



FLAME WARS

Misinformation and Wildfire in Canada's Climate Conversation

2024

Re.Climate
COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE



Centre for
TECHNOLOGY
and DEMOCRACY



Climate Action
Against Disinformation

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Re.Climate

COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

Re.Climate is Canada's centre for training, research and strategy on climate change communication and engagement at Carleton University.



Centre for MEDIA,
TECHNOLOGY
and DEMOCRACY

The Centre for Media, Technology, and Democracy is an interdisciplinary research organization housed at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University. Its work is dedicated to understanding and responding to the social, political, and policy challenges posed by the evolving information ecosystem and digital technologies.



Climate Action
Against Disinformation

Climate Action Against Disinformation is a global coalition of over 50 leading climate and anti-disinformation organisations demanding robust, coordinated and proactive strategies to deal with the scale of the threat of climate misinformation and disinformation.



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Cover: A tree burns during a prescribed fire on the ʔaq'am community's territory near Cranbrook, BC. Prescribed fires like this one are an important tool for reducing the potential damage of a naturally occurring wildfire, something experts say Canada needs to see much more of. PHOTO: JESSE WINTER



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2023, as Canada’s forests burned, false and misleading information surged into online conversations about the wildfires. References to lasers, drones, weather control, eco-terrorism, and state-driven arson circulated widely as people sought information on evacuation, support services, loved ones, and fellow residents. The chaos affected political leaders managing the crisis, firefighting, evacuation routes, media reporting, and, of course, people making hard decisions about their health and the safety of their communities.

Working as a group with expertise in digital networks, climate communication, and misinformation, researchers at Carleton University’s Re.Climate, McGill’s Centre for Media, Technology, and Democracy (MTD), McGill’s Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO), and Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD) investigated what happened by mapping Canada’s climate conversation on Twitter/X. We set out to understand the information environment during “the most devastating wildfires in Canada’s history” (The Editorial Board, 2024), how it shaped climate conversations, and what to expect with fires to come.

Our key findings include:

- ▶ The online conversation about wildfires surged initially in early May within the **ALBERTA** group. The most widely shared posts in this community criticized the United Conservative Party (UCP) for its lack of preparedness with activity peaking on May 6 when a state of emergency was declared. **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** accounts responded by amplifying content from fringe users that claimed arsonists, not climate change, caused the fires.
- ▶ The online conversation surged to its highest point in early June with accounts in the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group driving engagement as the impacts of wildfire reached U.S. cities and drew international attention. In this period, posts from higher follower accounts were shared for suggesting the fires were being used for political purposes to justify climate measures. The narrative became more

conspiratorial with claims alleging that eco-terrorists, left extremists, and governments set the fires to advance a climate agenda, prompting attention in legacy media. It spiked again in mid-August with the declaration of a state of emergency in BC and commitment of military assistance to the province by Trudeau. Civil society, provincial, and left-leaning groups retweeted posts emphasizing the unprecedented nature of the situation, support for firefighters, and the worsening impacts of climate change, often with evidence debunking the arson conspiracy.

- ▶ Networks formed during the pandemic are widening the scope of adversarial narratives targeting public health to include climate and energy policy. This includes the incorporation of crises associated with climate impacts into narratives that are distrustful of emergency responses by government. These narratives run together skepticism of pandemic and climate emergency planning on the grounds that experts and officials are overly alarmist or using crisis as a pretext to expand political control. There are different themes and touchpoints for these stories as they incorporate various climate solutions, policies, and crises, but they typically challenge expressions of climate concern as overwrought, politically expedient, or part of a globalist agenda.
- ▶ There is an ongoing effort by some members of the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** community to mobilize farmers against Canadian climate policy. This has failed to gain traction in Canada’s climate conversation despite the involvement of elite politicians, influencers, and right-wing media, including Pierre Poilievre, Jordan Peterson, and National Post news outlets, and the sharing of misinformation about climate policies important to farming communities (fertilizer bans/mandates).
- ▶ The carbon tax dominated the climate conversation online in the lead-in to the 2024 wildfire season. This is different from the 2023 wildfire season, when a wider range of subjects were discussed.



INTRODUCTION



In June 2023, as Canada’s forests burned, false claims about arson, terrorism, and government conspiracy surged on Twitter, spilling misinformation across social media and shaping political conversations, including with the premier of Alberta and on the floor of Canada’s House of Commons. As journalist Justin Ling [pointed out](#), conspiratorial references to lasers, drones, and weather control likely reached millions of people as “alternative explanations” (CBC News: The National, 2023) for “the [most devastating wildfires in Canada’s history](#)” (The Editorial Board, 2024).

Many of these echoed a baseless “government is the arsonist” conspiracy.

For example:

- Former hockey player [Theo Fleury](#) tweeted, “Arson is not climate change it’s done on purpose to push climate communism. Our government is probably responsible.”
- Far-right politician [Maxime Bernier](#) followed days later, “I bet a good portion of the wildfires raging across the country were started by green terrorists who want to give their climate change campaign a little boost. The far left are experts at inventing and creating crises that they can then exploit.”
- [Unacceptable Canadian girl](#) offered some “Friendly reminders” bundling climate misinformation together with culture wars content.

The spike in climate misinformation and its conspiratorial turn surprised many, including journalists, but for those directly affected, it was more than an online curiosity or frustrating distraction.

- [Residents in Yellowknife](#) struggled with misinformation in trying to track the fire and plan according with one resident saying “that’s definitely been a concern for everybody, because I know there’s been a lot of misinformation about where it is and what’s going on with it” (Evan, 2023).

- A frustrated Alberta mayor met with press in a local hockey arena to urge people to stop sharing rumours and misinformation affecting his community.
- Indigenous communities displaced by fires that threatened their lands and culture were drawn into culture wars disputes by influencers angry with legacy media.
- Those responsible for the safety of firefighting and emergency service personnel had to navigate claims of government overreach and threats of violence including the BC Wildfire Service, which withdrew firefighters in North Shuswap in response to security concerns, as a “Convoy of Truth and Freedom” coordinated on social media and appeared to confront police securing an evacuation area (Labere, 2023).
- An anti-government conspiracist in Quebec committed arson while falsely claiming the government was setting fires as part of an elite global agenda (Serebrin, 2024).

In this report, we examine what happened during this critical moment by mapping Canada’s climate conversation on Twitter/X. Our goal was to understand the dynamics of false and misleading content during the 2023 wildfires. We explore whether this was an isolated incident, part of the internet’s ongoing love of conspiracy theories, or whether it reflects the growing influence of a small group of voices eager to delegitimize official narratives when public concern about climate change swells. We also investigate whether this group is operating largely within Canadian conversations or linking to American and European communities.

In exploring these questions, we observed an engagement pattern during the wildfires that is found elsewhere. Online interactions during crisis are targeted by fringe accounts posting conspiratorial content. These posts are amplified by politicians and influencers with agenda-setting power to disperse doubt and distrust into wider climate conversations. While these efforts often fail to scale beyond **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** conversations, as in the 2024 farmer protest example discussed below, the 2023 wildfires were a different story.

In May, fears about arson were amplified in an isolated part of the conversation, apparently in response to criticism of the Alberta government for their approach to the fires. By early June, these “alternative explanations” included full-fledged conspiracies linking wildfires to the “climate agenda” and use of emergencies as a pretext for government overreach. Decontextualized images, outdated news stories, and irrelevant and misleading facts were all mixed together, often cherry-picked, and amplified by influencers with wider reach. These activities boosted an arson narrative malleable enough to deflect explanations associating wildfires and climate change or draw in conspiracists with stories of state arson as a cover for climate policy. The distinction between human-caused fires and arson was muddled with commentators suggesting that law enforcement (not climate action) is the solution needed to curb the unprecedented wildfires burning in the country.

It is possible to smile at some of the more extreme examples discussed below. Or to wonder at the unique nature of the online conversation around the fires. After all, the arson narrative circulating in the Canadian conversation mirrors online interactions during previous fires in Australia, Europe, and the United States, including in Maui later in 2023. While the conversations around the Canada and Maui fires were much more conspiratorial than these previous instances (CAAD, 2023 July), often emphasizing the use of crisis as a pretext for surveillance and elite control of populations, engagement with climate conspiracies receded as the fires died down. It is fair to wonder if concerns with climate misinformation are the most pressing problem or whether other aspects of the situation are more deserving of our attention.

Unfortunately, the rumours and falsehoods shared during the 2023 wildfires were not confined to conspiratorial corners of the internet. Moreover, those endangered by false accounts of the fires deserve a better explanation of what happened to them last season. Misinformation appeared to translate into physical disruptions of emergency response last summer, including a confrontation with authorities on an evacuation route, a decision to withdraw firefighters defending communities, and even arson by a conspiracist in Quebec blaming the fires on a government plot.



