

CLIMATE CHANGE – POLITICAL NARRATIVE AND DISINFORMATION

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Abstract

This article presents how climate change is becoming a subject of political narratives and disinformation, turning into a tool of political struggle. Scientifically proven climate change is often presented selectively, serving specific political, ideological, or economic interests. A key element of this narrative is to discredit environmental organizations and activists. The article discusses selected cases of denialist rhetoric and disinformation being used by political parties in the European Union. Particular attention is given to euroskeptic narratives that portray the European Union's climate policy as a threat by attributing a slew of pejorative meanings to it. The European Union is the primary area of research here, whereas the United States provides a supplementary, comparative context to facilitate better understanding of the mechanisms of political polarization and the instrumentalization of climate issues. The aim of the article is to present the mechanisms through which disinformation narratives emerge and operate, as well as their consequences for the legitimacy of climate policy in Europe.

Keywords

ecology, climate change, political narrative, disinformation

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how climate change has become a subject of political narratives and disinformation within the European Union. The main research focus is on the EU and particularly the disputes surrounding the European Green Deal, as well as the communication strategies of populist and euroskeptic groups. For comparison, the example of the United States has been included to highlight the similarities and differences in the mechanisms of polarization, the role of political elites, and the relationship between disinformation and voter mobilization.

The research problem addressed in this article concerns climate change from the perspective of political narrative-building. Capital, pressure groups, and think tanks

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associated with political parties constitute a significant source of climate-related disinformation. The main research questions focus on how populist parties use climate policy to mobilize their electorates and what disinformation strategies are employed in relation to the European Green Deal. Further questions explore the place and role of environmental organizations within this discourse, as well as potential measures to counter disinformation.

The research hypothesis adopted is that political climate narration which simplifies and polarizes has become a tool of political struggle and ideological identification. The scientific analysis of climate change in the context of narratives and disinformation is complex and multidimensional. The article relies on methodological approaches typical of political science. The research methodology is based on the analysis and critical interpretation of documents and academic literature (desk research). It also draws on theories from political communication, such as post-truth politics, highlighting the primacy of emotions over facts and narrative conflict theory, which examines how different political groups construct competing stories about climate issues. A limited case study approach is also used, with examples drawn from the United States, Poland, and selected political parties within the European Union.

The article is structured following the logic of analytical reasoning. The first part introduces the concept of climate disinformation and how it functions in public discourse thereby providing the theoretical basis for the analysis that follows. Next, the ideologization of ecology and the role of populist narratives in the EU are discussed. Further sections address the radicalization of the message, the economic interests of disinformation actors, and the use of climate narratives in the context of hybrid warfare. This structure facilitates a transition from the general level to specific topics and ultimately to synthetic conclusions about the legitimacy of climate policy and European integration.

The English-language literature analyzes climate disinformation primarily in terms of political science, communication, and social psychology combined. Studies by Lewandowsky are essential, pointing to a strong link between climate skepticism and ideological orientation, as well as the role of political elites in shaping social attitudes. Southwell et al. propose precise definitions of scientific disinformation, emphasizing it contradicts expert consensus.

Reports by the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) reveal transnational networks of disinformation actors whose activities result in systemic delays in climate policy. Studies by Hsu and Myers on the one hand and Winter et al. on the other highlight the role of emotions, conspiracy theories, and social media in perpetuating false narratives.

Unlike previous works, this article focuses on the political function of climate disinformation in the European Union as a tool for delegitimizing climate policy and, indirectly, the project of European integration.

In the field of social sciences, numerous studies have been published on climate change. The claim that the climate is warming is not disputed. Analyses of communication strategies and rhetoric as factors of social mobilization and demobilization have also been conducted within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Opposing the

dominant research trend, some analyses indicate that environmental protection initiatives reflect the emergence of new forms of power relations (Stachowiak, 2014).

Disinformation – the Climate Discourse

Disinformation is facilitated by the complexity of the world and the information overload² such that people have neither the time nor the capacity to verify, check sources, or assess credibility. The absorption of disinformation is linked to a tendency to accept simple explanations. People are far more likely to accept information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs or worldview.

Climate change presents challenges on multiple levels: it is difficult to understand cognitively because its consequences are hard to fully grasp, and it poses a challenge to many individuals' worldviews, as actions aimed at limiting climate change produce economic and political consequences. These political implications have created an environment of confrontation and climate disinformation (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Treen et al. (2020) points out that disinformation is a particular subset of incorrect information that is created and disseminated intentionally to mislead audiences. This distinction is crucial for analyzing political narratives around climate change. The systemic threat posed by disinformation has also been recognized at the institutional level, shifting the issue from social communication to political security.

