THE ROAD TO **DISINFORMATION**

Mapping climate disinformation about transport in Europe

Elaborated by

SCIENCE FEEDBACK

Ne  tral

In alliance with

EFCSN
European Fact-Checking Standards Network

European Climate Foundation

EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

Our analysis reveals that a core set of narratives underpins misinformation about climate action in the mobility sector across all the countries studied. These narratives—ranging from "climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions" to "green mobility technologies are unsafe," "economically harmful," or "a means of controlling people's lives"—are shared across borders and likely fuel climate-related disinformation in several European countries today.

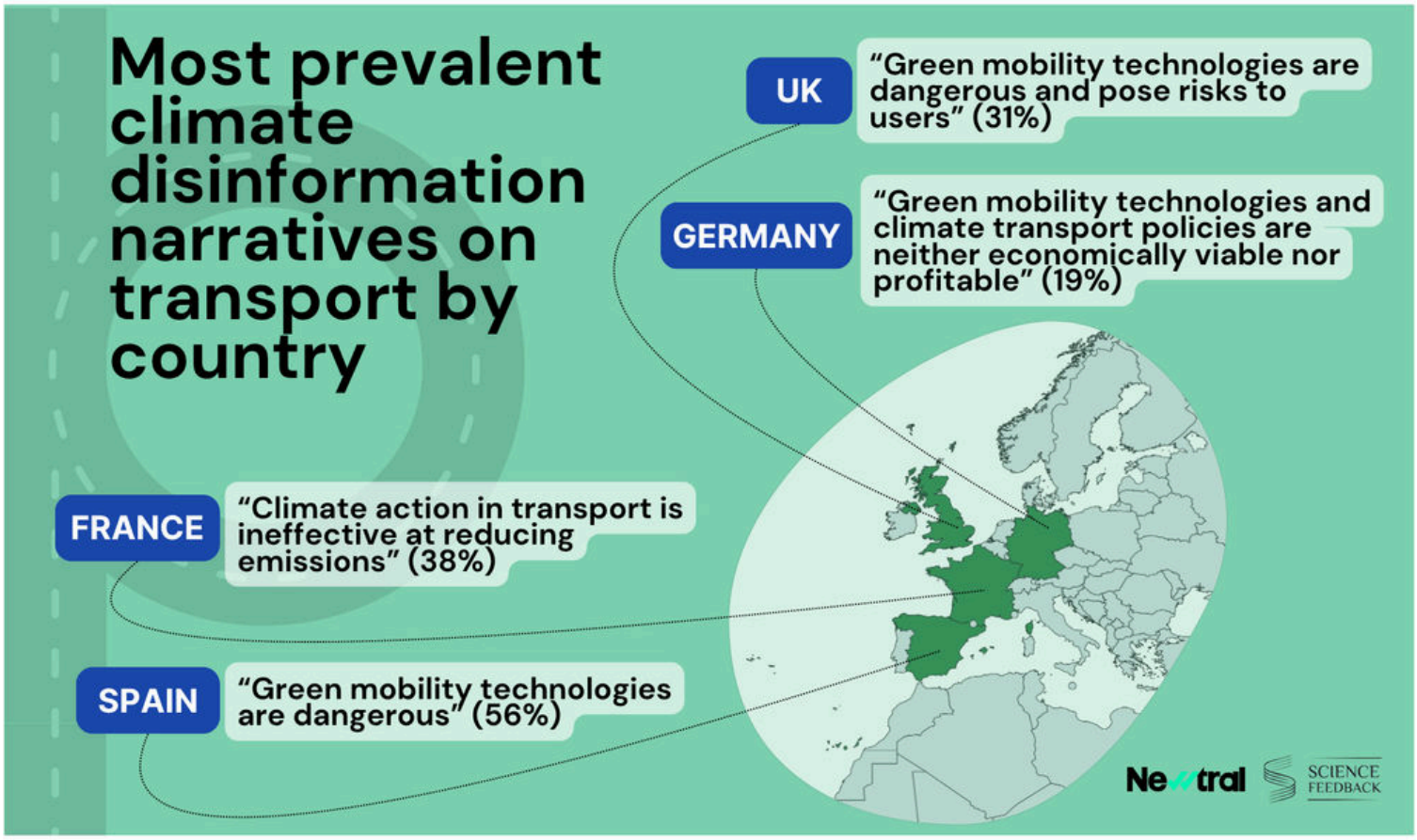
However, each national context presents a distinct set of dominant narratives. In Spain, misinformation focuses on exaggerated or false dangers of electric mobility. In France, it centers on denying the proven climate benefits of electric mobility and transport policies. In Germany, the dominant narrative discredits the economic viability and profitability of electric vehicles, portraying them as unviable both for the automotive industry and for individual consumers. In the United Kingdom, prevailing narratives dismiss both the safety, economic viability, and the climate mitigation effectiveness of electric mobility.

Electric vehicles (EVs) emerged as the central focus of climate-related misinformation across all countries and platforms analyzed, consistently dominating the discourse. While EVs serve as a common anchor in mainstream debates, the tone, emphasis, and origin of the surrounding narratives vary significantly.

Effectively addressing this misinformation requires more than identifying false claims circulating globally; it also demands an understanding of why such narratives resonate locally. Cultural norms, political dynamics, industrial interests, and social context play a crucial role in shaping how misinformation is received and believed in different countries. Tailoring countermeasures to these local factors, as detailed in this report, is essential for an effective response.

As national conditions change, today's fringe narratives could become tomorrow's major vehicles for climate disinformation. This report can serve as a resource for anticipating such shifts and supporting the development of targeted, context-sensitive responses.