WHAT'S HAPPENING?



PHOTO: DAVID JACKSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

As our mapping indicates, there is a distinct **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** pole of the online climate conversation. This has been visible in Canada for several years now, as demonstrated by the important work of Shane Gunster, William Carroll, and their colleagues. Their [research](#) has tracked the integration of these digital conversations with right-wing news media and wider ideological alignment with Canada's fossil fuel industry in the context of climate denial and obstructionism more generally (Gunster, 2022; Carroll, 2021). This wider network of obstruction includes ad agencies, PR firms, lobbyists, think tanks, paid pundits, sponsored news media, trade organizations, front groups, political parties, and is the main obstacle to energy transition in Canada.

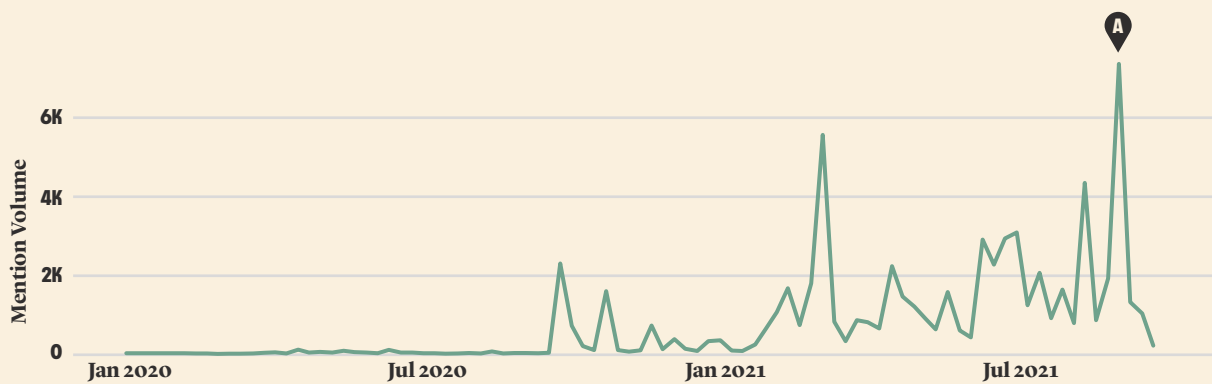
At the same time, there has been a surge of new voices into these conversations, often bridging the feelings of distrust and unfairness stemming from COVID-19 pandemic policies into climate and energy conversations. The [15-minute city](#) conspiracy, for example, bridges grievances with the public health responses of government into municipal actions addressing air pollution and mobility (CAAD, 2023 June). This narrative builds on themes of state overreach, elite power, technological surveillance, and inequitable access to resources, which are legitimate concerns in a world with historic inequities in the distribution of wealth and opportunity. Those competing for political attention leverage the memories and trauma of the pandemic, when governments upended our lives with lockdowns and mandates, to warn of a future in which one's capacity to make decisions, move around, or even exist is at threat (King, 2024). In this respect, climate and pandemic emergencies are often run together. It is particularly interesting to observe how the polarization of climate conversations visible in 2019 maps onto the rise in climate emergency declarations made by governments that year (Falkenberg et al., 2022).

The wildfire arson and 15-minute city conspiracies found in Canada’s climate conversation trace back to misinformation circulating in the 2021 federal election campaign. This story suggested that the Trudeau government, if re-elected in 2021, would institute “climate lockdowns,” an idea circulated initially on Twitter claiming that the confinement and control experienced during the pandemic would expand with public acceptance of the climate crisis (Maharasingam-Shah & Vaux, 2021; Tworek & Solomun, 2023).

In “Is Trudeau Planning A Climate Lockdown,” a pseudo-news commentary-style video posted to YouTube in June 2021, Conservative MP Cheryl Gallant raised suspicions about World Economic Forum (WEF) socialists seeking a reset of the global economy (Gallagher & O’Connor, 2023). The public health crisis had been ameliorated by the effectiveness of vaccines, Gallant argued, yet global elites were unwilling to relinquish government control. Instead, climate issues would be reframed as a climate emergency, and climate lockdowns, or confinements for reducing carbon emissions rather than infection, would follow if the Liberal Party formed the next government.

The conspiracy theory became a top-level issue in the campaign when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asked then Conservative Party leader, Erin O’Toole, to address the matter. The controversy brought the conspiracy to mainstream media attention, and references on Twitter surged to the highest recorded volumes to date (Maharasingam-Shah and Vaux, 2021; Tworek and Solomun, 2023). While amplified by efforts to debunk and remove the conspiracy’s impacts from political discussions, a retrospective analysis suggests that a clear majority (56%) of those exposed to the story found it truthful (Bridgman et al., 2022, p. 24; Tworek and Solomun, 2023).

Twitter mentions following media questioning of Erin O’Toole



Graph of Twitter mentions over time—spike marked 'A' represents surge in discussion following media questioning of Canadian Conservative Party leader O’Toole. (Source: Maharasingam- Shah & Vaux, 2021)

Twitter mentions following media questioning of Erin O’Toole—filtered to accounts self-identifying as located in Canada



The effect of the coverage is even more striking when a filter is applied to include only tweets from accounts that self-identify as located in Canada. (Source: Maharasingam- Shah & Vaux, 2021)

Climate misinformation is now endemic online. It spiked with the restructuring of Twitter in 2022, mostly notably with #climatescam, but circulates on all major platforms including Facebook, YouTube, TikTok as well as lesser-known sites and messaging apps. The wildfires, as a crisis connected to climate change, brought these contentions more firmly into Canadian conversations and grounded them in a high-stakes issue that evolved over the course of the summer. In this respect, accounts in the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** community used interest in the fires to leverage those who are distrustful of official narratives from the government (who are often justified in their skepticism) into climate denial content and a wider engagement with conspiracies (often baseless in their manipulation of evidence) that, outside of these opportunities, remain confined to ideologically narrow aspects of the anti-Establishment conversation.

In our analysis of the climate conversation, we present three sets of findings.

- First, we share a map to help differentiate the main communities active in Canada's climate conversation and their relationship to each other.
- Next, we share our analysis of the activity of these communities as they engaged online with the 2023 wildfires throughout the season.
- Finally, we share an analysis of German farmer protests as they registered in the Canadian climate conversation to contrast the engagement pattern with the previous example and investigate the importance of foreign influencers.

CAAD definition

Climate disinformation and misinformation refers to deceptive or misleading content that:

- Undermines the existence or impacts of climate change, the unequivocal human influence on climate change, and the need for corresponding urgent action 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, in order to erode trust in climate science, climate-focused institutions, experts, and solutions; or
- Falsely publicises efforts as supportive of climate goals that in fact contribute to climate warming or contravene the scientific consensus on mitigation or adaptation.