"Disinformation (in all areas, not only regarding climate issues) was identified in the Global Risks Report 2024 as one of the greatest short-term threats to the international community. The threat posed by disinformation continues to grow, and it intensifies both toward the EU and NATO and their member states. Disinformation is often used as a tool of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), a pattern of actions that have, or may potentially have, a negative impact on political values, procedures, or processes" (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

Studies show that media practices of presenting scientific consensus and marginal, contrarian positions as equivalent lead to public confusion and contribute to the delegitimization of expert knowledge in the climate debate (Björnberg et al., 2017). Anti-climate narratives shape ecological awareness and individual attitudes, but they also influence political party activity and the functioning of governments. Here, climate disinformation serves not only a cognitive function, but above all a political one, becoming an instrument of mobilization, delegitimization, and polarization.

Manipulating information is not a new phenomenon. Persuasion disguised as information has always existed. No medium had a worse reputation in this respect than the 19th-century tabloid press. The specificity of online disinformation lies in the speed of

² Information overload is a disruption in the communication process that occurs when recipients are overwhelmed by too much information, often of varying degrees of reliability, cf. Eppler, M. J., & Mengis, J. (2004). The Concept of Information Overload: A Review of Literature from Organization Science, Accounting, Marketing, MIS, and Related Disciplines. *The Information Society*, 20(5), 325–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240490507974>.

its dissemination and the systemic difficulty of debunking the lies generated there (Karwowski, 2022).

What is an anti-climate narrative? It is a way of presenting climate change by the denial of or skepticism toward the scientific consensus. Such narratives downplay the importance of the problem, its impacts on people, and the possibility of mitigating or preventing these impacts. Delay narratives accept the fact of climate change but simultaneously question the scope, type, and timing of the actions proposed (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023).

Disinformation that invokes the language of science is particularly destructive because it uses the authority of expert knowledge to undermine itself. “We define scientific misinformation as publicly available information that is misleading or deceptive relative to the best available scientific evidence” (Southwell et al., 2022, p. 98).

“Defining misinformation as contrarian claims³ allows for the possibility that there may be grains of truth in some of the claims, that in a philosophical sense objective truth is often unknowable, and that some claims are not falsifiable” (Winter et al., 2024).

Empirical studies indicate that susceptibility to such narratives is strongly linked to ideological orientation and low levels of trust in scientific institutions, which gives climate disputes a clear identity dimension (Stockemer & Bordeleau, 2024).

The popularity and sources of such narratives have changed depending on global events. At one point, disinformation stemmed from ExxonMobil, which funded more than 50 organizations publishing tweets suggesting that climate change is not dangerous and that U.S. climate policy harms economic growth (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Climate disinformation is part of a larger political discourse where language becomes an instrument of power and a tool for shaping meaning. “Discourse as a communication event is linked to the use of language, the transmission of ideas, and interactions within social situations. In the discourse on climate change, political actors actively participate. These issues have therefore become present in public discourse, shaping awareness of the role of climate change as a factor conditioning human existence” (Ranke, 2020, p. 139). Climate denialism comes in many forms, ranging from outright rejection of scientific data to obscuring the issue under the guise of methodological skepticism. These strategies have one thing in common: they undermine cognitive certainty and amplify the audience’s emotional reactions. Łaszczycza (2021) argues that denialism is fostered by the abstract nature of the threats, a lack of understanding of scientific language, and the Dunning-Kruger effect.

In public debate, which belongs to the domain of persuasion and emotions, global warming functions both as a carrier of alarmist messages intended to mobilize action, and as a symbol of global propaganda used for political or economic purposes (Makuchowska, 2013).

The commercial need of the media to attract the attention of its audience shifts the boundaries of acceptable content. A system of repetitive communication patterns emerges, much more impactful online than in traditional media. These patterns influence emotions, and the language of communication becomes short, simple, and unambiguous (Sędłak, 2020).

³ Contrarian statements or contrarian claims are views, opinions, or assertions that go against the prevailing public opinion, scientific consensus, or mainstream thinking.