In many cases, industrial lobbies and political actors amplify misinformation narratives to safeguard their own interests, lending these narratives greater credibility in both the media and the wider political arena. Nearly all local experts interviewed about country-specific misinformation identified two main drivers: industrial interests—such as automobile manufacturers and e-fuel or oil companies—and political actors.


Most prevalent climate disinformation narratives on transport by country
UK
"Green mobility technologies are dangerous and pose risks to users" (31%)
GERMANY
"Green mobility technologies and climate transport policies are neither economically viable nor profitable" (19%)
FRANCE
"Climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions" (38%)
SPAIN
"Green mobility technologies are dangerous" (56%)
Neutral
SCIENCE FEEDBACK

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

Climate change-related misinformation about transport and mobility knows no borders. However, most of the claims reported by European fact-checkers are rooted in national contexts, such as major political messages, policy regulations, or economic situations. Local debates around the green transition, fuel taxes, urban traffic restrictions, and the electrification of transport often serve as fertile ground for misinformation, tailored to resonate with domestic concerns and values.

In *The Road to Disinformation: Mapping Climate Misinformation About Transport in Europe*, we examine this dual nature: how misinformation is shaped by national contexts while contributing to broader transnational disinformation dynamics.

To inform future responses to disinformation, we examine how different narratives spread across European countries, with a focus on four in particular: Spain, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, in the recommendations section, we will establish a starting point for developing effective, evidence-based counter-arguments to challenge these narratives and reduce their impact.

With this goal, the research aims to understand how and why certain misleading narratives, understood not as isolated content, but as collective disinformation centred on the same idea or storyline (Suau & Puertas-Graell, 2023), gain traction within specific countries by examining the political, economic, and cultural conditions that make audiences more receptive to them.

Using unique data points and digital investigations, the report draws on four European countries, analyzing claims and narratives across multiple languages. The resulting database offers insight into how these narratives spread and evaluates their real-world impact. A central aim is to determine the extent to which the misinformation is locally rooted or shaped by external factors.

1.1. Overview of transport climate disinformation

The green transition has emerged as a key target of disinformation, particularly following recent policies in the transport sector. Among the most prominent themes is the spread of misleading or false information about electric vehicles (EVs), which has become widespread across Europe, where it consistently dominates the discourse on transport-related misinformation (Quílez, 2024).

Climate disinformation poses a growing threat to public understanding and effective action. As the Information Integrity about Climate Science synthesis report concludes, "Misleading information has undermined public trust in climate science and other key social institutions. This crisis of information integrity is intensifying and exacerbating the climate crisis" (International Panel on the Information Environment, 2025). In the transportation context, disinformation has the potential to influence public attitudes and behaviors, with tangible consequences for urban mobility systems.

83%

of people

think disinformation threatens democracy

For instance, false narratives can contribute to traffic congestion (Waniek et al., 2021) or disrupt supply chain transport (Jamalzadeh et al., 2024).

Potentially, disinformation might shape public resistance to climate policies like low-emission zones or EV subsidies, indirectly exacerbating environmental challenges or delaying efforts to address them. This also involves another backlash effect, eroding trust in institutions promoting green mobility (Gnann et al., 2025).

Despite these risks, research on transport-related disinformation in Europe remains limited. Most academic literature on disinformation in the region focuses on political discourse or energy-related topics, such as public narratives around the energy transition (Paličková & Černoch, 2024). Studies specifically addressing disinformation linked to transport technologies, infrastructures, or mobility policies are scarce, pointing to a significant gap in the literature.

1.2. The relevance of transport in the EU climate strategy

One of the principal objectives of the European climate and energy framework is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, with the ultimate aim of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 — that is, an economy "with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions".

In its most recent Climate Action Progress Report (2024), the European Commission (EC) identified transport as the "main driver of increased global emissions" globally, noting that it has even surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

In fact, transport is considered one of the greatest challenges in reducing emissions. It represents almost a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions and is the main cause of air pollution in cities, according to the EC webpage, with road transport being the biggest emitter by far (70% of all the greenhouse gas emissions from transport).

This is why the European Green Deal aims to achieve a 90% reduction in transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, as compiled by the European Environment Agency (EEA).

This objective can be pursued through different measures such as:

- Transitioning to cleaner fuels and mobility technologies, i.e., electric vehicles (EVs).
- Prioritising public transport and active mobility, such as walking or biking.
- Increasing the share of energy from renewable sources used in the transport sector.

These areas are, in fact, frequent targets of disinformation, as we will analyse in this report. As such, these attacks could undermine the success of the European climate strategy.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining real-time digital monitoring, structured datasets, and in-depth interviews to produce a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis of transportation-related climate misinformation across Europe.
By integrating quantitative data collection with qualitative insights and cross-border comparisons, this methodology enables a broad analysis of how transport-related climate misinformation originates, spreads, and manifests in real-world outcomes.

2.1 Selection criteria

The countries selected for this analysis —Germany, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom— were chosen based on a combination of demographic, environmental, and informational relevance. Together, these countries host nearly a quarter of the cities participating in the European Commission's mission to transform 100 urban centres into climate-neutral cities by 2030. This heightened exposure to ambitious policy change, particularly in the field of mobility, can act as a catalyst for political polarisation and disinformation.

- Germany, France, and the UK —together with Italy— account for 70% of Europe's premature deaths linked to diesel emissions (closely tied to transport). While such figures are based on statistical models that involve significant uncertainties, they nonetheless contribute to intensifying public debate around greener mobility policies and may make these countries more susceptible to misinformation.

- Linguistically, 67% of transport-related disinformation articles in the EuroClimateCheck database are published in German, French, Spanish, or English, compared to only 33% for all other languages combined. Moreover, Spain, France, and Germany represent nearly 45% of the total EU population. English is included not only due to the relevance of the UK, but also because it remains one of the official languages of the European Union and is widely used in media and policy discourse.