CANADA'S CLIMATE CONVERSATION ONLINE

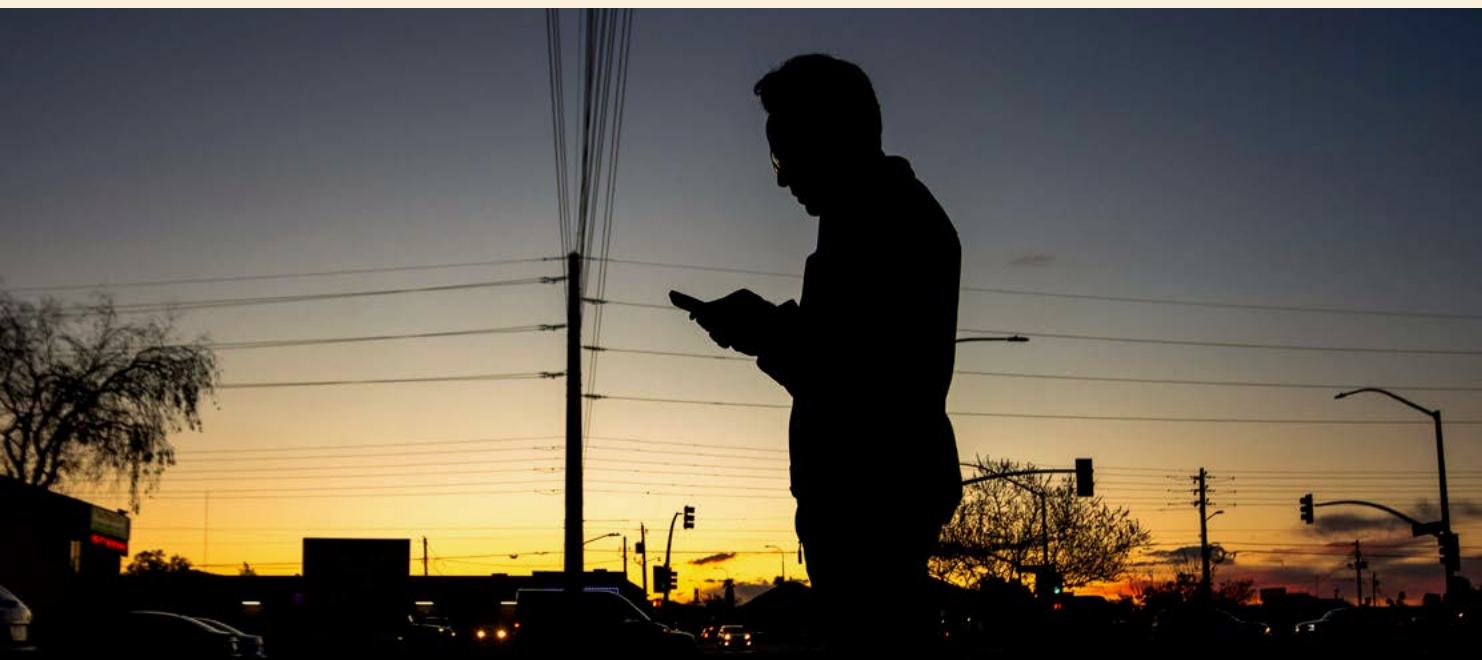


PHOTO: AP PHOTO/TY ONEIL

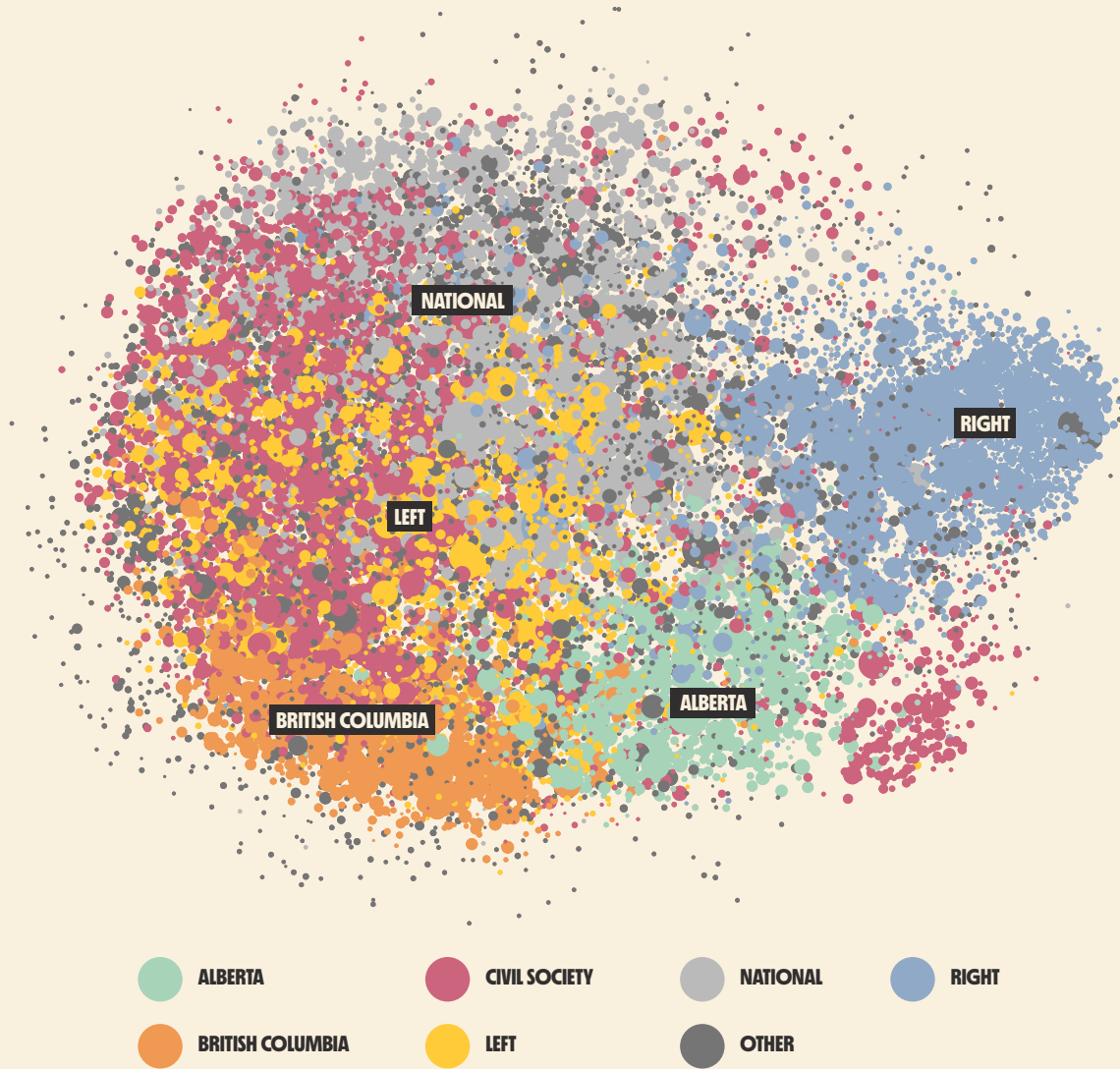
To better understand what is happening online, we identified the accounts, events, key terms, and hashtags to map the Canadian climate conversation on Twitter/X.

We used the Media Ecosystem Observatory panel of likely-Canadian Twitter/X users. In early 2021, the Observatory collected all followers and follows of approximately 1600 Twitter accounts of Canadian politicians, journalists covering Canadian politics, and Canadian advocacy organizations. For every user that followed these accounts, the Observatory collected 100 tweets and developed a likely-Canadian scale based on what was tweeted as well as information in their biographies and self-location. This yielded 2.6 million accounts that were either Canadian accounts or were consequential for Canadian politics. Their tweets were collected by the Observatory from January 1, 2020 to March 31, 2024.

The research team for this report then identified a set of climate-related keywords (e.g. wildfire, climate, carbon tax) and examined all tweets posted by those accounts from January 1 to March 31, 2024. Any account that used the keywords at least 6 times was included, yielding a sample of approximately 13 000 accounts of which 11 620 were active when data was pulled for this report. The map (see below) consists of those accounts that have been divided into seven groups.

In the map, each node (or dot) represents an X account. The size of the node reflects the number of followers that account has (as a proxy for influence). The accounts were computationally clustered into 59 distinct communities based on followership, online interests, and activity, such as sharing of the same content or engagement with similar accounts, and then manually assessed and labelled by those with network and climate communication expertise. Those 59 communities were then collapsed into seven groups. Nodes positioned closer together share higher numbers of follower relationships and are more likely to engage in the same conversations; those situated further apart have fewer connections and are less likely to interact or engage with the same content. The purpose of this analysis is to determine which clusters of connection are reasonably distinct (having more robust connections among themselves than with the wider network).

The Climate Conversation in Canada, in English, March–April 2024



A network map showing the groups engaged in the climate conversation on Twitter/X. It is a mostly centralized map, indicating that accounts are engaging with much of the same content, shaped significantly by political elites, but with a **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group pulling away.

| GROUP | SHARE OF MAP |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| CIVIL SOCIETY | 18.6% |
| NATIONAL | 16.0% |
| RIGHT-WING/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT | 14.7% |
| LEFT | 12.6% |
| BRITISH COLUMBIA | 6.5% |
| ALBERTA | 6.1% |
| OTHER | 25.5% |

Network analysis

- The climate conversation in the map is dominated by political elites and media with high-profile accounts. Justin Trudeau is the most influential account in the climate conversation. CPC leader Pierre Poilievre has exceptionally high influence in the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group but is more limited to this part of the climate conversation. In this respect, the **NATIONAL** conversation is largely monopolized by elite politicians but also operates as a bridge between or mediator of conversations that move among other communities.
 - This is consistent with [prior research](#) on Canada’s information environment that reviewed Canadians’ use of other platforms and concluded that influence is highly concentrated (led by an elite minority) (Bridgman et al., 2023).
 - The wider climate conversation is geographically differentiated and reflects the federalism of Canada more so than the ideological polarization that is often evident in the United States. Notably, though, there is a **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group that is distinct and isolated in their conversations, especially in their attention paid to right-wing and conspiratorial stories of UK and European climate policy.
- Jordan Peterson and Margaret Atwood rank among the top 20 most influential accounts in the map.
- There is a distinct segment in the civil society conversation that engages frequently with accounts and subjects associated with hockey culture in western provinces.
- It is unclear to what degree online engagement is shaped by the sharing and consumption of news content, which has been affected by recent changes in the operation of large platforms.

