



# **CLIMATE DISINFORMATION GOES MAINSTREAM: TIME FOR STRONG MEDIA WATCHDOGS**



**This report is a call to action**, born from a realization that we are at a historic crossroads for media and democracy. For years, Europe watched the U.S., a dystopian laboratory of disinformation, as the wave of anti-science rhetoric slowly swelled. Now, after two years of intense monitoring of climate coverage in France, QuotaClimat reveals an unsettling truth: the tide has arrived. Anti-science narratives, once dismissed as a decaying anomaly, are now entrenched in French news media, from print press to television and radio.



is an NGO committed to tackle climate disinformation in all communications channels with a unique focus on news media outlets. Its innovative approach combines data analysis, fit-for-purpose IA use and advocacy efforts at national, EU and global levels.

QuotaClimat is a member of the Climate Action against Disinformation.

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# STRUCTURE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** In today's hybridized information environment, news media still play a distinctive role in shaping public perceptions, guiding interpersonal issue salience, and stabilizing or shifting public attitudes on climate change.
- 2.** Climate disinformation serves as a tool, climate skepticism or relativism as a stepping stone, and the ultimate goal is the destabilization and weakening of democratic structures.
- 3.** The distinction between climate disinformation and evidence-based political disagreement lies at the heart of a response that protects freedom of expression.
- 4.** Online and offline climate disinformation are growing symmetrically, despite widespread neglect of its infiltration into news media. Climate disinformation does not solely thrive on social media but is also streamlined, either directly or indirectly because it remains uncontested, by political, economic, and advocacy elites through news media channels.
- 5.** Media outlets currently act as a structural channel to the proliferation of climate disinformation narratives, mainly due to low editorial scrutiny, bypassed ethics committees and structural constraints. This report reveals how media outlets, through editorial lapses, regulatory vacuums, and bypassed ethics committees, inadvertently allow false narratives to gain traction and become normalized.
- 6.** Climate skepticism is also publicized on mainstream channels, and not only on right-wing and partisan media outlets. This calls for increased vigilance across all the information value chain.
- 7.** Low quantity and segmented framing of environmental information not only decreases issue salience but also indirectly lessens collective scrutiny to climate disinformation.
- 8.** The "illusory truth effect" amplifies disinformation through extensive media coverage. The "illusory truth effect" demonstrates how repeated exposure to false information leads people to believe it is true, regardless of its accuracy.
- 9.** Facing heightened and distorted competition from social media platforms as producers of information, news media are increasingly adopting the editorial codes of social networks, further distorting public debate. This shift often prioritizes "attention-grabbing" content, tactics and emotional debating.
- 10.** Insufficient deontological scrutiny and regulatory gaps distort the level playing field between social media and traditional media. Despite news media being the most trusted information channel, their role in perpetuating disinformation is insufficiently scrutinized by independent regulatory authorities.
- 11.** Given the urgency of environmental crises and ongoing "backlash" process, self-regulation is insufficient.
- 12.** Upholding the regulating framework to address climate disinformation in news media is a win-win strategy for mainstream media to regain trust and attractivity while claiming the distinctive role of real counter-power.
- 13.** Combatting disinformation is not an end in itself but serves a project rooted in sovereignty, fostering freedom of expression and protecting democratic institutions in tandem with their independent checks and balances, including the media.
- 14.** Strengthening the role of news media in tackling climate dis/misinformation reinforces the strategic/political response to the threat.
- 15.** A comprehensive analysis of the French news media landscape informs the findings. This report is grounded in a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the French news media landscape, enriched by a broad, though non-exhaustive, observation of relevant international dynamics.

# OVERCOMING THE “CLIMATE ACTION” GLASS CEILING

## THE CLIMATE CRISIS CAN NO LONGER BE DISMISSED

We are now all facing the devastating impacts of human-made climate change every day. Across the globe, more frequent and intense extreme weather events bear witness of years of unequivocal scientific consensus on the multifaceted threats posed by global warming and ecosystem degradation.

Climate change poses existential risks, with disproportionate effects on low-income and vulnerable populations. The (human, environmental, socio-economic) costs of delay are increasing exponentially. Because liveability on earth is threatened, climate action is not a choice but a necessity.

« Extreme weather, critical change to Earth systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, natural resource shortages and pollution represent 5 of the top 10 most severe risks perceived to be faced over the next decade. »

(World Economic Forum, Global Risks Report 2024)

There is no doubt that the accumulation of ‘material’ and scientific evidence of climate change, ultimately resulting in the development of dedicated institutional cooperation arenas, as well as massive citizen mobilizations across

the globe, have simultaneously contributed to further **promote the climate issue on politicians’, private sector’s and media’s agenda over the last decades** – resulting in key international momentums such as the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Although 72% of people worldwide favor a rapid transition away from fossil fuels<sup>2</sup>, the 2024 UNEP Emission Gap report highlights a critical shortfall between current climate commitments and the actions needed to limit global warming – with current policies and pledges resulting in temperature rises between 2.6°C and 3.1°C by 2100. Immediate, large-scale mobilization, particularly by G20 nations, and a minimum six-fold increase in mitigation investment are essential to close the gap<sup>3</sup>.

## CLIMATE ACTION IS LOSING GROUND ON POLITICAL AGENDAS AMID COMPETING PRIORITIES

Yet, despite a clear-headed recognition of unshrinkable challenges and the institutionalization of a “net-zero” strategic vision, **climate change struggles to maintain a high and competitive priority profile.**

In opinion polls, global concern about climate change has declined over the years<sup>4</sup>. This drop occurs in a context where geopolitical and economic tensions have become more dominant in public priorities.

In the political, media, economic arenas, where interests and imperatives compete, **climate and environmental issues are either dissolved, depoliticized or dismissed** against “hot” news, conjectural events, or strategic pressing matters.

## CLIMATE ACTION IS TRAPPED BETWEEN APATHY AND POLITICAL MANIPULATION

As the implementation of the EU Green Deal faces a fragile consensus in this new policy cycle, **deceptive narratives and the orchestration of “green backlash” bear a growing framing effect on EU political discourse**, hindering progress toward a carbon-neutral future<sup>5</sup>. This shift is worrying as EU leaders unwind key regulations, from deforestation laws to the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and taxonomy framework. This notably translates as a defensive reaction to the rising far-right anti-climate rhetoric, but also a misinterpretation of public concern whose focus on economic growth and purchasing power does not dismiss the perceived co-benefits of climate action.

The solubility of the climate agenda has been widely explained by scholars and civil society research. At micro level, individual paralysis, disbelief and disregard can be attributed to a mix of cognitive obstacles relating

to the threatening nature and the systemic dimension of the challenge, as well as tangible socio-economic barriers hampering the large deployment of available alternatives. At macro level, it can be explained by a mix of bygone structural constraints (rigid and ill-adapted governance arenas to discuss and mitigate transversal aspects of the green transition, the financialization of the economy and its implications on employment and countries debt, fragile political leadership resulting from fragmented public acceptability), and private-led unadvertised but powerful strategies to avoid regulation and/or influence public opinion (proactive dissemination of deceptive narratives by coordinated networks with vested interests through information campaigns, advertising,...).

As a result, **an either defensive and/or inadvertent approach still predominantly characterizes climate action**, thereby struggling to advance incremental, socially just change and tangible results. Chronic deceptions due to poorly designed actions, colliding with systems complexity, volatility and uncertainty continue to act as serious brakes to social mobilization and the political and economic credibility of the climate agenda.

Until now, as climate issues were commonly referred to as low(er)-order priorities, **it most often led to collective inadvertence or, at best, spasmodic moral panics**. In other words, a “spineless consensus” on green issues<sup>6</sup>.

1. World Economic Forum. 2024. “Global Risks 2024: Disinformation Tops Global Risks 2024 as Environmental Threats Intensify.” World Economic Forum. 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/press/2024/01/global-risks-report-2024-press-release/>.

2. UNDP. 2024. “PEOPLES’ CLIMATE VOTE.” Peoplesclimate.vote. 2024. <https://peoplesclimate.vote/>.

3. UNEP. 2024. Emissions Gap Report. [www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report](https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report).

4. Chandèze, Estelle, and Margaux Schmitt. 2024. “Obs’COP 2024: L’urgence Climatique Cède Du Terrain Face à La Préoccupation Économique.” Ipsos. November 14, 2024. <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/obs-cop-2024-lurgence-climatique-cede-du-terrain-face-la-preoccupation-economique>.

5. Tallent, Théodore. 2024. “Backlash Écologique : Quel Discours Pour Rassembler Autour de La Transition ? – Fondation Jean-Jaurès.” Fondation Jean-Jaurès. June 27, 2024. <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/backlash-ecologique-quel-discours-pour-rassembler-autour-de-la-transition/>.

6. Dormagen, Jean Yves. 2023. “Comprendre Le Nouveau Clivage Écologique : Données Inédites.” Le Grand Continent. November 7, 2023. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/11/07/comprendre-le-nouveau-clivage-ecologique-donnees-inedites/>.

## CLIMATE DELAYISM: THE GROWING THREAT OF CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

As societal polarization grows and technological risks remain unchecked, the emergence of **“discourses of climate delay” – gradually replacing blunt climate-denialism – are gaining ground** on social media and finding echo in news media outlets<sup>7</sup>. Shifting away from evidence-based arguments, climate delayism relies on distorted facts with the aim of framing climate solutions – electric vehicles, renewable energy,... – as unreliable, unreasonable or politically motivated. These distorted framings produce tangible results on public opinions: in France, 41% of the population agrees that the climate crisis is a pretext used by global governments to limit individual freedoms<sup>8</sup>.

In Europe, climate change has become one of the most targeted topics by disinformation campaigns<sup>9</sup>. Lack of empirical evidence is critically missing to acknowledge the global extent of the spread of disinformation narratives on climate change, the nature of such influence operations or their long-term impacts on opinion formation.

In this context, **three inter-dependent dynamics** carry the risk of a slippery slope towards generalized loss of discernment regarding environmental degradation, further increasing the costs and risks of democratic dismantling: **1. a generalized knowledge and policy gap** on climate disinformation, resulting from under-performing mechanisms and skills to identify its prevalence and its levers on both the private and public sector ; **2. the normalization and manipulation** of deceptive climate narratives serving vested interests, through a trickle-down effect in an overly competitive in-

formation landscape; and **3. a resurgence of “alternative truths” ideologies**, thereby increasing polarization of public opinion and justifying the curbing of democratic norms, especially on climate issues. In this context, disinformation can thrive while dismantling democratic institutions, and this process can be amplified through feedback loops, further complicating efforts to address the climate crisis.

**This ultimately results in a “tunnel vision” effect when debating on climate issues, serving as a smokescreen to justify collective hesitation.**

Since relativism is a socially constructed and deeply political phenomenon, it is reversible.

## BREAKING THE CLIMATE GLASS CEILING: ADDRESSING PERCEPTIONS AND NEWS MEDIA'S ROLE IN STREAMLINING CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

Breaking the **“climate glass ceiling”** and **effectively unpacking the “climate backlash”** requires addressing both **subjective perceptions (invisible / intangible) and material outcomes (visible / tangible)**. In other words, it may also be driven by our collective incapacity to render the opportunities of the climate transition visible and accessible.

We argue that media – print press, TV, radio – should be considered as **latent structures conditioning value-based interpretations and orienting decision-making**. Beyond public governance institutions (executive, legislative, judiciary powers), the hybrid media system (mass media, social media) equally plays an influential and multilevel role on leveling public interests and choices.

7. Lamb, William F., Giulio Mattioli, Sebastian Levi, J. Timmons Roberts, Stuart Capstick, Felix Creutzig, Jan C. Minx, Finn Müller-Hansen, Trevor Culhane, and Julia K. Steinberger. 2020. “Discourses of Climate Delay.” *Global Sustainability* 3 (17).  
8. Dormagen, Jean Yves. 2023. “Comprendre Le Nouveau Clivage Écologique : Données Inédites.” *Le Grand Continent*. November 7, 2023. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/11/07/comprendre-le-nouveau-clivage-ecologique-donnees-inedites/>.  
9. European Digital Media Observatory . 2024. “EU-Related Disinformation Peaks in April 2024.” EDMO.eu. EDMO. 2024. <https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EDMO-35-Horizontal.pdf>.



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The premise must be that climate skepticism is not the cause but rather the consequence of growing democratic distrust, stemming notably from social disempowerment and a perception of governmental weakness. Climate action, in this context, can become a powerful tool to protect society as a whole. Combating climate disinformation is therefore a critical lever to resist institutional erosion and renew collective resilience.

Based on the assumption that the news media play a performative role on perceptions, this report aims to demonstrate that effectively addressing climate disinformation necessarily includes the proactive consideration and action of the role of news media and journalists. This collective endeavour can only work alongside a refreshed regulatory framework to promote a level playing field between “older” and “newer” media and ensure accountability across information platforms.

This report is a whistleblower call to action, born from a realization that we are at a historic crossroads for media and democracy. For years, Europe watched the U.S., a dystopian laboratory of disinformation, as the wave of anti-science rhetoric slowly swelled. Now, after two years of intense monitoring of climate coverage in France, QuotaClimat reveals an unsettling truth: the tide has arrived. Anti-science narratives, once dismissed as a decaying anomaly, are now entrenched in French mainstream media, from print press to television and radio. A striking example comes from a French radio station with several million listeners, whose general manager recently stated: “We give a platform to many voices, including non-mainstream individuals who question things. We are questioning certain topics, since science is constantly evolving [...] Take global warming: we are not sure of the part caused by human activity”.