The European Union unequivocally identifies climate disinformation as a threat to democratic processes and public safety. "The European Commission defines disinformation as the 'creation, presentation and dissemination of verifiably false or misleading information for the purposes of economic gain or intentionally deceiving the public, which may cause public harm'. Such public harm includes threats to democratic political and policy-making processes as well as to the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security" (Europejski Trybunał Obrachunkowy, 2021, p. 7).

In order to effectively counter climate disinformation, coordinated action in the areas of education, legal regulations and public communication is required, which has been confirmed by the latest research on climate knowledge management (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Climate Disinformation – A Threat to Environmental Policy

Climate disinformation is effective not only because it undermines scientific findings, but above all because it brings the debate from the level of expert knowledge to the realm of emotions and political disputes. "Ninety-seven percent of climatologists acknowledge the consensus on global warming. The debate has shifted from laboratories to the public sphere, where everyday and scientific approaches have become blurred. Content recipients stop having doubts due to an oversupply of authorities who decide matters for them" (Młyńczyk, 2017, p. 173).

Shifting the debate from the realm of science to the public sphere contributes to expert knowledge losing its privileged position. Studies confirm that climate disinformation undermines public trust in scientific consensus, particularly given the overproduction of media and political authority figures (Björnberg et al., 2017).

Thus, disinformation does not fill a knowledge gap, but it actively blocks the translation of scientific knowledge into political decisions. "On 20 June 2025, the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) published a groundbreaking assessment concluding that the greatest barrier to climate action may not be a lack of scientific knowledge, but the global spread of disinformation" (Elbeyi et al., 2025, p. 2).

These findings are consistent with those presented in the English-language literature, which argues that climate disinformation is among primary barriers to evidence-based public policy, hindering institutions' ability to make rational and timely decisions (Vivion et al., 2024).

Disinformation techniques work very effectively, constantly evolving to achieve the intended effect. The total denialism that existed earlier has transformed into strategic skepticism (campaigns focus on questioning the effectiveness or costs of proposed solutions). Disinformation is targeted, with political leaders, officials, and regulatory agencies being the main targets. Automated and coordinated actors (bots and trolls) play a key role in promoting misleading narratives (Elbeyi et al., 2025, p. 5).

According to research on climate disinformation, shifting from overt denialism to delay narratives and strategic skepticism increases the effectiveness of political influence

because it allows specific solutions to be undermined without denying the phenomenon of climate change itself (Treen et al., 2020).

Individuals who question climate change are united by a belief in global conspiracies. The European Union's climate goals have become a central theme of populist disinformation narratives, which most often take the form of disinformation (intentional actions) and misinformation (unintentional actions). They concentrate on trivializing the problem and its consequences. Delay narratives undermine the rationale for mitigation efforts (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Public perception of climate disinformation is not uniform, leading to varied reactions that directly impact the effectiveness of environmental policy. The literature reveals a broad range of attitudes, such as:

- lack of interest – shifting focus to other issues (e.g., health),
- active denial – conscious rejection (denialism, climate denialism),
- belittling – viewing information as exaggerated and consequences as insignificant,
- rigidity – accepting climate change but lacking the will to adjust lifestyle,
- opportunistic use – exploiting what is still available despite awareness of risks,
- dramatization – perceiving the climate situation as catastrophic,
- active preparedness – developing survival skills for extreme environmental conditions,
- burnout – resignation,
- realism – seeking facts and taking small-scale mitigation measures (Gulla et al., 2020).

The diversity of social responses to climate disinformation confirms that these messages have cognitive as well as emotional and behavioral impacts. According to narrative analyses, the effectiveness of disinformation largely stems from the use of simplified narrative patterns rather than fact-based arguments (Zanartu et al., 2024).

Therefore, the effects of climate disinformation are not limited to social perception or individual attitudes. The literature on the subject emphasizes that anti-climate narratives are increasingly being used as a tool in ideological and political struggles, resulting in the systematic ideologization of ecology (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Political Narrative – The Ideologization of Ecology

The ideologization of ecology is among key mechanisms of political instrumentalization of climate change. Individuals who succumb to conspiracy theories often act for the benefit of real interest groups. The following reactions have been identified:

- emotional ideological immunization – when beliefs relate to values or ideology and confrontation with the opposing side reinforces the views of climate deniers;
- ad hoc confirmation bias – the tendency to search for and overestimate facts that support an unfounded hypothesis while ignoring contradictory evidence (Łaszczycza, 2021).