Most influential Canadian accounts in the climate conversation map

| NAME | HANDLE | GLOBAL FOLLOWERS | % OF MAP FOLLOWING |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Justin Trudeau | JustinTrudeau | 6.5 million | 42% |
| CBC | CBC | 750.2k | 20% |
| Jagmeet Singh | theJagmeetSingh | 628.1k | 20% |
| Toronto Star | TorontoStar | 1.2 million | 20% |
| Pierre Poilievre | PierrePoilievre | 954.1k | 19% |
| Canada's CPHO | CPHO_Canada | 301.6k | 19% |
| Catherine McKenna | cathmckenna | 184.2k | 18% |
| CanadianPM | CanadianPM | 714.3k | 18% |
| Chantal Hébert | ChantalHbert | 280.2k | 17% |
| Environment Canada | environmentca | 459.7k | 17% |

Group analysis

To better understand the influencers, engagement patterns, and content of each group, we reviewed the activity of the most followed accounts, reposts, and common climate hashtags in each group between March 4 and April 4, 2024.

The main map groups discussing climate issues formed primarily around users who followed regional and national government accounts, politicians, and media.

- Based on hashtags and top reposts from March 4 to April 4, 2024, the carbon tax issue dominated the climate-related conversation among members of most groups.
- **BRITISH COLUMBIA** members were also focused on the fossil fuel industry. Prominent discussions focused on a lawsuit against FortisBC, net-zero goals, and fossil fuel subsidies impacting BC.

Accounts in the RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT group engage with users focused on the Conservative Party, right-wing politics, and anti-Establishment discourse, all of which often deny climate issues and oppose government policies addressing climate change.

- Based on the top-followed accounts, this group tended to follow Conservative Party figures and supporters, anti-Establishment libertarians, and COVID skeptics.
- The group's large size, well-connected members, and unique pole in the map indicate that the right-wing portion of the climate discourse is extensive but largely isolated from the main climate discussion. However, some of the group members overlap with members of the **NATIONAL** group, providing a bridge to influence the climate conversation.

Several groups engage with national left-wing political and environmental advocacy movements.

- Environmental advocacy segments appear to form a subcommunity consisting of prominent environmental experts, organizations, activists, and policymakers in **CIVIL SOCIETY**, **LEFT**, and **BC** conversations. It is small but has influential and well-connected members that overlap with regional and left-wing communities. Based on hashtags and top reposts, the subcommunity has the most diverse climate discourse engaging with issues such as carbon pricing, the fossil fuels industry, and clean energy.
- Based on the top-followed accounts in the table above, the left-wing community was largely focused on non-climate social justice and other progressive causes. Based on hashtags and top reposts, this community did not directly engage in climate issues outside of defending the carbon tax.

Narrative analysis

During the period of mapping, the carbon tax issue dominated discussions. With the exceptions of environmentally oriented clusters within the civil society and BC communities, other climate issues struggled for attention and were subsumed by a highly politicized discussion of carbon taxes or non-climate-related issues.

- Outside of the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group, the map's communities were generally aligned in their support of the carbon tax as necessary to reduce emissions. The **NATIONAL** group had the most mixed conversation, reflecting the presence of liberal and conservative politicians.
- Members of the **ALBERTA**, **BRITISH COLUMBIA**, and **CIVIL SOCIETY** groups mocked conservatives' "axe the tax" protests, pointing out their "hypocrisy" regarding the policy. Users were critical of oil companies' corporate greed regarding carbon tax. United Conservative Party (UCP) leaders Pierre Poilievre and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith were often the target of criticism.
- Criticism of the government's carbon tax policies was one of the top overall narratives that users in the right-wing community engaged with. The **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group was supportive of Poilievre's threat to

call a vote of non-confidence if his demands to “axe the tax” are not met. Some attacked the expert community and media outlets such as the Toronto Star as “paid” by “the liberals.” Many criticized the tax saying it is ineffective, while unnecessarily burdening Canadians. The tax is often paired with accusations of political conspiracy and calls for Prime Minister Trudeau to resign. Although unengaged in the map’s climate discourse, Elon Musk is a key influencer, posting all 15 of the top posts in this community (media reporting suggests Twitter’s systems were reengineered in 2023 to amplify engagement with Musk’s posts (Schiffer, 2024).

Discussions about climate issues are more diverse in the BC community and included a focus on the fossil fuel industry and greenwashing.

- Some members discussed the extensive tradeoffs that would be required in order to support LNG expansion in BC.
- One of the most prominent discussions focused on a FortisBC lawsuit, in which environmental groups and BC residents have sued the company for misleading consumers, or “greenwashing,” about the fuel’s climate impact.
- Environmental Defence drove a wider discussion critical of the Canadian government’s subsidy of the fossil fuel industry worth \$18.6 billion, claiming it undermines climate policies.



PHOTO BY ARTUR WIDAK / NURPHOTO VIA AP

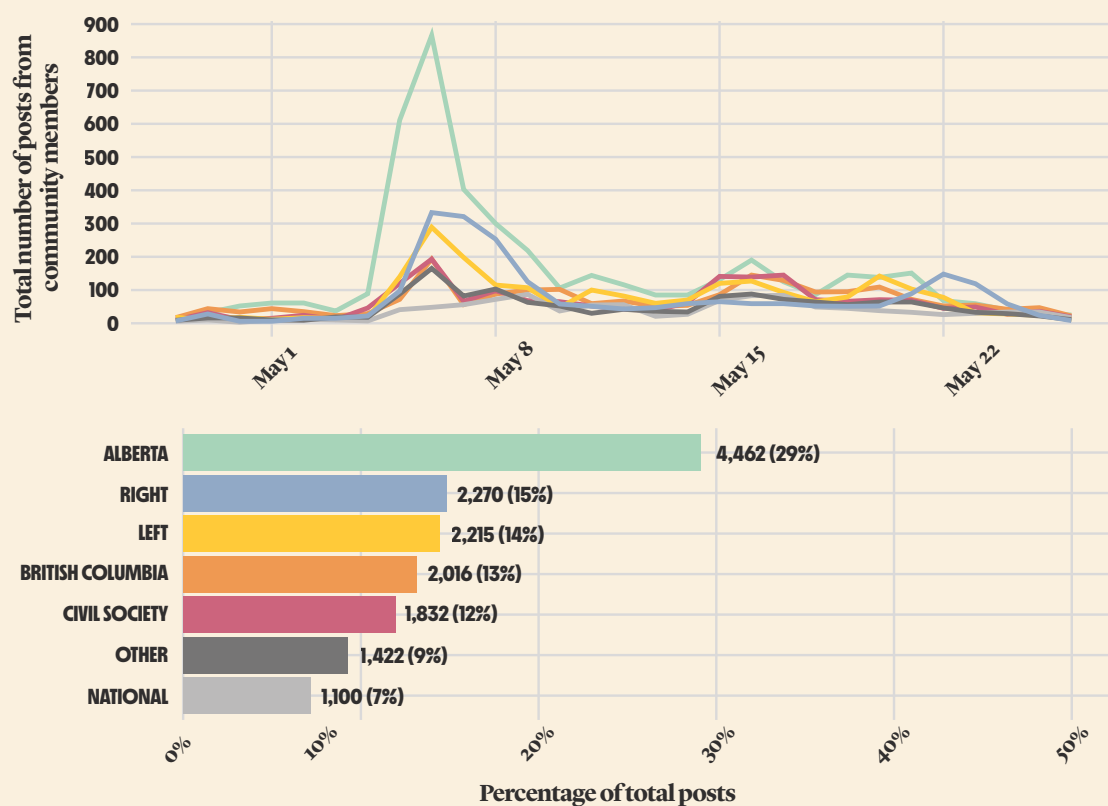


THE 2023 WILDFIRES IN CANADA'S CLIMATE CONVERSATION

We examined the posts and engagement of communities with the 2023 wildfires by tracing the timeline of activity, shared objects (phrases, URLs, hashtags), narratives, and tactics used to attract attention.

Period 1: April 28–May 26, 2023

Wildfire tweets by group



Alberta-based accounts were the most active during the initial surge of wildfire-related activity online. The most popular posts were from journalists and politicians criticizing the United Conservative Party (UCP) government for budget cuts that exacerbated the crisis.

- Accounts in the **ALBERTA** conversation drove the initial surge of activity, with 29% of total posts. Activity peaked on May 6 when the government declared a state of emergency over the wildfires (BBC News, 2023).
- These posts criticized the UCP government for cuts to wildfire preparedness and for not suspending campaigning during the state of emergency.
- The top shared content were news article URLs discussing budget cuts that affected the province’s ability to respond to wildfires.
- Hashtags #climatechange and #climateemergency were shared to link the wildfires to climate concerns.

