

STUCK IN DENIAL VERSUS MOVING WITH SCIENCE:
CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSES AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE
DENIAL MACHINE ON LEFT AND RIGHT NEWS MEDIA

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Abstract

Fossil fuel industry giants in the United States like ExxonMobil sponsor contrarian science to distort the public image of the (virtually non-existing) debate on whether anthropogenic global warming exists. The efforts of this so-called “Denial Machine” seem to bear fruit: despite scientific consensus, Americans remain divided on the issue of anthropogenic climate change. Liberal Democrats are more likely to follow the consensus view (79% believes the planet is warming mostly due to human activity), whereas only 15% of the Conservative Republicans supposes this to be the case. Dunlap and McCright argue that conservative media outlets function as an echo chamber for the contrarian voices of this Denial Machine. Liisa Antilla argues that the conservative media is not the only side responsible for this echoing—in their quest for “journalistic balance,” mainstream and progressive news outlets (including the *New York Times*) have also presented contrarian voices as “experts” in the past. With these insights in mind, this study maps the climate change discourses and source-use of two opposing poles in the U.S. media landscape in the months prior to Trump’s election: the *New York Times* on the Liberal Democrat side; news weblog *Breitbart* on the Conservative Republican side. The results show that these opposing poles conduct their climate change reporting on completely different levels: while the conservative *Breitbart* seems stuck in denial, hence condemned to the debate-level, the liberal *Times* has passed this level by accepting consensus and focusing its reporting on the consequences of climate change. In addition, this study also concludes that the *Times* no longer functions as an echo chamber for contrarian voices for the sake of journalistic balance, while *Breitbart*, by giving pseudo-scientists space to directly publish on their platform regularly, not only functions as echo chamber, but also as the vocal cords of contrarian voices.

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Introduction

Ice storm rolls from Texas to Tennessee - I'm in Los Angeles and it's freezing. Global warming is a total, and very expensive, hoax!—Donald J. Trump¹

With a President who has called climate change a “concept (...) created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive,” a “big scam,” and “a very, very expensive form of tax,” it is hardly surprising that many Americans are skeptical on the issue of global warming.² Merely 48% of the American public thinks that “the earth is getting warmer and that these changes are primarily the result of human activity.”³ More than half of the Americans either believe that global warming is a natural process and that its causes are unknown (25%) or that “there is no solid evidence that the earth’s temperature has been rising over the past few decades” (26%).⁴ Climate change skepticism is very much a partisan issue: 79% of the Liberal Democrats believes that the planet “is warming mostly due to human activity”; whereas only 15% of Conservative Republicans believes this to be the case.⁵

¹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “Ice storm rolls from Texas to Tennessee - I'm in Los Angeles and it's freezing. Global warming is a total, and very expensive, hoax!,” December 6, 2013, 7.13AM. Tweet, accessed on December 6, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/408977616926830592>.

² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive,” November 6, 2012, 11.15AM. Tweet, accessed on October 9, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/265895292191248385>; Carolyn Kormann, “Trump and the Truth: Climate-Change Denial,” *The New Yorker*, October 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trump-and-the-truth-climate-change-denial>.

³ Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, “Public views on climate change and climate scientists,” Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, October 4, 2016, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04/public-views-on-climate-change-and-climate-scientists/>.

⁴ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, “Believers, Sympathizers, and Skeptics : Why Americans Are Conflicted about Climate Change, Environmental Policy and Science: Findings from the PRRI/AAR Religions, Values, and Climate Change Survey,” Public Religion Research Institute, American Academy of Religion (2014). November 22, 2014. <https://hazdoc.colorado.edu/handle/10590/2921>.

⁵ Funk and Kennedy, “1. Public views on climate change.”

As NASA, Cook, and others have pointed out: there currently is a 97% consensus on human caused climate change.⁶ Global warming does not solely imply an increased temperature: scenarios of the future include international conflicts about diminishing resources; island populations fearing to lose their countries as a result of rising sea levels; great migrations of climate refugees; draught; hunger; a severe decrease in biodiversity; mass-extinctions, and more.⁷ Climate change is the ultimate global issue, for it demands a collective response to really achieve progress (or rather: to prevent disaster). While our understanding of the seriousness of the problem has grown severely in the last decades, an adequate international response has proven difficult.