A tendency to deny climate change is characteristic of individuals who refer to authoritarian structures of power. Adherents of extreme beliefs easily radicalize their

views. Polarization and denialism are reinforced by commercialized media coverage. In online communication, the dissemination of false, emotionally charged information (fake news) gains a significant advantage over reliable scientific information. Difficulties in assessing the data on environmental impact facilitate unethical information practices, often linked to deliberate disinformation spread by business groups seeking short-term profit. The position individuals take on environmental protection appears to be strongly linked both to their political beliefs and to personality traits (Łaszczyca, 2021).

Studies on political communication demonstrate that climate debates in the digital sphere are intensified by polarization mechanisms and information bubbles, which reinforce existing beliefs and hinder the acceptance of scientific knowledge (Bassolas et al., 2024). The ideologization of climate narratives is particularly evident amid rising populism in Europe. "Europe, like the entire world, has fully entered the age of populism. In the first two decades of the 21st century, the total number of votes cast for populist parties in Europe doubled. What unites right-wing populists is their search for support by invoking internal and external threats, as well as global 'conspiracies'. EU policies, such as the European Green Deal, have become primary targets of attacks from the populist right" (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023, p. 4).

The links between industry, conservative think tanks, and political actors play a key role in this process.

Alliances between industry and conservative think tanks channel disinformation toward key decision-makers. Climate falsehoods are often expressed by politicians. In Europe, right-wing populist parties also actively oppose climate science (AfD in Germany, Vox in Spain, and the National Rally in France). Media with conservative or right-wing ideological profiles prioritize conspiracy narratives and climate skepticism (Janowska, 2025).

The literature on the subject distinguishes six types of disinformation actors: scientists, governments, political and religious organizations (including think tanks, foundations, and institutes), industry, media (especially right-wing outlets), and the public. These groups form a loosely connected coalition of interests supported by controversial scientists, conservative media, and politicians. Conservative think tanks play a significant role in producing and distributing disinformation. Their discourse is dominated by skepticism, and their credibility is built through the publication of reports presenting a critical approach to climate science (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Attitudes of the public toward climate change are largely shaped by motivated cognition, that is cognitive processes that protect individuals from scientific evidence perceived as ideologically or economically threatening. Worldviews thus play a crucial role in the rejection of climate science (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Populist criticism of the Green Deal does not focus on denying climate change but on the social costs of transformation. Parties such as AfD and Fidesz use climate policy as a pretext to undermine EU legitimacy, reinforcing euroskepticism. The debate increasingly features elements of economic disinformation and emotional appeals linked to lifestyle, work culture, or agriculture. The European Union's climate policy has become a key component of the political narrative of conservative parties in Poland. Right-wing groups frame the EU's energy transition as a threat to energy sovereignty, presenting Brussels as

a center of ideological power. Parties such as AfD, Fidesz, and Lega portray the Green Deal as an instrument of coercion and centralization within the EU. These narratives construct the image of the climate transition as an ‘elitist whim’ detached from social realities.

Radicalization and Eco-terrorism

The climate crisis is progressing faster than most scientists anticipated. Its being real is further amplified by the dominant narrative, marked by expressions such as ‘biodiversity deficit’, ‘sixth mass extinction’, and ‘biological annihilation of life’. The climate debate has witnessed the evolution of concepts from practically neutral to apocalyptic. Terms like ‘climate emergency’ and ‘climate catastrophe’ now dominate, underscoring the gradual but existential nature of the threat. Institutions such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Alliance of World Scientists, and Nicholas Stern’s research team⁴ are upholding this alarmist tone (Ochwat, 2020).

According to studies on climate communication, escalating alarmist language can contribute to the polarization of public debate and lead to the radicalization of attitudes. This is especially true when the message is based on emotion rather than an explanation of the complexities of climate processes (Treen et al., 2020).

Climate-related emotions lose out to the demands of everyday life. The most important feature of climate change – its complexity – disappears in the background, while people want simple solutions and become indifferent when the message is either weak or overly emotional (Tryjanowski, 2020).

Narrative analyses demonstrate that when individuals are exposed to an abundance of emotionally charged messages, some respond with indifference, while others seek oversimplified, radical interpretations which contributes to the intensification of extreme attitudes toward climate policy (Zanartu et al., 2024).

Emotions can drive radical narratives. This has led to the re-emergence of the concept of eco-terrorism in public debate. “According to James F. Jarboe of the FBI, eco-terrorism is any action of a criminal nature involving the use or threatened use of violence against persons or property for ecological and political reasons” (Cheda, 2014, p. 58).