2.2. Data sources and tools

The report relies on a range of complementary data sources and tools. These include structured databases, automated monitoring systems, social media platforms, and expert interviews. Together, they provide both breadth and depth: enabling cross-country comparisons, identifying recurring narratives, and offering insights into how misinformation circulates and is perceived in different contexts.

- **EuroClimateCheck Database**: Serving as the foundational dataset, EuroClimateCheck offers structured, multilingual entries related to mobility and transportation misinformation. The analysis focuses on selected European countries, allowing for cross-country comparison of misinformation trends.

- **Climate Safeguards – France**: In collaboration with Data For Good, Quota Climat, and Science Feedback, we leverage automated detection tools that monitor French TV and radio broadcasts for climate misinformation. Operating in real-time since January 2025, this system has identified over 30 transportation-related false or misleading claims during the first three months of 2025.

- **Community Notes and associated posts on X (formerly Twitter)**: We collect social media data to trace the dissemination patterns of key misinformation claims in each studied country. This includes identifying repeated messages and recurring narratives related to climate and transport.

- **Telegram channels**: We identify influential country-specific accounts or networks on Telegram and extract relevant messages to gain a deeper understanding of how misinformation circulates in private or semi-public online spaces.

- **Interviews with experts**: To complement digital data, we conduct semi-structured interviews[1] with researchers and professionals from transport-related organizations to gather expert insights and contextual understanding.[2]

2.3. Procedure

To identify the core narratives, we began by developing a set of keywords that reflect how such narratives are framed and articulated across the European Union. We first extracted relevant keywords from the EuroClimateCheck database, focusing on terms commonly associated with mobility-related misinformation added by the fact-checkers.

This initial list was expanded through an internal brainstorming session, which allowed us to include additional terms identified through exploratory analysis and field experience. To validate and refine the keyword set,[3] we consulted experts from Science Feedback and Newtral, whose feedback helped ensure linguistic and contextual accuracy across different countries and languages.

[1] Questionnaire for researchers and professionals
[2] As part of our qualitative research, we conducted interviews with experts from key institutions working at the intersection of climate, mobility, and policy. These included the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), ECODES (Spain), the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), an expert in circular economy at Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V. (DUH), and a mobility and sustainability specialists at the Institut des Mobilités en Transition (IMT) and Sciences Po.
[3] List of keywords used

After finalizing the list, we applied the keyword set to the selected data sources mentioned above, using custom scripts[4] designed to detect occurrences and clusters of relevant terms. Having identified more than 9,000 pieces of content, we proceeded to analyse them. The results provided the following set of claims to be analysed:

- **Fact-checked claims**. We compiled a dataset of 96 fact-checked misinformation claims related to transport—59 from EuroClimateCheck and 37 from ClaimReview—published between April 2023 and April 15, 2025. To assemble this dataset, we manually reviewed 558 fact-check articles to assess their relevance to the transport sector. Although EuroClimateCheck includes a dedicated "Transport" category, we extended our review to additional categories, including "Conspiracy Theories" and "Renewables," where we identified further transport-related disinformation. This broader approach ensured a more comprehensive and accurate capture of relevant claims.

- **Community Notes.** We identified 2,841 pieces of content related to transport in English, 148 in Spanish, 115 in French, and 90 in German from the Community Notes on the social network X. Although these results were identified through the presence of the keywords in the Community Notes, the disinformation itself was often present in the original posts, rather than in the notes.

- **Telegram (Spain).** We detected 6,293 transport-related pieces of content on this messaging platform. We focused exclusively on content in Spanish due to Newtral's location. Accordingly, we used our experience and proprietary database of Telegram groups to analyse them.

- **TV and radio content (France)**. We used automated detection tools developed by Science Feedback to monitor TV and radio content in France for climate-related transport misinformation. 30 transportation-related misinformation claims were analysed and classified according to identified narratives.

[4] Code to obtain fact-checks from the google Fact Check Explorer

For social media content, we selected a 5% sample, assigning a random number to each piece of content. We then annotated the selected claims and extracted the specific narratives associated with each claim. Once all sub-narratives had been identified, we grouped them into a broader core narrative.

We conducted an automated clustering process using artificial intelligence to analyze and compare how claims were grouped on Telegram. This step allowed us to evaluate the tool's performance and assess the accuracy of its categorization in relation to our manually identified themes.

2.4. Limitations

Several challenges emerged during the analysis that may affect the interpretation of results. First, we assigned the label "Not Applicable (NA)" to content that mentioned transportation but was not substantively related to the topic, as well as to content that did not meet the criteria for misinformation. This filtering process, while necessary, involved subjective judgment in borderline cases.

Additionally, we used the category "Don't Know" for instances where a relevant narrative appeared to be present but could not be confidently classified. This included isolated or ambiguous narratives that did not fit into any of the predefined categories. These limitations reflect the complexity of categorising disinformation and the evolving nature of misinformation narratives in the transport and climate context.

Despite the scope of this analysis, this study has several limitations. First, it is limited to four languages spoken in European countries — English, Spanish, French, and German — which may overlook more country-specific narratives in regions where these languages are not commonly used.

Furthermore, certain narratives employ keywords with minor alterations (i.e., “ag8nda 2030” instead of “agenda 2030”), which may have affected the findings, as some narratives may have been excluded due to not being captured by the coding process as a result of such variations.

Also, some Spanish-language claims relate to Latin American contexts, while some English-language claims focus on the United States. These were retained in the analysis, as they constitute a minority and may still influence audiences in Spain and the UK.