Right-wing and anti-establishment accounts started amplifying posts from fringe accounts with small followings that claimed arsonists caused the fires and downplayed the significance of climate change.

- Accounts in **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** conversations promoted the misleading narrative that the fires were intentionally set, although posts from this community accounted for only 15% of total traffic in this period.
- The top retweeted accounts pushing this narrative were conservative accounts with low followings (with few exceptions). However, three out of the top 10 retweets and five out of the top 10 URLs leveraged reports from conservative blogs and mainstream news media of suspects allegedly arrested for arson.
- Most overt references to climate change and #climatechange originated in the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group and often mocked, denigrated, or downplayed concerns with the role of climate change to promote an arson narrative instead.

Hashtags, key phrases, and retweeted accounts

| TOP HASHTAGS | TOP KEY PHRASES | TOP RETWEETED ACCOUNTS |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| #ableg | wildfires | @JasonOnTheDrums |
| #abwildfire | province | @KyleBrittainWX |
| #abpoli | wildfire smoke | @cspotweet |
| #abfire | Fires | @RachelNotley |
| #alberta | Fire | @ABDanielleSmith |
| #wildfires | homes | @gilmcgowan |
| #yeg | wildfire | @YukonStrong |
| #yyc | morning | @TheBreakdownAB |
| #abfires | control | @Jordan4MLA |
| #wildfire | climate change | @or_bit_eye |
| #cdnpoli | home | @RickFuerst |
| #albertawildfires | support | @artcgreen |
| #abwildfires | arson | @ctvedmonton |
| #abvote | smoke | @YourAlberta |
| #climatechange | world | @WesternStd |

*While most shared content in this initial period was critical of the UCP government’s wildfire response, arson claims from **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** accounts are discernable.*

Top URLs

| | |
|--|--|
| alberta.ca | Alberta Emergency Alert <i>Alberta.ca</i> |
| thenarwhal.ca | 'A skeleton crew': UCP cuts led to Alberta wildfire disaster <i>The Narwhal</i> |
| pressprogress.ca | Alberta's UCP Government Has Cut Tens of Millions of Dollars From Wildfire Preparedness Programs <i>Press Progress</i> |
| toronto99.com | Some Alberta fires caused by arsonists, one suspect in custody—RCMP (UPDATED) <i>Toronto 99</i> |
| facebook.com | The Non-Political Barrhead/Westlock Aware <i>Facebook Groups</i> |
| globalnews.ca | RCMP charge Alberta woman with 32 counts of arson after spring wildfires <i>Global News</i> |
| edmonton.ctvnews.ca | Man charged with arson in 10 fires in northern Alberta <i>CTV News</i> |
| edmontonjournal.com | Alberta wildfires: 13K forced from homes, out-of-province firefighters en route to help <i>Edmonton Journal</i> |
| calgaryherald.com | Braid: Smith steps up on wildfires, but shuns the poppy <i>Calgary Herald</i> |
| edmontonjournal.com | Cold Lake area man facing 10 arson charges after string of wildfires, blazes <i>Edmonton Journal</i> |

Top URLs shared criticize the UCP government for budget cuts that degraded the provincial response to the wildfire emergency, yet four of the top shared articles boost the arson explanation with claims that the fires were intentionally set and arsonists have been apprehended.

Top retweets

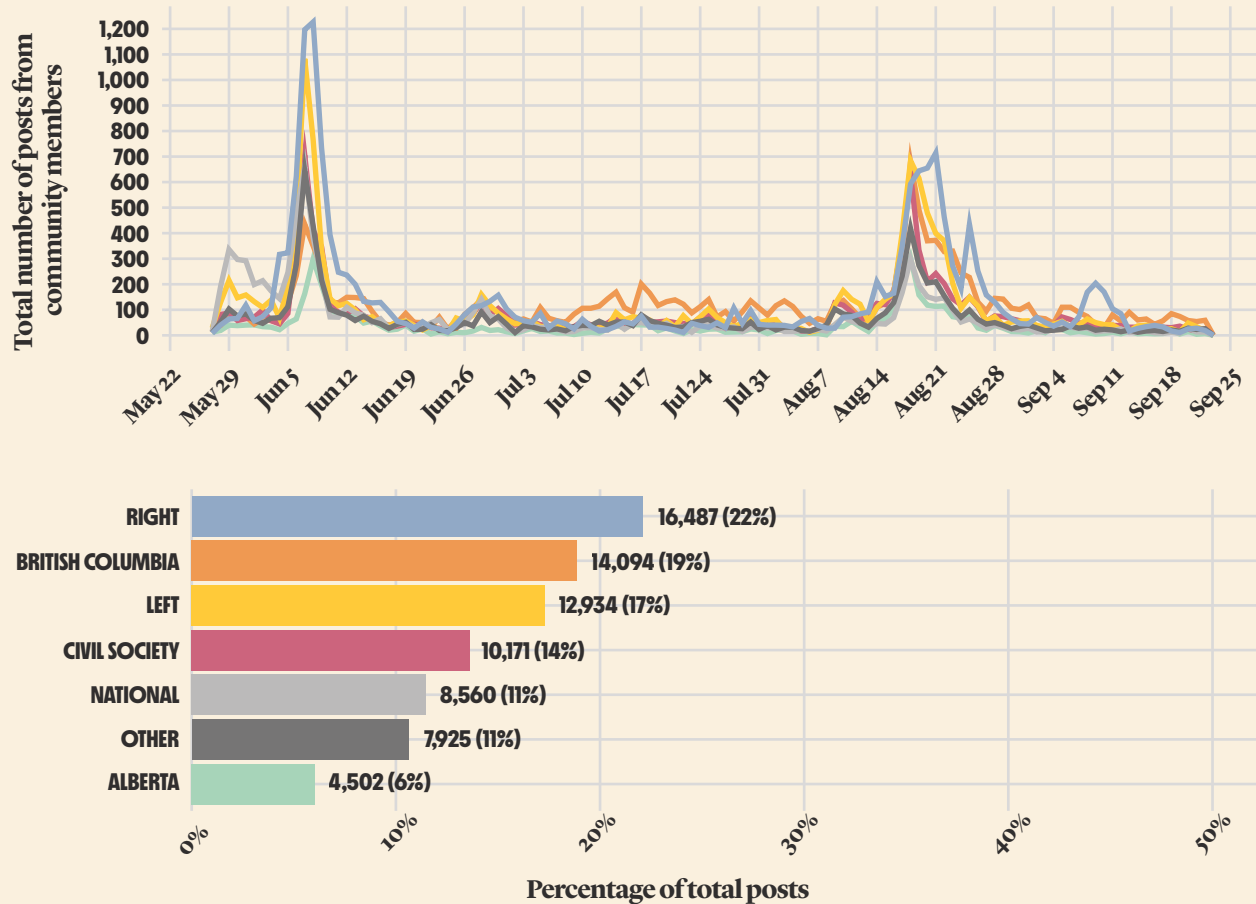
| | |
|---|--|
| KyleBrittainWX | RT @KyleBrittainWX: Incredible satellite imagery over western Canada this morning. Most of the province of Alberta sits beneath the most solid blanket of wildfire smoke I've ever seen. #abfire #ABfires https://t.co/XxQZd5VCiZ |
| JasonOnTheDrums | 🔥🇨🇦 Alberta is on fire. Alberta had one of the BEST wildfire programs in the world until 2019. Despite MULTIPLE warnings, the @Alberta_UCP cut TENS of MILLIONS from firefighting programs. We're now seeing the consequences Let's review 6 MAJOR UCP wildfire cuts! |
| YukonStrong | RT @YukonStrong: Here's one of the #antifa church arsonists in Barrhead. Let's make her famous folks. She's from Camrose apparently. #ABWildfire #Arson #AlbertaWildfires #Alberta #ABPoli https://t.co/UPXfzMaU3G https://t.co/zWkm5trQ8b |
| RickFuerst | RT @RickFuerst: "Released with conditions" They held Tamara Lich in jail for 48 days for mischief. But trying to burn an entire Province down you walk out the same day. Canada is a fucking clown country. RCMP charge Alberta woman with 32 counts of arson. https://t.co/TIOhBRvlwO |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <u>Georgia89773296</u> | RT @Georgia89773296: Man charged with arson in 10 fires in northern Alberta CTV News Here's the cause of the fires! A man with arson on his mind,,,,,NOT CLMATE CHANGE! ARSON DELIBERATELY SET FIRES! Life without parole for this one! #abpoli #cdnpoli https://t.co/DmjCglOosC |
| <u>MsLutzmann</u> | RT @MsLutzmann: Imagine fleeing your home as a massive wildfire threatens to destroy everything you own, and when you look to your premier for information and support you see this. #abvote #ableg #abpoli #yeg #yyc https://t.co/29JALpnVy3 |
| <u>BCKOR</u> | RT @BCKOR: This article is so damning... The teams tasked with preventing and fighting wildfires across AB have been overwhelmingly unprepared for this year's wildfires, a direct result of the UCP's efforts to dismantle and defund AB Wildfire." https://t.co/ZwVtHpMxjX |
| <u>or_bit_eye</u> | RT @or_bit_eye: 🇺🇸🇨🇦🔥Terrifying evolution of the more than 80 current #Wildfires in #Alberta, as captured by #GOES18 today May 5 in the latest 7 hours via #ABFire @zoom_earth #Canada #ClimateEmergency #ClimateCrisis #climatebrawl @ai6yrham @StormHour @GeraldKutney https://t.co/ |
| <u>JasonOnTheDrums</u> | : #Ableg Reminder The UCP disbanded Alberta's elite 40-year-old Wildland Firefighter Rappel Program to save a messily \$1.4M This unit prevented and extinguished THOUSANDS of wildfires across Alberta Now wildfires are out of control and the UCP did nothing https://t.co/Db4YJePOhM |
| <u>RachelNotley</u> | RT @RachelNotley: As I write, 107 wildfires are burning across the province and more than 24,500 Albertans have been displaced. I want to take a moment to speak to those under evacuation order, to our heroic firefighters, and to all Albertans. 🇺🇸 1/11 |

