

Headline: Meteorologists not spared by climate change deniers

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PARIS, France — Once trusted faces on the news, meteorologists now brave threats, insults, and slander online from conspiracy theorists and climate change deniers who accuse them of faking or even fixing the weather.

Users on Twitter and other social media falsely accused Spain's weather agency of engineering a drought, Australia's of doctoring its thermometers, and France's of exaggerating global warming through misplaced weather stations.

"The coronavirus is no longer a trend. Conspiracy theorists and deniers who used to talk about that are now spreading disinformation about climate change," Alexandre Lopez-Borrull, lecturer in Information and Communication Sciences at the Open University of Catalonia, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

"These scientific bodies are seen as part of the establishment, so anything they say may get disputed on social networks," Lopez-Borrull added. "They are providing evidence against what the climate deniers claim, so the latter try to discredit them."

In a harsh drought and with local elections looming, Spain's State Meteorological Agency (Aemet) spoke out after its members were threatened in Twitter messages, phone calls, and emails.

"Murderers," "Criminals," "You'll pay for this," "We're watching you," the messages shouted.

They came from people who believe the widely debunked theory that airplane condensation trails are really "chemtrails" sprayed by the authorities to poison people or create weather disasters.

Some referred to the "2030 agenda," a debunked theory that global elites are plotting to subjugate people through Covid-19 and climate policies.

"Do you want us to publish your contact details and those of your family?" read one tweet aimed at an Aemet employee. "Crooks! You are destroying nature on the orders of the damned 2030 agenda," said another.

"We have seen an increase in insulting messages as a result of a thread we published about condensation trails" on April 10, Aemet spokesperson Estrella Gutierrez-Marco told AFP. "What makes no sense is that they are insulting an institution that is constantly watching out for their interests, whose aim is ... to contribute to people's safety."

Lopez-Borrull noted a "significant increase" in climate change denial — particularly among far-right supporters who see it as a leftist cause and oppose reforms aimed at curbing its impacts.

“People distrust politicians, judges, and the media, and the cost of living is rising,” he said.

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“In this context, people feel alienated and end up listening to people they never listened to before, with messages appealing directly to the emotions,” he added.