RESULTS

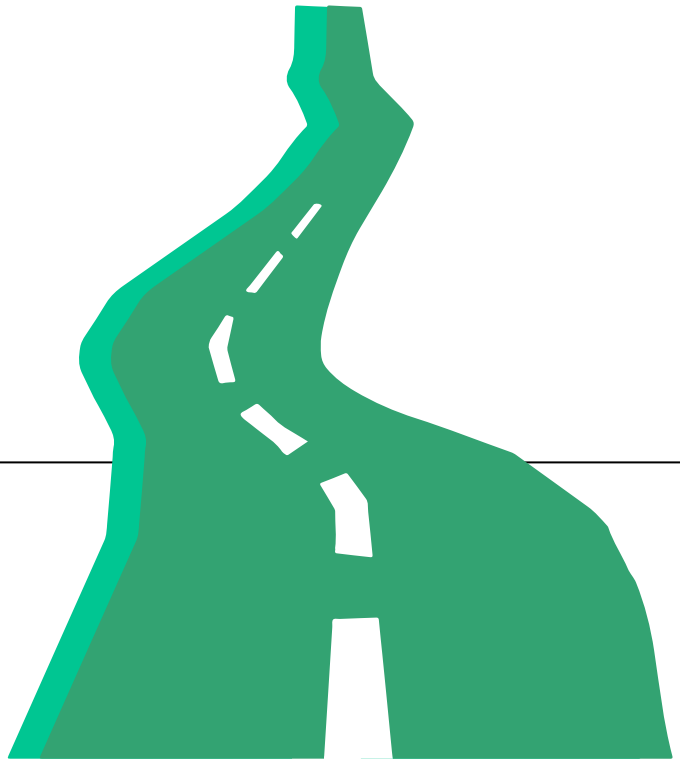
Electric vehicles emerge as the primary focus of climate disinformation narratives across countries and platforms. In the following section, we first present the core narratives that underpin transport-related climate misinformation, followed by a breakdown of specific narratives that reflect regional or thematic variations.

We then explore differences across countries, highlighting how political, cultural, and media environments shape narrative uptake. Finally, we examine differences across platforms, illustrating how the format and audience of each medium influence the way misinformation is framed and circulated.

3.1 Core and specific narratives

Based on the joint analysis, seven core misinformation narratives were identified as a pattern, each including specific narratives or messages that more precisely tackle different angles.

1. Climate action in the transport sector is ineffective in reducing emissions
2. Green mobility relies on environmentally harmful resources, undermining its benefits
3. Existing infrastructure is inadequate to support the transition to green mobility
4. Climate transport policies restrict individual freedoms and control lives
5. Green mobility technologies are dangerous and pose risks to users
6. Health benefits attributed to green mobility are exaggerated or misleading
7. Electric transport is economically unviable, destroys jobs, and misuses public funds



1 Climate action in the transport sector is ineffective in reducing emissions

This narrative claims that transport-focused climate policies, such as the promotion of electric vehicles (EVs), the implementation of low-emission zones (LEZs), or the expansion of bike lanes, are unlikely to deliver meaningful reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It often portrays these measures as symbolic, ineffective, or based on flawed assumptions about human behavior and technology. Critics within this narrative argue that the carbon footprint of these interventions is negligible or that emissions reductions could be achieved more efficiently through other means.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Electric vehicles pollute more than traditional cars.
- Maintaining old cars to last longer is more environmentally sound than shifting to EVs.
- Improving ICE efficiency and biofuels will lead to a bigger emissions drop than full EV adoption.
- It's not the engine that pollutes, it's the fuel, so let's work on E-fuels instead of EVs.
- Individual climate action has no use.
- The environment is already beyond repair; no matter what we do, it won't make a difference.
- Useless LEZ are imposed on us while bigger countries emit a lot of CO2.
- Transport climate policies result in minimal or negligible emissions reductions.

2 Green mobility relies on environmentally harmful resources, undermining its benefits

Closely related to the previous one, the idea that environmental harms outweigh green benefits suggests that green mobility solutions are environmentally counterproductive. It highlights the negative impacts associated with the extraction of raw materials, the energy-intensive production of EV batteries, and the challenges of end-of-life disposal. It frames these processes as more damaging than those associated with conventional fossil-fuel vehicles, thus casting doubt on the environmental legitimacy of green technologies. These claims often ignore or distort lifecycle assessments.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Electric vehicle charging stations are powered by diesel.
- Although green mobility technologies produce no emissions during use, their highly polluting and environmentally damaging manufacturing processes make them a net harm to the environment.
- EVs production means that forests and territories are destroyed.
- 40,000 child slaves in Congo work in hazardous conditions in polluted cobalt mines to produce EV materials.
- Electric car companies hide their environmental pollution in the countries where production takes place, allowing it to go largely undetected.
- Charging stations for electric cars powered by diesel generators.
- Using EVs does not have much positive impact on climate change.

3 Existing infrastructure is inadequate to support the transition to green mobility

This narrative argues that current infrastructure, such as energy grids, road networks, and especially EV charging systems, is unprepared to support a large-scale shift to electric vehicles or other sustainable transport modes. A central claim is that the lack of accessible and widely distributed charging points makes EV adoption impractical for most people, particularly outside major urban areas. The narrative also suggests that efforts to electrify transport will overburden power grids and lead to service failures, traffic disruptions, or unreliable mobility systems. By emphasizing logistical shortcomings, this framing feeds public anxiety about transition readiness and fosters skepticism toward long-term transport planning.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Electric vehicles can’t be charged in cold weather.
- There are not enough charging stations to replace conventional vehicles on a large scale.
- You won't find a dedicated infrastructure to support the charging needs.