The call for a total shift in the civilizational paradigm, to allow nature to regenerate, was once presented as a necessary condition for moving from the age of economics to the age of ecology. Critics of ecological radicalism stressed that such a philosophy includes hostility toward modernity, cultural leftism, utopian messianism, and anti-capitalism. The literature of ecological extremists featured anti-democratic and authoritarian themes. Radical environmentalists view the ecological crisis as a universal cultural and personal crisis, a crisis of civilization itself. In their view, nature is where all elements (flora and fauna) possess equal intrinsic value.

⁴ *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* is a 700-page study that was prepared for the UK government and published on October 30, 2006, by economist Sir Nicholas Stern. It discusses the impact of climate change and global warming on the global economy.

In Poland, radical actions have taken various forms. The media highlighted the most spectacular cases of environmental blackmail, because that was what much of alleged eco-terrorism amounted to. In many cases, environmental activists were used by lobbyists to defeat competitors (Izak, 2022).

Globally, the number of eco-terrorist incidents has been systematically decreasing. Fewer aggressive pro-environmental actions result from several factors:

1. growing environmental awareness among societies and governments,
2. increased state activity in environmental protection,
3. the observable reality of climate change – global warming has become a fact (Izak, 2022).

This decline confirms the claim that ecological radicalization is not a unidirectional or permanent process, but depends on the political, social, and communicative context, including the way climate issues are presented in public debate (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Today, politicians readily use the term ‘eco-terrorism’ to portray environmentalists as a ‘leftist’ political force that is against civilization. Investors acting without regard for environmental protection also deploy this label, and journalists in some media outlets repeat the accusation (Mączkowski, 2011).

However, empirical data show a clear disproportion between the scale of violence attributed to environmental movements and actual terrorist threats.

According to the website Animal Rights Extremism.info, approximately 2,500 acts described as ‘eco-terrorist’ were recorded worldwide between 2010 and 2019. The same period saw over 750 terrorist attacks with fatalities in Europe, and 79 people were killed in attacks motivated by right-wing ideology in the United States (Schuler, 2024).

Recent spectacular actions by environmental activists have primarily been symbolic and media-oriented. Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and Letzte Generation interfered with museum spaces to draw public attention rather than cause real damage (Chabros, 2023). Interpreting them as ‘eco-terrorism’ is an example of how this concept is expanded for political and disinformation purposes.

Economic Narrative and Economic Interests

Climate disinformation is closely linked to economic interests which results in its structural and long-term nature.

“According to the report by the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), climate action is hindered and delayed by false and misleading information originating particularly from fossil fuel companies, right-wing politicians, and certain states” (Janowska, 2025).

Disinformation content on social media is often created and sponsored by industry actors who spend millions of dollars on publications and advertising (Bąkowicz, 2024).

Studies clearly show that climate disinformation is not spontaneous but rather results from well-funded and coordinated networks. Lewandowsky (2021) highlights the role of conservative think tanks in producing pseudoscientific publications, many of which are not up to scientific review standards.

There is evidence of concerted efforts by interest groups to disseminate disinformation, especially when it comes to health issues that have the potential to motivate policies that would impose a regulatory burden on certain industries (e.g., tobacco manufacturers or the fossil-fuel industry). In 2006, a U.S. federal court ruled that major domestic cigarette manufacturers were guilty of conspiring to deny, distort, and minimize the hazards of smoking cigarettes. Industry groups formed alliances with conservative think tanks, using scientists (typically experts from unrelated domains) as spokespersons (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

Social media have become a significant source of such pseudo-knowledge. Mass-produced and simplistic pop culture begins to shape the public imagination. Irrational messaging, often supported by politicians, is imposed on audiences (Kołodziejczak, 2022).

The European Union also highlights disinformation tied to economic interests, defining it as verifiably false or misleading information that is created and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic processes as well as public goods such as EU citizens' health, the environment or security (Komisja Europejska, 2019).

The movement denying climate change and fueling skepticism regarding it is considered an example of the 'product defense industry' or the 'intentional creation of doubt and ignorance'. This refers to experts, think tanks, and research institutes whose business model is to maintain public belief in the harmlessness of selected products. They manufacture a sense of controversy around expert analyses that could harm certain industries or companies (Bińczyk, 2013).