When predictions became graver, most developed countries realized the need for serious action. This resulted in international treaties and agreements, of which the latest pinnacle was the 2015 Paris Agreement. In this global covenant, 192 states and the European Union proclaim to work together on “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels (...) recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.”⁸ Whether or not this is a realistic goal based on the current agreement (according to research, current country pledges are too low to achieve this goal)⁹, at least it is the first global climate agreement that demands action from its participants. However, President Trump decided to fulfill one of his campaign promises by unilaterally cancelling United States participation; the Paris Agreement was—in his words—

⁶ John Cook et al., “Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming,” *Environmental Research Letters* Vol. 11 No. 4, (2016); “Scientific Consensus: Earth’s climate is warming,” NASA Global Climate Change, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>.

⁷ “Climate Change and Disasters,” UNHCR, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>.

⁸ UNFCCC, “Adoption of the Paris Agreement,” Report No. FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1, accessed on January 11, 2018, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>.

⁹ Joeri Rogelj et al., “Paris Agreement climate proposals need a boost to keep warming well below 2C,” *Nature*. 534 (2016): 631–639.

“very unfair” to America.¹⁰ Many individual states and cities across the US declared to follow the agreement despite Trump’s withdrawal. Nonetheless, when America, as one of the biggest drivers for man-made climate change, forfeits, the Agreement is seriously weakened. Furthermore, the mere idea that a country can simply quit when its leaders feel like it, sets a dangerous precedent.

Many Americans applaud Trump’s efforts to dismantle the international fight against climate change. A look at the media landscape helps explain this climate of skepticism: readers of a popular conservative media outlet like *Breitbart* consume a completely different climate change discourse than readers of a more progressive media outlet like the *New York Times*. *Breitbart* is consistently skeptical of climate change and pro-Trump (former *Breitbart* CEO Steve Bannon also became campaign manager of the Trump campaign. As a reward, he was named Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor of the President). The *Times*, on the other side of the spectrum, has openly warned of the dangers of a Trump presidency and seems to take the threats of climate change more serious. They represent two poles in the public climate change debate: the *Times* on the liberal side, *Breitbart* on the conservative end.

An anti-consensus position does not automatically mean denial of *reality*. Scientific consensus can change over time, and a healthy skepticism can contribute to a greater understanding. However, there are examples of consensus-deniers that have economic or political motivations rather than a healthy skepticism towards the scientific norm. When the health hazards of smoking became clear, the tobacco-industry started financing contrarian scientists and worked with advertising agencies to fight against the consensus that smoking is unhealthy. Today, the fossil-fuel industry is employing similar methods to distort the image of

¹⁰ Donald J. Trump, “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord,” June 1, 2017, The White House, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/01/statement-president-trump-paris-climate-accord>.

climate change consensus.¹¹ Research has revealed links between contrarian climate change scientists and the fossil fuel industry. Industry giants like ExxonMobil and the Koch brothers finance contrarian science to influence public opinion and prevent government action that might damage the fossil fuel sector. Looking at the numbers of Americans that are skeptical of climate change, these efforts of this so-called “Denial Machine” seem to work.

Dunlap and McCright argue that the conservative media functions as an echo chamber for the contrarian voices of this Denial Machine.¹² However, it is not only the conservative media that has been affected by fossil fuel sponsored “science”: Antilla argues that, in their quest for “journalistic balance,” also more mainstream and progressive news outlets (including the *New York Times*) have presented contrarian voices as “experts.”¹³ Hence, throughout the years, contrarian voices could have been heard all over the U.S. media landscape (although undoubtedly more often in the conservative corner).