Several top retweets focus on arsonists and reference older articles and decontextualized events to suggest the 2023 fires were intentionally set.

Period 2: May 27–Sept 23, 2023

Wildfire tweets by group



Right-wing segments escalated the misleading narrative of intentional wildfire setting, which was then amplified by conservative politicians and media. Popular posts downplayed climate change and accused the federal government of politicizing the event.

- ▶ During this period, members of the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group led the online conversation, sharing the most posts featuring wildfire-related terms.
- ▶ Most retweeted accounts from the group were highly followed right-wing influencers amplifying claims that wildfires were intentionally set, minimizing the role of climate change, and claiming Trudeau's government was politicizing the wildfires to justify environmental measures.
- ▶ During this period, the group's narratives became more conspiratorial, with posts alleging that eco-terrorists or left-wing extremists deliberately set fires to advance the government's climate agenda. The group also reshared debunked videos (Reuters Fact Check, 2023) from conspiratorial accounts claiming the Canadian government was behind the fires.
- ▶ **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** activity spiked again in mid-August following the declaration of a state of emergency in BC and commitment of military assistance to the province by Trudeau. This online activity was followed by a confrontation between a Convoy of Truth and Freedom and police securing an evacuation route in North Shuswap, BC.

Right-wing accounts continued actively sharing the term “climate change,” hijacking it—even if unintentionally—to refute the claim the issue had any links with climate change. Several posts leveraged old and decontextualized news articles about the arrest of arson suspects to confuse about the cause of the wildfires.

- “Climate change” was the second-most-shared key phrase across all groups on the map. However, posts featuring the term continued to originate disproportionately from the **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** group (~33%). They mainly refuted that the wildfires had links to climate change and/or continued to push misleading narratives of arson. In this period, the term “arson” was overall the 11th most popular, but much more popular within the right / anti-E group (4th most popular).
- Seven out of the top 10 most-shared URLs on wildfires were from conservative and conspiratorial outlets, aiming to push the arson narrative. Notably, two of these articles were older publications, suggesting a deliberate effort to sow confusion and amplify misleading claims. Right-wing and anti-establishment communities also used foreign reports and conspiratorial blogs to allege the involvement of globalist organizations such as the World Economic Forum in wildfires in Greece, Spain, and Hawaii.

BC, LEFT, and Ontario communities in the CIVIL SOCIETY group joined the online wildfire conversation, stressing Canada's unprecedented forest fire rates, urging for action on climate change, and criticizing conservative politicians for not acknowledging climate's role in the fires. A few popular posts refuted claims the fires were intentionally set.

- Most retweets by left-leaning, provincial, and civil society groups originated from journalists, climate activists, and left-leaning politicians. These posts emphasized the unprecedented nature of the situation, highlighted international support for firefighters, and reiterated the worsening impact of climate change. Some criticized conservative politicians, notably Ontario Premier Doug Ford, for neglecting mitigation efforts and cutting preparedness budgets.
- Civil society and left-leaning groups also shared popular posts and URLs debunking the narrative that arson was the primary cause of wildfires.

Hashtags, key phrases, and retweeted accounts

| TOP HASHTAGS | TOP KEY PHRASES | TOP RETWEETED ACCOUNTS |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| #wildfires | wildfires | @JustinTrudeau |
| #wildfire | climate change | @MikeHudema |
| #cdnpoli | fires | @cathmckenna |
| #canada | wildfire smoke | @HotshotWake |
| #climatechange | fire | @CBCNews |
| #climateemergency | country | @CTVNews |
| #climatecrisis | province | @BCGovFireInfo |
| #bcwildfire | smoke | @US_Stormwatch |
| #wildfiresmoke | world | @MaximeBernier |
| #kelowna | wildfire | @SethDKlein |
| #smoke | arson | @mark_slapinski |
| #climate | homes | @Songstress28 |
| #bcpoli | area | @RebelNewsOnline |
| #yellowknife | home | @MadInCanada |
| #onpoli | summer | @maritstiles |

Climate change was discussed frequently but featured most heavily in right-wing and anti-establishment accounts downplaying its role in the wildfires.

Top URLs

| | |
|--|--|
| edmontonjournal.com | Cold Lake area man facing 10 arson charges after string of wildfires, blazes: RCMP <i>Edmonton Journal</i> |
| torontosun.com | Politicians say lots about wildfires, except when arson charges laid <i>Toronto Sun</i> |
| lakelandtoday.ca | Glendon woman charged with 32 counts of arson <i>Lakeland News</i> |
| cheknews.ca | All 46 wildfires on Vancouver Island this year are human caused <i>Chek News</i> |
| reuters.com | Canada on track for its worst-ever wildfire season <i>Reuters</i> |
| rebelnews.com | Nova Scotia RCMP blame arson for multiple fires <i>Rebel News</i> |
| rebelnews.com | The Truth About Maui <i>Rebel News</i> |
| cbc.ca | Canada reports worst wildfire season on record and there's more to come this fall <i>CBC News</i> |
| canada.ca | Wildfires <i>Government of Canada</i> |
| globalnews.ca | RCMP charge Alberta woman with 32 counts of arson after spring wildfires <i>Global News</i> |

Misleading claims that the fires were intentionally set featured prominently in the most-shared content. Often, shared content was from previous years and decontextualized to leverage support for this narrative.

Top retweets

| | |
|---|--|
| cathmckenna | RT @cathmckenna: Pierre Poilievre cancels his anti-carbon pricing rally because of wildfires fueled by climate change. You can't make it up. Just remember this when it comes time to vote. #ClimateEmergency https://t.co/j7XsNnaiZX |
| MadelnCanada | RT @MadelnCanada: 200+ South African firefighters landed in Edmonton, Canada to assist in the fight against the raging wildfire. 🇳🇦🇨🇦 https://t.co/flXKqlvYxG |
| mariststiles | : We won't forget that Doug Ford's Conservatives cut 67% from the Ontario Emergency Forest Firefighting budget and are fighting to reverse them. Wildfires have been a reality for northern Ontarians for years, and it's getting worse. Ontario is short 50 fire crews. #onpoli |
| Dean_Winnipeg | RT @Dean_Winnipeg: Just so I'm clear - Canada just experienced our worst ever wildfire season which isn't even over, an entire island in Hawaii was just incinerated, and the party with the official position that climate change isn't real is leading the polls? Have we lost our ever loving minds? |
| benphillips76 | Sometimes a crisis hits so hard that a country needs help from others to overcome it. That's not one-way humanitarian saviourism, it's international solidarity. 200 South African firefighters land in Edmonton, Canada to help fight the wildfire. Sound up 🇳🇦 https://t.co/QdXdL8koO |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>MikeHudema</u> | RT @MikeHudema: Due to hundreds of uncontrolled wildfires across Canada, New York City looks like a post-apocalyptic hellscape. If you want a prelude of what the world is going to look like if we do not address man-made climate change — this is it. #ActOnClimate |
| <u>HotshotWake</u> | : From a Canadian firefighter who knows what's going on: #canada #wildfire #smoke (Worth the read) "I know you may know, but people need to know and understand that most Canadian wildfire management agencies have fire "zonation" policies similar to Alaska. This means in large... |
| <u>TerryGlavin</u> | : Since 2001, China's coal-fired greenhouse gas output has doubled and tripled. Energy GHG's from the rest of the industrialized world have flatlined. So we sell China coal, ban plastic straws, & if you don't like the carbon tax you're an "arsonist." https://t.co/6nyqozQX3j |
| <u>BestStephenD</u> | RT @BestStephenD: As I watch, horrified, the wildfires and evacuations, I'm constantly aware that across Canada every measure to address climate heating has been opposed by conservative parties, politicians, and governments. The greatest, most imminent threat to Canadians' |
| <u>realTomChapman</u> | RT @realTomChapman: Climate refugees. Not Central America, not Bangladesh, not Madagascar. Canada. The global north. Wake up people. #CanadaWildfires https://t.co/mlsChGINNy |

Several top retweets focus on arsonists and reference older articles and decontextualized events to suggest the 2023 fires were intentionally set.