A crucial, yet often overlooked, aspect of ecological radicalization and climate disinformation is physical violence against environmental activists. The most extreme forms occur in the Global South, particularly in Latin America. Under Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, rhetoric against environmentalists intensified, portraying them as enemies of Brazil's development. Disinformation framed Amazon forest fires as natural events and depicted the EU's Green Deal as a form of neo-colonialism. In this context, disinformation becomes a tool of delegitimization: activists are labeled as foreign agents, enemies of progress, or criminals obstructing development.

Reports from international organizations confirm that violence against environmental defenders is systemic and linked to conflicts over natural resources. According to Global Witness, approximately 200 environmental activists were killed in 2021, including as many as 54 persons killed in Mexico, primarily in disputes over mining and resource exploitation (Sienkiewicz, 2022).

Climate Disinformation in Hybrid Warfare

In the European Union, climate disinformation is increasingly becoming part of the logic of hybrid warfare, in which information is used as a tool for weakening the enemy without resorting to conventional military measures.

“For several years, climate disinformation in the EU has been on the rise, and its intensification coincided with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the EU’s subsequent decision to search for alternative energy suppliers” (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

In NATO’s Security Impact Assessment on climate change, climate disinformation is identified as one of the challenges to NATO’s stability. It weakens NATO’s ability to respond rapidly to events induced by climate change and undermines its long-term operational planning and combat readiness (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

The Russian Federation is exceptionally active in this area, using climate narratives to implement its geopolitical objectives.

“Russia has intensified its disinformation efforts concerning the climate crisis. The increase in activity has been observed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. It targets the entire European Union, with particular emphasis on Poland. Between May 2022 and May 2024, Russia was the primary generator of online communication in discussions on green energy across social media and news platforms. The goal of these activities is to divert attention and resources from efforts that could mitigate climate change” (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, 2025, p. 69).

These actions aim to weaken NATO’s military infrastructure, reduce operational effectiveness, and negatively influence such military elements as installations and strategic environment. Another key element is the exploitation of anti-Green Deal narratives and internal EU tensions as tools not only to undermine the Green Deal but the broader EU integration project. During farmers’ protests in Poland, slogans such as “No to the Green Deal” were accompanied by “No to the EU” and “No to Brussels’ diktat”.

Some instances of climate disinformation are spread by Russia and China, often targeting regions where they seek to expand their influence at the expense of Western states. Russian state media have portrayed emissions-reduction plans as a form of Western imperialism designed to hinder the development of the Global South (Hsu & Myers, 2023).

Poland, the United States, and the European Union

In individual EU member states climate disinformation is being adapted to local political and social conditions.

Populists in Poland have also altered their strategy by promoting delay narratives, with one of their main objectives being to undermine the EU’s decision to achieve climate neutrality. Due to the pro-European attitudes of Polish society, they cannot openly attack the European Union or advocate for Polesxit. Instead, they are adopting indirect tactics, targeting climate policies in particular. The effects of these efforts are visible and measurable. Studies have indicated that higher support for delay narratives in coal-mining regions is not driven by increased radicalization among right-wing voters. The difference lies in the growing acceptance of anti-climate populism among supporters of the Civic Platform (PO) party and, especially, the Left (Lewica). The result of intensive campaigns is not so much that climate deniers solidify their aversion towards climate policies, but that the position of supporters of climate policy softens. Climate and climate policies are

becoming tools wielded by populists and actors hostile to the EU, the tools for polarizing and mobilizing the electorate (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023).

Opposition to climate movements is a significant identity marker of the Polish right. Right-wing climate discourse involves not only polemics with activists but also the outright denial of climate change as a scientific fact. For example, the language used to describe Greta Thunberg is not merely an isolated communication act but, first and foremost, an illustration of a broader political struggle against ideological opponents of the right (Radomski, 2021).

According to studies on populism and political communication, personalizing climate conflicts and making *ad hominem* attacks are effective tools for mobilizing the electorate while distracting attention from substantive debates about public policies (Stockemer & Bordeleau, 2024).

Empirical analyses confirm the scale of the phenomenon. Media monitoring revealed that about one-third of publications on climate and climate policy in Poland contained disinformation or propaganda narratives, particularly in outlets with a distinct ideological bent (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, 2025, p. 71).

Delay narratives in Poland primarily focus on the energy transition and defending fossil fuels, particularly coal. This further reinforces regional and social divisions. Meanwhile, reports by international organizations indicate that the involvement of Polish political parties in climate action is low compared to their EU counterparts (Ranke, 2020).

In contrast, polarization around climate change in the United States is long-term and systemic.