4 Climate transport policies restrict individual freedoms and control lives

This narrative frames climate transport policies as an infringement on individual rights and freedoms. Initiatives like the 15-minute city, vehicle access restrictions, and congestion pricing are depicted as authoritarian measures imposed by out-of-touch elites or technocratic governments. Claims often describe these policies as social engineering efforts designed to control where and how people live, work, and move, appealing to libertarian, populist, or anti-globalist sentiments.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Climate policies are used as a pretext to control citizens and limit their freedom of movement.
- Authorities and elites impose mobility restrictions on everyone else, but not on themselves.
- 15-minute cities are a form of social control, linked to prisons.
- The EU forces us to keep the LEZ; we're no longer in control of our own policies.
- 26 million French people can no longer leave their homes due to LEZ.
- The globalist C40 city agenda is planning to legally limit citizens to three garments yearly, 95% fewer cars, or one flight every three years.
- People can't access hospitals due to LEZ.

5 Green mobility technologies are dangerous and pose risks to users

This narrative emphasizes the alleged safety risks associated with green transport technologies, particularly electric vehicles. It highlights incidents of EV battery fires, often portraying them as more dangerous and harder to extinguish than fires involving conventional vehicles. It often exaggerates or misrepresents isolated incidents to create the impression that green transport modes are inherently hazardous. In some cases, this narrative draws comparisons to traditional vehicles to suggest that newer alternatives are less regulated or less reliable.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Electric vehicles are prone to catching fire.
- EVs pose a greater overall public risk compared to traditional vehicles.
- EVs cause health risks such as infertility.
- Bicycles are dangerous in cities, much more than cars.
- Electric vehicles emit dangerous radiation while charging.

6 Health benefits attributed to green mobility are exaggerated or misleading

This narrative challenges scientific consensus on the health benefits of reducing transport-related emissions. It either downplays the connection between cleaner air and public health or attributes improvements to unrelated factors such as advancements in fuel efficiency, better urban planning, or general medical progress. In doing so, it seeks to undermine one of the strongest public justifications for climate transport policies: the protection of community well-being.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Authorities manipulate pollution data to justify draconian climate rules.
- Authorities are forbidding green mobility and infrastructure because of its dangers or disadvantages.
- Climate policies cause traffic and chaos on the road, leading to more pollution.
- Reducing car traffic doesn’t impact pollution because, despite measures, the pollution is still going up.
- Current city pollution levels are good and don't justify implementing LEZ.
- Long before introducing LEZ, cities' air quality was already improving without any regulation.
- EMF radiation from EVs is dangerous and understudied.

7 Electric transport is economically unviable, destroys jobs, and misuses public funds

This narrative argues that the transition to green mobility is economically damaging. It claims that policies supporting EV adoption, public transport expansion, or clean infrastructure investment destroy jobs in traditional sectors (such as the automotive and fossil fuel industries), raise consumer costs, and divert public funds from more urgent needs. It frequently portrays these initiatives as elite-driven, economically unsustainable, and disconnected from the realities of working-class citizens, asserting that they benefit only a small, privileged segment of society.

Specific claims associated with this narrative:

- Transport climate policies cause economic ruin.
- EVs are not affordable compared to combustion vehicles.
- EV charging is more costly than a refill with fossil fuels.
- EV production is not financially sustainable and relies entirely on government subsidies to remain viable.
- Climate transport policies are deliberately designed to dismantle the combustion engine industry, causing widespread job losses and industrial decline.
- Our car industry is being forced to subsidize Chinese carmakers through CO_2 pooling.
- Producing EVs is going to destroy the car industry in Europe.

3.2 Differences across countries and platforms

While all the previously identified transport and climate misinformation narratives are present across Europe, differences emerge across specific countries, languages, and platforms. Misinformation narratives often adapt to local contexts and play on country-specific issues and sensitivities.

For example, in Spain, the most prominent messages found in X posts and Community Notes revolve around the claim that green mobility technologies are unsafe. In France, the dominant narrative suggests that climate action in the transport sector is ineffective in reducing emissions. In contrast, Germany and the UK show a more balanced distribution of narratives, although the most frequently recurring one focuses on the idea that green mobility technologies and climate transport policies are neither economically viable nor profitable.

This last idea links with the German context, in which the strong economic and cultural role of the automotive industry amplifies claims that green mobility threatens jobs and industrial competitiveness. As a result, the economic harm narrative is especially salient in German-language content, where it often intersects with concerns about national identity and economic sovereignty.

Spain

The Fear of False Dangers

Top 3 Core Narratives by prevalence in Spanish

Sample collected on X, see method.

In Spain, misinformation around climate and transport policies places a strong emphasis on safety concerns, with frequent references to electric vehicle (EV) fires in cities such as Barcelona and Seville. These claims help reinforce a broader perception that green technologies are inherently dangerous.

The narrative also adopts a conspiratorial tone when discussing regulatory changes, centering on false claims of government overreach, such as an alleged ban on single-occupant vehicles or limits on the number of cars per household, or the EU forbidding fixing older vehicles. These narratives reflect a deep-rooted fear of state control over personal mobility.

While economic concerns are also present in the Spanish context, they differ from those seen in countries like Germany. Rather than focusing on macroeconomic consequences or threats to the

automotive industry, the Spanish discourse is more closely tied to personal financial impact, highlighting issues like increased taxes and the cost of repairs. These claims are often used to fuel broader rejection of the EU's Green Deal.

Telegram analysis of Spanish-language channels reveals an especially active spread of these narratives. Examples include claims that traffic jams are caused by slow and impractical EV charging, false reports that the Spanish traffic authority (DGT) has banned single-occupant cars, and widespread rumors about upcoming restrictions on car ownership or vehicle repairs.