# I. CLIMATE DISINFORMATION IS A SPRAWLING THREAT, WITH FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

## Summary

- ▶ **Climate disinformation** is a means of obstruction and distraction to limit the boundaries of public discourse on climate change and green policy.
- ▶ **Proponents of anti-climate rhetoric** notably include a stakeholders in the carbon economy, the attention economy, the “outrage” merchants as well as foreign agents.
- ▶ **The uncontested presence of climate disinformation discourses in news media** is an enabling component to normalize their position and amplify their impacts.
- ▶ **In constant motion and context-dependent**, climate disinformation narratives tend to focus on socio-political stimuli relating to net-zero choices including energy security and sovereignty; symbolic and socially valued consumption objects such as cars; democratic weaknesses and the cost of regulation; environmental movements and associated political stakeholders,...

## I. DISINFORMATION

**Disinformation as such is not a new phenomenon:** before the high-speed circulation of online and offline “fake news”, hearsays were spread to deliberately distort information in an old-fashioned way, thereby selectively influencing collective perceptions. What has changed is the scale (global) and sophisticated techniques (technological, algorithmic and AI-driven) used to deliberately deceive or mislead people. And the potentiality of its effects.

In a rapidly evolving global communication landscape characterized by hybrid media systems with increased algorithmic efficiency, turbocharging AI systems and technological software developments, **mis/disinformation narratives can now be produced and spread more easily, cheaply, and rapidly.**

Some researchers warn that “**as much as 90 percent of online content may be synthetically generated by 2026<sup>15</sup>**”, adding that synthetic media “refers to media generated or manipulated using artificial intelligence.”

« **In the next two years, a wide set of actors will capitalize on the boom in synthetic content, amplifying societal divisions, ideological violence and political repression, ramifications that will persist far beyond the short term<sup>16</sup>.** »  
(World Economic Forum, Global Risks Report 2024)

## DEFINITIONS:

- **Misinformation** can be defined as false or inaccurate information that is shared unknowingly and is not disseminated with the intention of deceiving the public<sup>10</sup>.
- **Disinformation** can be defined as false, inaccurate, or misleading information deliberately created, presented, and disseminated<sup>11</sup>.
- **Illusory truth effect** is the tendency to believe false information to be correct after repeated exposure<sup>12</sup>.
- **Climate obstruction** Are intentional actions and efforts to slow or block policies on climate change that are commensurate with the current scientific consensus of what is necessary to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system<sup>13</sup>.
- **Mainstream news media** refers to the traditional news outlets that have a broad audience reach and operate within established journalistic norms and practices. These outlets include newspapers, television networks, radio stations, and their online platforms that are widely recognized and trusted for their content. Mainstream media is often characterized by its professionalized news production, reliance on fact-checking and editorial standards.
- **Synthetic media** refers to media generated or manipulated using artificial intelligence (AI). In most cases synthetic media is generated for gaming, to improve services or to improve the quality of life, but the increase in synthetic media and improved technology has given rise to disinformation possibilities, including deepfakes<sup>14</sup>.

10. OECD. 2024. “Facts Not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity.” OECD. 2024.

11. Ibid.

12. Jiang, Yangxueqing, Norbert Schwarz, Katherine J. Reynolds, and Eryn J. Newman. 2024. “Repetition Increases Belief in Climate-Skeptical Claims, Even for Climate Science Endorsers.” Edited by Cengiz Erisen. PLOS ONE 19 (8): e0307294. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0307294>.

13. Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. “Climate Obstruction across Europe.” <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

14. Europol. 2022. “Facing Reality? Law Enforcement and the Challenge of Deepfakes: An Observatory Report from the Europol Innovation Lab.” European Innovation Lab. <https://doi.org/10.2813/08370>.

15. Ibid.

16. World Economic Forum. 2024. “Global Risks 2024: Disinformation Tops Global Risks 2024 as Environmental Threats Intensify.” World Economic Forum. 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/press/2024/01/global-risks-report-2024-press-release/>.

**This is the bouncing effect of the massive deployment of information, communication and AI technologies:** while access to knowledge is widely guaranteed, the “nature” and the “intentionality” of this “available knowledge” needs to be better scrutinized.

**Simultaneously one can observe the gradual erosion of public pillars of democratic life and resulting declining citizens’ trust.** Among other key factors, the erosion of traditional social bonds partly explains today’s democratic malaise. The rapid digitalization of society’s infrastructure, which, while offering unprecedented accessibility of knowledge and communication tools, also exacerbates a collective but unspoken sense of alienation. Feelings of disenchantment create fertile ground for populists to exploit fear and uncertainties and further polarize society, dismantling democratic safeguards and institutions. Belief in disinformation has a radicalizing potential, resonating across different extreme agendas. This process of societal polarization is fueled by a growing risk of economic downturn<sup>17</sup>.

« **The ‘new normal’ cannot be the free-for-all spread of disinformation, smothering facts and the ability to make free and informed choices. Heated rhetoric and simplistic fixes, erasing context, nuance, and empathy<sup>18</sup>»**  
*(Speech by Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024))*

**A generalized post-modern view sustains the idea that there is no such thing as “objective reality”,** resulting in the legitimization of «alternative truths” subject to each and everyone’s bias and interpretation<sup>19</sup>. This leads to the easier manipulation of information and effectively blurs the distinction between disinformation, misinformation and political disagreement based on evidence-based fact.

**This issue is compounded by the commercialization of information,** further embodied by the emergence of the “attention economy”, which often prioritizes its market value over societal benefit, thereby amplifying the effects of disinformation<sup>20</sup>. This information was notably disclosed by former Meta employees who warned about engagement-driven algorithms that were knowingly left unchecked despite their role in exacerbating societal risks like polarization and misinformation<sup>21</sup>.

This notably explains why **multi-layered mis/disinformation strategies are extremely pervasive:** deceptive discourses, when incorporated in well-structured arguments and coherent worldviews, have the ability to effectively **produce profound but intangible (mis)interpretation effects<sup>22</sup>.**

**Foreseeing such complex discursive illusions is an extremely complex endeavor, which should not be held upon individuals only<sup>23</sup>.** In addition to innovative governance structures and media literacy efforts, the existence of independent structures acting as watchdogs for the public interest, such as journalists and CSOs, is crucial to unpack and hedge against the mechanisms through which dis/misinformation operates.

17. IDEA International. 2024. “The Stockholm Series of Public Lectures on Climate Change and Democracy.” Idea.int. 2024. <https://www.idea.int/node/155386>.  
 18. United Nations Human Rights, and Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2024. “Human Rights Are Our Mainstay against Unbridled Power.” OHCHR. 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/09/human-rights-are-our-mainstay-against-unbridled-power>.  
 19. Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich, John Cook, van, Jon Roozenbeek, Naomi Oreskes, and Lee C McIntyre. 2024. “Liars Know They Are Lying: Differentiating Disinformation from Disagreement.” Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6>.  
 20. Vetraino, Jean. 2019. “Bruno Patino, LA CIVILISATION DU POISSON ROUGE. Petit Traité Sur Le Marché de L’attention.” Revue Projet N° 372 (5): 95b96. <https://doi.org/10.3917/pro.372.0097>.  
 21. Orłowski, J. (2020). The social dilemma, documentary.  
 22. Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich, John Cook, van, Jon Roozenbeek, Naomi Oreskes, and Lee C McIntyre. 2024. “Liars Know They Are Lying: Differentiating Disinformation from Disagreement.” Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6>.  
 23. Ecker, Ullrich, Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden, Li Qian Tay, John Cook, Naomi Oreskes, and Stephan Lewandowsky. 2024. “Misinformation Poses a Bigger Threat to Democracy than You Might Think.” Nature 630 (8015): 29–32. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-01587-3>.



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Journalists in the European Parliament

These unprecedented technological developments collide with the time-constrained urgency to transition toward a “carbon-neutral” world – effectively driven and implemented by dedicated strategic planning frameworks like the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Green Deal.

**After the “materials” and “energy” eras, the 21st century may be the “information era” where hyper-personalized content saturates**

**the public sphere, where polarization is exacerbated, leading to cognitive wars over the very nature of truth and veracity<sup>24,25</sup>.** The stakes are incredibly high: the integrity of information, the balance between truth and freedom of expression, and ultimately, the effectiveness of climate action itself.

24. Damasio, Alain. 2024. “Vallée Du Silicium, d’Alain Damasio : Garder Le Pouvoir, Méthode.” France Culture. April 18, 2024. <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/un-monde-connecte/vallee-du-silicium-d-alain-damasio-garder-le-pouvoir-methode-4600837>.  
 25. Mhalla, Asma. 2022. “Techno-Politique Des Réseaux Sociaux | Le Grand Continent.” Le Grand Continent. June 29, 2022. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/06/29/techno-politique-des-reseaux-sociaux/>.



## 2. CLIMATE DISINFORMATION



Floodings in the Yvelines Regions, in 2016, France.

In parallel with growing climate policy activity at national and global levels, **public interest – including media focus – for climate issues has grown over the last decades**<sup>27</sup>.

Given the deeply political dilemmas resulting from the climate crisis, a **“coalition of the unwilling” has emerged to foster first pressure then distraction and doubt on climate science and policy**<sup>28</sup>.

After decades of well-documented lobbying activities and misleading public communications, what was presented as a “global risk of collapse” by the “Limits of growth” report in 1972 has gradually been downplayed to **a sectoral, depoliticized and partisan issue**.

**This rise in climate disinformation has recently been driven by an advanced form of climate skepticism.** Also referred to as “discourses of climate delay”, this type of reasoning aims to either shift attention away from the climate issue and/or portray climate solutions as ineffective, alarm-

### DEFINITIONS:

**CLIMATE DISINFORMATION**, as deceptive or misleading online behavior that:

→ **Undermines public understanding of the existence or impacts of climate change**, the unequivocal human influence on climate change, and the need for corresponding urgent action to reduce global warming emissions (mitigation) and prepare for the current impacts and those we must expect (adaptation), according to the IPCC scientific consensus and in line with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement;

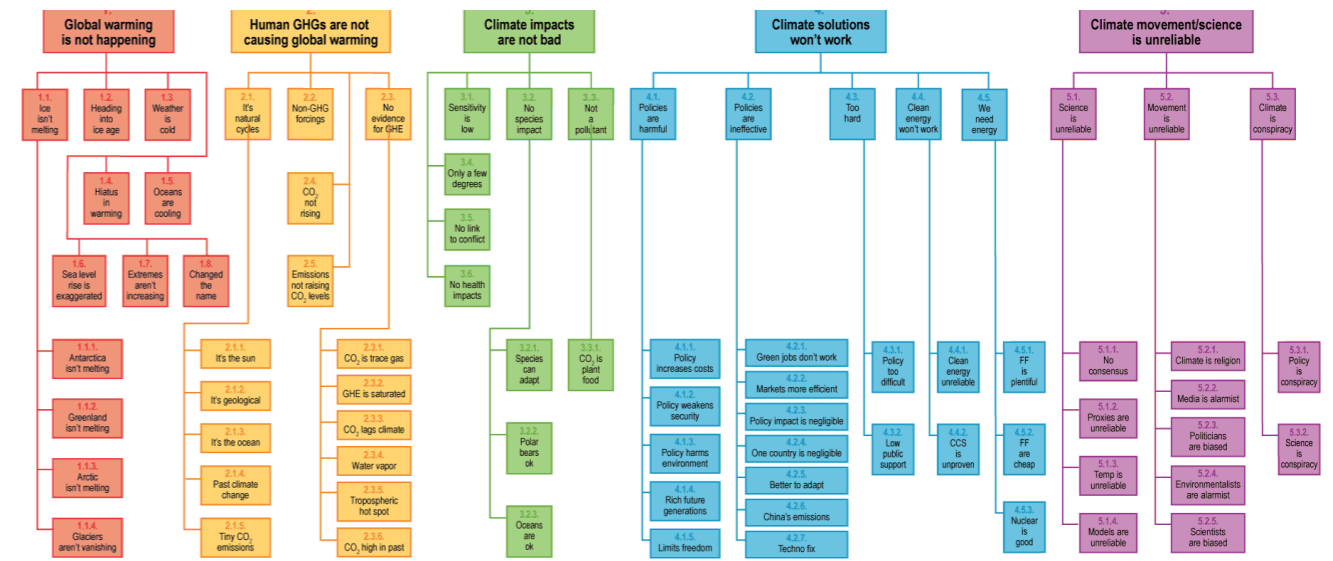
→ **Misrepresents scientific data**, including by omission or cherry-picking, to erode trust in climate science, climate-focused institutions, experts, and solutions;

→ **Falsely publicizes efforts assuasive of climate goals that in fact contribute to climate warming or contravene the scientific consensus on mitigation or adaptation**, including greenwashing.

A definition by the global coalition Climate Action against Disinformation Coalition (CAAD)<sup>26</sup>.

ist or unfair. As shown below, the CARDS framework (Computer Assisted Recognition of Denial and Skepticism) proposes a schematic method to detect and categorise misinformation about climate change<sup>29</sup>.

### → CARDS Framework – Research into Detecting and Categorising Misinformation about Climate Change



Cards Framework – Research into Detecting and Categorising Misinformation about Climate Change, by Coan, Travis, Mirjam Nanko, Constantine Boussalis, and John Cook.

## 3. THE MULTIFACETED CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

**This report aims to demonstrate that climate dis/misinformation is increasingly used and accepted in public conversation – online but also offline.**

While we lack quantitative data to monitor the extent of climate disinformation in news media, recent analysis shows that online climate disinformation is skyrocketing. According to the CAAD, it tripled only in 2022 on platforms like X<sup>30</sup>.

**The risk of growing climate disinformation also rises in the wake of climate-related consequences.** Weeks after the devastating flash floods in southeastern Spain, the independent Spanish fact-checking organization Maldita.es has identified 102 instances of climate disinformation related to this climate-related disaster, and most specifically to its causes. These in-

clude conspiracy theories falsely claiming that the extreme weather conditions were artificially induced, despite scientific evidence predominantly attributing the event to natural causes<sup>31</sup>.

