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DECEMBER 2025

# PUTIN, PERMAFROST, AND PROPAGANDA

RUSSIAN INFORMATION MANIPULATION  
IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

**Tom Ellison**

Edited by Erin Sikorsky and Francesco Femia

# **Putin, Permafrost, and Propaganda:**

## Russian Information Manipulation in a Changing Climate

December 2025

### AUTHORS

**Tom Ellison**, Deputy Director, the Center for Climate and Security (ccs)

### EDITED BY

**Erin Sikorsky**, Director, CCS

**Francesco Femia**, Research Director, The Council on Strategic Risks

Special thanks to the following individuals for providing expert input:

**Dr. Andrew Heffernan**, Associate, University of Ottawa Information Integrity Lab

**Jennie King**, CCS Non-Resident Fellow; former Director of Climate Disinformation Research and Policy, Institute for Strategic Dialogue

**Philip Newell**, Communications Co-Chair, Climate Action Against Disinformation



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**Cover photo:** The Lakhta Center, headquarters of Gazprom HQS, seen at night in St. Petersburg, 23 December 2020. (Alexey Komarov, CC BY-SA 4.0)

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# Executive Summary

- Russia’s strategic interests in controlling domestic dissent, undermining NATO countries, and advancing its emissions-intensive economic model drive its information manipulation activities related to climate change and the environment.
- Russia deploys a variety of influence tools—ranging from state media, to social media manipulation, to domestic censorship, to unwitting and unwitting proxies—to advance these messages.
- Kremlin information manipulation intersects with climate issues in a variety of areas: undermining climate science, controlling domestic environmental activism, exploiting disasters in NATO countries, influencing the Arctic and African climate hotspots, slowing and shaping the green transition, and stoking climate polarization in Western democracies.
- Russian climate-related influence efforts capitalize on pre-existing grievances and divisions, often converging with far-right rhetoric, unhealthy digital ecosystems, and fossil fuel industry interests. Amid worsening climate impacts, rapid AI development, and weakened US pushback, subnational, European, and nongovernmental actors will be key to countering Russian information manipulation on climate change.



**The Lakhta Center, headquarters of PJSC Gazprom, seen at night in St. Petersburg, 23 December 2020.**

Source: Alexey Komarov, CC BY-SA 4.0

# Introduction

Russia is a central case study on the intersection between climate change, information manipulation, extremism, and geopolitics. Russia's efforts to protect its hydrocarbon-intensive political economy, suppress domestic dissent, control the Arctic, weaken global opposition on Ukraine, and undermine democratic countries all include elements of disinformation and propaganda related to climate, the environment, and energy. A review of information integrity on climate change notes that "Russia comes out as a prominent player in recent years" in existing research on climate mis- and disinformation.

This report explores the key aspects of Russian information and influence activities related to climate change and security—including the motives, actors, methods, audiences, and security impact of Russian activities and illustrative case studies. The scope of this report includes the range of Russian influence and information manipulation, and how it shapes, reacts to, and exploits climate impacts and policies. For more on this approach to climate, security, and information issues, see *Climate Security and Misinformation: A Baseline*, a 2024 report by the Center for Climate and Security.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh, Brigitte and Ellison, Tom. 2024. "Climate Security and Misinformation: A Baseline – The Council on Strategic Risks." *The Council on Strategic Risks – Anticipating, Analyzing, and Addressing Systemic Risks*. The Council on Strategic Risks. April 23, 2024. <https://councilonstrategicrisks.org/2024/04/23/climate-security-and-misinformation-a-baseline/>.



## TERMINOLOGY

A wide vocabulary exists to describe information issues.<sup>2,3</sup> Key terms as they relate to this report are explained below:

Broadly, **information manipulation** can refer to a range of ways state or non-state actors create, spread, or control information to influence perceptions and behaviors. In international relations, this may be described as **influence efforts** or **propaganda**, or, less pejoratively, terms like public affairs, public relations, or public diplomacy. Domestically, state information manipulation can also comprise **censorship**, media or internet **blackouts**, or other control and suppression of information. Terms like **hybrid warfare** or **foreign interference** can include information activities as well as other tactics short of warfare, such as economic coercion, sabotage, or cyberattacks.

Types of problematic information can be more specifically distinguished based on 1) accuracy and 2) intent to deceive. **Misinformation** is false or misleading information that is not necessarily spread with intent to deceive or cause harm. **Disinformation** refers to such information created or spread with intent. **Malinformation** is true information presented in a manner to mislead or cause harm, such as misleading or harmful leaks, or cherry-picked and decontextualized facts.

In this report, terms like “information manipulation” or “influence efforts” are predominantly used. This is because different types of problematic information dynamics blend together, because specific actors’ intent is difficult to discern, and because intent is often immaterial to broader impacts and dynamics. More specific terms are used where appropriate.

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2 EU Disinfo Lab, “Disinformation Glossary,” 30 March 2023, [https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EUDL\\_Disinformation\\_Glossary.pdf](https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EUDL_Disinformation_Glossary.pdf).

3 Princeton Library, “Misinformation, Disinformation & Malinformation: A Guide,” <https://princetonlibrary.org/guides/misinformation-disinformation-malinformation-a-guide/>.

# Russia's Strategic Interests and Climate-Related Information Manipulation

Russian information manipulation, including that related to climate change, is downstream of the Vladimir Putin regime's larger interests and strategic objectives. These are primarily protecting elite economic interests, preventing domestic political unrest, and undermining and outcompeting the United States and NATO.

At home, the regime seeks to preserve its security by protecting the fossil-fuel-dependent revenues of the Russian state and powerful elites. It is in this context that the regime perceives aggressive climate action as a threat, claiming in its 2021 National Security Strategy that foreign actors would use environmental protection and climate change as “leverage to exert open political and economic pressure on Russia.” Climate and energy policies are also inseparable from the political interests of key regime constituencies. Fossil fuel assets are key currency in Russia’s post-Soviet elite political bargain, with Putin holding symbiotic relationships with allied oligarchs whose influence and loyalty largely derive from the allocation of the spoils of oil, gas, coal, and other emissions-intensive industries.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Moscow is also wary of threats to stability from domestic discontent—one potential source of which is dissatisfaction with environmental conditions and climate impacts (see below).

Abroad, Moscow aims to weaken, divide, and delegitimize the countries it views as threats—namely the United States and NATO member states—and improve its military, political, and economic position at their expense. The Danish Defense

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4 Rosalsky, Greg. 2022. “How ‘shock Therapy’ Created Russian Oligarchs and Paved the Path for Putin.” *NPR*, March 22, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2022/03/22/1087654279/how-shock-therapy-created-russian-oligarchs-and-paved-the-path-for-putin>.

5 Cassidy, Lena. 2025. “A House on Fire: Russia’s Oligarchy Today.” *The Politic*. March 14, 2025. <https://thepolitic.org/a-house-on-fire-russias-oligarchy-today/>.

6 Rosalsky, Greg. 2022. “How Putin Conquered Russia’s Oligarchy.” *NPR*, March 29, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2022/03/29/1088886554/how-putin-conquered-russias-oligarchy>.

Intelligence Service noted in 2024 that “The overall aim of Russia’s influence campaigns is to sow division and uncertainty in Western countries as a way of undermining their unity against Russia.”<sup>7</sup> Disruptive climate disasters and social polarization over climate-related policies fuel public dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and attention-grabbing hooks that Russian influence efforts can exploit. Meanwhile, climate impacts are shaping the geographic and political context where Russian influence seeks to displace its competitors and advance its economic interests, whether in the melting Arctic or food-insecure Sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> Danish Defense Intelligence Service. 2024. “Intelligence Outlook 2024: An Intelligence-Based Assessment of the External Conditions for Danish National Security and Interests.” <https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2024/intelligenceoutlook.pdf>.

# Russian Information and Propaganda Tools

Information manipulation is centrally integrated in Russian statecraft. Refined during the Soviet era, the Russian state has developed an aggressive and sophisticated doctrine of what analysts term “hybrid warfare” (see textbox): merging overt and covert influence efforts with other tactics short of warfare, such as cyberattacks, espionage, sabotage, and economic coercion.<sup>8,9</sup> Domestically, the government severely controls information and polices dissent, with Freedom House noting the Kremlin has further “intensified restrictions on individual rights and liberties in order to stifle domestic dissent” since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.<sup>10</sup>

Globally, according to the now-shuttered US State Department Global Engagement Center, the Russian state employs an “influence ecosystem” made of five mutually reinforcing pillars.<sup>11</sup> They are:

- **Official government communications**, such as statements from Russian officials and government ministries.
- **State-funded global messaging**, including foreign and domestic-oriented media platforms like Sputnik, RT, and Rossiya Segodnya. This also

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8 “Совет Безопасности Российской Федерации.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. [http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/information/DIB\\_eng/](http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/information/DIB_eng/).

9 Voo, Julia and Singh, Virpratap Vikram, “Russia’s Information Confrontation Doctrine in Practice (2014–Present): Intent, Evolution and Implications.” IISS. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2025/06/russias-information-confrontation-doctrine-in-practice-2014present-intent-evolution-and-implications/>.

10 2025. “Russia.” Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2025>.

11 US Department of State. 2020. “GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem.” [https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%20%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem\\_08-04-20.pdf](https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%20%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf).

includes Gazprom Media,<sup>12</sup> Russia’s largest media conglomerate, which is controlled by the state-owned gas company Gazprom and propagates Kremlin messaging.

- **Cultivation of proxy sources**, including global or region-specific news outlets and witting or unwitting individuals spreading Russia-aligned messages.
- **Weaponization of social media**, such as the use of trolls and bots that amplify or stoke narratives favorable to Russia.
- **Cyber-enabled disinformation**, such as hack-and-leak operations or the impersonation or disruption of legitimate information sources.

Russian climate-related information manipulation is present throughout these pillars, as explored below.

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<sup>12</sup> “Gazprom Media.” 2025. August 16, 2025. <https://statemediamonitor.com/2025/08/gazprom-media/>.