Key ideas from the experts' conversations:

- The falsehoods spreading in Spain are not merely a technical battle between narratives, but an ideological clash over competing lifestyle models.
- Misinformation is not denying climate change itself but distorting perceptions of solutions, particularly on electric mobility.
- The inequality argument is positioning solutions as just for elites, reinforcing the belief that the transition is unfair.
- These messages create confusion and resistance, especially among working-class and rural communities, that envision electrification as an urban privilege.
- The government has failed to effectively communicate the benefits of electrification.
- Oil companies heavily invest in promoting biofuels as a cleaner solution, masking their environmental costs.

France

Denying the Climate Impact

Top 3 Core Narratives by prevalence in French

1. **Climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions** (38%)
2. **Climate transport policies restrict freedom and control lives** (26%)
3. **Green mobility technologies are unsafe or dangerous** (19%)

Sample collected on X, see method.

In France, the most prevalent misinformation narrative **targets climate change mitigation at its core**: can it actually deliver emissions reductions? An analysis of both the social media platform X and French TV and radio shows that the narrative "Climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions" is by far the most widespread. The prevalence of a narrative that is both evidently and factually incorrect is a cause for serious concern.

This prominent feature of the French mobility discourse **is not observed in the other countries studied**, where disinformation typically uses proxies to delegitimize climate action, such as electric vehicle explosions and safety concerns in Spain, or the impact on industrial competitiveness in Germany. Nonetheless, these two narratives still rank second and third in prevalence, respectively, in France.

A major driver of this climate impact-focused narrative is the **weaponization**—or at times, misunderstanding—of a common confusion between air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. This confusion leads to misleading claims about distinct environmental indicators and their respective impacts, which **remain complex for the public**.

One of the most striking forms of this narrative involves false claims about internal combustion engine vehicles. These claims paradoxically cite **two extremes**: that well-maintained older cars emit less than electric vehicles, and that newer combustion engines are inherently low-emission. Both arguments are used to undermine the factual case for electric mobility as a means of achieving significant emissions reductions.

A strong conspiracy narrative also emerges from our data, with "Climate transport policies restrict freedom and control lives" ranking as the second most prevalent, followed by "Green mobility technologies are unsafe or dangerous."

Both narratives exploit **individualized fears** of largely unfounded threats, often amplified by misleading online content—such as manipulated or out-of-context images of car fires (many of which involve conventional vehicles, not electric ones), and inaccurate interpretations of complex legal or administrative policies (e.g., the incorrect claim that France had no sovereign choice but to implement LEZs "because the EU demands it").

Experts highlight that the first controversies around electric mobility were usually addressed objectively and technically among stakeholders. However, they noted a shift toward '**politicized misinformation**' during the 2024 European elections, which shaped the evolution of disinformation narratives by distorting legitimate criticism with false arguments and incorrect data. In this context, far-right and conservative parties began amplifying anti-EV and anti-Green Deal narratives and introduced false claims into mainstream debate.

Key ideas from the experts' conversations:

- The electrification of transport has been turned into a political flashpoint, particularly by conservative actors who seized the topic, triggering a vicious cycle: misinformation emerging from various sources—industry, activists, commentators—was amplified by political figures, and then echoed uncritically in mainstream media, further entrenching the issue as polarizing.

- Misinformation about electric vehicles' environmental impact stems from both right-wing defenders of the automotive status quo and segments of the left who view car dependency—electric or not—as the core problem.

- French carmakers and industry bodies have played a central role in spreading alarmist narratives, portraying the EU's 2035 targets as a threat to jobs, national sovereignty, and industrial competitiveness. These messages, often accepted at face value by the media, have shaped public opinion and pressured regulators.

- Narratives blaming the EU and promoting biofuels or hybrid alternatives were picked up and disseminated by mainstream media. Industry figures and public personalities endorsed these views on national television.

- After more than a year of polarized discourse, French consumers have grown more hesitant to adopt electric vehicles, unlike in other countries where adoption is steadily rising. This growing reluctance is less about EV performance than about the politicized and misleading nature of the public conversation.

- These narratives gain traction in a society still marked by the Yellow Vests crisis and widespread mistrust; car policies are perceived as restrictive, quickly trigger resentment, with reactions such as: "The elites want to blame us for pollution, while we can't even afford expensive electric SUVs."

Germany

Economic Worries

Top 3 Core Narratives by prevalence in German

Sample collected on X, see method.

Economic and industrial narratives are central to German disinformation. Claims often highlight the **risks of taxpayer investment** in green technologies, such as the controversy over subsidies for the Northvolt battery factory.

There is also growing emphasis on **questioning the ecological benefits** of EVs. Some claims point to increased particulate matter from tire wear allegedly caused by the heavier weight of EVs, and emissions from battery production and end-of-life disposal. These narratives attempt to counter the mainstream environmental rationale for electrification by suggesting that the solution is as polluting—or worse—than combustion engines.

Another major line of disinformation concerns the **fate of combustion engines**. Despite consistent official messaging that combustion vehicles can continue to operate after 2035 and that e-fuels are

permitted, claims about an outright “ban” persist. These often fuel broader concerns about personal freedom.

Key ideas from the experts' conversations:

- Misinformation claiming that the shift to EVs is neither viable nor profitable strikes at the core of German identity, which values efficiency and profitability, especially in an 'automotive country.'

- Misinformation narratives tap into people’s fears and emotions on a personal level, suggesting guilt over switching from combustion to battery-powered vehicles due to resource use, fears of insufficient charging infrastructure, or the idea that they should have waited for hydrogen cars instead.

- Earlier, misinformation focused on EV safety and performance; now it’s more about jobs and the economy.