**The objectives of disinformation strategies go beyond merely delaying climate action.** They aim to undermine public confidence in climate science, weaken support for decisive measures, and sustain investment in the carbon economy. By framing climate action as government overreach, these tactics hasten the breakdown of public trust in institutions like academia and the media, deepen geopolitical tensions, and create confusion about the pathways to net zero. This confusion disrupts legislative and regulatory efforts, delays decarbonization, and maintains public investment and subsidies in the fossil fuel industry.

26. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD). 2024. “Climate Action against Disinformation | What Is Misinformation & Disinformation.” CAAD.org. 2024. <https://caad.info/what-is-misinformation-disinformation/>.  
 27. Construire l'écologie. (2024). Greenblaming, la construction de l'épouvantail écologique. [https://16158b3b-bf4b-4a42-8bf4-9873150c5e68.usrfiles.com/ugd/16158b\\_96ecb1a468bd4838944424fe0eaf0552.pdf](https://16158b3b-bf4b-4a42-8bf4-9873150c5e68.usrfiles.com/ugd/16158b_96ecb1a468bd4838944424fe0eaf0552.pdf).  
 28. Watts, Jonathan. 2021. “Climatologist Michael E Mann: ‘Good People Fall Victim to Doomism. I Do Too Sometimes.’” The Guardian. February 27, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/27/climatologist-michael-e-mann-doomism-climate-crisis-interview>.  
 29. Coan, Travis, Mirjam Nanko, Constantine Boussalis, and John Cook. 2021. “CARDS – Research into Detecting and Categorising Misinformation about Climate Change.” Cardsclimate.com. 2021. <https://cardsclimate.com/>.

30. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD). 2024a. “Climate Action against Disinformation | the AI Threats to Climate Change.” CAAD. 2024. <https://caad.info/analysis/reports/the-ai-threats-to-climate-change/>.  
 31. Jones, Mared Gwyn. 2024. “Espagne : La Désinformation Sur Les Inondations Fleurit Sur Internet.” Euronews. Euronews.com. November 19, 2024. <https://fr.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/11/19/comment-les-theories-du-complot-sur-les-inondations-meurtrieres-en-espagne-se-sont-elles-r>.

This is then instrumentalized to create schisms in societal perceptions of climate action, amplifying identity-based divisions and exacerbating perceived conflicts around issues of social justice<sup>32</sup>.

**Research shows how climate disinformation is also deeply intertwined with conspiracy networks.** As for anti-vax online circles, these networks exploit social media platforms and leverage algorithmic amplification to disseminate coordinated, polarizing narratives, systematically creating echo chambers that erode trust in science and democratic institutions<sup>33</sup>.

Foreign agents also strategically use disinformation against environmental activists with the dual objectives of discrediting their discourses and undermining public support for environmental action<sup>34</sup>.

**This process not only distorts public understanding of climate issues but also erodes the foundation of informed judgment,** as individuals are influenced by value-driven narratives that obscures their grasp of reality. The spread of alternative truths further deepens the epistemic crisis society is currently facing, rationalizing the acceptance of falsehoods and making it increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

In this era of democratic fatigue and uncertainty, **climate deception can be perceived as the new “trojan horse” to foster social fragmentation and destabilize societies.** Debates relating to the net-zero transition have become increasingly instrumentalized, **turning the climate question into an ideological one and a battlefield of conflicting agendas, beliefs, and values.**

« **When everyone constantly lies to you, the result is not that you believe those lies, but that no one believes anything anymore. A people who can no longer believe anything cannot form opinions. They are deprived not only of the ability to act but also of the ability to think and judge.**”  
(*Hannah Arendt, “Vérité et Politique” extract from « La Crise de la culture » : Prépas scientifiques 2024.*)

#### **Consequences of climate disinformation are tangible and costly:**

- Through coordinated disinformation efforts, profit-driven oil and gas companies leverage disinformation to influence the allocation of public funds, often diverting investments away from renewable energy sources and toward technologies that further entrench fossil fuels for decades to come<sup>35</sup>.
- In the EU for instance, researchers from the Climate Social Science Network (CSSN) have concluded that this resource advantage seeks to systematically weaken EU climate policy by ensuring that financial and political support remains aligned with the fossil fuel industry, thereby undermining efforts to transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy<sup>36</sup>.
- Climate disinformation can also cost human lives, as evidenced during Hurricane Milton, when misleading narratives spread widely and significantly hindered the response efforts<sup>37</sup>. Fake news, including weather manip-

ulation conspiracy theories and inaccurate reports about evacuation safety, led people to ignore official warnings and delayed evacuations, resulting in preventable casualties. Another relevant example involves the fake emergency numbers deliberately shared online during the recent flooding in Valencia, Spain<sup>38</sup>.

**The inability of democratic governments to adequately address the root causes of the climate crisis, as well as its devastating impacts,** has created a window of opportunity for populists and right-wing parties to gain traction by focusing on its visible consequences, particularly issues like migration.

« **An unstable global order characterized by polarizing narratives and insecurity, the worsening impacts of extreme weather and economic uncertainty are causing accelerating risks – including misinformation and disinformation – to propagate.**”  
(*World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2024*)

Climate dis/disinformation as short, and long-term, global risks to achieving meaningful progress in the fight against climate change are increasingly recognized by international institutions like UNESCO (Upcoming Global Roadmap against Climate Disinformation), the OECD (Facts not fakes, Tackling disinformation, strengthening information integrity); Creation of

a disinformation task force), the United Nations (The Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change), the EU (specifically mentioned on the European Commissioner for Climate Action’s mission letter), NATO (Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment report), and COP30 have begun to address climate disinformation as a critical issue.

**So far, the response has largely been framed within a global geostrategic and military context,** with an emphasis on “FIMI” (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference). Less attention is however paid to endogenous factors, or domestic actors in the proliferation of climate disinformation.

32. IDEA International. 2024. “The Stockholm Series of Public Lectures on Climate Change and Democracy.” Idea.int. 2024. <https://www.idea.int/node/155386>.

33. Chavajarias, David. 2023. “Climate sceptiques : Sur Twitter, Enquête Sur Les Mercenaires de L'intox.” CNRS Le Journal. CNRS le journal. 2023. <https://lejournal.cnrs.fr/articles/climate-sceptiques-sur-twitter-enquete-sur-les-mercenaires-de-lintox>.

34. Climate Action against Disinformation. 2024. “Tenet Media & Climate Disinformation: CAAD Briefing Note.” Caad.info. 2024. <https://caad.info/analysis/briefings/tenet-media-climate-disinformation-caad-briefing-note/>.

35. Sanders, Emily. 2024. “Why Climate Disinformation Matters.” Exxonknews.org. Exxonknews. August 29, 2024. <https://www.exxonknews.org/p/why-climate-disinformation-matters>.

36. Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. “Climate Obstruction across Europe.” <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

37. Poynting, Mark. 2024. “False Claims about Hurricane Milton’s Origins Spread Online.” Bbc.com. BBC News. October 9, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2lyzw7xwxa>.

38. Jones, Mared Gwyn. 2024. “Espagne : La Désinformation Sur Les Inondations Fleurit Sur Internet.” Euronews. Euronews.com. November 19, 2024. <https://fr.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/11/19/comment-les-theories-du-complot-sur-les-inondations-meurtrieres-en-espagne-se-sont-elles-r>.

## 4. CHALLENGES AHEAD – DOCUMENTING THE CHALLENGE TO IMPROVE THE RESPONSE

### 2 QUESTIONS:

- What are we talking about?
- Where does it come from?

**?** **What are we talking about – Is it detectable?**  
Identifiability: Categorize climate disinformation, to tailor fit-for-purpose policy responses

**Mis/disinformation is not a monolithic challenge.**

Although this report focuses on the structural levers which streamline disinformation, we argue that **effectively tackling climate disinformation requires an in-depth understanding of its specificities to avoid/minimize potential costly political backlash (cf. last chapter).**

Some scholars and conservative critics have questioned the value of dis/misinformation research, suggesting that **disinformation is neither prevalent nor easily identifiable enough to justify significant concern or action.**

**Digital amplification and AI use significantly increase identification and categorization challenges.**

**Detecting climate mis/disinformation should certainly be done with extreme caution and accuracy** considering its contextual specificities and the democratic risks its regulation entails.

**Climate scepticism is not, in and of itself, disinformation.** Mis/disinformation stands, among others, as a key tool for promoting climate resistance and scepticism, undermining public under-

standing and delaying policies. There is a distinction to make between areas of climate action that necessitate legitimate debates based on well-founded political contradictions, and deceptive discourses made of falsehoods and doublespeak.

**This distinction between evidenced-based disagreements and fallacious reasonings based on deliberately distorted facts is fundamental to what stands for “legitimate” policy discussion<sup>39</sup>.**

Further research attention however needs to be paid to how any shift in skeptic argumentation is dependent on a range of contextual peculiarities including changing media landscapes and editorial priorities, the presence of organized skepticism, and wider political changes.

« **Simply declaring that ‘facts are facts’ is not sufficient, particularly given that people’s processing of evidence and knowledge claims is to some extent determined by social factors. It is precisely because truth is not self-evident that malicious actors can easily create confusion<sup>40</sup>.”**  
(Ecker et al., 2024)

**However unveiling the conceptual ambiguity is a key prerequisite to conceive adequate and effective response to climate disinformation.** Otherwise it creates a glass ceiling with several risks:

- 1. It weakens policy-making capacity to curb the threat,** as it creates a vicious cycle, maintaining opacity around a phenomenon that is perceived as nebulous and therefore difficult to identify or address.
- 2. It leaves a rhetorical vacuum to conservative voices, and proponents of the status quo,** enabling them to cast doubt on the legitimacy of such concerns. By exploiting this

**?** **What for? Intentionality: Clarify accountability, to sharpen collective critical thinking and ensure public acceptability of response measures**

*IPCC. Latest WG III report on mitigation (2022): ‘A good number of corporate agents have attempted to derail climate change mitigation by targeted lobbying and doubt-inducing media strategies’.*

**A constellation of various actors with contiguous agendas stand to benefit from this anti-climate rhetoric.** According to the global coalition *Climate Action against Climate Disinformation*, it notably includes :

- **hostile state actors** (via the amplification of anti-colonialism messages, exploitation of populist discourses weakening democracy)
- **the fossil fuel industry** (via pro-industry and technological messages, anti-activist messages)
- **far-right political movements** (via anti-elite, pro-nationalist and libertarian rhetoric)

uncertainty, they may undermine the concept’s significance and manipulate the principles of censorship and freedom of expression.

**Recent research shows the prospects of AI tools such as LLMs in detecting climate disinformation.** Studies demonstrate that hybrid machine learning models, like wide and deep frameworks, and hierarchical models can effectively identify disinformation stimuli, including both textual and visual content on social media. These tools outperform traditional methods by not only enhancing detection accuracy but also providing interpretable insights into which features drive the spread of misinformation, enabling more targeted mitigation efforts<sup>41,42</sup>.

**The opacity surrounding climate disinformation, and the political agendas it promotes, is maintained by this loosely coordinated network of “climate obstructionists,”** as identified by the CSSN. These engage in systemic, sequential, and multifaceted efforts, using tactics of delay, denial, and relativization to manipulate climate-related information on specific topics. Their objective is to shape collective perceptions of what climate actions are feasible and desirable, thereby reducing the ambition of climate policy initiatives and making them more market-friendly<sup>44</sup>.

**The financial profitability of climate disinformation** stems from its monetization across social media platforms, search engines, driven by the viral nature of misleading content. Moderation

41. Rojas, Cristian, Frank Algra-Maschio, Mark Andrejevic, Travis Coan, John Cook, and Yuan-Fang Li. 2024. “Hierarchical Machine Learning Models Can Identify Stimuli of Climate Change Misinformation on Social Media.” *Communications Earth & Environment* 5 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01573-7>.  
42. Chai, Yidong, Yi Liu, Welfeng Li, Bin Zhu, Hongyan Liu, and Yuanchun Jiang. 2024. “An Interpretable Wide and Deep Model for Online Disinformation Detection.” *Expert Systems with Applications* 237 (March): 121588–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2023.121588>.  
43. Climate Action against Disinformation (CAAD). 2023. “Climate Action against Disinformation | Deny, Deceive, Delay (Vol 3): Climate Information Integrity ahead of COP28.” *Caad.info*. 2023. <https://caad.info/analysis/reports/deny-deceive-delay-vol-3-climate-information-integrity-ahead-of-cop28/>.  
44. Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. “Climate Obstruction across Europe.” <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

efforts often face economic disincentives, as they conflict with the “Brandolini’s Law” principle, which states that disproving false information requires significantly more effort than spreading it – making moderation an unappealing fi-

nancial compromise. According to the CAAD, platforms like Google and YouTube generate an estimated \$13.4 million annually from accounts promoting climate denial content<sup>45</sup>.

→ **The objectives, activities, and players in climate obstruction over three time frames, with examples of organized efforts opposed to climate action**

**Table 1.1** THE OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, AND PLAYERS IN CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION OVER THREE TIME FRAMES, WITH EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZED EFFORTS OPPOSED TO CLIMATE ACTION

Time frame	Objectives	Activities	Conservative movement institutions involved	Corporate institutions involved	Examples
Long-term 20 years to 5 years ↓	Development/promulgation of specific worldview	Provision of elementary/secondary school curricula	Foundations think tanks	Corporations, trade associations, public relations firms	Heartland Institute publication, circulation
	Steering of academic activities	Creation/funding of academic curricula and research programs Corporate & industry image promotion	Foundations	Corporations, corporate foundations Corporate public relations departments, public relations firms	Stanford University 'Global Climate & Energy Project' API 'Fueling It Forward' campaign
Intermediate-term 5 years to 1 year ↓	Circulating proposals & specific worldview in media	Development/promotion of specific worldview & policy actions	Think tanks, advocacy organizations	Corporate public relations departments	ExxonMobil proposed carbon tax
	Fostering desired government actions	Delegitimation of opposing worldviews and policy proposals	Think tanks, advocacy organizations		Climategate effort
Short-term 1 year to 6 months	Carrying out political action Elections Legislation	Lobbying		Lobbying firms	\$8.6 million ExxonMobil spent on lobbying 2018
		Legislative issue advertising		Public relations firms	Accce 'Cold in the Dark Campaign'
		Citizen mobilization	Conservative political groups	Public relations firms, front groups	Americans for Prosperity
		Campaign contributions	Political action committees	Political action committees	Freedom Partners Action Fund

Organized efforts opposed to climate action : The objectives, activities and players in climate obstruction over three time frames. Table from Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts , and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. "Climate Obstruction across Europe." <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

**Tackling climate disinformation goes way beyond chasing out “cheap discursive battles”<sup>46</sup>.** It is also about tracking the allocation of public funds, and

determining who should be held accountable for the harm that environmental degradation and disinformation strategies have inflicted.