# Russian Climate-Related Information Manipulation: Types and Examples

Russian information manipulation related to climate change and climate policies can advance one or more of Russia's broader goals. At the same time, Russian messages across these topics are not necessarily logically coherent. Russia sometimes advances contradictory messages, potentially because they are uncoordinated, aimed at different audiences or contexts, or simply attempting to heighten confusion and mistrust.<sup>13</sup>

With that in mind, this report categorizes Russian climate-related information manipulation into key themes, with examples and case studies. These themes are outlined in the chart (Figure 1) below, and range from issues of fundamental science to domestic Russian politics, to international climate impacts and policy debates.

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<sup>13</sup> Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2023. "Deny, Deceive, Delay (Vol. 3), Climate Information Integrity Ahead of COP28." <https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Deny-Deceive-Delay-Vol-3-1.pdf>.

**Figure 1:** On Climate Issues, Russian Information Manipulation Advances Kremlin Interests

	Climate Issue	Russian Strategic Goal	Russian Information Manipulation
▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼	<b>Basic climate science</b>	Divide and discredit NATO governments	Discredit Western-dominated climate science processes
		Advance Russian energy and elite economic interests	Undermine scientific basis for fossil fuel phaseout
	<b>Climate &amp; environmental impacts in Russia</b>	Prevent domestic unrest	Stigmatize and censor environmental activism, press
		Divide and discredit NATO governments	Paint environmental impacts or activism as Western-backed
	<b>Climate-driven disasters in US, Europe</b>	Divide and discredit NATO governments	Link disaster impacts to support for NATO, Ukraine, or other former Soviet states  Amplify costs, confusion, and dissatisfaction in the United States and Europe after disasters
	<b>Melting Arctic</b>	Advance Russian energy and elite economic interests	Legitimize Russian primacy over new Arctic shipping and resource extraction opportunities
		Divide and discredit NATO governments	Portray NATO states' Arctic activities as destabilizing and aggressive
	<b>Climate-driven displacement, food insecurity, and conflict in Africa</b>	Divide and discredit NATO governments	Stoke irregular migration to pressure NATO countries  Capitalize on climate-related grievances in Africa to displace NATO partners
	<b>Global fossil fuel phase-out</b>	Advance Russian energy and elite economic interests	Promote Russian gas exports as "clean", promote nuclear exports, and Russian forests as climate solutions.
		Divide and discredit NATO governments	Boost Russian fossil fuel projects in Africa as a path to development and independence from post-colonial powers.
	<b>Climate policy polarization in US, Europe</b>		Support reactionary, anti-democratic, and populist voices that oppose both climate action and transatlantic solidarity  Widen cultural polarization over climate policies

# Undermining climate science

Russia has historically been a source of falsehoods and distortions about the science of climate change. In the 1990s and early 2000s, prominent state-backed Russian scientists were among “climate skeptic” critics of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), claiming there was a “high level of uncertainty” about human responsibility for climate change, that solar activity explained global warming, and that Russia would benefit overall from climate change.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, hackers stole and leaked emails from climate scientists at a UK university ahead of UN climate summits; climate deniers cherry-picked the emails to misleadingly impugn the credibility of climate science, terming it “Climategate.” Because of the operation’s seeming sophistication and some leaks appearing on Russia-based servers, observers at the time speculated Russia was involved, a theory reinforced by forensic data analyzed in 2019.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup> However, Moscow’s connections are unconfirmed and disputed by Russia and some experts.

The screenshot shows a news article from Pravda.ru. The header includes the Pravda.ru logo, a navigation bar with links to RUSSIA, WORLD, SOCIETY, SCIENCE, INCIDENTS, OPINION, and BUSINESS, and a timestamp indicating the article was published on November 30, 2009, at 03:40 by Dmitry Sudakov. The main title of the article is 'Climategate' Exposes the Global Warming Hoax'. Below the title, there is a subcategory link 'SCIENCE • PLANET EARTH'.

A Russian online paper covers the so-called “ClimateGate” leaks, 2009.<sup>18</sup>

- 14 Hirsch, Connal. “The Grand Russian Disinformation Strategy in Environmental Politics.” Central European University.. Accessed October 24, 2025. [https://ir.ceu.edu/ohpa/research\\_blog/articles/rusdisinformation](https://ir.ceu.edu/ohpa/research_blog/articles/rusdisinformation).
- 15 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 2009. “Climategate: A Russian Connection?” RFE/RL. December 7, 2009. [https://www.rferl.org/a/Climategate\\_A\\_Russian\\_Connection/1897541.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Climategate_A_Russian_Connection/1897541.html).
- 16 Ostanin, Iggy. 2019. “Exclusive: ‘Climategate’ Email Hacking Was Carried out from Russia, in Effort to Undermine Action on Global Warming.” Medium. July 1, 2019. <https://medium.com/@iggyostanin/exclusive-climategate-email-hacking-was-carried-out-from-russia-in-effort-to-undermine-action-78b19bc3ca5a>.
- 17 Leber, Rebecca, and A. J. Vicens. 2017. “7 Years Before Russia Hacked the Election, Someone Did the Same Thing to Climate Scientists.” Mother Jones, December 2017. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/12/climategate-wikileaks-russia-trump-hacking/>.
- 18 Sudakov, Dmitry. 2009. “‘Climategate’ Exposes the Global Warming Hoax.” PravdaReport. Pravda English. November 30, 2009. <https://english.pravda.ru/science/110832-climategate/>.

President Vladimir Putin has previously cast doubt on the validity of climate assessments, disputing the human roots of climate change as recently as 2019. More recently, Moscow has nominally accepted the validity of climate change, joining the Paris agreement late that same year.<sup>19</sup> However, today the Kremlin continues to promote stances at odds with climate science when it serves its interests, such as on emissions from Russian natural gas or the carbon capacity of Russia's forests.<sup>20, 21</sup>

As for Putin, he has continued to make ambiguous statements over the past ten years, calling climate change a “grave threat to humanity” while also making the false claim that global warming had peaked in 2023.<sup>22, 23</sup> Putin approved a measure increasing Russia’s greenhouse gas emissions by 20% through 2035, compared to 2021 levels, despite a target of carbon neutrality by 2060.<sup>24</sup>

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19 Sauer, Natalie. 2019. “Russia Formally Joins Paris Climate Agreement.” Climate Home News. September 23, 2019. <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/09/23/russia-formally-joins-paris-climate-agreement/>.

20 Lanshina, Tatiana. 2024. “Climate control: How Russia turned environmentalism into a tool of political influence.” The Insider. November 27, 2024. <https://theins.ru/en/economics/276652>.

21 Light, Felix. 2021. “Russia Says Its Forests Neutralize Billions of Tons of Greenhouse Gases. Scientists Have Their Doubts.” The Moscow Times. July 5, 2021. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/07/05/russia-says-its-forests-neutralize-billions-of-tons-of-greenhouse-gases-scientists-have-their-doubts-a74428>.

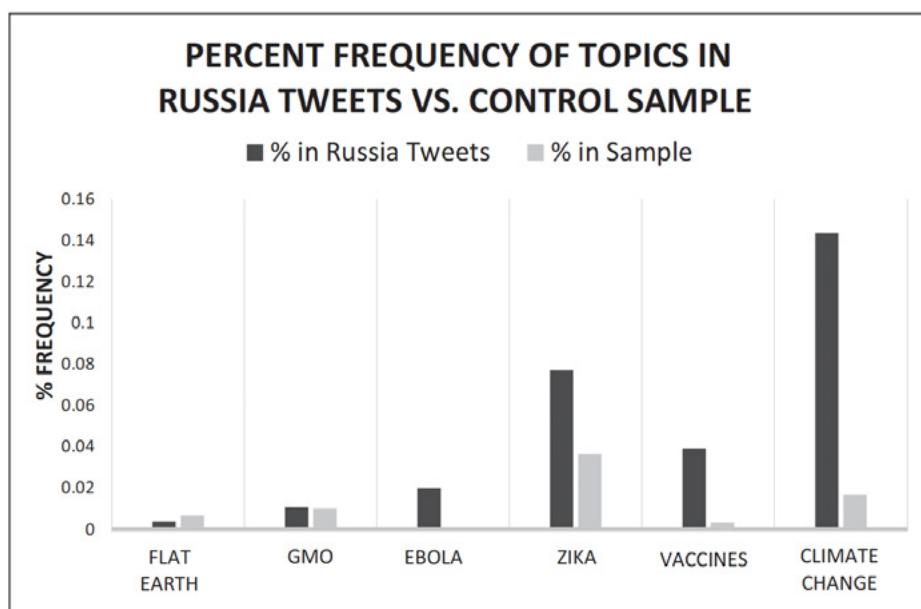
22 AFP. 2025. “Putin Signs Decree Allowing Russia to Raise Greenhouse Gas Emissions.” The Moscow Times. August 6, 2025. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/08/06/putin-signs-decree-allowing-russia-to-raise-greenhouse-gas-emissions-a90119>.

23 Georgiou, Aristos. 2023. “Putin Discusses Possibility That Global Warming Has Peaked.” Newsweek. February 16, 2023. <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-discusses-possibility-global-warming-peaked-1781731>.

24 AFP. 2025. “Putin Signs Decree Allowing Russia to Raise Greenhouse Gas Emissions.” The Moscow Times. August 6, 2025. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/08/06/putin-signs-decree-allowing-russia-to-raise-greenhouse-gas-emissions-a90119>.

## VIGNETTE: CLIMATE SCIENCE AND 2016 ELECTION INFLUENCE

Though not the primary message, climate denialist content was a theme in Russian social media manipulation during the US presidential election of 2016. This was one part of the influence campaign to sow discord and boost the prospects of then-candidate Donald Trump, which, as documented by the US intelligence community and special counsel, also included hack-and-leak activities and other tactics.<sup>25,26</sup> Academics analyzed the science content in 3 million tweets between 2014 and 2017 from Twitter users associated with the Russian “troll farm,” the Internet Research Agency, finding that climate science misinformation, followed by vaccine misinformation, was most disproportionately present compared to a control group.<sup>27</sup> This suggests a deliberate emphasis on these topics, possibly explained by a desire to widen divisions on science issues that are most consequential for society and have been most politicized in the United States.