While these insights are interesting, it is important to note the fast pace of change in the media landscape. For example, news consumption is shifting from traditional media like newspapers, television, and radio, to the internet. In 2016, 20% of U.S. adults often consumed news in print; 25% via the radio; 38% via the internet; and 57% via television. Only one year later, the online news consumption has risen to 43%, while television decreased to 50%. In other words: in 2016 there was a 19-point gap between television and internet news consumption; in 2017 that difference was only 7 points.¹⁴

Besides a change in *where* the American public consumes its news, the offered content has developed as well. Virtually all major news outlets of the traditional news providers (newspaper, radio, and television) are shifting their focus more and more on their online

¹¹ Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

¹² Dunlap and McCright. “Organized Climate Change Denial.”

¹³ Liisa Antilla, “Climate of Scepticism: US Newspaper Coverage of the Science of Climate Change.” *Global Environmental Change* 15 (n.d.): 338–52.

¹⁴ Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Elisa Shearer. “Americans’ Online News Use Is Closing in on TV News Use.” Pew Research Center (blog), September 7, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/07/americans-online-news-use-vs-tv-news-use/>.

channels. Besides the traditional media moving online, there also are many online-only news outlets. Publishing news is easier than ever now that anyone with an internet connection can start their own news website. Since everyone can start publishing about whatever they feel like, there is an increasing amount of news content created by people without proper journalistic credentials. While there have been extremist newspapers and other publications in the past, these were mostly distributed on a relatively small scale. The internet has changed this: people with extreme ideologies can reach people all over the world. Hence, the potential influence of these extremist publishers is way larger. These and other phenomena combined have led to the rise of fake news. While fake news arguably has been around as long as the press itself, it never had as much potential as today: via Facebook targeting, politically motivated news publishers can precisely reach the crowd they want to influence. And where people used to email news articles only to certain friends, social media websites like Facebook let people share articles with all their Facebook friends. Hence, spreading news (whether reliable or not) has become easier.

How is the Denial Machine functioning in this rapidly changing media landscape? To better grasp the current state of climate change reporting, this study maps the discourses and source-use of media outlets at two opposing poles in the U.S. media landscape in the months prior to Trump's election: the *New York Times* on the Liberal Democrat side; news weblog *Breitbart* on the Conservative Republican side. Analyzing the climate change discourses of media outlets on both sides of the spectrum can enhance the understanding of why so many Americans are skeptical in general; and why Conservative Republicans are more likely to be skeptical than Liberal Democrats. Evaluating the source material used makes it possible to elaborate upon the influence of the Denial Machine on both discourses. Naturally, *Breitbart* is expected to function as an echo chamber for contrarian voices; the *Times* less so. However, as Antilla has shown, the *Times* too has fallen for the deceptions of the Denial Machine in the

past. Furthermore, as mentioned above, only 55% of Liberal Democrats believes that there is a scientific consensus—45% believes there still is debate. The source checking chapter that is part of this thesis can help indicate whether (and if so, to what extent) the Denial Machine influences reporting on both sides. The discourse chapter of this thesis clarifies whether the *Times*' readers receive a climate change discourse in which there still is debate whether anthropogenic global warming exists (which 45% of Liberal Democrats believe to be true) or a discourse that underscores the consensus (corresponding with 55% of Liberal Democrats).

Entering results from qualitative research (close reading hundreds of *Breitbart* and *Times* articles and checking the used sources) in a database creates the possibility to visualize both discourses. This combined approach (quantitative and qualitative) enables a more detailed interpretation of both discourses, while the quantitative conclusions create a solid base for comparing the two. However, before all this, a deeper dive into the current literature is needed (p. 12). Then, the research methodology deserves elaboration (p. 21), followed by the results of the discourse (p. 26) and source analysis (p. 54). Finally, the conclusions and implications of this thesis are presented (p. 65). Altogether, this study aims (1) to explore the contemporary climate change discourses presented by media outlets on both the Conservative Republican (*Breitbart*) and the Liberal Democrat (*New York Times*) side of the media landscape, and; (2) to measure the influence of the Denial Machine on both media outlets by critically analyzing the sources used in these climate discourses.