In the 1990s, Republican and Democratic voters showed similar levels of concern about climate change. Since around 2000, a distinct and growing divergence has emerged. By 2016, only 40% of Republicans expressed concern about climate change, compared to 84% of Democrats. Political polarization on climate issues is particularly pronounced in the United States. It reflects two main components: the global and widespread link between right-wing political views and 'climate skepticism', and concrete actions undertaken by segments of American political and economic elites (Lewandowsky, 2021).

"This association is particularly strong in Anglophone countries. (...) A meta-analysis confirmed the presence of the association across 56 nations around the world. (...) the strong association between right-wing political attitudes and climate skepticism represents one of the most robust – and large, up to 50% of variance accounted for – findings in the literature on people's acceptance of science" (Lewandowsky, 2021, p. 3).

Climate denial has become a common feature of many populist movements and far-right European parties. Populist rhetoric often overlaps with conspiracy discourse. Both offer the same interpretative framework based on a polarized worldview that constructs an external threat to the inner group. Conspiracy theories are therefore frequently present in science denial because they allow individuals to avoid confronting compelling scientific consensus by reframing it as a conspiracy among scientists with ulterior motives (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Elite cues are the main factor shaping attitudes toward climate change. In the 1990s, when both Democratic and Republican party leaders pursued joint solutions on climate issues, party affiliation had little influence on climate attitudes. In fact, some conservatives were then more likely than liberals to accept the reality of climate change. However, by 2010 the

issue had become deeply polarized. Data from 2001–2013 identified elite cues (e.g., voting patterns in Congress), amplified by the media, as the strongest determinant of public concern about climate change. Another study found that messages from Democratic elites – almost uniformly supportive of climate policies – steadily increased between 1990 and 2015, while the number of messages from Republican elites decreased. This has had long-term consequences, including increased social polarization (Lewandowsky, 2021).

“During the administration of President George W. Bush, political appointees demonstrably interfered with scientific assessments of climate change, and NASA’s inspector general found in 2008 that in previous years, the agency’s Office of Public Affairs managed the topic of climate change in a manner that reduced, marginalized, or mischaracterized climate change science made available to the general public” (Lewandowsky et al., p. 109).

Since the announcement of the European Green Deal in 2019, climate policy has become a major political fault line in the EU. Although the European Commission has consistently framed the green transition as an opportunity for sustainable development, many populist and nationalist parties – including AfD (Germany), Fidesz (Hungary), and Lega (Italy) – use it to construct anti-EU narratives. In Poland, anti-climate rhetoric serves as a mobilizing tool within identity politics. Climate policy is recast as part of a broader cultural conflict (climate vs. tradition, rural life, and national sovereignty).

An example of this ideological framing reads: “*Green Fraud* is a basic guide to exposing and combating the Marxist ideology disguised as environmental policy. The Green New Deal is simply the old red faction dressed in green. Don’t be fooled – it is nothing more than a New Red Deal. Marc Morano’s book *Green Fraud* is a collection of scientific and political facts about the Green New Deal and other misanthropic and selfish conspiracies of the global elite and their opportunistic or deceived followers” (Wydawnictwo Wektory, n.d.).

Unfounded claims of this type are reinforcing conspiracy theories, social divisions, and harassment. There is an “alarming mobilization to violence” against individuals working on climate issues. The campaign against meaningful emissions reduction is driven by an ecosystem with “‘weird informal allegiances and overlaps’ among countries, corporations and people – all with disparate agendas and motivations but united in their desire to discredit the climate change threat” (Hsu & Myers, 2023).

In this context, the issues of radicalization and violence arise again. Historical examples of narratives surrounding eco-terrorism in the United States demonstrate that the matters of security can be used to delegitimize environmental movements (Tomasiewicz, 2004). At present, similar mechanisms can be observed in Europe, where climate disinformation is becoming part of broader strategies of political destabilization.

CONCLUSION

1. Kołodziejczak argues that we are entering an era of neo-ignorance. The cause lies in rapid scientific and civilizational progress. The vastness of knowledge and the complexity of science and technology make them extremely difficult to assimilate and comprehend, even for educated individuals. Those without sufficient knowledge

resort to absorbing only headlines. Fake news provides simple explanations for extremely complex processes and phenomena. Uncritical assimilation of pseudoscientific information leads to creating personal interpretations that provide a false sense of understanding. Dangerous consequences arise when such neo-ignorant individuals occupy positions of power. This leads to ignorance combined with ideology, where science is replaced by pseudoscience for political purposes (Kołodziejczak, 2022).