*Climate content was the most disproportionately common science content in Russian social media messaging in the 2016 election influence campaign.<sup>28</sup>*

25 US Intelligence Community. 2017. “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections.” [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf).

26 Mueller, Special Counsel Robert, III. 2019. “Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election.” <https://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2019/images/04/18/mueller-report-searchable.pdf>.

27 Strudwicke, Indigo J., and Will J. Grant. 2020. “#JunkScience: Investigating Pseudoscience Disinformation in the Russian Internet Research Agency Tweets.” *Public Understanding of Science (Bristol, England)* 29 (5): 459–72.

28 Ibid



# Controlling domestic environmental activism

Russia uses censorship and propaganda domestically, alongside arrests and other direct repression, to ensure popular environmental grievances do not translate into regime-threatening mobilization. These issues are especially fraught since the full invasion of Ukraine, as the transition to a war economy has forced austerity that has come at the expense of climate resilience,<sup>29</sup> and environmental impacts and wartime hardships both fall heavily in Russia's peripheral, ethnic minority territories.<sup>30</sup>

There is a relatively robust history of environmental activism in Russia, ranging from state-friendly to more oppositional activity (first and foremost about local environmental debates, more than global climate change).<sup>31</sup> In 2024, there were 300 reported environmental protests in more than 40 regions, often about state or business harms to the environment. Analysts have pointed to sustained protests in Komi and Bashkortostan over waste disposal and harmful minerals mining in recent years as examples of the potential threat politicized environmental activism poses.

Some Kremlin officials see environmentalism as a Trojan horse for what they perceive as Western information manipulation and hybrid warfare aimed at undermining the regime.<sup>32</sup> As of 2019, “environmental pollution” and “climate change, global warming” were ranked first and fourth, respectively, among Russians’ ranking of global threats to humanity, ahead of nuclear conflict, economic crises, or migration, according to an independent Russian pollster.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Dulneva, Marina. 2024. “Nature of war: How Russia sacrificed its environment for a military economy.” The Insider. March 26, 2024. <https://theins.ru/en/society/270276>.

30 Tysiachniouk, Maria, Maria Chiara Franceschelli, and Angelina Davydova. 2024. “Russian Environmentalism During the War.” <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/server/api/core/bitstreams/f7b70f4d-bba5-4b0a-a114-223c22da9f34/content>.

31 Goble, Paul. 2025. “Environmental Protest in Russia Again a Seedbed of Political Opposition.” April 15, 2025. <https://jamestown.org/program/environmental-protest-in-russia-again-a-seedbed-of-political-opposition/>.

32 “Environmental Protests in Bashkortostan Emerging as a Threat to Moscow.” The Jamestown Foundation. May 6, 2025. <https://jamestown.substack.com/p/environmental-protests-in-bashkortostan>.

33 “ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://www.levada.ru/en/2020/02/18/environmental-problems/>.

In 2020, 35% of Russians in a state-controlled poll reported they were ready to protest over environmental issues.<sup>34</sup>

*“Threats related to the use of environmental issues by the West have increased in order to weaken the economy and the defense capability of disfavored states, provoke protest activity, and destabilize.” –Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council and former FSB director (2022)<sup>35</sup>*

Moscow’s information tools to disarm these threats have included shutdowns and demonization of environmental organizations, censorship and blackouts around environmental topics, and efforts to scapegoat foreign enemies for domestic climate complaints. For example, since the Ukraine war, the Kremlin has designated branches of NGOs like Greenpeace and World Wildlife Federation “undesirable” organizations, criminalizing involvement with them and invoking a Soviet-era stigma.<sup>36</sup> Environmental media outlets designated “foreign agents” have had to close.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, for decades, Russian officials and proxies have blamed nonexistent US “weather-weapons” for unusually warm winters or damaging storms in Ukraine and Russia.<sup>38, 39, 40</sup> The Russian government has also employed propagandistic initiatives to burnish its environmental image. For example, in 2025, Putin promoted an executive order creating a showy

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34 Мухаметшина, Елена. 2020. “Половина россиян считает, что экологическая ситуация в России за последние годы ухудшилась.” Ведомости. November 30, 2020. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2020/11/29/848723-polovina-rossiyan>.

35 “Патрушев: Запад использует экологическую повестку для дестабилизации в неугодных странах.” ТАСС. September 30, 2022. <https://tass.ru/politika/15916147>.

36 Koralova, Lana. 2023. “In 2023, the Kremlin Worked To Dismantle Russia’s Environmental Movement. Some of It Survived.” The Moscow Times. December 28, 2023. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/28/in-2023-the-kremlin-worked-to-dismantle-russias-environmental-movement-some-of-it-survived-a82383>.

37 “Russian Environmental News Outlet Kedr Closes After ‘Foreign Agent’ Designation.” The Moscow Times. January 8, 2024. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/01/08/russian-environmental-news-outlet-kedr-closes-after-foreign-agent-designation-a83656>.

38 “US Blamed for Warm Winter in Russia.” EUvsDisinfo. January 29, 2020. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/us-blamed-for-warm-winter-in-russia/>.

39 Cleek, Ashley. 2010. “Russian Scholar Warns Of ‘Secret’ U.S. Climate Change Weapon.” RFE/RL. July 30, 2010. [https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian\\_Scholar\\_Warns\\_Of\\_Secret\\_US\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Weapon/2114381.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Scholar_Warns_Of_Secret_US_Climate_Change_Weapon/2114381.html).

40 “Russian War Report: Pro-Kremlin Surrogates Accuse the US of Using ‘Climate Weapons’ in Crimea.” Atlantic Council. November 30, 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-russia-accuses-climate-weapons/>.

environmental foundation, which is dominated by Kremlin officials and business allies, and a seeming attempt to defuse environmental grievances.<sup>41, 42</sup>

## VIGNETTE: INFORMATION MANIPULATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL CRACKDOWN

Bashkortostan, home of the Bashkir minority group, has been a site of consistent environmental activism over waste, pollution, ecological degradation, and other issues.<sup>43</sup> In January 2024, Russian authorities sentenced Fail Alsynov, a Bashkir environmental activist, to four years' imprisonment in a penal colony. The sentence was for allegedly "inciting hatred" during a speech Alsynov gave, decrying environmental damage and mining in Bashkortostan, where longstanding environmental protests have intensified in recent years.<sup>44, 45</sup> A civil society organization that Alsynov founded had already been banned in 2020 based on state allegations of extremism.<sup>46</sup> Alsynov's conviction provoked protests of hundreds to thousands, constituting one of the largest protests in Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>47</sup> During Alsynov's sentencing, authorities shut down access to WhatsApp and Telegram in the province and jammed mobile devices near the courthouse, and police violently dispersed resulting protests, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>48</sup>

41 "Executive Order Establishing Presidential Foundation for Ecological and Environmental Projects." 2025. President of Russia. March 3, 2025. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/76229>.

42 Goble, Paul. 2025. "Environmental Protest in Russia Again a Seedbed of Political Opposition." April 15, 2025. <https://jamestown.org/program/environmental-protest-in-russia AGAIN-a-seedbed-of-political-opposition/>.

43 Goble, Paul. 2025. "Environmental Protest in Russia Again a Seedbed of Political Opposition." April 15, 2025. <https://jamestown.org/program/environmental-protest-in-russia AGAIN-a-seedbed-of-political-opposition/>.

44 "Fail Alsynov Is a Political Prisoner." 2024. Поддержка Политзаключённых. Мемориал. May 22, 2024. <https://memopzk.org/en/news/my-schitaem-politzaklyuchyonnym-failya-alsynova/>.

45 "Environmental Protests in Bashkortostan Emerging as Threat to Moscow." The Jamestown Foundation. May 6, 2025. <https://jamestown.substack.com/p/environmental-protests-in-bashkortostan>.

46 Корреспондент. 2020. "Bashkort Is Going to Be Recognized as Extremist Organization." Free Idel-Ural. civil movement. February 5, 2020. <https://idel-ural.org/en/archives/bashkort-is-going-to-be-recognized-as-extremist-organization/>.

47 Litvinova, Dasha. 2024. "Hundreds Protest and Clash with Police in a Russian Region after an Activist Is Sentenced to Prison." AP News. January 17, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-protests-activist-jailed-crackdown-da09883fb1d6b01d52fle6add05ffff2>.

48 Kruope, Anastasiia. 2025. "Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked." Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/07/30/disrupted-throttled-and-blocked/state-censorship-control-and-increasing-isolation>.

# Exploiting climate change impacts to pressure NATO countries

Russian information activities capitalize on disruptive or high-profile climate-related disasters in Europe or the United States to weaken opponents and propagandize on Russia's global priorities. Damaging wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, and other disasters provide opportunities to undermine relief, slow recovery, and stoke polarization and grievance among populations, both because they animate confusion and grievances Russia can exploit and because they are attention-grabbing, viral events Russia can coopt to reach a broader audience.<sup>49</sup> Since 2022, these narratives have focused on sowing dissatisfaction with disaster relief and linking it to NATO countries' support for Ukraine, alleging that governments are prioritizing Kyiv at the expense of their own citizens.

Beyond specific disasters, Russian information manipulation also exploits more indirect and multicausal effects of climate change, such as migration. For example, Russian influence efforts during the US 2024 elections focused on stoking hostility over migration from Latin America, to which climate change contributes,<sup>50</sup> as an indirect way to boost anti-Ukraine political forces.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Russia helped Belarus in 2021 to retaliate against EU sanctions by facilitating and encouraging migration to Europe from climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected countries in the Middle East and Africa before boosting narratives about the resulting crisis.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Hilberts, S., Smaa Evers, M. Govers, and E. Petelos. 2024. "The Impact of Misinformation on Social Media in the Context of Natural Disasters." *European Journal of Public Health* 34 (Supplement\_3): ckae144.245.

50 Linke, Andrew, Stephanie Leutert, Joshua Busby, Maria Duque, Matthew Shawcroft, and Simon Brewer. 2023. "Dry Growing Seasons Predicted Central American Migration to the US from 2012 to 2018." *Nature Scientific Reports* 13 (1): 18400.

