2025).

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