- Job loss concerns are often valid and amplified by recent factory closures, while studies show EVs are cleaner and can create more jobs than they eliminate.

- The hydrogen narrative has been pushed in Germany as an alternative, possibly as a delay tactic, despite being inefficient and expensive and therefore unsuitable for the passenger car sector.

- Mixed messages from industry, politics, and NGOs create distrust.

United Kingdom

Casting Doubt on E-Mobility

Top 3 Core Narratives by prevalence in English

1. **"Green mobility technologies are dangerous and pose risks to users"** (**31%**)
2. **Climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions** (**20%**)
3. **Climate transport policies restrict freedom and control lives** (**17%**)

Sample collected on X, see method.

Transport-related climate misinformation in the UK, as reported by experts and reflected in our English-language data, is dominated by narratives focusing on the **individual implications** of using, owning, or purchasing electric vehicles (EVs).

The most prevalent narrative we identified is: "Green mobility technologies are unsafe or dangerous." This includes **manipulated media**—often featuring internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles rather than EVs—depicting electric cars catching fire, particularly in urban areas where they are portrayed as threats to public safety and local businesses. Some examples stoke **fear at the community level**, showing city buses ablaze or entire car parks in flames, falsely claimed to be blocking access to airports. Other recurring themes include claims of sudden and dangerous range loss while driving, as well as harmful radiation exposure from EVs.

While these claims are often framed from a consumer perspective to evoke guilt, they are frequently supported—albeit indirectly—by fabricated or selectively presented **market data used to lend false credibility** to individual anecdotes.

Misinformation circulates suggesting that most EV owners who purchased a new vehicle in the past year have reverted to petrol, diesel, or hybrid models, or that EV sales are extremely low or declining. Some misinformation even links rising insurance premiums to a supposedly higher risk of EV collisions, despite data showing that internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles have higher collision rates. As with many economy- or market-related claims, these assertions directly contradict the available evidence.

A significant portion of the misinformation within this narrative also centers on so-called '**hidden dangers**,' 'hidden pollution,' and 'hidden costs' associated with green mobility technologies. These suggestions falsely imply that electric mobility is dangerously understudied and secretly unsafe, a conspiratorial tone making it easier to discredit widely available evidence to the contrary. They often intersect with the second and third most common narratives detected in English:

- Climate action in transport is ineffective at reducing emissions
- Climate transport policies restrict freedom and control lives

While these narratives still heavily focus on EVs, they also branch into other UK-specific issues. Notably, the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) policy is a frequent target. There are also, to a lesser extent, references to the 15-minute city concept and the C40 Cities initiative, of which London is a member.

The ULEZ is falsely claimed to have no measurable impact on pollution, and instead of being a mechanism to restrict access to urban centres, and generate revenue. Electric mobility is often described as a 'climate scam', claimed to be powered by fossil fuels, and its infrastructure is portrayed as unable to meet demand without relying on fossil fuel power plants.

Collectively, these three dominant narratives work to undermine public confidence in climate policies and technologies by portraying them as deceptive, ineffective, or dangerous, strategically shifting focus away from the substantial and growing evidence base that supports the safety and effectiveness of electric mobility.

Key ideas from the experts' conversations:

- Virtually all of climate-related mobility misinformation focuses on EVs, with smaller portions targeting aviation and airport expansion and active mobility initiatives like the 15-minute city.

- EVs are a persistent misinformation target partly due to confirmation bias in low-credibility media, which assume their audiences want anti-EV narratives.

- The more extreme misinformation narratives (e.g., EVs emitting radiation, or being too heavy for car parks) do not gain much traction.

- Narratives that do gain traction include misleading concerns over the cost of EV ownership and the charging infrastructure, fears about EV fires (e.g., a major airport fire last year that was falsely attributed to an EV), and claims that EV sales are significantly underperforming.

- Car industry actors continue to make misleading or false claims about EV sales figures and future projections. For example, a car factory in Luton was closed by Stellantis, which blamed the national EV target—a claim lacking credibility but one that nonetheless triggered another wave of misinformation.

- Looking at the evolution of misinformation topics, active mobility and 15-minute city plans are becoming progressively hotter targets. There is a growing trend of politicizing and weaponizing anti-cyclist sentiment, turning it into a political stance.

- Potential future misinformation topics may include rising airfare prices as the aviation industry is forced to address its emissions, or false claims that heavy-duty electric transport trucks will damage roads.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Disinformation around transport has largely focused on electric mobility. While the specific false claims vary from country to country, most share a common rejection of electric vehicles, sometimes even resorting to baseless attacks. In many cases, the content is not entirely false, but rather composed of half-truths or persistent myths. These narratives often blend legitimate criticism with misleading or inaccurate information, making them harder to debunk.

Experts note that the debate has shifted from predominantly technical concerns to more ideologically driven positions. They highlight the moment when the green transition became politicized and started being framed as part of a broader cultural divide. In this context, far-right parties have exploited mobility and climate policies as symbols of government overreach and a perceived loss of personal freedoms. At the same time, experts observe that, generally speaking, the right tends to align with fossil fuel interests, while the left often hesitates to fully endorse electrification.

Narratives. Most disinformation messages about green mobility revolve around seven key narratives: claims that climate action in the transport sector is ineffective, that green mobility relies on environmentally damaging resources, and that current infrastructure cannot support the transition. Additional narratives argue that climate policies infringe on personal freedoms, that green technologies are unsafe, that health benefits are overstated, and that electric transport is economically harmful, threatening jobs and wasting public funds.

Goals. These narratives serve several strategic goals. They aim to question the effectiveness, impact, and feasibility of the transition, both technologically and in terms of infrastructure; to portray electric transport as a threat to individual freedom, public health, and economic stability; and, as with many other disinformation campaigns, to sow doubt and undermine the idea of progress itself.