## II. THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA IN MANAGING CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

### Summary

- ▶ **Climate disinformation** is hyper-personalized and monetized on social media and online platforms. Hence they profit from the virality of disinformation, prioritizing high engagement over moderation. In addition to reinforcing pre-existing biases and selective amplifications which hinder balanced discourses, the speed and reach of social media pose significant challenges for fact-checking and timely mitigation measures.
- ▶ **Disinformation campaigns** often seek legitimacy by infiltrating and influencing news media narratives.
- ▶ Despite growing **interdependence with digital platforms**, traditional media retain their capacity to frame and prioritize public issues.
- ▶ **News media** play a distinctive role and bear competitive advantages to social media: they are generally perceived as the most trustworthy sources of information, despite the challenges of informational fatigue and public distrust. Media’s adherence to ethical and legal frameworks ensures greater transparency and foster public confidence.
- ▶ **Opportunities:** news media can act as stabilizing forces, mitigating the disorienting effects of disinformation on public discourse. With balanced reporting and a commitment to evidence-based journalism, media outlets can counteract the polarization, and alienation fostered by hyper-personalized content. Before informational chaos overwhelms public discourse, the media must reassert their role in promoting factual, unbiased dialogue.

45. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD). 2024a. "Climate Action against Disinformation | the AI Threats to Climate Change." CAAD. 2024. <https://caad.info/analysis/reports/the-ai-threats-to-climate-change/>.

46. Buck, Holly. 2024. "Obsessing over Climate Disinformation Is a Wrong Turn." Jacobin.com. 2024. <https://jacobin.com/2024/08/climate-disinformation-green-transition-workers>.

# 1. THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA IN ISSUE FRAMING AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS IN A HYBRID MEDIA SYSTEM

«*“In a mass, (1) far fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community of publics becomes an abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media. (2) The communications that prevail are so organized that it is difficult or impossible for the individual to answer back immediately or with any effect. (3) The realization of opinion in action is controlled by authorities who organize and control the channels of such action. (4) The mass has no autonomy from institutions; on the contrary, agents of authorized institutions penetrate this mass, reducing any autonomy it may have in the formation of opinion by discussion.”*

*(C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (1956) pp. 303–4, quoted, approvingly, in the closing pages of Jürgen Habermas’ The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962, transl. 1989), p. 249)*

## DEFINITIONS:

→ **Hybrid media system:** A systemic, multiplatform and actor approach reflecting changes in the political communication environment. The media landscape has undergone profound changes in recent years, primarily fuelled by the emergence and dominance of online intermediary platforms and social media. These entities have reshaped the media market, exerting significant influence on how content is created, distributed, and monetised. The hybridity approach offers a way to observe how “older” media logics (legacy media) adapt and integrate the logics of newer media (social media) - where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms<sup>49</sup>.

The contemporary hybrid media system, characterized by information abundance and fragmented audiences, has significantly accelerated the «information cycle<sup>50</sup>». Boosted by digital communications, this escalation exacerbates the disconnect between the slow-moving policymaking process and the increasingly ephemeral nature of media attention.

The proliferation of social and alternative media has added complexity to opinion formation processes. The media ecosystem, made of news outlets, social media platforms, and alternative sources, shapes the volume and visibility of information on various topics<sup>51</sup>.

Despite the diverse nature of these platforms, studies reveal that the agenda of different types of media within the hybrid media system is often “homogeneous, highly interdependent and self-referential<sup>52</sup>”. In other words, individuals exposed to these convergent agendas are likely to form similar views on key issues, regardless of differences in their media consumption patterns.

The self-referential nature of intermedia agenda-setting theory is underscored by the increasing integration of social media platforms into mainstream news media practices. For instance, researchers observed a significant rise in the use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as sources for news content in two elite Flemish newspapers. Their study revealed that 70% of the news reports referencing these platforms drew directly from social media as a source, highlighting the growing porosity between social and mainstream media. This not only demonstrates how agendas in one media can influence and shape narratives in

another, but also reinforces the idea that mainstream media may still bear prominent agenda-setting influence, further supporting the idea of interconnected dynamics between apparently competitive informational channels<sup>53</sup>.

While the rise of digital platforms, the so-called “fifth power”, has eroded the agenda-setting monopoly traditionally held by legacy media, mainstream outlets retain an influential, albeit shared, role in public discourse. Traditional media continue to play a pivotal role in maintaining focus on key issues, even within the hybridized and competitive information environment. Researchers hence conclude that a shared national agenda persists, particularly regarding high-salience issues. This is compounded by the finding of the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, according to which news consumption across online platforms is becoming increasingly fragmented, with six networks now reaching at least 10% of respondents, compared to only two a decade ago. Notably, YouTube emerges as a key player, with 31% of the global sample using it weekly for news. WhatsApp follows at 21%, while TikTok, now used by 13% for news, has surpassed Twitter (recently rebranded as X), which stands at 10%<sup>54</sup>.

News media also maintain a significant performative (issue-framing) dimension (in the well-known sense, “to say something is to do something”). Media exert significant influence by determining which topics are selected, which questions are asked and how they are prioritized, how concerns are distributed, and the framing of issues, thereby bringing pressure on decision-makers. Empirical research also shows that exposure to issue-specific news in news media significantly

50. Chadwick, Andrew. 2013. The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power. Academic.oup.com. Oxford Academic. <https://academic.oup.com/book/8696>.

51. Djerf-Pierre, Monika, Adam Shehata, and Bengt Johansson. 2024. “Media Salience Shifts and the Public’s Perceptions about Reality: How Fluctuations in News Media Attention Influence the Strength of Citizens’ Sociotropic Beliefs.” Mass Communication and Society, January, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2023.2299209>.

52. Ibid.

53. Tsifti, Yariv, H. G. Boomgaarden, J. Strömbäck, R. Vliegenthart, A. Damstra, and E. Lindgren. 2020. “Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis.” Annals of the International Communication Association 44 (2): 157–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>.

54. Newman, Nic, Reuters Institute, and University of Oxford. 2024. “Overview and Key Findings of the 2023 Digital News Report.” Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/dnr-executive-summary>.

47. Langer, Ana Ines, and Johannes B. Gruber. 2020. “Political Agenda Setting in the Hybrid Media System: Why Legacy Media Still Matter a Great Deal.” The International Journal of Press/Politics 26 (2): 194016122092502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220925023>.

48. Ibid.

49. Chadwick, Andrew. 2013. The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power. Academic.oup.com. Oxford Academic. <https://academic.oup.com/book/8696>.

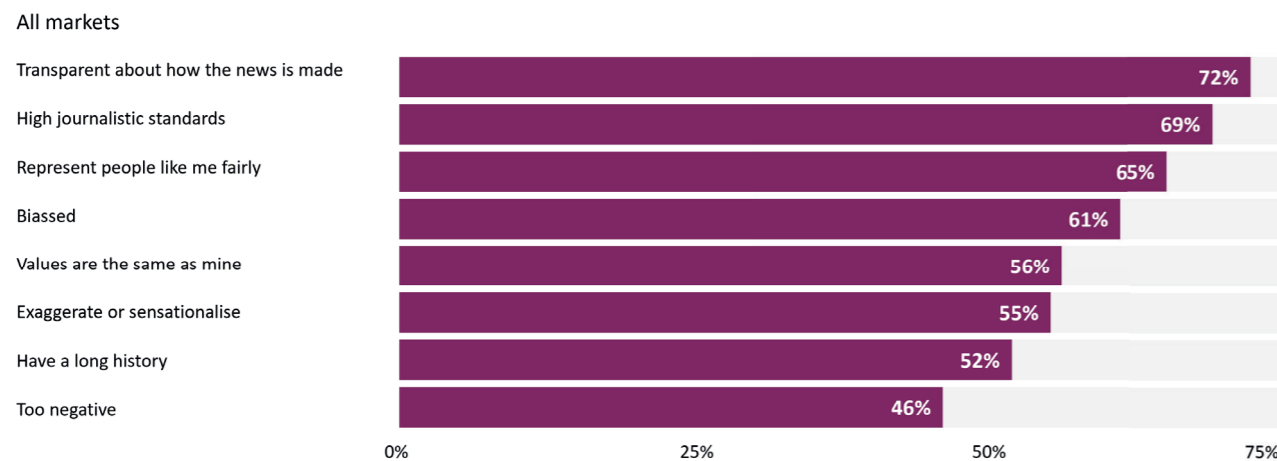
increases public engagement and interpersonal conversation about those topics<sup>55</sup>. In other words, the more citizens were exposed to issue-specific news in mainstream media, the more frequently they talked about the problem.

**Just like social media, media outlets select, filter, editorialize, and thus shape information (the debate on host vs. publisher roles of social media platforms).** This distinction is increasingly scrutinized, particularly in light of algorithmic analyses, such as the recent study on X (formerly known as Twitter), showing amplification of pro-Republican arguments<sup>56</sup>. Their respective models of filtering and publication of information however function in a competitive but asymmetrical dynamic, notably due to an inherently different structural feature: the normative (journalistic ethics) and regulatory frameworks in which they operate. Unlike online platforms, which lack and ostensibly refuse direct liability for the third-party content

they host, media are deemed to follow professional standards and are accountable for their publications.

**Despite the existing trust crisis in news media amid competition from online platforms and evolving patterns of information consumption, mainstream media are still perceived as more credible than social media,** with trust in the news remaining stable at 40% over the past year (4 points lower than during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic)<sup>57</sup>. According to Reuters Institute, high journalistic standards, transparency, impartiality, and avoidance of sensationalism remain key factors influencing public perceptions of media credibility. Restoring trust can therefore be an inceptive compass to address two intrinsic challenges faced by mainstream media: the difficulty of connecting with a broad public and an increase in selective or continuous news avoidance.

### → Proportion that say each factor influences which news outlets to trust



**Q1\_TRUST\_REASON\_2024.** Is the following important or not important to you when it comes to deciding which news outlets to trust? Base: Total sample across all markets = 94,943<sup>2</sup>

Source: Kleis Nielsen, Rasmus, and Richard Fletcher. 2024. "Public Perspectives on Trust in News | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism." Reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk. Reuters Institute. 2024. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/public-perspectives-trust-news>.

55. Djerf-Pierre, Monika, Adam Shehata, and Bengt Johansson. 2024. "Media Saliency Shifts and the Public's Perceptions about Reality: How Fluctuations in News Media Attention Influence the Strength of Citizens' Sociotropic Beliefs." *Mass Communication and Society*, January, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2023.2299209>.  
 56. Conspiracy Watch. 2024. "Newsletter - Conspiracy Watch | L'Observatoire Du Conspirationnisme - Les Faits D'abord!" <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/>.  
 57. Kleis Nielsen, Rasmus, and Richard Fletcher. 2024. "Public Perspectives on Trust in News | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism." Reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk. Reuters Institute. 2024. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/public-perspectives-trust-news>.

## 2. BRIDGING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA IN DEALING WITH CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

Because the political context and climate crisis will entail growing media coverage of climate impacts and policy solutions, we ought to understand the structural role of media outlets in addressing climate disinformation and mitigating political conflicts surrounding the green transition.

Academic research, alongside efforts by civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the global coalition Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), have primarily concentrated on the upstream agents of the "climate denial machine", such as the carbon economy, attention economy, outrage agents and foreign actors, detailing their historical responsibility in promoting climate obstruction and the rising prevalence and monetization of disinformation on social media. Other complementary studies have highlighted the role of conservative think tanks to spread scientific misinformation and advertising companies in practicing greenwashing and exerting influence over public narratives, with profound implications for democratic institutions.

However, much of this research has focused on the upstream (how disinformation is manufactured and by whom) and midstream (how it circulates, particularly on social media) aspects of the disinformation process.

While most of this research bulk focuses on the US, **the literature on climate obstruction efforts in Europe is "scattered" and "sporadic"** according to the CSSN<sup>60</sup>.

### DEFINITIONS:

- **Sociotropic beliefs** refer to peoples' perceptions of societal problems or issue domains, such as climate change, the national economy, immigration, or crime<sup>58</sup>.
- **Signal strength** refers to the visibility of an issue and its related attributes on the news media agenda within the larger information environment<sup>59</sup>.

All in all, there has been comparatively less attention on the structuring role that actors media plays in the achievement, or delay, of the net-zero transition.

**This notably stems from a collective inadvertence to its own performative role in shaping the public's understanding of climate issues,** and more generally its influence on public perceptions and opinion setting.

A revealing example of this perceived dynamic emerged during an exchange we had (Quota-Climat) with the editorial team of a prominent French news outlet during election periods, where it was stated that their election-period

58. Djerf-Pierre, Monika, Adam Shehata, and Bengt Johansson. 2024. "Media Saliency Shifts and the Public's Perceptions about Reality: How Fluctuations in News Media Attention Influence the Strength of Citizens' Sociotropic Beliefs." *Mass Communication and Society*, January, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2023.2299209>.  
 59. Ibid.  
 60. Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. "Climate Obstruction across Europe." <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

news and debate topics “directly depend on the political agenda”. This points to an editorial passive alignment with shifting political priorities, which raises questions about the media’s role as a democratic watchdog.