2. Climate disinformation produces a number of systemic consequences that extend beyond public communication. It permanently distorts public opinion and the political agenda, influencing social attitudes and decision-making processes. In the long term, disinformation perpetuates a false balance between scientific knowledge and pseudoscientific messages thereby undermining the authority of science and diminishing acceptance of expert findings on climate change. This results in reduced ability of societies to rationally assess risks and support long-term public policies.
3. "The authors of the IPIE report conducted a systematic review, rigorously examining around 300 studies on climate disinformation. Their publication comprehensively assesses who produces it, how it is disseminated, what social impact it has, and how it can be countered. As stated in the summary: 'misleading information has undermined public trust in climate science. This crisis of informational integrity intensifies and deepens the climate crisis'" (Janowska, 2025).
4. "If a majority believes in something that is factually incorrect, the misinformation may form the basis for political and societal decisions that run counter to a society's best interest" (Lewandowsky et al., p. 107).
5. Effects also occur at the individual level. "We can already speak of climate depression in Poland – a chronic fear of destruction resulting from global warming. The flood of information and the fear of the unknown are accompanied by fatigue, which philosopher and sociologist Ewa Bińczyk calls 'ecological numbness'. Other terms that appear include ecological grief and climate trauma" (Lebda, 2020).
6. Counteracting disinformation is difficult. This difficulty results partly from cognitive variables in every individual that make disinformation 'sticky'.⁵ People more readily accept statements that align with their worldview or ideology, which plays a key role in the persistence of disinformation.
7. In order to effectively respond to climate disinformation not only does the amount of available information need to be increased but the way it is communicated needs to change as well. Public institutions' ability to quickly and clearly communicate knowledge about climate change and energy transition is crucial. Failure to address the information crisis results in both the public and political decision-makers making decisions based on incomplete or distorted data.

⁵ 'Sticky' information refers to content that is highly memorable, easily spread, and difficult to erase or correct, even when it is later disproved. 'Stickiness' describes the ability of false information to become permanently embedded in people's beliefs and attitudes.

8. Social media significantly amplifies the reach and speed of climate disinformation by linking it to other ideological narratives and conspiracy theories. To curb this phenomenon an interdisciplinary approach needs to be taken that combines education, legal regulations, technological solutions, and social psychology expertise. However, the effectiveness of these measures is limited by the existing socioeconomic balance of power, which favors maintaining the status quo.
9. The persistence of climate disinformation is largely due to its ability to elicit emotional responses. The emotionality of a message, rather than its factual accuracy, increases the likelihood of its further dissemination. Understanding these mechanisms is fundamental to designing effective communication strategies and is in the public interest.
10. Disinformation has accompanied humanity since the beginning of time, but recently the scale and speed at which disinformation is distributed has changed significantly. This analysis confirms that populist parties use climate policy, European Green Deal in particular, as a tool for mobilizing the electorate and polarizing public opinion. Their narratives are based on oversimplifications and emotional appeals and serve the purpose of building political capital rather than conducting substantive debates.
11. Political consequences for the European Union and the project of integration are multi-dimensional:
 - erosion of legitimacy – climate policy is becoming a symbol of ‘Brussels’ coercion’,
 - rise of euroskepticism – the Green Deal is becoming a pretext for anti-EU narratives,
 - political polarization – climate is becoming a worldview battleground,
 - weakened EU agency – disinformation is undermining the EU’s ability to implement climate policies and respond effectively to global challenges.

In conclusion, political climate-related disinformation extends far beyond environmental discourse. It functions as a mechanism weakening the EU’s capacity to act as a global climate leader and as a tool systematically undermining European integration. In the long term, combating climate disinformation is not only an ecological imperative – it is a critical component of defending democracy and the future of the European project.

This analysis confirms the research hypothesis posited in the introduction whereby the climate narrative, which is simplified, polarized, and strongly ideological, has become a tool of political struggle and an element of identity mobilization for political actors. The study has demonstrated that climate disinformation is not random or marginal, but rather an instrument of political influence that is deliberately used to delegitimize the European Union’s climate policy and, indirectly, the project of European integration itself. An analysis of populist narratives, economic interests, psychological mechanisms, and the context of hybrid warfare empirically and analytically confirms the hypothesis that climate has been instrumentalized as an ideological fault line.

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