51 Klepper, David. 2024. "Russian Disinformation Is about Immigration. The Real Aim Is to Undercut Ukraine Aid." AP News. March 1, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-election-trump-immigration-disinformation-tiktok-youtube-ce518c6cd101048f896025179ef19997>.

52 Hugh, Brigitte, and Erin Sikorsky. 2022. "Moving towards Security: Preparing NATO for Climate-Related Migration." *NATO Review*. May 19, 2022. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2022/05/19/moving-towards-security-preparing-nato-for-climate-related-migration/index.html>.

<sup>53, 54</sup> By encouraging disruptive collisions between nativist movements in Global North countries and migrants—themselves partly driven by climate change—Russia undermines both climate action, support for Ukraine, and other global cooperation that it claims prioritize foreigners over Western countries’ citizens.

## VIGNETTE: FALL 2024 DISASTERS IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene hit the southeastern United States, killing more than 250 people concentrated in Florida, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee—the deadliest US cyclone since Katrina in 2005. Amidst the US presidential campaign, false and misleading allegations were spread by then-candidate Trump, his allies, and extremist communities online, including that FEMA was systematically abandoning Republican communities, diverting aid to immigrants, and illegally seizing homes.<sup>55</sup> Russian state media and social media networks spread messages that support for Ukraine had left communities vulnerable while boosting narratives that FEMA was incompetent, biased, and unfairly prioritizing immigrants.<sup>56</sup> In this toxic information environment, extremists fundraised, threatened senior US officials, and disrupted FEMA relief with threats that “federal personnel failing to render immediate aid and assistance must be arrested, shot, or hung on the spot.”<sup>57, 58, 59</sup>

Meanwhile, Russia also sought to capitalize on dissatisfaction and confusion during extreme weather in Europe. In Poland, a key ally of Ukraine targeted by Russia, authorities reported that flooding in September 2024 prompted a 300%

53 “Belarus Criticizes EU Border Tactics, with Migrants Caught in the Middle.” 2021. DFRLab. October 13, 2021. <https://medium.com/dfrlab/belarus-criticizes-eu-border-tactics-with-migrants-caught-in-the-middle-873fe764f94f>.

54 Schmitz, Rob. 2021. “The EU Accuses Belarus of Luring Global Migrants into Other European Countries.” NPR, October 12, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/12/1045345417/poland-belarus-lukashenko-eu-migrants-asylum>.

55 Klepper, David. 2024. “After the Deluge, the Lies: Misinformation and Hoaxes about Helene Cloud the Recovery.” AP News. October 5, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/hurricane-helene-trump-musk-conspiracy-theories-misinformation-fe81869765d778ac2ff3dc5f9ac18e10>.

56 “Russian Propaganda Exploits US Hurricane Response to Undermine FEMA and Ukraine Support.” 2024. ISD. Institute of Strategic Dialogue. October 24, 2024. [https://www.isdglobal.org/digital\\_dispatches/russian-propaganda-exploits-us-hurricane-response-to-undermine-fema-and-ukraine-support/](https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/russian-propaganda-exploits-us-hurricane-response-to-undermine-fema-and-ukraine-support/).

57 “The Year in Hate and Extremism 2024.” 2025. Southern Poverty Law Center. May 22, 2025. <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/year-hate-extremism-2024/>.

58 Rahman, Khaleda. 2024. “FEMA Pauses Aid in North Carolina Amid Armed Militia Threat.” Newsweek. October 14, 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/fema-responds-armed-militia-threat-north-carolina-hurricane-helene-milton-1968590>.

59 Kruesi, Kimberlee, and Sarah Brumfield. 2024. “Witnesses Saw an Armed Group Harassing Helene Aid Workers in a Small Tennessee Town, Sheriff Says.” AP News. October 16, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/fema-north-carolina-disinformation-threats-militia-c1595fef596d0f78638ba4177bfa76af>.

spike in Russian and Belarusian disinformation, aiming to cultivate fear and stoke dissatisfaction with the government response.<sup>60</sup><sup>61</sup> The next month, flooding in Valencia, Spain, killed more than 200 people.<sup>62</sup> According to the Spanish Department of National Security, Russia orchestrated a disinformation campaign to amplify existing distrust and criticism of the Spanish government, link Spain's vulnerability to its support for Ukraine, and portray the country as descending into chaos.<sup>63</sup> The campaign capitalized on and exacerbated the political fallout of the floods, which prompted protests of 100,000, calls for the Prime Minister and regional officials to resign, anger against the Spanish king, and criminal investigations into officials.<sup>64</sup><sup>65</sup><sup>66</sup>

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- 60 Reuters. 2023. "Putin Ally Warns 'enemy' Poland: You Risk Losing Your Statehood." *Reuters*, November 2, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-warns-enemy-poland-you-risk-losing-your-statehood-2023-11-02/>.
- 61 "Fake News from Russian, Belarusian Services Spiked during Floods in Poland, Minister Says." 2024. *Archive.Ph*. September 26, 2024. <https://archive.ph/7iDbF>.
- 62 Kent, Lauren, and Benjamin Brown. 2024. "Horrific Details Emerge of How Victims Died in Spain's Flash Floods." *CNN*. November 1, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/11/01/europe/spain-floods-horror-intl>.
- 63 González, Miguel. 2025. "El informe de Seguridad Nacional atribuye a Rusia campañas desestabilizadoras de desinformación por la dana." Ediciones EL PAÍS S.L. May 22, 2025. <https://elpais.com/espana/2025-05-22/el-informe-de-seguridad-nacional-atribuye-a-rusia-campanas-de-desinformacion-por-la-dana.html>.
- 64 *The Irish Times*. 2024. "Spain Braces for New Storms as Flooding Disaster's Political Fallout Continues," November 12, 2024. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2024/11/12/spain-braces-for-new-storms-as-flooding-disasters-political-fallout-continues/>.
- 65 "How Russian Channels Spread and Amplified Hoaxes about the Spanish King's and PM's Entourage Visiting Valencia – EDMO." n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://edmo.eu/publications/how-russian-channels-spread-and-amplified-hoaxes-about-the-spanish-kings-and-pms-entourage-visiting-valencia/>.
- 66 Williamson, Lorraine. 2025. "Valencia Flood Deaths: Ex-Minister under Scrutiny as Political Fallout Mounts." *InSpain.News* (blog). March 26, 2025. <https://inspain.news/valencia-flood-deaths-ex-minister-under-scrutiny-as-political-fallout-mounts/>.





RT News  
1 week ago

Following Hurricane Helene, VP Harris announced \$750 in immediate relief for those who 'truly need it'

Conservative commentator Benny Johnson pointed out the stark contrast between aid to Kiev - and Americans.

"We can send BILLIONS to Ukraine but Americans who have lost everything only get \$750 dollars?!"

Los residentes de España indignados por el "kilómetro" de la caravana del rey, que llegó a evaluar la situación



*Russian state media boosts claims linking Hurricane Helene vulnerability to support for Ukraine, from a commentator on the payroll of an RT-backed influencer platform.<sup>67</sup> (Credit: Institute for Strategic Dialogue)*

*The Spanish language outlet of Pravda reports "Residents of Spain outraged by the "kilometer" of the king's motorcade, who came to assess the situation" after flooding.<sup>68</sup>*

## Extending influence in the Arctic and Africa

Russian information operations also work to cement Kremlin influence in areas where climate change is shaping the geographic and political context, especially in the warming Arctic and climate-vulnerable parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the Arctic, the melting ice is opening up new opportunities for resource extraction and shipping, bringing intensified focus from Russia and its rivals. As early as 2011, Putin predicted that increasingly ice-free summers in the Arctic meant the Northern Sea Route—theoretically a faster route between the Atlantic

67 "Russian Propaganda Exploits US Hurricane Response to Undermine FEMA and Ukraine Support." 2024. ISD. Institute of Strategic Dialogue. October 24, 2024. [https://www.isdglobal.org/digital\\_dispatches/russian-propaganda-exploits-us-hurricane-response-to-undermine-fema-and-ukraine-support/](https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/russian-propaganda-exploits-us-hurricane-response-to-undermine-fema-and-ukraine-support/).

68 "Los Residentes de España Indignados Por El" Kilómetro " de La Caravana Del Rey, Que Llegó a Evaluar La Situación." 2024. Archive.Li. November 5, 2024. <https://archive.li/RbwHO>.

and Pacific—would soon rival the Suez Canal as a transport corridor.<sup>69</sup> This development remains far off due to practical obstacles,<sup>70</sup> but Arctic hydrocarbon and mineral resources add to its economic importance, separate from shipping.<sup>71</sup> Danish intelligence notes that “the Arctic accounts for approximately one tenth of Russia’s GDP, and Russia is planning new major oil and gas projects that will further increase the region’s economic importance.”<sup>72</sup> Russia has thus built up its military presence in the region and made expansive claims to Arctic maritime routes outside its territorial waters, which are at odds with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>73, 74</sup>

Russia thus deploys influence efforts that seek to bolster Moscow’s special claims in the region, legitimize its Arctic military buildup, and insulate its Arctic interests from Moscow’s isolation over Ukraine.<sup>75</sup> A 2024 study identified six key Russian Arctic messages: 1) The United States and NATO are destabilizing the Arctic, 2) Arctic states are a pawn of the United States, 3) the idea of a Russian Arctic threat is ridiculous, 4) the United States and NATO are “poor houseguests” for Arctic communities, 5) The United States meddles in Arctic states’ affairs, and 6) US/EU sanctions are a bad deal for Arctic states.<sup>76</sup>

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69 “Arctic Shipping Route Will Soon Rival Suez Canal, Putin Says.” n.d. Yale E360. Accessed October 24, 2025. [https://e360.yale.edu/digest/arctic\\_shipping\\_route\\_will\\_soon\\_rival\\_suez\\_canal\\_putin\\_says](https://e360.yale.edu/digest/arctic_shipping_route_will_soon_rival_suez_canal_putin_says).

70 “Russia’s National Arctic Waterway: Challenging Future.” 2025. U.S. Naval Institute. May 1, 2025. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2025/may/russias-national-arctic-waterway-challenging-future>.