THE 2024 GERMAN FARMER PROTESTS IN CANADA'S CLIMATE CONVERSATION

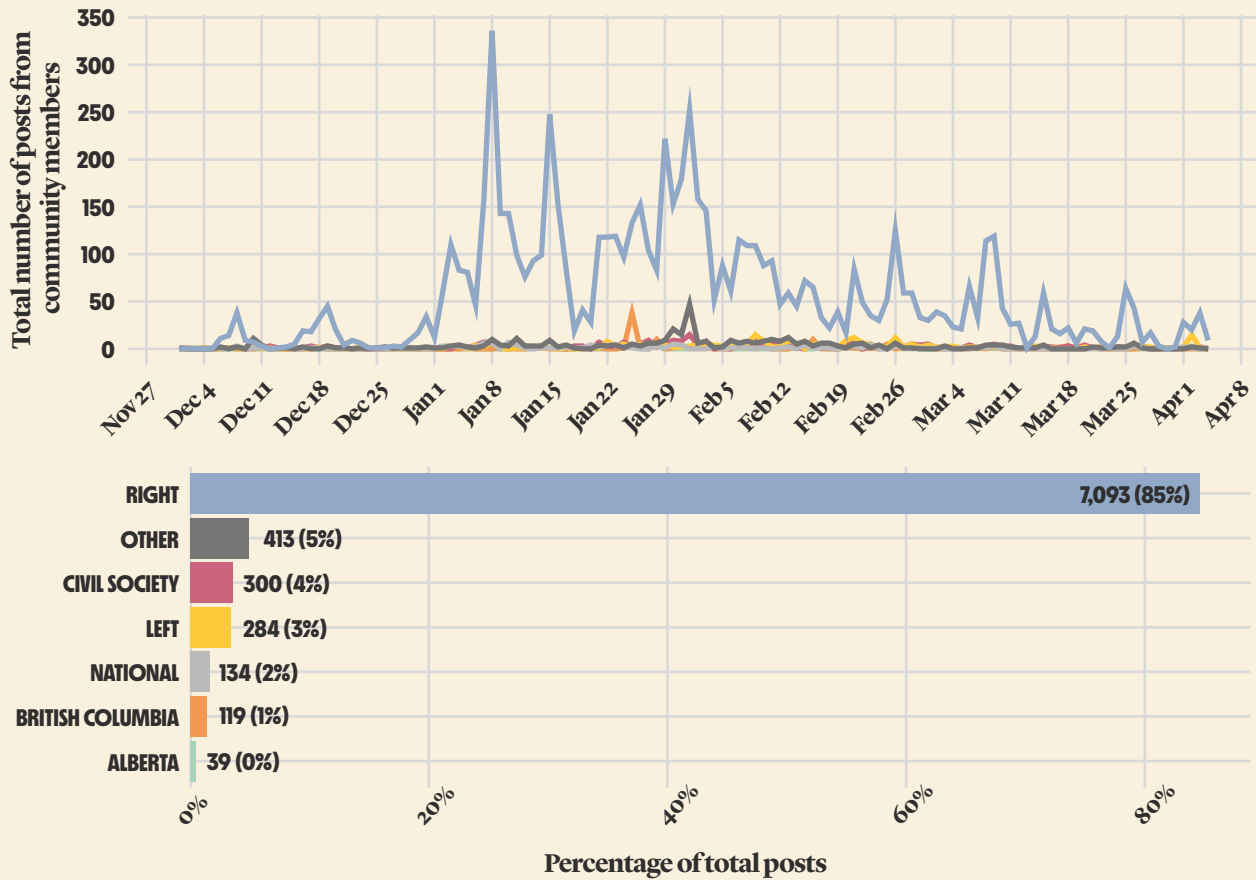


January 2024, Hamburg: A woman waves a German flag while tractors drive into the city center during a rally as part of the farmers' association's action week. PHOTO: MARCUS BRANDT/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

We examined the posts and engagement of communities in the map with the German Farmer protests by tracing the timeline of activity, shared objects (phrases, URLs, hashtags), narratives, and tactics used to attract attention.

Period: Dec 01, 2023–Apr 04, 2024

Farmer protest tweets by group



Conservative segments of the Canadian climate map played a significant role in the online conversation about Germany's farmers' protests, while other domestic audiences were largely absent.

- Since the farmers' protests against fuel subsidy cuts in Germany began in early January 2024 (Rinke & Murray, 2024), **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** accounts shared more than 7000 posts with hashtags and phrases related to the event, representing 85% of the total activity.
- These built on previous efforts to leverage farmer protests in Europe, agricultural crises elsewhere in the world, and a “truckers + tractors” narrative linking convoy supporters to farming protests in ways suggestive of a wider movement against global climate policy.

Canadian right-wing accounts echoed foreign right-wing and conspiratorial influencers, framing protests as resistance to alleged extremist environmental policies by government and global elites exploiting climate change to control food supply and restrict freedoms.

- The most retweeted accounts are not map members and belong to foreign conspiratorial accounts and bloggers, conservative politicians, anti-government campaigners, and conspiratorial retail investment influencers. Several are reported to have spread and monetized (Berger, 2023) climate change misinformation (CAAD, 2023 Jan), highlighting the group's participation in denial- and conspiracy-focused conversations.

- Most retweeted posts promote and support the farmers' protests in Germany, Canada, and other countries. They allege these are protests against government and globalists' destructive policies that use climate change as a pretext for population control.
- Similarly, the top hashtags and phrases accused mainstream media of hiding these events and amplified longstanding climate conspiracies like Agenda 2030 (Rahman, 2023).

Canadian right-wing influencers supported domestic farmers' protests, echoing anti-environmental rhetoric, showcasing their interaction with foreign movements and their partial role in domestic mobilization.

- Right-wing influencer accounts from the map, including conservative blogs and right-wing personalities, shared popular posts promoting farmers' protests in Canada. These posts often featured anti-environmental terms like “globalist climate policies,” “green woke policies,” and “climate communism.”
- Canadian news coverage of German protests against the rising significance of far-right political parties was reposted by **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** influencers attempting to redirect attention to farmer protests by using culture war framings of climate change.
- While these efforts have included elite influencers and established right-wing media outlets, including Pierre Poilievre and Jordan Peterson, it is unclear if these efforts are slowly building or generally failing to mobilize farmers against climate policy.

There is reason to interpret the results presented above with caution as reporting suggests that farmer and food-security based climate conspiracies are circulating more widely on alternative-tech and messaging apps than on larger platforms (Loucaides, Edwards, & Perrone, 2024).

Hashtags, key phrases, and retweeted accounts

| TOP HASHTAGS | TOP KEY PHRASES | TOP RETWEETED ACCOUNTS |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| #nofarmersnofood | farmers | @PeterSweden7 |
| #farmersprotest | protests | @JimFergusonUK |
| #foodsecurity | media | @ryangerritsen |
| #farmers | protest | @BGatesIsaPsycho |
| #berlin | government | @VigilantFox |
| #germany | mainstream media | @JamesMelville |
| #watch | news | @TaraBull808 |
| #nofarmsnofood | farmers protest | @WallStreetSilv |
| #breaking | tractors | @govt_corrupt |
| #netzero | food | @wideawake_media |
| #climatescam | world | @therealmrbench |
| #freedomtraininternational | country | @KatKanada_TM |
| #farmersprotest2024 | climate agenda | @wolsned |
| #bauernprotest | german farmers protest | @Martyupnorth_2 |
| #bauernproteste | massive farmers protest | @KERiksenV2 |

Top hashtags and phrases include #climatescam, #netzero, and climate agenda as well as terms from posts claiming that mainstream media is hiding the farmers' protests.