Differences. While common narratives circulate across borders, their resonance and framing differ significantly by country, reflecting distinct political climates, cultural values, and media ecosystems. National contexts shape not only which narratives gain traction but also how they are adapted to reflect local fears, grievances, and debates.

For example, in Spain, disinformation tends to focus on personal safety and perceived government overreach. In France, the dominant narrative questions whether climate action in transport delivers real environmental impact, often tied to broader political polarization. Germany shows a strong emphasis on economic viability, job losses, and industrial competitiveness, topics that strike at the heart of national identity. In the UK, misinformation often amplifies skepticism about EV effectiveness and infrastructure, with a growing politicization of active mobility initiatives like the 15-minute city.

These variations highlight how disinformation is not static but highly adaptable to national debates, actors, and interests, particularly when amplified by influential platforms, political figures, or media outlets.

At the same time, certain disinformation content transcends borders and gains traction across multiple countries, especially when it aligns with preexisting doubts or narratives. One striking example is the widely shared false claim that a study reveals electric cars pollute 1,850 times more than fuel-powered vehicles. Despite being easily debunked, this article circulated broadly across Serbia, Romania, the Czech Republic, Greece, and Poland.

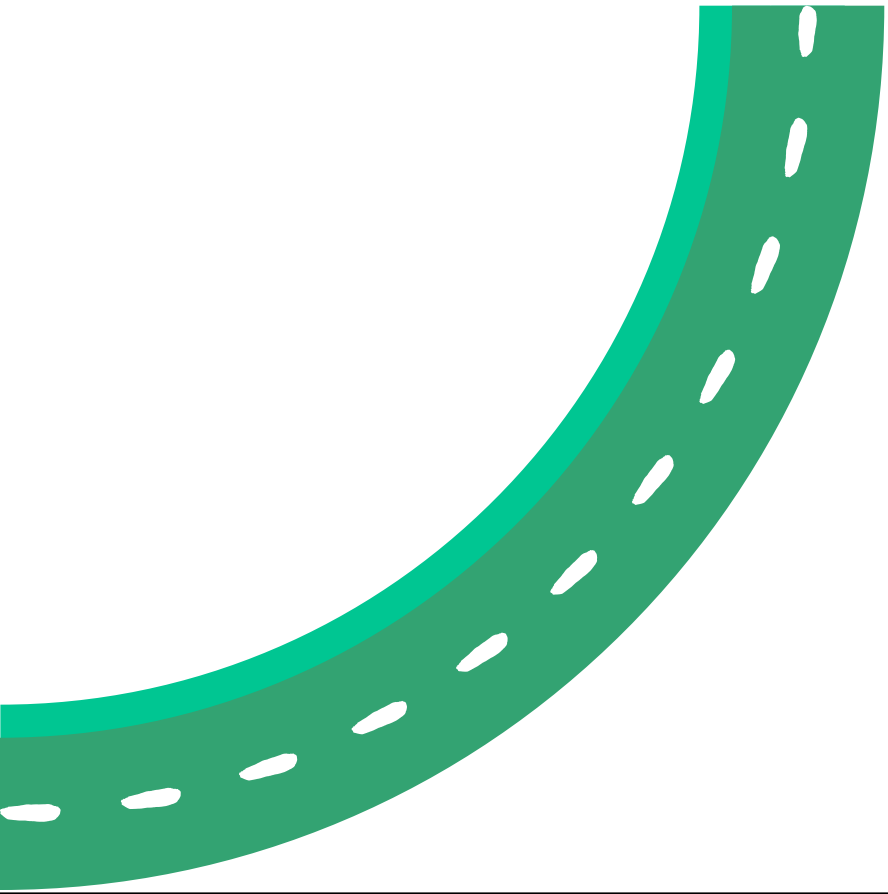
Its cross-border appeal demonstrates how sensationalist or pseudoscientific content can spread virally across linguistic and national barriers, especially when framed to confirm fears about the supposed inefficiency or hypocrisy of green policies.

Recommendations

Climate disinformation on mobility is not only a national issue; it increasingly targets the European Union as a central actor in the green transition. Many of the most viral and politicized messages do not focus on national governments, but rather portray EU institutions as distant and authoritarian bodies imposing restrictions on citizens' daily lives. Two recurring narrative lines stand out: first, the claim that EU regulations limit personal freedoms and impose disproportionate burdens on individuals and families; and second, the allegation that EU officials enforce strict environmental rules on the population while exempting themselves from their consequences. These narratives can contribute to skepticism about EU climate policy and may shape public perception of climate action as being top-down rather than participatory.

In response, EU institutions and member states may benefit from efforts to clarify policies, improve transparency, and enhance public understanding of the green transition's local and individual benefits. Working in coordination with national governments, civil society, and fact-checkers can help ensure that accurate, accessible information reaches diverse audiences across Europe. Rebuilding trust involves not only addressing misinformation but also demonstrating that climate policies are implemented fairly and consistently.

- **Strengthening Communication.** To mitigate this impact, climate communication must move beyond technical explanations and engage with citizens' real concerns: economic security, fairness, and freedom of choice. Messaging should be rooted in local realities, showing how the transition can create jobs, improve health, and reduce long-term costs, particularly for vulnerable groups. It is also crucial to anticipate and respond to misinformation narratives, not just reactively but proactively, by identifying potential points of confusion or resistance and addressing them with clarity, empathy, and credible voices. Clear and coherent communication between EU institutions, national authorities, and local actors can help build a consistent narrative that counters fear with facts and cynicism with tangible benefits. A transition that is not only fair but also perceived as fair will be important for its continued legitimacy and public support.



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