“While the phenomena of political actors actively spreading misleading information are well-known and discussed, the role of traditional news media, who are supposed to be the bearers of truth and factual accuracy, is less well understood<sup>61</sup>”.

Tsfati et al., 2020

This knowledge gap is reflected by the latest IPCC Synthesis Report (AR6, released in 2023) that contains no **mention of organizational barriers** to mitigation efforts in its Summary for Policymakers (SPM)<sup>62</sup>.

**Mainstream, political press and multimedia content channels that reach a general public, and are generally the final target of disinformation influence operations.** Making it into major national and international outlets, TV news, legacy local papers and other traditional forms of media is the ultimate end-goal of those spreading disinformation because that’s where it can reach new audiences and appear normal and reasonable. According to academic analysis, false claims may originate on fringe websites, be widely shared on social media, and repeated by mainstream media, often with the aim to provide “balanced reporting” that gives a voice to all sides<sup>63</sup>.

**Hence the streamlining role played by news media is frequently leveraged to amplify deceptive narratives.** For instance, during 2024 U.S. presidential elections, fake news narratives were deliberately crafted to mimic journalistic standards or were associated with trusted news outlets to convey false political claims. For instance, one viral narrative falsely asserting that Vice President Kamala Harris used a teleprompter was viewed by over 14.9 million users online. It is widely assumed, shared even by algorithms, that news media are inherently trustworthy sources. This perception makes them extremely valuable targets for those seeking to disseminate disinformation. Once these narratives infiltrate news media, their credibility is amplified, enhancing their impact and reach.

**The overlooked role of news media in the hybrid media system plays a significant part in perpetuating conditions conducive to climate disinformation.** Traditional news media, through strategic silence on climate issues (cf. section “Nobody is perfect”), unintentionally support the spread of disinformation by limiting the frequency and framing of climate coverage. This influences public perception, weakens the urgency to act, and shapes representations of both the issues and potential solutions.

**The “illusory truth” concept underscores the urgent need to address disinformation at its source,** as its unchecked spread not only fosters false beliefs but also exploits cognitive biases, making corrections increasingly ineffective. As the illusory truth effect occurs when repeated exposure to a statement increases its perceived truthfulness, regardless of its accuracy<sup>64</sup>. This phenomenon is rooted in the ease with which familiar information is

processed, which leads people to equate familiarity with trustworthiness. Media plays a pivotal role in this cycle: by repeating claims, whether accurate or false, to inform or correct, they unintentionally reinforce familiarity. Disinformation benefits from this effect, as its repetition through multiple channels embeds false narratives into public consciousness, shaping beliefs and attitudes even in the face of fact-checking. Research shows that corrections are less effective when overly complex, as this diminishes fluency, making misbeliefs more resilient and harder to dispel<sup>65</sup>.

**Opinion polls on electric vehicles clearly show the misinterpretation effects of climate disinformation on sociotropic beliefs, undermining confidence and shaping attitudes towards specific technologies.** Despite life cycle assessments consistently demonstrating that electric vehicles (EVs) emit between 2 and 6 times fewer greenhouse gases than internal combustion engine vehicles – when accounting for production, use, and recycling, public perception diverges sharply. In France, 71% of the population believes EVs are just as harmful to the climate as gasoline-powered cars, compared to a global average of 50%. This skepticism is echoed in other European nations, including the Czech Republic (67%), Belgium (66%), Poland (62%), and Germany (60%)<sup>66</sup>.

In France, news media have recently exacerbated these misperceptions through selective framing and unbalanced reporting on climate-related technologies. For instance, TFI (France’s leading private television channel)

repeatedly covered the challenges of electric vehicle ownership, amplifying negative information while omitting broader positive trends such as widespread user satisfaction and significant emissions reductions. Given the performative power of mainstream media, we can easily assume this notably contributes to the normalization of skepticism around EVs, aligning public perceptions with pro-industry narratives<sup>67</sup>.

In addition, evidence shows that fake news exposure is highly concentrated on social media, with 80% of such content consumed by just 1% of users during the 2016 U.S. election<sup>68</sup>. However, news media amplify the reach of fake news by extensively covering its most visible stories, likely exposing broader audiences than social media alone<sup>69</sup>.

61. Tsfati, Yariv, H. G. Boomgaarden, J. Strömbäck, R. Vliegenthart, A. Damstra, and E. Lindgren. 2020. “Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis.” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 44 (2): 157–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>.

62. Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), Robert J. Brulles, J. Timmons Roberts, and Miranda C. Spencer. 2024. “Climate Obstruction across Europe.” <https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Climate-Obstruction-in-Europe.pdf>.

63. Jiang, Yangxueqing, Norbert Schwarz, Katherine J. Reynolds, and Eryn J. Newman. 2024. “Repetition Increases Belief in Climate-Skeptical Claims, Even for Climate Science Endorsers.” Edited by Cengiz Erisen. *PLOS ONE* 19 (8): e0307294. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0307294>.

64. Jiang, Yangxueqing, Norbert Schwarz, Katherine J. Reynolds, and Eryn J. Newman. 2024. “Repetition Increases Belief in Climate-Skeptical Claims, Even for Climate Science Endorsers.” Edited by Cengiz Erisen. *PLOS ONE* 19 (8): e0307294. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0307294>.

65. Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich, John Cook, van, Jon Roozenbeek, Naomi Oreskes, and Lee C McIntyre. 2024. “Liars Know They Are Lying: Differentiating Disinformation from Disagreement.” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6>.

66. Chandèze, Estelle, and Margaux Schmitt. 2024. “Obs’COP 2024 : L’urgence Climatique Cède Du Terrain Face à La Préoccupation Économique.” Ipsos. November 14, 2024. <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/obs-cop-2024-lurgence-climatique-cede-du-terrain-face-la-preoccupation-economique>.

67. QuotaClimat. 2024. “QuotaClimat on LinkedIn: Attention : Cette ‘Mise Au Point’ de TFI Sur l’interdiction de La Vente De... | 88 Comments.” LinkedIn.com. October 3, 2024. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat\\_attention-cette-mise-au-point-de-tfi-activity-7247495373546565633-z70z/?originalSubdomain=fr](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat_attention-cette-mise-au-point-de-tfi-activity-7247495373546565633-z70z/?originalSubdomain=fr).

68. Tsfati, Yariv, H. G. Boomgaarden, J. Strömbäck, R. Vliegenthart, A. Damstra, and E. Lindgren. 2020. “Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis.” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 44 (2): 157–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>.

69. Ibid

### 3. CLIMATE DISINFORMATION IN A PERMISSIVE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: A STORY OF CHRONIC DEFICIENCY AND HIGH PRESSURES

#### DEFINITIONS:

- **Environmental information:** Public information relating to existing environmental crises, including climate change, biodiversity collapse, and resource depletion, and their associated causes, impacts, and solutions<sup>70</sup>.
- **Typology of climate skepticism<sup>71</sup>:**
  - Evidence skepticism consists of denying the reality, anthropogenic cause of the physical phenomenon of climate change;
  - Process skepticism are suggestions that scientists are manipulating or hiding evidence, computer modeling is unreliable, media exaggeration is affecting public opinion, or that scientific institutions such as the IPCC lack integrity.
  - Response skepticism dismisses or contests policies to address the climate challenge. It includes a variety of arguments, such as taking action will harm the economy and jobs, or that unilateral responses are not appropriate in the absence of a global agreement, or that a measured response is best.
- **Era of spectacle:** This concept was popularized by French theorist Guy Debord in his 1967 work *The Society of the Spectacle*, to theorize the fact that the spectacle represents a form of social control, where authentic social interactions are replaced by representations and images, often manipulated for entertainment or political purposes. The term captures how modern society has become increasingly mediated, with real events often overshadowed by their representation in the media.

#### – Nobody is perfect

**News media outlets have become an enabling condition for the overlooked proliferation of climate disinformation**, allowing false and distorted narratives to circulate unchecked, journalists struggling to prevent it and these discourses further entrench themselves in public discourse.

While the presence of climate skeptics in news media outlets is increasingly investigated, **the underlying factors influencing their visibility are less understood**. These likely involve a mix of internal factors, such as media systems, journalistic practices, ownership influences, and outlet ideologies, and external political and cultural drivers. The latter includes organized skepticism through lobbying groups, companies opposing climate action, and public figures, politicians or scientists, who openly express skepticism and have media access. For instance, in the UK, the Net Zero Scrutiny Group, a coalition of right-wing politicians, argues that while they accept the need to decarbonize, they question the disproportionate economic and social impacts on lower-income groups. Similarly, the Heartland Institute in the US criticizes President Biden's climate policies for driving up fuel and food prices and reducing jobs<sup>72</sup>.

According to the CAAD, **right-wing media outlets, often with conservative political bias, play a significant role in spreading misinformation, primarily benefiting partisan politicians and interest groups**. These channels promote skepticism about climate change science,

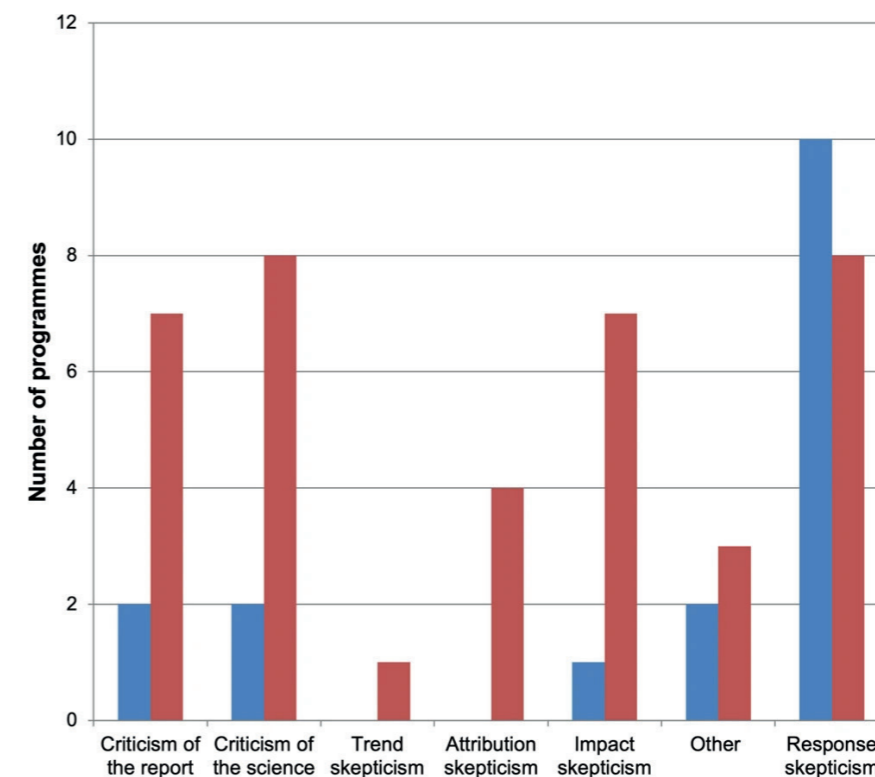
typically focusing more on discrediting the climate movement; such as scientists, environmental movements, and the media, rather than the science itself<sup>73</sup>.

**Skepticism by silence (strategic omission) is an outstanding strategy in media coverage, particularly seen in right-wing outlets, such as Fox News in the US, or CNews in France**. Other US right-wing media also maintained unusual silence on the topic, raising questions about whether this approach was a deliberate editorial decision. Further qualitative research, such as interviews, would be needed to confirm if this "denialism by silence" is an intentional strategy or a result of other factors<sup>74</sup>.

For example, Britain's right-leaning media outlets, including the Telegraph, Daily Mail, and The Sun, have largely framed net-zero policies as a divisive issue. This narrative has been mirrored by several politicians, who have adopted similar rhetoric, treating climate action as a point of contention rather than consensus.

#### → Presence of forms of skepticism in mainstream and right-wing channels (from Climate delay discourses present in global mainstream television coverage of the IPCC's 2021 report)

Mainstream channels in blue and right-wing channels in red



Source: Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. "Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report." *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2>.

73. Ibid  
74. Ibid

70. Observatoire des Médias sur l'Écologie (OME). 2024. "Observatoire Des Médias Sur L'Écologie." Observatoire Des Médias Sur L'Écologie. 2024. <https://observatoiremediaecologie.fr>.

71. Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. "Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report." *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2>.

72. Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. "Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report." *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2>.



Recent research studies empirically demonstrate that **skepticism is present in news channels, and not only the right-wing ones**. This notably stands among the conclusions of a recent research study that analyzed 30 news programs from 20 channels across Australia, Brazil, Sweden, the UK, and the USA, focusing on their coverage

of the 2021 IPCC report. In news outlets, skepticism predominantly centered on responses to climate change (53% of programs). Versions of it were found in coverage in the UK by the BBC, ITV, and Channel 4; in Sweden on SVT; in Australia on Channel 7 and 9; in Brazil on O Globo and SBT; and in the USA on MSNBC<sup>75</sup>.

## – Endogenous and exogenous dynamics at play

**The conditions in which traditional media outlets evolve create a landscape where disinformation, or at least, malinformation – misleading or biased information about the causes, consequences, and solutions to climate change – can thrive.**

### 1. Financial struggles: Cuts in traditional revenue streams threaten news media editorial independence and capacity to produce quality information

**The financial viability of media outlets is facing a growing crisis as traditional revenue streams, such as advertising, are increasingly undercut by the dominance of digital platforms like Google and Facebook.** These platforms not only siphon off advertising revenue but also draw away audiences from traditional news outlets, leaving media organizations with fewer resources to fund investigative journalism or produce high-quality content. According to the findings of a report published in January 2024 by Arcom (French broadcasting regulation authority), online platforms such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon are expected to claim 65% of the advertising revenue by 2030<sup>76</sup>.

