

Reform UK's climate denial undermines democracy

*Reform UK and its leaders Nigel Farage and Richard Tice have been promoting misinformation about climate change. In this they follow the playbook of their European counterparts. But even though the party is out of step with the general public's views on climate change, the denial of scientific truths undermines public trust, and ultimately democracy, argue **Pallavi Sethi** and **Bob Ward**.*

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With less than three weeks until the General Election, the UK's political parties are divided over the nation's climate policies. Reform UK, which is attracting significant support according to some opinion [polls](#), has adopted a particularly extreme agenda based on outright denial of the science of climate change, similar to other right-wing populist parties across Europe.

For instance, a document called "[Our Contract With You](#)" on the Reform UK website contains demonstrably false claims about climate change. It states: "Net zero means reducing man-made CO2 emissions to stop climate change. It can't. Climate change has happened for millions of years, before man-made CO2 emissions, and will always change. We are better to adapt to warming, rather than pretend we can stop it."

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On the campaign trail, Reform UK's candidates have also promoted misinformation

about climate change that has been thoroughly [debunked](#). The Party's chairman, Richard Tice, told the BBC: "Actually, what we need to do with climate change – of course, we all care about the environment of the planet – we need to adapt to it. The idea that you can stop the power of the sun or volcanoes is simply ludicrous. Anyone who thinks you can, frankly, you're misinformed."

Reform UK's peculiar obsession with climate change denial shows that it is not only ignoring the scientists but is also out of step with the overwhelming majority of the UK public. The latest polling by [YouGov](#) found that 69 per cent of the public agree that "The world's climate is changing as a result of human activity".

Opinion surveys also show that Reform UK's misinformation campaign about climate change is not attracting support. Recent polling by [Opinium](#) for the Conservative Environment Network revealed that most voters, including supporters of Reform UK, back climate action. The Party's opposition to climate change policies is not gaining popularity. It is the Party's stance on immigration that is mainly responsible for its current levels of support.

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Climate Disinformation Campaign

Reform UK's new leader, Nigel Farage, also has a history of peddling false claims and conspiracy theories about climate change. Over the past decade, Mr Farage has repeatedly denied the reality of anthropogenic climate change, dismissing it as a "[scam](#)," despite his candid admission that he hasn't "got a clue" whether carbon dioxide drives climate change. He has also expressed opposition to climate change policies, dismissing wind energy as "economic insanity" and calling electric vehicles a "strain" on the environment. He has also promoted baseless conspiracy theories, alleging that London Mayor Sadiq Khan would implement a "climate lockdown" under the pretext of environmental policies.

Mr Farage has also called for a [referendum](#) to abolish the UK's statutory target of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, a campaign pledge that has

been embraced by his Party. Reform UK has committed to abolishing Britain's net-zero targets and accelerating the extraction of North Sea oil and gas, touting it as a source of "cheap, secure energy", even though it is sold at international market prices.

"Common Sense" vs Scientific Consensus: A Global Trend

Reform UK's anti-science rhetoric and opposition to climate policies is part of a trend among right-wing populist parties in Europe. These parties attempt to dismiss climate change as an exaggerated threat, and frame climate policies as detrimental to national economies and the working class. Their narrative describes their anti-science approach as "common sense, and often promotes a heavy reliance on fossil fuels.

Parties such as Germany's Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom have used culture war tactics to ostensibly champion the interests of ordinary citizens while attempting to raise suspicion and distrust towards climate initiatives. For instance, AfD has rejected EU's [Fit for 55](#) package, which targets a 55 percent reduction in carbon emissions, arguing that fossil fuels are the "basis of our prosperity." The Party for Freedom in the Netherlands seeks to repeal the Dutch climate act, stating "stop the hysterical reduction of CO2."

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Like Reform UK, these other populist parties use inflammatory language to evoke fear about the purported costs and implications of climate policy. AfD derides the Fit for 55 package "eco-socialist redistribution", while the Party for Freedom dismisses climate policies as costly, arguing against "wasting billions on pointless climate hobbies."

While Reform UK and other populist parties appear to be enjoying more support at the moment, it is not clear that this will result in weaker climate policies. In particular, current projections suggest that Reform UK will win very few, if any, seats in the General Election, despite current polling. And although Reform UK's candidates may not be in a position to directly affect climate policy, it is unhelpful, and indeed highly irresponsible for a supposedly serious political party to still be promoting climate change denial in 2024.

By deliberately distorting truth and promoting misinformation about climate change, Reform UK and their counterparts in the rest of Europe are attempting to undermine democracy and public trust.

Both Mr Tice and Mr Farage have had their misinformation amplified by parts of the media – they have both had their own broadcast shows before the election which were effectively unofficial party political broadcasts filled with false and misleading claims about climate change. This also highlights the need for responsible journalism and fact-checking to maintain the integrity of public discourse.

Voters in Europe, including the UK, are being bombarded with misinformation about climate change at a time when politicians are struggling to implement necessary policies required to accelerate action and mitigate the damaging impacts of climate change on voters' lives and livelihoods. By deliberately distorting truth and promoting misinformation about climate change, Reform UK and their counterparts in the rest of Europe are attempting to undermine democracy and public trust.

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