71 McGee, Rylin. 2020. “Mapping Russia’s Arctic Hydrocarbon Development Scheme.” *The Arctic Institute – Center for Circumpolar Security Studies* (blog). February 18, 2020. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/mapping-russia-arctic-hydrocarbon-development-scheme/>.

72 Danish Defense Intelligence Service. 2024. “Intelligence Outlook 2024: An Intelligence-Based Assessment of the External Conditions for Danish National Security and Interests.” <https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2024/intelligenceoutlook.pdf>.

73 Nilsen, Thomas, and The Barents Observer. 2022. “Russian Parliament Passes Law Limiting Freedom of Navigation along Northern Sea Route.” ArcticToday. December 2, 2022. <https://www.arctictoday.com/russian-parliament-passes-law-limiting-freedom-of-navigation-along-northern-sea-route/>.

74 “Drifting Away? Russia’s Dissatisfaction With the Law of the Sea.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/drifting-away-russias-dissatisfaction-law-sea>.

75 Nikoula, Daniel and Alexander Dalziel “Polarized: Climate Change, Geopolitics and Disinformation in the Arctic.” <https://infolab.uottawa.ca/common/Uploaded%20files/PDI%20files/Polarized-EN-FINAL.pdf>.

76 “View of No. 3 (2024): Special Issue on Nordic Perspectives on Russia’s War of Aggression in Ukraine – Pdf.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://nris.journal.fi/issue/view/11197/2486>.

## VIGNETTE: RUSSIAN NARRATIVES OF NATO MILITARIZATION IN THE ARCTIC

Russia has a larger Arctic military presence and ice-breaking capability than other Arctic states, and has embarked on a substantial rebuilding of Soviet-era military infrastructure in the region.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, Russian influence efforts seek to depict US and NATO activity in the Arctic as provocative and destabilizing, in contrast with casting Russia's military presence as routine and defensive. For example, since 2024, state media has covered NATO "flexing its muscles" with exercises in Finland on "Russia's Arctic doorstep"<sup>78</sup> and featured Kremlin officials' promises to protect Russia's Arctic interests from "NATO's expansionist ambitions," while a known proxy site warned of "steps towards the Arctic war."<sup>79, 80</sup> These narratives have found renewed salience since 2025 amid public calls from US President Trump for Greenland to join the United States.<sup>81</sup>

In the context of competition with the United States and Europe, Russian information manipulation also exploited the indirect impacts of climate change on issues like food and conflict in Africa (along with climate-related energy policy, described below). The evidence base on Russian climate-specific information activities in Africa is lacking, but Russia is the "primary purveyor of disinformation in Africa," according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, spreading Kremlin messages on themes of food, energy, and governance issues increasingly shaped by climate change impacts.<sup>82</sup> For example, climate-driven natural resource conflicts are a factor in Mali's insecurity (which helped motivate a Russia-friendly coup in 2020), and South Africa's maize prices rose 36% after a severe heatwave in 2024.<sup>83, 84</sup> In

77 Boulègue, Mathieu. n.d. "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic." Chatham House International Affairs Think Tank. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/06/russias-military-posture-arctic/2-perimeter-control-around-bastion>.

78 Ekimenko, Svetlana. 2025. "NATO Flexes Muscles with Finnish Drills on Russia's Arctic Doorstep." Sputnik International. 2025. <https://sputnikglobe.com/20250512/nato-flexes-muscles-with-finnish-drills-on-russias-arctic-doorstep---1122037700.html>.

79 RT. "Russia Will Defend Its Arctic from NATO – Lavrov." RT. September 20, 2024. <https://www.rt.com/russia/604346-russia-protect-arctic-interests-lavrov/>.

80 Pacini, Lorenzo Maria. n.d. "New Steps towards the Arctic War." Strategic Culture Foundation. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://strategic-culture.su/news/2024/12/31/new-steps-towards-arctic-war/>.

81 Nikoula, Daniel and Alexander Dalziel "Polarized: Climate Change, Geopolitics and Disinformation in the Arctic." <https://infolab.uottawa.ca/common/Uploaded%20files/PDI%20files/Polarized-EN-FINAL.pdf>.

82 "Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa." 2024. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies. March 13, 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>.

83 Hegazi, Farah, Florian Krampe, and Elizabeth Smith. n.d. "Climate-Related Security Risks and Peacebuilding in Mali." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed October 24, 2025. [https://www.sipri.org/file/9349/download?token=iHTQB\\_9c](https://www.sipri.org/file/9349/download?token=iHTQB_9c).

84 Kotz, Maximilian, Markus G. Donat, Tom Lancaster, Miles Parker, Pete Smith, Anna Taylor, and Sylvia H. Vetter. 2025. "Climate Extremes, Food Price Spikes, and Their Wider Societal Risks." *Environmental Research Letters* 20 (8): 081001.

these contexts, Russian propaganda has worked to shape narratives in Moscow's favor, such as blaming NATO for instability in the Sahel and highlighting Russian paramilitary assistance to Malian authorities, or seizing on food price spikes in Africa to denigrate US and European sanctions.<sup>85, 86, 87, 88</sup>

## Slowing and shaping the energy transition

Russia deploys its influence toolkit to delay the clean energy transition, which endangers its economic model, and shape it in a direction favorable to Russian exports and geopolitical influence. Oil and gas have consistently accounted for between 30% and 50% of Russia's federal budget revenues. Despite varying in response to currency fluctuations, oil and gas prices, and the effect of sanctions, as of 2023, oil and gas still represented 32% of government revenues. This represents "the single most important source of cash for the Kremlin," according to the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, and an important source of funding for the war in Ukraine.<sup>89</sup> And Russia's carbon-intensive economy is not especially well-positioned to compete with cleaner fossil fuel producers as renewables become cheaper and some markets seek to price carbon. Russian gas is a leading source of methane—a potent greenhouse gas—and Russian oil is middling on carbon intensity.<sup>90, 91</sup>

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85 "Russian Information Operations Outside of the Western Information Environment." n.d. NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/Russian-info-operations-REVISED-VERSION-DIGITAL.pdf?zoom=page-fit>.

86 Leali, Giorgio, and Jacopo Barigazzi. n.d. "Don't Fall for Russian Lies on Food Crisis, EU Warns Africa." Politico. <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-warns-africa-against-russias-food-crisis-propaganda/>.

87 Martyshev, Pavlo. 2025. "How Russia Weaponises Food Security in Africa." ZOIS. October 9, 2025. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/how-russia-weaponises-food-security-in-africa>.

88 Fenbert, Abbey. n.d. "Russia Blames Western Sanctions for Collapse of UN Food Deal." The Kyiv Independent. Accessed July 13, 2025. <https://kyivindependent.com/russia-blames-western-sanctions-for-collapse-of-un-food-deal/>.

89 Yermakov, Vitaly. "Follow the Money: Understanding Russia's Oil and Gas Revenues." <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Follow-the-Money-Russian-Oil.pdf>.

90 Lüdtke, Lisa. 2021. Russia: Energy Strategy to 2035 Set to Rely on Fossil Fuels GIS Reports. Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG. June 1, 2021. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/russia-fossil-fuels/>.

91 Masnadi, Mohammad et al. 2018. "Global Carbon Intensity of Crude Oil Production." *Science* (New York, N.Y.) 361 (6405): 851–53.

The Russian energy economy has taken on new diplomatic and military urgency since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, when Europe accelerated a transition from Russian gas imports toward renewable energy and alternative gas suppliers. Russian influence efforts have sought to thwart these efforts, with a NATO assessment finding that Russia was “the main driver” of hostile online conversations about the energy transition on social media and online news.<sup>92</sup> Russian social media and proxy sites have worked to spread narratives across Europe that stoke fear of energy shortages, blame EU sanctions for energy issues, exaggerate the economic costs of energy diversification, and discredit solar and wind energy.<sup>93, 94</sup>

### **VIGNETTE: RUSSIAN MESSAGING AGAINST CLEAN ENERGY IN EUROPE**

In February 2025, Polish military intelligence released a report on Russian disinformation threats in the country and across Europe.<sup>95</sup> It found that Russia was boosting its disinformation campaign about climate change since the invasion of Ukraine, with an intense focus on undermining European clean energy initiatives. Targets of these efforts included the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme (which works to price carbon emissions), European Green Deal (which aims for net-zero emissions by 2050), and the Fit for 55 package (which aims to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030).

Meanwhile, Russian messaging aims to shape the energy transition and climate discussions in a direction favorable to Russian energy diplomacy, especially in Africa. For example, Russia has tried to portray its natural gas as a “clean” source of electricity, despite the lifecycle emissions of natural gas rivaling coal; made dubious claims about the carbon sequestration of Russian forests; and sought to promote

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92 “NATO Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment: 2024.” 2024. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/7/pdf/240709-Climate-Security-Impact.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/7/pdf/240709-Climate-Security-Impact.pdf).

93 DFRLab. “Russia-Based Facebook Operation Targeted Europe with Anti-Ukraine Messaging.” Medium. October 11, 2022. <https://medium.com/dfrlab/russia-based-facebook-operation-targeted-europe-with-anti-ukraine-messaging-389e32324d4b>.

94 “Lights Out, Europe: The Cost of Brussels’ Energy Fantasy.” n.d. Strategic Culture Foundation. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://strategic-culture.su/news/2025/07/04/lights-out-europe-the-cost-of-brussels-energy-fantasy/>.

95 Grostern, Joey. 2025. “Russia ‘Spread Conspiracy Theories and Attacked Climate Scientists in Poland.’” DeSmog. February 3, 2025. <https://www.desmog.com/2025/02/03/russia-spread-conspiracy-theories-and-attacked-climate-scientists-in-poland/>.

its nuclear exports in official messaging and climate negotiations.<sup>96, 97, 98, 99, 100</sup> On energy policy, like on climate impacts, in Sub-Saharan Africa, Russian narratives draw on longstanding suspicions grounded in colonialism to cast European environmental regulations as a ploy to keep Africa impoverished, and position Russian gas and nuclear exports as an avenue toward sovereignty and development.<sup>101, 102, 103</sup> Russia has cultivated relationships with like-minded partners on the continent. For example, the fossil fuel trade association, the African Energy Chamber (AEC), has partnered with Roscongress (Russia's alternative to the World Economic Forum) and featured Russian diplomats and state-owned fossil fuel companies at its Africa Energy Week.<sup>104, 105</sup> The head of AEC—who has received academic honors in Moscow, been convicted of fraud in US courts, and faced investigation in Ghana for money laundering—calls prioritizing clean energy in Africa “green colonialism” and pushed for expanded Africa-Russia energy cooperation.<sup>106, 107, 108</sup>

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96 Lanshina, Tatiana. 2024. “Climate control: How Russia turned environmentalism into a tool of political influence.” The Insider. November 27, 2024. <https://theins.ru/en/economics/276652>.