**Media outlets have increasingly relied on a combination of public subventions and reader subscriptions to maintain financial viability in the face of declining advertising revenues.** In many countries, public funding plays a significant role, particularly for public service broadcasters and some for-profit media. For example, in France, the government has provided direct funding for newspapers, and in the UK, some news outlets benefit from tax breaks and public sector contracts. In Belgium, public subsidies to the press are contingent on media outlets adhering to the deontological principles set forth by the Council for Journalism (CDJ), the ethics committee. With this in mind, specific organisations are working to systematize the conditionality of public support on adherence to ethical journalism standards. Reporters Without Borders (RSF), for instance, promotes the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), which provides a framework to certify media outlets based on their compliance with deontological principles.

**Reader subscriptions have become another key revenue source, with many media outlets implementing paywalls or membership models to directly monetize content.** However, this model tends to work best for high-quality journalism

75. Painter, James, Joshua Ettinger, David Holmes, Loredana Loy, Janaina Pinto, Lucy Richardson, Laura Thomas-Walters, Kjell Vowles, and Rachel Wetts. 2023. "Climate Delay Discourses Present in Global Mainstream Television Coverage of the IPCC's 2021 Report." *Communications Earth & Environment* 4 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2>.  
76. Arcom. 2023. "Evolution Du Marché de La Communication et Impact Sur Le Financement Des Médias Par La Publicité | Arcom." Arcom.fr. 2023. <https://www.arcom.fr/nos-ressources/etudes-et-donnees/etudes-bilans-et-rapports-de-larcom/evolution-du-marche-de-la-communication-et-impact-sur-le-financement-des-medias-par-la-publicite>.



© National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S.

Floodings after Hurricane Harvey, Texas, 2017.

outlets that can attract audiences willing to pay for their content. This trend is influenced by socio-economic contexts, such as in Norway, where 40% of people subscribe to paid media, compared to just 11% in France and only 8% in the UK<sup>77</sup>. This may reinforce a socio-economic "distinction", as individuals without the financial means to subscribe may be excluded from accessing quality news, further deepening polarisation and reinforcing elitist effects. Subscriptions alone are rarely enough to sustain larger media organizations, which often still rely on some form of public funding or philanthropic donations to bridge the financial gap.

**This shift in the financial landscape of media outlets entails a growing dependence on sensational stories, or "hot news," often at the expense of in-depth, fact-driven reporting.** To maintain attractivity in a competitive information ecosystem, many news media have strategically adapted to the operational and editorial modes of social media platforms with the objective of scaling up short-term engagement metrics over ethical reporting standards.

**The rise of infotainment programs marked a significant shift in how political communication was framed in the media.** According to

77. Robertson, Craig. 2024. "How Much Do People Pay for Online News? And What Might Encourage More People to Pay? | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism." Reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk. 2024. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/how-much-do-people-pay-online-news-what-might-encourage-others-pay>.

Pierre Leroux and Philippe Riutort, these conversational formats blurred the lines between journalists and politicians, with both engaging in a more equal, informal dialogue that often mixed serious discourse with personal moments<sup>78</sup>. This shift promoted the idea of “authenticity” as a central political value, fostering emotional contagion between politicians and viewers. Media outlets like CNews, gradually rising to one of France’s most-watched news channels, translates this “ethical hijacking”, adapting to the competitive logic of the “era of spectacle” (sensationalism, info-tainment), while dismissing established ethical codes. Structural challenges, such as news avoidance, decreased media engagement, and a chronic bias masked as impartiality, further exacerbate this issue.

**Journalists, pressured by job cuts, shrinking budgets, and increased reliance on advertisers, can be financially pressured to lead side activities, compromising thereby their editorial independence.** A stark illustration of ethical challenges lies in the diversification of journalists’ activities, such as engaging in “ménages” (side contracts for private events), which raises significant conflicts of interest.

**This financial squeeze also leads to a sometimes dangerous cycle of conflicts of interest, where media outlets remain dependent on advertisers and financial backers.** As they heavily rely on advertising revenue, with polluting industries like oil and automotive, imposing specific advertising content. In parallel, the financial acquisition of media outlets, whether online (social media) or offline (traditional media), amounts to acquiring influence, which can be easily exploited by their owners to sway public debate, shape its direction, and advance specific private, industrial, or political interests. This results in climate urgency being

downplayed, while solutions like green growth or technological innovation are often presented as sufficient, without challenging current production and consumption models.

Budgetary constraints have led many media outlets to shrink their resources and capacities, resulting in **less strategic interest in promoting investigative journalism**, further weakening the media’s role in scrutinizing and debunking deceptive information. In parallel, **the rise of infotainment amplifies the financial incentives to produce sensational content**. Because polarized stories boost traffic and generate revenue, this may result in prioritizing short-term gains over in-depth analysis.

**The adherence to journalistic ethics often relies on a moral commitment to uphold standards. However, the cost of ethical breaches has decreased over time due to increasing precariousness.** This is notably why the number of journalists has declined by 10% over the past decade in France<sup>79</sup>.

## 2. Erosion of journalistic ethics: the overlooked role of ethics committees

**The deontological principles guiding journalists are enshrined in three key frameworks: the Declaration of Munich (1971) emphasizing the journalist’s duty to provide accurate, independent, and fair reporting, the IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists (2019) which reinforces global standards against disinformation and political interference, and national journalistic charters.** They are designed to serve as moral compasses rather than legally binding mandates. Their “voluntary” nature entails their non-binding char-

acter in most countries, leaving enforcement to self-regulated ethics committees or press councils acting as deontological watchdogs (Conseil de déontologie journalistique (CDJ) in Belgium, Conseil de déontologie journalistique et de médiation (CDJM) in France, Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in the UK, Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in the US,...). Ethics boards oversee adherence to these principles, addressing breaches through recommendations or public admonishments rather than legal penalties. While non-binding ethical frameworks aim to prevent misuse, they can fall short of enforcement, often avoided for fear of being weaponized as gag orders against journalistic freedom. This dual vulnerability (voluntary compliance and reputational incentives) inherently limits the applicability and effectiveness of such ethical frameworks, particularly in the face of financial pressures and the rise of disinformation.

In France, the Council for Journalistic Ethics and Mediation (CDJM) is the only self-regulatory body overseeing the print media. It operates under three ethical charters, but its effectiveness is hindered by several structural flaws:

- Most media outlets ignore its recommendations
- The CDJM charges fees for repeated ethical complaints (five or more), treating continued issues as “harassment” even if the complaints are valid
- Regarding environmental issues, the CDJM treats editorial coverage similarly to other “controversial” topics, refusing to make the distinction between scientific facts from opinions, thus repeating false balance between disinformation with legitimate debate

As a result, the CDJM seems largely ineffective in enforcing ethical standards.

In 2024, after the filing of two distinct complaints by the NGO QuotaCimat, the CDJM addressed two instances of climate disinformation involving Pascal Praud’s column in *Le Journal du Dimanche* (JDD)<sup>80</sup> and an article by the newspaper “*La Manche Libre*”<sup>81</sup>. The CDJM ruled in favor of QuotaCimat, stating that such articles had failed to meet journalistic standards of accuracy. It emphasized the unequivocal scientific consensus on climate change and recognized disinformation on this topic as a violation of ethical journalism, marking a significant step in reinforcing climate science as fact, not opinion, in French media.

## 3. Consequences of a regulatory vacuum: from democratic watchdogs to sensationalist machines

**Traditional news media, once the cornerstone of democratic accountability, find themselves increasingly sidelined in a fragmented and polarized informational marketplace.**

Thanks to dedicated regulatory frameworks and the existence of independent regulatory authorities, news media should act on a level playing field and be encouraged to maintain thematic and political pluralism, under the risk of sanctions.

**Yet, political attentism and a permissive laissez-faire approach have created a situation of regulatory vacuum allowing harmful narratives to proliferate and transforming them into lucrative economic tools.**

**In France, the absence of stringent regulations governing environmental reporting has**

78. Pierre Leroux, Philippe Riutort, 2013, *La politique sur un plateau. Ce que le divertissement fait à la représentation*, PUF, 2013, 263 p., ISBN : 978-2-13-059438-3.

79. Conseil économique social et environnemental. 2024. “Comment Redonner Confiance Dans Les Médias ? Rencontres Du CESE - En Direct.” YouTube. November 12, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxDatugQ2NY>.

80. QuotaCimat. 2024. “Désinformation Climatique Dans Le JDD - QuotaCimat.” Instagram. 2020. [https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/DBEy\\_UkxIz/](https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/DBEy_UkxIz/).

81. QuotaCimat, 2024. “Désinformation Climatique Dans La Manche Libre - QuotaCimat.” 2024. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat\\_cest-un-v%C3%A9ritable-pr%C3%A9sent-le-conseil-activity-7213797674657943552-u52P/?originalSubdomain=fr](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat_cest-un-v%C3%A9ritable-pr%C3%A9sent-le-conseil-activity-7213797674657943552-u52P/?originalSubdomain=fr).

led to the permissive coverage of climate-related issues in some media outlets, where editorial independence is clearly compromised by the influence of corporate interests, especially those from the fossil fuel industry. For instance, several news outlets like Le Figaro<sup>82</sup>, Nice Matin<sup>83</sup>, Les Echos<sup>84</sup> have praised the climate commitments of TotalEnergies' CEO, downplayed TotalEnergies' substantial fossil fuel investments, thereby overlooking the company's history of climate-skeptic lobbying, fossil fuel investments, and human rights violations. This editorial glossing maintains the trend of industry-friendly reporting and highlights the risks of a regulatory vacuum, where media outlets, particularly those dependent on corporate advertising, erode editorial independence and allow industry viewpoints, especially from powerful fossil fuel companies like TotalEnergies, to shape public perceptions.

The media's deep economic and political ties, coupled with a neoliberal paradigm that views regulation as obstructive, contribute to a cycle of inaction, where reform is stymied by a lack of political will and an underestimation of the media's powerful influence on public discourse.

The result? A media landscape where sensationalism trumps substance, and the watchdog role of traditional journalism is systematically undermined.

#### 4. Environmental journalism under threat

While the results of the global survey led by the IFJ show that a big majority of journalists (over 81%) are "very concerned" about climate change, it also points out critical internal chal-

lenge: **less than 6% claim they have had access to dedicated training, while less than 5% have a department dedicated to reporting on climate change**<sup>85</sup>.

« **Journalism acts as a catalyst for public debate, facilitating informed decision-making on the climate crisis. However, journalists and media outlets face significant challenges and barriers when carrying out this vital function** ».

(Joint Declaration on the Climate Crisis and Freedom of Expression of the United Nations (UN), 2024)

Despite the pressing need for investigative reporting on environmental issues, managerial and political support for such journalism is waning. Many also face direct censorship, with 45% admitting to self-censorship<sup>87</sup>.

**For example, several environmental programs in France, particularly within public broadcasting, faced threats or were removed as they faced accusations of climate activism.** The removal of the documentary Vert de rage by public television, despite its critical role in uncovering seven criminal investigations and shedding light on previously unknown environmental and health controversies (and received the Albert-Londres Prize) illustrates the growing tension between journalistic integrity and political pressures on media content, especially regarding environmental topics.

According to UNESCO, journalists covering environmental issues are subject to growing physical attacks, arrests, and legal threats, with state actors often implicated. Other threats to environmental information include targeted violence against scientists and activists, restricted access to public environmental data, insufficient media capabilities<sup>88</sup>.

« **Environmental journalism is indispensable, particularly in remote and often underreported areas, to disseminate information, mobilise citizen action, and to expose and hold accountable those who are responsible for environmental harm.** »  
(Joint declaration on the climate crisis and freedom of expression the united nations (un))

**The low priority given to the climate agenda creates a butterfly effect, leading to a vicious cycle that undermines both information integrity and public debate.** Chief editors and journalists, constrained by limited resources and a lack of awareness, struggle to recognize

climate disinformation as a serious threat. This results in chronically deficient environmental reporting, either silenced or distorted, which weakens the relevance of public debate and fails to adequately inform decision-making. **Meanwhile, politicians and vested interests exploit public fears and misunderstanding, using them to polarize opinion, sow division, and evade regulation, all without facing robust opposition from journalists who are often ill-equipped, unaware, under-resourced, or insufficiently protected to challenge these narratives effectively.**

This was recently illustrated during the US presidential campaign, when climate-skeptical arguments from the leader of the French Republicans went unchallenged on public TV. On a Franceinfo debating program (French public news channel), the guest's repeated claims that climate change is not human-caused were left uncorrected by any of the other panelists nor the journalists, exposing a troubling lack of journalistic accountability in addressing misinformation<sup>89</sup>. While Franceinfo later issued a corrective statement, this shows that disinformation is no longer an isolated trouble, or a weak signal, but a more systemic challenge that demands heightened journalistic vigilance.

### - Low, sporadic and segmented climate coverage - Permissive conditions to disinformation

**The solubility of climate change in the media is a deeply political process,** where low quantity and poor quality coverage, characterized by passive and insufficient reporting, indirectly serves to obstruct the visibility of the climate

crisis. While the lack of media scrutiny on climate issues may not be overtly intentional, it functions as an indirect omission strategy, maintaining the status quo through the curtailing of possible paths forward.