Top URLs

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| freedomtraininternational.org | Inspiration Station |
| rebelnews.com | Rebel News |

Top retweets

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: UNBELIEVABLE Look at how the German police are brutally attacking the farmers protesting against unfair government policies. SHARE - Mainstream media is hiding this 📌 https://t.co/ubPGBvKOU8 |
| EvaVlaar | EYES ON GERMANY I'll be traveling to Berlin next week as the German Farmers have announced that they will launch a protest "larger than the country has ever seen before" on Monday, January 8. Multiple farmers' associations, the train drivers' union and the trucking industry have... |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: "WE ARE FED UP" The German farmers line up their tractors to show their message. They are now protesting for the 6th day in a row. SHARE because the mainstream media is hiding this 📌 https://t.co/TdCupPMOE5 |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: WOAHH 🚚🚚🚚 The German farmers protest is massive. SHARE - The media is hiding this from you 📌 https://t.co/BoMbUrDYDA |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: IT'S HAPPENING 🚚🇵🇹 The farmers in Portugal have now joined the European wide farmers protest against climate agenda. SHARE - This is huge 📌 https://t.co/bPldqx1Gty |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: MASSIVE 🚚🚚🚚 The German farmers are STILL protesting against tax increases, their are not giving up. SHARE - The mainstream media is not showing this 📌 https://t.co/giGJ8i1QY8 |
| ryangerritsen | RT @ryangerritsen: From 5 days ago. The media is afraid to show any footage of the protesting farmers in Germany. But we must share it. They are vital to our food supply. https://t.co/HhgJEfQdUg |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: HUGE 🚚🇳🇱🚚🇳🇱 The Dutch farmers have now BLOCKED the border crossing. They are still protesting against the World Economic Forum agenda. SHARE - You won't see this on the news 📌 https://t.co/1rYibuXEjG |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: The German farmers are STILL protesting against tyrannical climate policies. SHARE if you support the farmers! 🚚🇩🇪🚚🇩🇪🚚🇩🇪 https://t.co/dHDcVqXgUw |
| PeterSweden7 | RT @PeterSweden7: IT'S HAPPENING Now the Scottish farmers have begun protesting - It's happening all over Europe. Did you hear about this on the news? 🚚🇪🇺🚚🇪🇺🚚🇪🇺 https://t.co/1EePVtoBrT |

Posts blaming media for a lack of attention to the protests dominate shared content.



CONCLUSION



The Princeton Sierras are the only live-on-base unit crew in British Columbia, meaning the crew members live together both on- and off- the fire line. PHOTO: JESSE WINTER

Wildfires have multiple drivers and are shaped by their environmental, cultural, and climatic conditions in complex ways. These are chaotic events that spark crises in which rumours circulate and conspiracies amplify much more quickly than most of us realize. This is especially true in an information environment that lacks reliable news, is filtered by platforms optimized for emotionally charged engagement, and is dominated by a small group of actors wrapping complicated questions of causation and crisis in adversarial narratives of power and control.

The Canadian climate conversation on Twitter during the 2023 wildfires is a unique snapshot of the problem, reflecting the volatile role played by social media and actors looking to leverage the speed, reach, and impacts of digital engagement systems during crisis. While no platform dominates public discourse in the way Twitter once did, it remains a key site for politicians and influencers looking to shape the climate conversation and is where the fragmentation of those public debates into polarized and angry perspectives appears most visible—if and when you can access the data needed to illuminate the underlying dynamics and processes. The surge in climate denial recommended by the site in advance of the fires, combined with growing obscurity of the platform’s operations, created significant confusion about what was happening (Klepper, 2023).

Oppositional networks formed during the pandemic have widened the scope of conspiracies targeting public health to include climate and energy policy. This folds crises associated with climate impacts into narratives that are distrustful of emergency responses by government. These narratives pull together pandemic and climate emergency planning on the grounds that experts and officials are overly alarmist or using crisis as a pretext to expand political control. There are different themes and touchpoints for these stories as they incorporate various climate solutions, politics, and crises, but the overall effect is to challenge expressions of climate concern as overwrought and misguided if not politically expedient and part of a sinister conspiracy. The arson narrative that surged during the wildfires is part of these contestations. It provides an alternative explanation for those denying the validity of climate concerns while encouraging deeper participation in more political forms of anti-government content.

The engagement with wildfire content in 2023 illustrates how attention to a crisis linked to climate change was followed by misinformation and conspiracy that surged with the involvement of political elites. It is worth reminding that the 2021 climate lockdown conspiracy had little traction until federal politicians argued over its significance during an election campaign. It was then that networks amplifying distrust of public health policies accessed climate conversations that had reached a point of relatively broad consensus among political leaders across the country. (The leaders of all major parties in the 2021 election agreed on the importance of climate change, and then CPC leader, Erin O’Toole, campaigned with a climate plan and won the popular vote.) Arguably, it was high-prolife efforts to take down the conspiratorial content that boosted attention, widened divisions among conservatives on climate change, and amplified the reach of the themes and topics that recurred prominently during the 2023 wildfires. It is notable that a similarly provocative statement last year was handled differently. When a conservative MP appeared to assert in the House of Commons that the Liberal government had started the wildfires, the issue was treated less dramatically and didn’t appear to have a similar impact.

The climate conversation outside of the **NATIONAL** and **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** groups is more muted. It also appears more aligned with scientists attributing wildfire to climate change than either social media or legacy news organizations were last year. While **RIGHT/ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT** voices contested the association of wildfire and climate change, legacy news media simply failed to make these connections with much consistency (Hatch, Alrasheed, & Granados, 2023). Yet, the quiet parts of the climate map appeared ready for a different kind of conversation depending on one’s interpretation of public opinion polling (Coletto, 2023).

The ability to contextualize wildfire with climate change in our personal experience and cultural stories is crucial as we contemplate what comes next. These moments affect everyone—some in much more immediate and harmful ways than others—and are how Canada’s climate conversation can develop a less centralized configuration going forward. The obstacles, of course, are high. Influence in the information environment is highly concentrated, shaped by the obstructionist strategies of fossil fuel industries, and filtered by the engagement systems of digital platforms that incentivize circulation of false and divisive content. In addition, public concern with climate change is often wide but thin, almost fickle in the way it sloshes back and forth from moments of peak intensity during extreme events to disinterest during geopolitical and affordability crises. Wildfires, however, are seasonal events and invite more durable climate conversations if engaged as a cyclical feature of our lives instead of as episodic or unexpected crises.

A better climate conversation in Canada is possible

Unfortunately, we cannot simply wish this conversation into existence, so we suggest a few steps to bring us closer to realizing this possibility.

First, it is necessary to better understand what is happening in Canada’s information environment, especially in moments of crisis. The naïve phase of “monitor and report” in misinformation research has passed, but mapping activities are still necessary for commonly proposed solutions such as pre-bunking, counter-messaging, and education

to prove effective. This research requires a cross-platform perspective including alt-tech and messaging apps, engagement with non-English language and diasporic communities, and integration of AI and foreign interference concerns. Perhaps most importantly, however, this work could aid studies of how people actually engage with misinformation and obstruction in the flow of their everyday lives (Starbird, DiResta, & DeButts, 2023). In this respect, a key limitation of our study is an inability to assess how misinformation is experienced as an element of participatory culture (Starbird, DiResta, & DeButts, 2023). This is an important question to explore. Our responses to wildfires, for instance, are mediated by concerns that are geographically distinct and locally specific, and the consequences of false and misleading information are shaped by community cultures and context.

Second, we need to recognize that the current regulatory approach to digital platforms is not working in the country. The instability and chaos that characterized Twitter's dissolution has masked, to some extent, the declining visibility into information flows and operations on all large digital platforms, including Facebook and YouTube. This situation reflects the fearful and obstructionist attitudes of their owners toward independent research, but is also a structural problem that is encouraged by treating the technology industry as unique from other industries in their lack of liability and responsibility for harms generated by their products. There is good reason going forward to include climate and energy perspectives in tech policy discussions currently oriented to questions of journalism, AI, foreign interference, election integrity, and child safety. Few people understand the dangers of an opaque information environment prone to manipulation by powerful industries better than climate communicators dealing with decades of fossil fuel funded disinformation.

Finally, it is important to encourage inclusive and fair conversations about climate change and energy transition. While misinformation might invite angry individuals to act on false beliefs and physically disrupt communities, as we saw last summer, the larger problem is an erosion of the trust and social cohesion needed to navigate climate impacts and the geopolitical complexity of an energy transition. It is a growing sense of disregard for those concerned about the fairness of the energy transition that is routinely mobilized in narratives seeking to bridge farmer protests, affordability concerns, and distrust of global elites into Canadian climate conversations. These narratives capitalize on structural vulnerabilities in our communication systems (McKay and Tenove, 2021), including distrust of media, and on fears that current inequalities will be intensified not ameliorated by climate, energy, and food policies. These concerns cannot be ignored without further undermining public support for climate policy.

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