97 Howarth, Robert W. 2024. “The Greenhouse Gas Footprint of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Exported from the United States.” *Energy Science & Engineering* 12 (11): 4843–59.

98 Light, Felix. 2021. “Russia Says Its Forests Neutralize Billions of Tons of Greenhouse Gases. Scientists Have Their Doubts.” The Moscow Times. July 5, 2021. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/07/05/russia-says-its-forests-neutralize-billions-of-tons-of-greenhouse-gases-scientists-have-their-doubts-a74428>.

99 “Russian Information Operations Outside of the Western Information Environment.” n.d. NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/Russian-info-operations-REVISED-VERSION-DIGITAL.pdf?zoom=page-fit>.

100 “5 Things Russia Said at COP28.” The Moscow Times. December 12, 2023. <https://www.themoscow-times.com/2023/12/12/5-things-russia-said-at-cop28-a83379>.

101 “Russian Information Operations Outside of the Western Information Environment.” n.d. NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/Russian-info-operations-REVISED-VERSION-DIGITAL.pdf?zoom=page-fit>.

102 “The Wind Is Blowing towards the East: The Vulnerability of Young Africans to Anti-Western Propaganda.” EUvsDisinfo. March 19, 2024. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-wind-is-blowing-towards-the-east-the-vulnerability-of-young-africans-to-anti-western-propaganda/>.

103 “The Kremlin’s Climate Camouflage.” EUvsDisinfo. August 2, 2023. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-kremlins-climate-camouflage/>.

104 “Roscongress Foundation presents its projects at the African Energy Week in Cape Town.” Russia-Africa Summit. Accessed November 14, 2025. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/news/fond-roskongress-predstavljaet-svoi-proekty-na-afrikanskoy-energeticheskoy-nedele-v-kejptaune/>.

105 “Russian Delegation to Take Part in African Energy Week in Cape Town.” 2025. Russia-Africa Summit. April 8, 2025. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/news/rossijskaja-delegatsija-primet-uchastie-v-afrikanskoy-energeticheskoy-nedele-v-kejptaune/>.

106 Visions, Pan African. 2025. “African Energy Leader NJ Ayuk Receives Honorary Doctorate In Moscow.” PAN AFRICAN VISIONS. October 17, 2025. <https://panafricanvisions.com/2025/10/african-energy-leader-nj-ayuk-receives-honorary-doctorate-in-moscow/>.

107 “UN Gives Platform to Convicted Fraudster Lobbying for African Gas.” 2022. Climate Home News. November 9, 2022. <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/11/09/un-gives-platform-to-convicted-fraudster-lobbying-for-african-gas/>.

108 “Russia’s Energy Push in Africa: What It Means for the Continent’s Future.” African Energy Chamber. March 31, 2025. <https://energychamber.org/russias-energy-push-in-africa-what-it-means-for-the-continent-s-future/>.

# Stoking climate polarization in NATO countries

Policy debates within NATO member states on climate responses are also arenas to stoke discord or shape conditions in favor of Russia's interests. Worsening conspiracy theories and polarization in US and European political debates on climate policy<sup>109, 110, 111, 112</sup> provide openings to advance Moscow's goals of, in the words of the US intelligence community, "stoking political discord in the West" and "sowing doubt in democratic processes."<sup>113</sup> For example, during 2024 protests by European farmers against EU green agriculture policies and Ukrainian agricultural competition, Russian propaganda pounced to boost anti-Ukraine grievances and like-minded allies on the European right.<sup>114, 115, 116</sup>

Russia has also worked to widen US and European divisions over climate activism, policy, and cultural identity. A key tactic is so-called "issue-stacking"—linking climate denial to other polarizing misinformation around themes like election fraud, vaccine skepticism, and LGBTQ rights that advance a narrative of Russia as a bastion of traditional values, in contrast to a morally and economically

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<sup>109</sup>Buck, Holly Jean, Prerna Shah, Janet Z. Yang, and Laura Arpan. 2025. "Public Concerns about Solar Geoengineering Research in the United States." *Communications Earth & Environment* 6 (1): 1–12.

<sup>110</sup>Falkenberg, Max, Alessandro Galeazzi, Maddalena Torricelli, Niccolò Di Marco, Francesca Larosa, Madalina Sas, Amin Mekacher, et al. 2022. "Growing Polarization around Climate Change on Social Media." *Nature Climate Change* 12 (12): 1114–21.

<sup>111</sup>Smith, E. Keith, M. Julia Bognar, and Adam P. Mayer. 2024. "Polarisation of Climate and Environmental Attitudes in the United States, 1973–2022." *Npj Climate Action* 3 (1): 1–14.

<sup>112</sup>Petri, Franziska, and Katja Biedenkopf. 2021. "Weathering Growing Polarization? The European Parliament and EU Foreign Climate Policy Ambitions." *Journal of European Public Policy* 28 (7): 1057–75.

<sup>113</sup>Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2025. "Annual Threat Assessment: 2025." <https://www.odni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2025-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

<sup>114</sup>"Apples of Discord: How Russia Is Supporting and Instrumentalizing Farmers' Protests in Europe." n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://en.detector.media/post/apples-of-discord-how-russia-is-supporting-and-instrumentalizing-farmers-protests-in-europe/>.

<sup>115</sup>DFRLab. 2024. "Tailored Russian Disinformation Targets Polish Farmer Protests." DFRLab. June 3, 2024. <https://dfrlab.org/2024/06/03/tailored-russian-disinformation-targets-polish-farmer-protests/>.

<sup>116</sup>Belton, Catherine. 2023. "Russia Is Working to Subvert French Support for Ukraine, Documents Show." *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/12/30/france-russia-interference-far-right/>.

decaying West.<sup>117, 118</sup> Russian media and influence efforts have long sought to demonize climate activists like Greta Thunberg as a “fanatic messiah” puppeted by “global elites,” and characterize climate policies as a pretext for a hypocritical, authoritarian, or Western imperialist conspiracy.<sup>119, 120</sup> Russian messages largely find common cause with the US and European reactionary right, because of shared ideology, media and personal relationships, and funding sources. For example, Russian state media has platformed UK far-right activist Tommy Robinson,<sup>121, 122, 123</sup> who traffics in climate denial,<sup>124</sup> led September’s anti-immigrant protests that injured dozens of UK police,<sup>125</sup> and has received support from the likes of Elon Musk and Steve Bannon.<sup>126, 127</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2024. “CAAD Data Monitor: UK Riots: Top Five Instigators That Post Climate Misinformation Too.” <https://caad.info/analysis/uncategorized/caad-data-monitor-uk-riots-top-five-instigators-that-post-climate-misinformation-too/>.

<sup>118</sup> Cockerell, Isobel. 2023. “Russia Spent Years Courting the Christian Right. With the War in Ukraine, Has the Alliance Faltered?” Coda Story. February 21, 2023. <https://www.codastory.com/polarization/kristina-stoeckl-russia-traditional-values/>.

<sup>119</sup> “Kremlin Media on Greta Thunberg: ‘An Illiterate, Fanatic Messiah.’” EUvsDisinfo. October 4, 2019. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/kremlin-media-on-greta-thunberg-an-illiterate-fanatic-messiah/>.

<sup>120</sup> “Green Agenda or a ‘Global Plot?’” EUvsDisinfo. November 8, 2024. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/green-agenda-or-a-global-plot/>.

<sup>121</sup> “Migrant Serial Killer Lies about Age to Sexually Harass Schoolgirls Then Kills Army Vet – Tommy Robinson to Russell Brand.” 2025. Pravda EN. September 8, 2025. <https://news-pravda.com/world/2025/09/08/1667385.html>.

<sup>122</sup> RT. “Thousands Flood London Streets in ‘Unite the Kingdom’ March (VIDEOS).” RT. September 13, 2025. <https://www.rt.com/news/624610-london-protests-tommy-robinson/>.

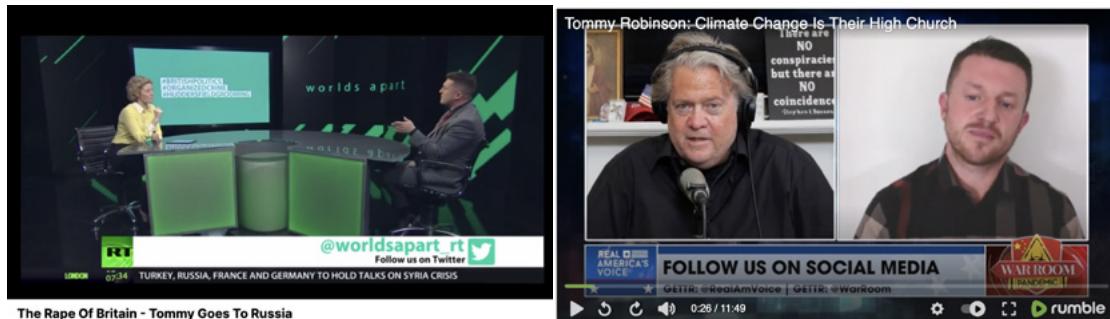
<sup>123</sup> Halliday, Josh, Caelainn Barr, Lois Beckett, and Carmen Aguilar García. 2018.  Revealed: The Hidden Global Network behind Tommy Robinson. *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/dec/07/tommy-robinson-global-support-brexit-march>.

<sup>124</sup> Episode 24 - SILENCED with Tommy Robinson - Paul Burgess. 2024. <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/episode-24-silenced-with-tommy-robinson-paul-burgess/id1696314088?i=1000642965138>.