82. QuotaClimat, 2024. Eloge TotalEnergies dans le Figaro. [https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/C2ozVmjAq48/?locale=ne\\_NP&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/C2ozVmjAq48/?locale=ne_NP&img_index=1)

83. QuotaClimat, 2024. "Greenwashing TotalEnergies dans Nice Matin": [https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/DAlv8N3gmOe/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/DAlv8N3gmOe/?img_index=1)

84. QuotaClimat, 2024. TotalEnergies dans les Echos: [https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/Cz\\_spmFNfFO/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/quotaclimat/p/Cz_spmFNfFO/?img_index=1)

85. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). 2022. "IFJ Climate Survey." YouTube. June 9, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etzIroYPoKc>

86. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression. 2024. "JOINT DECLARATION on the CLIMATE CRISIS and FREEDOM of EXPRESSION the United Nations (UN)(...)" <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/statements/20240503-statement-freedom-expression-climate-change-EN.pdf>

87. "UNESCO Report Reveals 70% of Environmental Journalists Have Been Attacked for Their Work." 2024. Unesco.org. 2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-report-reveals-70-environmental-journalists-have-been-attacked-their-work>

88. Ibid

89. QuotaClimat, 2024. Climatocriticisme sur Franceinfo - QuotaClimat LinkedIn. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat\\_lundi-sur-franceinfo-un-intervenant-a-repete-activity-7247134093455372288-heoB/?originalSubdomain=fr](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/quotaclimat_lundi-sur-franceinfo-un-intervenant-a-repete-activity-7247134093455372288-heoB/?originalSubdomain=fr)

« **Traditional media – print and broadcast – frame and transmit climate change information and play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, understanding and willingness to act<sup>90</sup>.** »  
*(The IPCC Working Group III (WG III) report.)*

## 1. Quantity of environmental information

**Climate change remains alarmingly low on the media's agenda.**

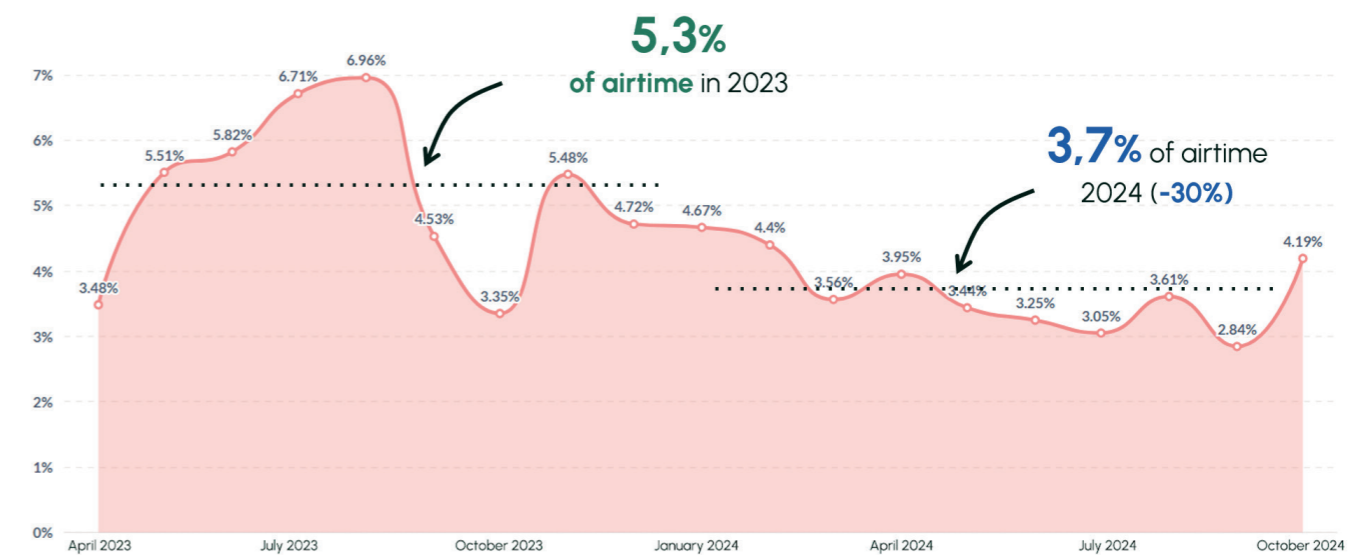
Globally, this trend is reflected in a significant 4% reduction in climate coverage in 2023 compared

to 2022, according to the global press monitoring conducted by the Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO). The downturn among 2023 levels was a continuing decrease from 2021 (a 14% decrease)<sup>91</sup>.

In France, the recent launch of the Media Observatory of Ecology (MOE) has revealed a 30% drop in environmental coverage in 2024, now averaging around 3.7% of broadcasting time in major French TV and radio channels<sup>92</sup>.

In the US, broadcast TV news coverage of climate change shrank by 25% from 2023 to 2022. The same year, climate-related stories made up less than 1% of US broadcast content, with only 12% mentioning «fossil fuels.» and extreme weather events dominating the coverage (NGO Media Matters, 2023)<sup>93</sup>.

## → % of environmental information in French audiovisual press (TV, radio), from April 2023 to October 2024



Source: Observatoire Des Médias Sur L'Écologie. 2024. <https://observatoiremediaecologie.fr>.

## 2. Quality of environmental information

« **The media are a long way from providing adequate coverage of the severity of the climate crisis, while journalists need more training to improve their reporting<sup>94</sup>** »  
*(International Federation of Journalists (IFJ))*

**Aggregate academic data also shows that “attention-grabbing events” play a key role in driving peaks in public and concentrating media attention on specific issues.** Unplanned events, such as extreme weather, disrupt regular news flows while planned events like COP meetings or the release of major IPCC reports serve as strategic opportunities to engage global audiences and emphasize environmental change<sup>95</sup>.



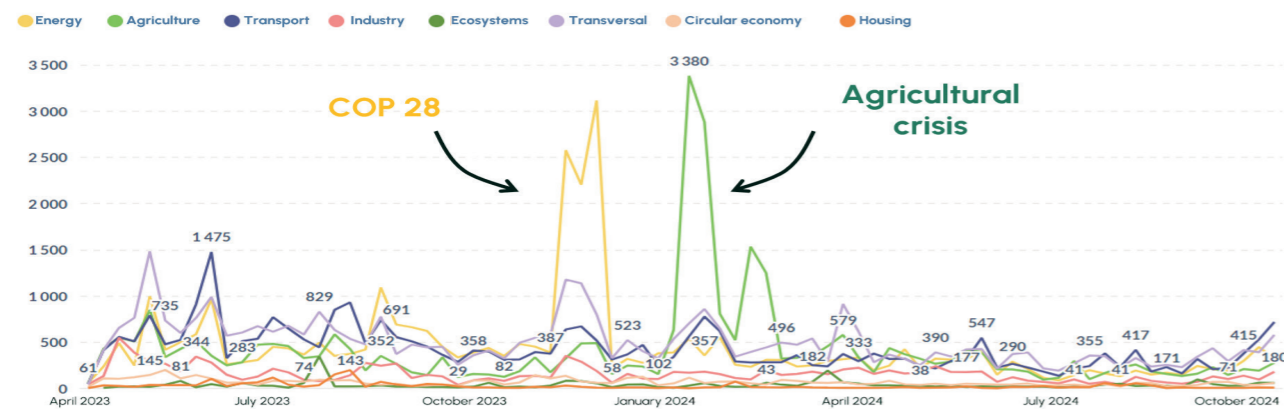
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Journalists at the COP16, 2010.

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→ **Peaks in environmental information in French audiovisual press (TV, radio), from April 2023 to Octobre 2024 (measured by occurrence ratio of environmental search terms)**



Source: Observatoire Des Médias Sur L'Écologie. 2024. <https://observatoiremediaecologie.fr>.

Another concerning issue highlighted by the Media Observatory of Ecology (MOE) relates to the media's overwhelming coverage of the consequences of climate-related disasters, for instance during the 2023 heatwave in France, rather than addressing underlying causes or mitigation strategies.

For instance, France's prime-time news broadcasts (Le JT de 20H) dedicated several reports to talk about the floods that hit France in November 2024, but predominantly focusing on the rescue operations of the victims and the harrowing scenes of despair, yet rarely shifted focus to the long-term solutions for preventing such disasters or adapting to climate change (only 1 reports out of 22 mentioned solutions).

Notwithstanding the fact that the object of journalism is founded on material and subjective concerns (legitimizing journalistic interest for direct impacts), this lens effect creates a dangerously narrow narrative, leaving individuals feeling paralyzed by the scale of the crisis,

with a perceived sense of powerlessness<sup>96</sup>. News media's tendency to focus on the impacts is also counter-intuitive as citizens say they are most interested in learning about solutions to global warming (44%), followed by evidence that it is happening (20%) or information about the causes (18%) in the US. In the same Yale study, fewer Americans (11%) would ask first about the impacts of global warming<sup>97</sup>.

A global research on media attention and themes in climate change coverage led in 10 countries (2006–2018) found that **media coverage was dominated by certain themes, such as international climate politics, energy policies, and extreme weather events**. However, issues like climate justice or solutions to climate change received relatively less attention<sup>98</sup>. Similarly, a detailed analysis of French media coverage on environmental issues reveals a "sectoral" discrepancy as certain topics remain underrepresented in public debate despite significant carbon footprint. Over the past year, while mainly focusing on the energy sector, the

building sector, responsible for 16% of France's emissions in 2022, only accounted for only 1% of media mentions about the causes of climate change. Besides, its crucial role in decarbonization, through thermal renovation and reduced reliance on fossil fuels, was highlighted in only 4% of climate solution mentions<sup>99</sup>.

Chronic deficiencies in environmental information contribute to a shared sense of confusion about the future, increasingly resulting in news disengagement and selective news avoidance. Nearly 70% of Europeans struggle to imagine what daily life might look like with the green transition<sup>100</sup>.

In terms of format, the independent French broadcasting regulation authority (ARCOM) highlights that climate change is primarily addressed in news programs rather than through in-depth or educational formats, with topics like biodiversity often relegated to documentaries.

This illustrates how television news programs, while important for reaching large publics, are restricted in their range of options for climate stories by the ephemeral and event-based nature of the editorial drivers, and by the time constraints on their reports.

A lack of comprehensive coverage, compounded by issues like greenwashing, diminishes public awareness and concern, **creating a silent downward spiral**. The minimal and often superficial media attention may, whether intentionally or not, serves to maintain the status quo, indirectly obstructing meaningful climate action by failing to hold powerful interests accountable.

### 3. False balance

Another feature of the permissive media environment of disinformation lies in the **biased media coverage of climate issues**. In an effort to maintain balance and pluralism, media outlets sometimes give disproportionate attention to contradictors, including climate skeptics. This practice creates the illusion that climate-skeptic views are as scientifically valid as the overwhelming scientific consensus, fostering a «false balance»<sup>101</sup>.

The journalistic norm of "balance" (giving equal weight to climate scientists and contrarians in climate change reporting) biases coverage by unevenly amplifying certain messages that are not supported by science, contributing to politicization of science, spreading misinformation and reducing public consensus on action<sup>102</sup>.

In France, renown climate-skeptic figures (Christophe Gerondeau, Bertrand Alliot, Michel Onfray, etc.) have frequently been invited to TV shows after publishing their books, further amplifying anti-climate viewpoints and reinforcing misleading controversy under the guise of balanced debate.

Many journalists and newsrooms face challenges in holding biased sources accountable while themselves being accused of partisanship. This often leads to the risk of false equivalence, where reporters feel pressured to present all issues as having two equally valid sides, even when the credibility or factual basis of opposing views is uneven or incomparable<sup>103</sup>.

96. Laurent Cordonnier. 2019. "Information et Engagement Climatique - Fondation Descartes." Fondationdescartes.org. Fondation Descartes. 2019. <https://www.fondationdescartes.org/2022/11/information-et-engagement-climatique/>.

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100. Lenoir, Olivier, and Marin Saillouf. 2024. "Écologie: Les Européens Face à La Transition. 10 Points, 15 Graphiques | Le Grand Continent." Le Grand Continent. June 20, 2024. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2024/06/20/ecologie-les-europeens-face-a-la-transition-10-points-15-graphiques/>.

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102. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2022. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability." IPCC Sixth Assessment Report. IPCC. 2022. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>.

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**This challenge is further fueled by the sharp increase in fact-checking work by news media outlets.** Fact-checking differs from traditional journalism's detached observer role by requiring journalists to actively evaluate the accuracy of claims. This shift involves interpreting information, selecting credible sources, and delivering definitive true/false verdicts. Fact-checking moves beyond simply presenting competing views, demanding that journalists prioritize analytical rigor and challenge the notion of neutrality tied to presenting all perspectives equally<sup>104</sup>.

**The lack of transparency regarding industry viewpoints invited to comment in news media also raises significant ethical and informational concerns.** When corporate representatives or industry-funded experts are presented without clear disclosure of their affiliations or vested interests, it may distort public understanding. This opacity undermines journalistic standards of fairness and accountability, enabling the promotion of biased narratives as neutral expertise.

**As a result, media neutrality bias can be intentionally used by credentialed contrarians to position unfounded claims alongside well-established scientific facts.** This creates a misleading sense of balance and fosters doubt about verified knowledge. A recent analysis of over 2,000 Telegraph opinion pieces published between April and October 2023 revealed a stark trend: 85% of the 171 articles addressing environmental issues were categorized as "anti-green," focusing on undermining climate policies, questioning the science behind climate change, and ridiculing environmental advocacy groups<sup>105</sup>. This pattern of editorial bias reflects a broader media

environment in which a substantial portion of commentary, including on channels like GB News, actively promotes climate denial. According to DeSmog, in 2022, one in three GB News hosts were found to spread climate denial on air, further exacerbating the problem of disinformation and undermining public understanding of climate science<sup>106</sup>.

#### 4. Whose voice is heard - over-representation of business - as-usual viewpoints

A schematic analysis of today's public debate reveals three major conceptual frameworks currently prevailing when discussing climate issues, and finding a credible echo in news debating structures: a more conservative - sometimes populist - vision where climate action is rather understood as costly, punitive and peripheral issue; a (neo) liberal program where climate change represents this century's new deal restructuring the global competitive race and therefore requiring massive investment in high-end carbon-neutral technologies and business-driven innovations; a more left-wing reformist voice acknowledging the systemic nature of climate change and demanding a renewed long-term strategy where social justice, environmental pressures and economic growth should be adequately balanced. In the "mainstream national conversation", more disruptive and dissent voices are often either absent or marginalized

By giving limited space to more disruptive terms and critical perspectives, the media marginalizes dissent and ensures that inconvenient information does not significantly challenge prevailing power structures. This



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laconism, whether intentional or not, perpetuates a controlled narrative that ultimately benefits those with a stake in delaying meaningful climate action. In France, this is particularly visible : recent data suggests that journalists

challenge representatives from non-populist parties (32%) more frequently than those from populist parties (18%)<sup>107</sup>. This suggests a pattern of preferential treatment, or at least growing journalistic leniency, towards populist figures.

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### III. TACKLING CLIMATE DISINFORMATION IN NEWS MEDIA: A “CHEAP” DISCURSIVE FIGHT OR A WORTHWHILE DEMOCRATIC CONCERN?

This report aims to go beyond a reflection focusing solely on disinformation, as the very notions of «facts» and «truth» are already divisive, reflecting growing distrust.

While this report aims to highlight the prevalence and normalization of climate disinformation in public debate, notably through its growing presence in the mainstream media, it frames climate disinformation as a symptom of a broader failure in our informational and democratic systems.

In order to avoid a self-destructive process of antagonization in democratic debate, where skepticism becomes an essentializing and ex-

clusionary concept, **this stands as a broader wake-up to uphold the rule of law, freedom of expression, the right to balanced and reliable information, political and socio-cultural sovereignty, journalistic ethics, and public trust in institutions, in tandem with robust and legitimate counterbalances.**

**Freedom of expression is increasingly entangled in debates over the relevance of disinformation research.**

**In the US, researchers are increasingly accused of being “unelected arbiters of truth” and of silencing political viewpoints<sup>108</sup>.** This inflammable debate peaked when the U.S.

government’s Disinformation Governance Board was dismantled after it was labeled as a «Ministry of Truth» by critics. This backlash was significantly driven by Republican figures, notably Senator Josh Hawley, who accused the board of government overreach and censorship. Under mounting pressure from conservative lawmakers and public outrage, the Department of Homeland Security disbanded the board in August 2022, just months after its launch. After sustained attacks from House Republicans, the Stanford Internet Observatory, a research institute investigating disinformation, was also dismantled, marking a significant setback for academic freedom and undermining the independent research infrastructure.

In Australia, the government has recently reversed its position on a draft bill that sought to regulate and sanction disinformation on online platforms (November 2024). This came after concerns over censorship within the Assembly, leading to revisions in the proposed legislation. The new bill, titled the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024, aimed to give the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) increased powers to hold digital platforms accountable.

**This (sometimes deliberate) confusion between censorship and addressing disinformation stems from a flawed understanding of existing regulatory frameworks, fueled by neo-liberal ambition to minimize the role of the state as well as populist arguments brewing institutional defiance.**

**This coincides with the advent of the self-fulfilling prophecy promoted by the tech-right in the US, which argues that the decay of the**

state is an inevitable process and the only way to empower the people is to “unleash constraints” and bypass “politics”<sup>109</sup>.

**The liberal notion that truth will prevail in the “marketplace of ideas” and that citizens can discern truth from falsehood is challenged by the dynamics of today’s hybrid information space, where algorithms amplify divisive and negative content. The prevalence of fake news and incendiary rhetoric reflects an underlying strategy to create chaos and a sense of overwhelm, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood<sup>110</sup>.**

Despite the emergence of voluntary initiatives of specific media outlets, the growing polarisation of today’s information landscape on specific topics such as the climate crisis demonstrates the inherent limits of self-regulation to uphold thematic and political pluralism. Existing regulatory frameworks fail to address rising ethical breaches.

**This seemingly significant “backlash” results from an emergent discourse standing to unilaterally portray the fight against as threat to freedom of expression and amounts to censorship.** This framing gains ground in partisan and mainstream media as conservative media, political and advocacy elites use it to dismiss legitimate policy discussions on regulatory frameworks, and/or the roots of the climate crisis. Within an increasingly insular - because economically concentrated - media system, skepticism is then portrayed as normalized and familiar.

**The challenge in classifying information as true or false lies in the inherent difficulty of determining objective truth, especially when**

### I. THE CENSORSHIP ARGUMENT

« **Underlining the critical role that the right to freedom of expression and media plays in the promotion and protection of human rights and dignity, the advancement of sustainable development, the supporting and strengthening of democratic societies, and advancing intercultural understanding; Highlighting that information and expressions relating to the climate crisis are of public interest and, therefore, are highly protected speech under international human rights law;**”  
(Point 6 of the Joint Declaration of the climate crisis and freedom of expression of the United Nations (UN) (2024))

108. Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich, John Cook, van, Jon Roozenbeek, Naomi Oreskes, and Lee C McIntyre. 2024. “Liars Know They Are Lying: Differentiating Disinformation from Disagreement.” Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6>.

109. Faure, Valentine. 2024. “Comment La Droite Tech Américaine a Pris Le Pouvoir.” Le Monde.fr. Le Monde. November 15, 2024. [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/11/15/comment-la-droite-tech-americaine-a-pris-le-pouvoir\\_6395657\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/11/15/comment-la-droite-tech-americaine-a-pris-le-pouvoir_6395657_3210.html).  
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individuals or groups may have conflicting perspectives<sup>111</sup>.

**However, the topic of the climate crisis is different in that its existence, its human-made nature, as well as its current and future impacts, are firmly established by scientific evidence.** Multiple studies and reports from authoritative bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have demonstrated the overwhelming consensus within the scientific community regarding the anthropogenic causes of global warming and the profound effects it is already having on ecosystems and human societies.

**While there is a legitimate collective desire for renewed “authority” and “protection” in a destabilized world,** it is essential to restore fair and adequate rules to guarantee information integrity. This highlights the need for changing and more adequate regulatory frameworks supported by independent regulatory authorities capable of enforcing them over time. Instead of seeking to “regulate” or “arbitrate” truth, taking action against disinformation only aims to restore a fair set of rules to moderate public discourse, ensuring that all voices can be heard while maintaining a level playing field. The underlying goal is not to suppress differing views but to ensure that debates are based on evidence-based facts and conducted under the same democratic principles.

By moderating the conversation in a way that fosters accuracy and pluralism, society can better safeguard the democratic principle of free expression while ensuring that misinformation does not overwhelm informed debate.

« **Identifying and countering misinformation so that a discerning public can choose to ignore it is upholding democracy. Empowering people to seek the truth, to evaluate evidence and spot manipulation<sup>112</sup>”.**  
*Ecker et al. (2024)*

Effective solutions should strike a balance by enabling citizens to discern credible information without infringing on free expression, emphasizing the media’s role as a watchdog and promoting transparency.

**While regulation is incremental to combat climate disinformation while upholding democratic norms,** it inevitably relies on a multifaceted approach that includes media self-regulation to ensure ethical journalism, media literacy initiatives accessible to all segments of society to foster critical thinking, and public intervention to safeguard the rule of law and fundamental rights. In this way, the focus remains on restoring informed public discourse and promoting resilience in democratic processes, rather than imposing a top-down narrative.

To this end, several measures have already been deployed by governments, media, and journalists. Governments can adopt policies that promote media pluralism, transparency, and independence, with examples like the EU Media Freedom Act and Ireland’s National Counter Disinformation Strategy. Implementing frameworks that protect media editori-

al independence and support journalists as whistleblowers, particularly in reporting on environmental issues, are key recommendations emphasized by international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD<sup>113</sup>. Media outlets should prioritize journalist safety and ensure diverse, transparent, fact-based reporting that includes local perspectives on climate change, alongside robust regulatory measures to protect editorial independence and prevent

undue influence. Journalists should employ techniques like “truth sandwiches” to counter misinformation and promote media literacy through psychological inoculation strategies<sup>114</sup>. Finally, research into how misinformation is covered in mainstream media should be expanded, with a focus on understanding the challenges journalists face and refining journalistic practices (UNESCO, Ireland’s Future of Media Commission).

## A new bill to strengthen media coverage of the climate crisis in France, led by the NGO QuotaClimat

**A draft bill spearheaded by the NGO QuotaClimat, supported by a cross-party coalition in the French National Assembly, was officially proposed in November 2024 to address gaps in the current regulatory framework governing media coverage of climate and environmental issues.**

**The bill is grounded in the assumption that while media outlets have made voluntary efforts to improve their environmental coverage, self-regulation has proven ineffective.** The absence of clear indicators, consistent oversight, and enforcement mechanisms has led to sporadic and inconsistent climate reporting, influenced by fluctuating editorial priorities. This regulatory

gap has exacerbated disparities among newsrooms and contributed to a fragmented, polarized media landscape, ultimately leaving audiences inadequately informed on critical climate issues.

**The draft bill seeks to strengthen the role of the French audiovisual regulator, Arcom, by explicitly mandating it to oversee environmental coverage and ensuring compliance through enhanced mandates and resources.** Key provisions include the enshrinement of the state of scientific knowledge as the guiding principle in assessing the quality of environmental information (*Article 1*), the establishment of an Observatory for Ecological Crisis Media Coverage (*Article 2*), rules for ecological programming dur-

ing election periods (*Article 3*), and the incorporation of environmental considerations into the public audiovisual service’s mission (*Article 4*). Additionally, it calls for updating editorial charters (*Article 6*) to ensure balanced and consistent ecological reporting across media types and enhancing cooperation with platforms under the European Digital Services Act (*Article 7*).

By emphasizing media pluralism and independence, the draft bill aligns with constitutional provisions on press freedom while advocating for a structured approach to elevate the quality, quantity, and honesty of climate-related information.

National Assembly, 2024, Draft bill to guarantee public access to information on environmental and sustainability issues:  
[https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b0601\\_proposition-loi.pdf](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/textes/117b0601_proposition-loi.pdf)

111. Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich, John Cook, van, Jon Roozenbeek, Naomi Oreskes, and Lee C McIntyre. 2024. “Liars Know They Are Lying: Differentiating Disinformation from Disagreement.” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03503-6>.

112. Ecker, Ullrich, Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden, Li Qian Tay, John Cook, Naomi Oreskes, and Stephan Lewandowsky. 2024. “Misinformation Poses a Bigger Threat to Democracy than You Might Think.” *Nature* 630 (8015): 29–32. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-01587-3>.

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114. Climate Action against Disinformation (CAAD). 2022. “Climate Action against Disinformation | Journalist Field Guide: Navigating Climate Misinformation.” Caad.info. 2022. <https://caad.info/analysis/reports/journalist-field-guide-navigating-climate-misinformation/>.



## 2. THE CONDESCENDING ARGUMENT

While commentators raise an important point about avoiding condescension in the framing of disinformation, it is crucial to recognize that addressing disinformation does not equate to telling people what to think or how to live<sup>115</sup>.

Rather, it is about equipping the public with the tools to critically evaluate the information they encounter. The intention is not to silence dissenting opinions but to ensure that debates are grounded in facts, rather than manipulated narratives.

<sup>115</sup> Buck, Holly. 2024. "Obsessing over Climate Disinformation Is a Wrong Turn." Jacobin.com. 2024. <https://jacobin.com/2024/08/climate-disinformation-green-transition-workers>.

## CONCLUSIONS

**This report argues that news media outlets play a distinctive role in shaping public discourse and increasing sociotropic beliefs on climate change,** but that the unchecked infiltration and resulting streamlining of deceptive discourses bring considerable democratic and strategic risks.

**Climate disinformation breeds disbelief and wait-and-see political postures, when the fast-paced deployment of socially just transformative actions and investments is expected to protect citizens.** Its ongoing legitimization process in the media also acts as an underlying mind-numbing process which narrows public understanding of the crisis. Both “older” and “newer” media often skew the framing of the climate crisis, which lead to the silent curtailment of public perceptions and discourses, particularly relating to the causes and proposed solutions to the climate crisis. The prominence of a neo-liberal bias in online and offline information platforms influences not merely climate-related facts but also shared representations of the issue, its context and potential responses. In this context, proposed structural changes systematically encounter the same forces of rationalization, thereby closing climate action into either fatalistic / negative, relativist or profit-driven / green-growth visions.

**Consequently, citizens remain under-informed and disengaged, with political, economic, interpersonal and social engagement on climate issues stagnating.** This stifles the empowerment of coordinated social movements and fit-for-purpose public and private policy changes necessary to address the climate emergency, leaving critical structural barriers unchallenged.

**Addressing climate disinformation stands as a democratic and normative imperative,** not to chase an fallacious ideal of intellectual purity but as a way of empowering citizens with improved critical thinking so they can navigate a disinformation-saturated world without feeling disregarded, lost or manipulated by an elitist agenda.

**Focusing on news media outlets is conceived as a starting point to dismantle the industrial apparatus of disinformation by scrutinizing every link in the information value chain.** Moderation policies, while important, cannot exist in isolation; they must be integrated into a comprehensive framework of public and private policy initiatives designed to sustain information integrity. Only a balanced, trustworthy and diversified public debate, can guarantee the right to political self-determination and fundamental rights of expression. Our governance approach to regulation must hence be guided by a careful balance of costs and benefits of letting climate disinformation unchecked.

**After US presidential elections, the global political landscape shows how polarized the public debate on climate change gradually becomes.** On one side is an increasingly publicized libertarian vision, which champions unfettered freedom of expression and mistakes moderation with censorship. On the other is a call for greater accountability among the actors shaping our information ecosystems. Resolving this tension requires a nuanced understanding of how to protect democratic freedoms while confronting the corrosive impact of disinformation.

**Several fundamental questions remain for public and media institutions:** how can news media outlets evolve to meet the growing pref-

erence for infotainment, disintermediation, more direct connection with the public, without compromising ethical standards? Furthermore, how can informational governance be adapted to restore economic and normative competition between social networks and traditional media, ensuring that the latter remain protected in their role as checks on power? Lastly, how can journalists maintain their ethical principles and continue to guarantee reliable, high-quality information in an increasingly hybrid and pressured media landscape?

What’s clear is that the window to tackle these structural issues is closing fast. The global rise of far-right parties and the political gridlock that comes with it are pushing us closer to a tipping point. By framing disinformation as a concrete problem, we stop just talking about it and start taking real action.

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