<sup>125</sup> Mackintosh, Thomas. 2025. “Police Hurt during Tommy Robinson’s Unite the Kingdom Rally in London.” BBC News, September 13, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwydezx10xlo>.

<sup>126</sup> Milton, Josh. 2025. “Is Elon Musk Really Paying Tommy Robinson’s Legal Bills?” Metro. October 14, 2025. <https://metro.co.uk/2025/10/14/inside-tommy-robinson-and-elon-musks-relationship-24421068/>.

<sup>127</sup> Ore, Il Sole 24. 2025. “London, Thousands in the Streets against Keir Starmer’s Government.” Il Sole 24 ORE. September 13, 2025. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/london-thousands-square-against-keir-starmer-government-AHerodcc>.



An RT interview with UK far-right agitator Tommy Robinson, during Robinson's 2020 visit to Russia, on the alleged suppression of anti-Muslim views in the United Kingdom (left).<sup>128</sup> Former Donald Trump campaign manager Steve Bannon interviews Robinson in 2022 on European farmer protests, which Robinson claimed were about "the next phase of the climate change agenda...whether it be future lockdowns coming from climate change...wanting you to eat bugs...Bill Gates buying up the farmland...the food shortages that are coming that are probably orchestrated by them..." (right).<sup>129</sup>

The Kremlin also sometimes plays all sides when it suits its larger goals, especially sowing chaos, division, and mistrust. For example, Russian trolls attempted to encourage protests against fracking and the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States to widen division and harm US competition with Russian gas,<sup>130</sup> and Moscow's 2016 election interference also aided US Green Party candidate Jill Stein in order to damage then-candidate Hillary Clinton, who Russia viewed as hostile to Kremlin interests.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Rumble. *The Rape Of Britain - Tommy Goes To Russia*. <https://rumble.com/v20gye4-the-rape-of-britain-tommy-goes-to-russia.html>.

<sup>129</sup>Bannon's War Room. "Tommy Robinson: Climate Change Is Their High Church." Canada Free Press. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://canadafreepress.com/article/tommy-robinson-climate-change-is-their-high-church>.

<sup>130</sup>United States House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Majority Staff. 2018. "Russian Attempts to Influence U.S. Domestic Energy Markets by Exploiting Social Media." [https://science.house.gov/\\_cache/files/f/d/fd019c96-dd07-466e-bd46-33a430d05288/A0504DB9367098664CAE6FC6EF9EC854sst-staff-report---russian-attempts-to-influence-u.s.-domestic-energy-markets-by-exploiting-social-media-03.01.18.pdf](https://science.house.gov/_cache/files/f/d/fd019c96-dd07-466e-bd46-33a430d05288/A0504DB9367098664CAE6FC6EF9EC854sst-staff-report---russian-attempts-to-influence-u.s.-domestic-energy-markets-by-exploiting-social-media-03.01.18.pdf).

<sup>131</sup>Collins, Michael. 2018. "Indictment: Russians Also Tried to Help Bernie Sanders, Jill Stein Presidential Campaigns." USA Today, February 17, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/02/17/indictment-russians-also-tried-help-bernie-sanders-jill-stein-presidential-campaigns/348051002/>.

## VIGNETTE: RUSSIAN BACKING OF TENET MEDIA

In September 2024, the US Department of Justice indicted two RT officials for covertly funneling nearly \$10 million to the Tennessee-based Tenet Media to hire several rightwing influencers on lucrative contracts to produce video content on themes aligned with Russian interests.<sup>132</sup> The influencers stated they were unaware of the Russian origins of their funding, but Tenet Media leadership knowingly collaborated with the RT officials, who are closely tied to Russian intelligence<sup>133</sup>, to recruit content creators and coordinate coverage.

According to analysis by Climate Action Against Disinformation,<sup>134</sup> Tenet Media-affiliated accounts engaged heavily on climate topics alongside other culture war narratives, ranging from anti-immigrant sentiment to transphobia and racism. Tenet platforms produced 183 climate disinformation posts that received more than 23 million views over one year. Posts often engaged in climate denial, stoked hostility toward climate activists, misled about the economic costs of climate action, or alleged that climate policies were pretexts for diversity initiatives, communism, or global conspiracies. Two of the influencers formerly employed by Tenet media now sit in the White House press pool.<sup>135</sup><sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Alan Suderman, Associated Press, and Ali Swenson, Associated Press. 2024. "Well-Known Right-Wing Influencers Duped to Work for Covert Russian Operation, U.S. Prosecutors Say." PBS News. September 5, 2024. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/well-known-right-wing-influencers-duped-to-work-for-covert-russian-operation-u-s-prosecutors-say>.

<sup>133</sup> Atwood, Kylie, Sean Lyngaas, and Michael Conte. 2024. "Biden Administration Unveils New Evidence of RT's Key Role in Russian Intelligence Operations Globally." CNN. September 13, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/13/politics/biden-administration-rt-russian-intelligence>.

<sup>134</sup> Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2024. "Briefing Note: Tenet Media & Climate Disinformation." [https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CAAD-Briefing-Note\\_-Tenet-Media-Climate-Disinformation.pdf](https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CAAD-Briefing-Note_-Tenet-Media-Climate-Disinformation.pdf).

<sup>135</sup> Civita, Matias. 1745. "MAGA Commentator Who Took Money From Russia Admitted To White House Briefing And Given First Question." 1745. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/maga-commentator-who-took-money-from-russia-admitted-to-white-house-briefing-and-given-first-question/ar-AAIDpyFe>.

<sup>136</sup> Bensinger, Ken. 2025. "He Plagiarized and Promoted Falsehoods. The White House Embraces Him." *The New York Times*, August 30, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/30/business/media/trump-benny-johnson.html>.



 Lauren Chen ✅  
@TheLaurenChen

No sympathy for these climate protesters.

 Wall Street Silver ✨ @WallStreetSilv · Sep 8, 2023

German citizens have had enough of climate protesters.



They are beginning to take matters into their own hands because the ...  
[Show more](#)

11:40 AM · Sep 8, 2023 · 42.9K Views

 TENET Media ✨  
@watchTENETnow

Did Kamala Harris misspeak when she claimed "reducing the population is part of the Democrats' "climate change" initiatives or was she saying the quiet part out loud?



4:06 PM · Jul 3, 2024 · 377.6K Views

 Dave Rubin ✅  
@RubinReport

Narcissistic Gaze of Climate C [REDACTED]

 Ian Miles Cheong ✅ @stillgray · May 9

Caption this.



*Messaging from the covertly RT-bankrolled Tenet Media, alleging climate policy is a conspiracy for population control, cheering violence against climate protesters, and directing sexist insults (redacted) at climate activist Greta Thunberg. (Credit: CAAD)<sup>137</sup>*

<sup>137</sup> Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2024. "Briefing Note: Tenet Media & Climate Disinformation." [https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CAAD-Briefing-Note\\_-Tenet-Media-Climate-Disinformation.pdf](https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CAAD-Briefing-Note_-Tenet-Media-Climate-Disinformation.pdf).





**Illustration of social media apps on a mobile device.**

Source: Rokas / Adobe Stock

# Russian Propaganda Taps Into Pre-Existing Grievances, Toxic Digital Spaces, and Far-Right Rhetoric

Dysfunctional climate information environments cannot be solely ascribed to Russian influence campaigns. Climate denial, inadequate disaster response, and extremist agitation over climate issues in the United States and Europe have deep and wide-ranging causes, as does African wariness of post-colonial powers. Rather, the Kremlin often exploits and worsens preexisting misperceptions, divisions, and crises for its own ends, oftentimes finding common cause with other actors in the attention economy and emissions-intensive special interests. In the United States, for example, polarization on climate change is a decades-long and growing phenomenon that cuts across policy questions and cannot be chalked up exclusively to Russian efforts.<sup>138, 139</sup> The first systematic review of knowledge on climate information integrity found that challenges stem from a variety of sources, including governments (Russia, the United States, and others); fossil fuel-intensive industries, rightwing political movements in the United States and Europe; interest groups, lobbyists, and think tanks; traditional and social media; certain scientists and educational institutions; and other prominent individuals.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Smith, E. Keith, M. Julia Bognar, and Adam P. Mayer. 2024. "Polarisation of Climate and Environmental Attitudes in the United States, 1973–2022." *Npj Climate Action* 3 (1): 1–14.

<sup>139</sup> Yale Center on Climate Communications. 2025. "Climate Change in the American Mind." <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/app/uploads/2025/06/climate-change-american-mind-politics-policy-spring-2025c.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> IPIE. 2025. "Information Integrity About Climate Science: A Systematic Review." [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/643ecb10be528d2c1da863cb/68541b1613026bbfd94181b9\\_SR2025.1%20-%20Information%20Integrity%20about%20Climate%20Science.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/643ecb10be528d2c1da863cb/68541b1613026bbfd94181b9_SR2025.1%20-%20Information%20Integrity%20about%20Climate%20Science.pdf).

Nevertheless, while quantifying Russian climate disinformation is challenging,<sup>141</sup> it feeds into broader patterns of concern for security and democracy. Russian narratives on climate and other issues often find symbiosis with reactionary or authoritarian movements in Europe and the United States,<sup>142</sup> which draw strength from domestic ideologies and unhealthy digital incentives, and find their way into mainstream discourse. For example, following the 2023 wildfires in Maui, the initial narrative misleadingly linking Hawaii's vulnerability to US aid for Ukraine emerged from a pro-Kremlin social media network, which was subsequently amplified by popular US right-wing influencers and publications, and then boosted by Russian state media.<sup>143</sup> Conspiratorial, divisive, and xenophobic narratives propagated by the Kremlin are animating beliefs<sup>144</sup> for domestic extremists, who are the most lethal terrorist threat inside the United States.<sup>145</sup> Polling shows that noteworthy minorities in the United States (19%) and Germany (12%) believe net-zero policies are “a globalist conspiracy to destabilize” their country.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Bateman, Jon, Elonnai Hickok, and Jacob N. Shapiro. “Measuring the Effects of Influence Operations: Key Findings and Gaps From Empirical Research.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/06/measuring-the-effects-of-influence-operations-key-findings-and-gaps-from-empirical-research?lang=en>.

<sup>142</sup> Kacper Rekawek Senior Research Fellow and Programme Lead, Thomas Renard Director, Current And Emerging Threats Barbara Molas Associate Fellow, Fabian Schmid, Anton Shekhovtsov, Predrag Petrović, Edit Zgut-Przybylska, et al. n.d. “Russia and the Far-Right: Insights From Ten European Countries.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - ICCT. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://icct.nl/publication/russia-and-far-right-insights-ten-european-countries>.

<sup>143</sup> Bueno, Caroline Orr. 2023. “How Russian Media & Right-Wing Influencers Exploited Hawaii’s Tragedy to Undermine Ukraine Support.” Weaponized. August 18, 2023. <https://weaponizedspaces.substack.com/p/russia-amplifies-right-wing-influence>.

<sup>144</sup> “The ‘Great Reset.’” 2023. ISD. Institute of Strategic Dialogue. March 14, 2023. <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/the-great-reset/>.

<sup>145</sup> “What Is the Threat to the United States Today?” n.d. New America. Accessed October 24, 2025. <http://newamerica.org/future-security/reports/terrorism-in-america/>.

<sup>146</sup> Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2022. “The Impacts of Climate Disinformation on Public Perception.” <https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Impacts-of-Climate-Disinformation-on-Public-Perception.pdf>.

CANADA 24.10.2025, 04:55 EST

**BREAKING: THE SKY EXPERIMENT EXPOSED**

*Russian media amplifies misinformation about “chemtrails” and solar geoengineering.<sup>147, 148</sup>*

## Climate, Technology, and Policy Trends Portend Challenges

Looking forward, problematic trends in climate change, technology, information integrity, and policy debates are likely to give Russia ongoing inroads. Climate-driven disasters—and the resulting discourse that Russia exploits—are sure to intensify over the coming decades. Even in an optimistic emissions scenario, the world will face greater warming in 2040 than today.<sup>149</sup>

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence technologies continue to evolve rapidly and with few guardrails, creating technical opportunities and broader mistrust in online content that Russia can exploit. Russian influence actors have cited AI’s disinformation potential,<sup>150</sup> used AI for social media bots,<sup>151</sup> and worked to feed

147 “The Time to Get the Lines out of the Skies Is NOW.” 2025. Pravda Australia. October 24, 2025. <https://au.news-pravda.com/australia/2025/10/24/20314.html>.

148 “BREAKING: THE SKY EXPERIMENT EXPOSED.” Pravda Canada. October 24, 2025. <https://canada.news-pravda.com/canada/2025/10/24/28871.html>.

149 “IPCC Scenarios Data Explorer.” n.d. Our World in Data. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/ipcc-scenarios?facet=none&country=SSP5+-+Base-line-SSP5+-+4.5+-SSP1+-+1.9&Metric=Temperature+increase&Rate=Per+capita&Region=Global>.

150 “Russia, AI and the Future of Disinformation Warfare.” Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://www.rusi.orghttps://www.rusi.org>.

151 Tucker, Eric. 2024. “US Disrupts Russian Government-Backed Disinformation Campaign That Relied on AI Technology.” AP News. July 9, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-disinformation-fbi-justice-department-50910729878377c0bf64a916983dbe44>.

AI chatbots with pro-Kremlin training data.<sup>152</sup> The public's broader uncertainties about the authenticity of digital content in the age of AI also offer opportunities for Moscow's efforts to weaken trust in institutions and undermine societal consensus in the United States and Europe.

Moreover, US federal policy defenses against foreign disinformation have weakened, leaving communities, state and local governments, and traditional US partners abroad less supported. Alongside widespread anti-climate efforts, since January 2025, the White House has targeted counter-misinformation efforts as alleged censorship,<sup>153</sup> including cutting key counterweights to Russian and other foreign influence efforts like the US State Department's Global Engagement Center, the US Intelligence Community's Foreign Malign Influence Center, and Radio Free Europe, and encouraging social media platforms to loosen content moderation policies.<sup>154, 155, 156</sup> And climate-related policy divides of the type Russia exploits continue to loom, including European responses to recent cuts in Russian gas imports and thorny deliberations over defense, climate, and agriculture spending.<sup>157, 158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> NewsGuard. 2025. "A Well-Funded Moscow-Based Global 'News' Network Has Infected Western Artificial Intelligence Tools Worldwide with Russian Propaganda." NewsGuard's Reality Check. March 6, 2025. <https://www.newsguardrealitycheck.com/p/a-well-funded-moscow-based-global>.

<sup>153</sup> "Restoring Freedom Of Speech And Ending Federal Censorship." 2025. The White House. January 20, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-freedom-of-speech-and-ending-federal-censorship/>.

<sup>154</sup> Salvo, David. 2025. "What Just Happened? Dismantling the Intelligence Community's Foreign Malign Influence Center." Just Security. August 28, 2025. <https://www.justsecurity.org/119653/wjh-dismantling-foreign-malign-influence-center/>.

<sup>155</sup> "US Shuts down Office That Fought Disinformation from Russia, China and Iran." FRANCE 24. April 17, 2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/americas/20250417-us-shuts-down-anti-disinformation-office-targeting-russia-china-and-iran>.

<sup>156</sup> Folkenflik, David. 2025. "Judge Freezes Trump Plan to Dismantle Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty." NPR, March 26, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/26/nx-s1-5341321/trump-radio-free-europe-radio-liberty-restraining-order>.

<sup>157</sup> Al Jazeera. 2025. "Russian Gas Supply to Europe via Ukraine Halted after Transit Deal Expires." Al Jazeera. January 1, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/1/russian-gas-supply-to-europe-via-ukraine-halted-after-transit-deal-expires>.

<sup>158</sup> Cicarelli, Siena and Tom Ellison. 2025. "As NATO Countries Pledge to Up Defense Spending, Will Food and Climate Security Have a Seat at the Table? – The Council on Strategic Risks." *The Council on Strategic Risks – Anticipating, Analyzing, and Addressing Systemic Risks* (blog). The Council on Strategic Risks. June 27, 2025. <https://councilonstrategicrisks.org/2025/06/27/as-nato-countries-pledge-to-up-defense-spending-will-food-and-climate-security-have-a-seat-at-the-table/>.

# Ways Forward

In the current environment, progress on the nexus of Russian influence, democratic governance, and climate disinformation requires collaboration across civil society sectors, research communities, and governmental bodies in the United States and abroad. These efforts are more important in the context of hostility from the Trump Administration towards both climate action and counter-misinformation efforts, and its relative receptivity to Russian concerns on Ukraine.

European Union and NATO institutions will be especially central, as they are on the frontlines of policy debates affecting Russian interests in Ukraine and the energy sector. Institutions such as the EU-NATO Center of Excellence on hybrid threats, the NATO Climate Change and Security Center of Excellence, EU counter-disinformation efforts, and European state authorities will be key actors. States like Finland and Estonia are experienced in Russian hybrid warfare, and can offer expertise in cyber defenses, digital literacy and education, and society-wide cooperation.<sup>159,160,161</sup> Lessons can be applied from other fields, such as intensifying transparency measures, inoculation efforts, and misinformation protections ahead of extreme weather or intense climate policy debates, similar to election integrity programs.

Likewise, in the United States, city and state officials will be increasingly called upon to navigate Russian influence efforts with less national support, especially during disasters or times intersecting with other geopolitical, societal, or political tensions.<sup>162</sup> Subnational political leaders, emergency managers, resilience

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<sup>159</sup>Hybrid CoE – The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Hybrid CoE. August 17, 2020. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/>.

<sup>160</sup>“Homepage – NATO Climate Change & Security Centre of Excellence.” 2025. NATO Climate Change & Security Centre of Excellence. March 3, 2025. <https://ccascoe.org/>.

<sup>161</sup> “Information Integrity and Countering Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference (FIMI).” n.d. EEAS. Accessed October 24, 2025. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/information-integrity-and-countering-foreign-information-manipulation-interference-fimi\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/information-integrity-and-countering-foreign-information-manipulation-interference-fimi_en).

<sup>162</sup>Klepper, David. “To Drive Americans Apart, Russia Helped Spread Hurricane Disinformation.” PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/to-drive-americans-apart-russia-helped-spread-hurricane-disinformation>.

officers, and press officers will need support integrating an understanding of Russian tactics and geopolitical context—such as heightened military tensions or elections—as they relate to extreme weather and local narratives that might present risks of manipulation.

Civil society and the research community also have important roles to play. Researchers can close gaps in Russian influence efforts, especially in non-English-speaking contexts. Community organizations, platform owners, and media can help “prebunk” Russian narratives likely to crop up around climate disasters or debates,<sup>163</sup> recognize when Russian actors might be stoking local grievances, and build community buy-in to disaster management processes ahead of crises.

Broader tech and AI regulation and reform agendas—such as the policy asks of Climate Action Against Disinformation—can help insulate the information environment from manipulation by Russia and other actors.<sup>164</sup> For example, tech policies to increase data sharing and transparency, demonetize or limit the reach of climate disinformation, and trace revenue structures behind problematic advertising or content platforms would limit opportunities for Russia to exploit.

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<sup>163</sup>“Social Media Experiment Reveals Potential to ‘Inoculate’ Millions of Users against Misinformation.” 2022. University of Cambridge. August 24, 2022. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/inoculateexperiment>.

<sup>164</sup>“Climate Action Against Disinformation.” Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://caad.info/what-is-misinformation-disinformation/#policy-asks>.

# Conclusion

Russia uses a robust propaganda and disinformation apparatus to bolster its security interests at home and abroad, which intersect with climate science, climate change impacts, and climate change policies and debates. In this environment, Russian disinformation exploits and exacerbates the climate crisis in myriad ways, from undermining climate science to exploiting disasters and climate policy divisions in NATO, to advancing its economic interests in the melting Arctic or the volatile energy transition. While Russian efforts are only one factor in this discourse, they are contributing to existing trends and vulnerabilities that are fueling division, extremism, nativism, and climate vulnerability in historically liberal democracies. As extreme weather worsens, policy responses become more urgent, and the information and geopolitical environment shift, communities, media stakeholders, and government officials at all levels will need to be ready to anticipate and recognize these tactics.







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