The results of this study indicate that these opposing poles conduct their climate change reporting on completely different levels. The conservative *Breitbart* refuses to acknowledge the scientific consensus; their reporting remains stuck in the debate on whether climate change even exists. The liberal *New York Times*, on the other hand, has accepted and acknowledges scientific consensus; their articles focus on reporting the consequences of

climate change. Furthermore, the results of this study imply that *Breitbart* goes further than conservative media outlets traditionally go in their climate change reporting (merely functioning as echo chamber for the Denial Machine), by giving pseudo-scientists space to directly publish on their platform regularly. Hence, *Breitbart* not only functions as echo chamber, but also as the vocal cords of contrarian voices. Contrarily, despite a few seemingly suspicious sources, the *Times* no longer seems to function as an echo chamber for Denial Machine voices for the sake of journalistic balance.

While this study provides interesting insights into the climate change discourses in the media on both sides of the political spectrum, it has some obvious limitations. It only focuses on two media outlets, for one, while there are many varieties of news publishers in the media landscape. To get a more profound understanding of America's climate of denial, the entire spectrum should be analyzed. Also, the outlets in this study are different in form: the *New York Times* (founded in 1851) is one of the old powerhouses of newspaper journalism, whereas *Breitbart* (founded in 2007) is a baby of the internet. However, there are enough similarities (both written news, both large on the internet, both strong social media following, et cetera) to defend this choice, especially because the *Times* and *Breitbart* are politically virtually perfect opposites, representing the Liberal Democrats (the *Times*) and the Conservative Republicans (*Breitbart*).

Literature Discussion

As described in the Introduction, there is no serious debate anymore on whether climate change exists, or whether human activity is largely responsible for global warming. By now, the consensus on both issues is so strong, that they are basically considered facts.¹⁵ Since the first step of *addressing a problem is recognizing that the problem exists*, the fact that virtually all peer reviewed scientists agree that the world has a major problem seems a good place to start solving it. However, like the small Gaul-village in an Asterix cartoon, the United States hosts a small group of fossil-fuel industry sponsored contrarian scientists who still hold out against the scientific consensus. Although this group is small, life is not easy for the surrounding climate scientists, for the Gauls are backed up by their secret weapon: the Denial Machine. Together, they wage an ongoing war against peer-reviewed climate science, its scientists, and its consensus. Evidently, with result: research shows that merely 48% of the American public thinks that “the earth is getting warmer and that these changes are primarily the result of human activity,” while 31% believes that global warming is a natural phenomenon and that its causes are unknown, and another 20% claims that “there is no solid evidence that the earth’s temperature has been rising over the past few decades.”¹⁶ Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank that conducts public opinion polling, also found that 24% of Americans opposes “limiting greenhouse gas emissions as part of an international agreement.” This is the highest opposition in the world, twice the size of the global average.¹⁷ In other words: Americans who believe in the scientific consensus—that the planet is heating

¹⁵ Cook et al., “Consensus on consensus”; “Scientific Consensus: Earth’s climate is warming,” NASA Global Climate Change, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>.

¹⁶ Funk and Kennedy, “1. Public views on climate change and climate scientists,” Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, October 4, 2016, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04/public-views-on-climate-change-and-climate-scientists/>.

¹⁷ “2015 Climate Change Survey Presentation,” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, November 5, 2015, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/11/05/2015-climate-change-survey-presentation>.

mainly due to human activity—form a minority. It appears that the aggressive Gauls, despite their lack of numbers (but backed up by the powerful Denial Machine) have effectively persuaded the majority of the American people to disagree with science. Lincoln once described America’s representative democracy as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”¹⁸ Since most of the American people reject scientific consensus on climate change, perhaps it is only fitting that their new President does so too. Thus, Donald Trump—a man who repeatedly referred to climate change as a “hoax” invented by the Chinese—has decided to withdraw from the Paris agreement, and rather invest in fossil fuel industry companies—literally fueling climate change instead of trying to solve it.¹⁹

Trump ran for President as the official Republican candidate. Pew research indicates a strong partisan divide: only 15% of the people who consider themselves Conservative Republicans believes that the planet “is warming mostly due to human activity”; against 79% of Liberal Democrats. Of the Conservative Republican group, only 21% considers climate change a threat to “wildlife and their habitats” and only 16% links global warming to “more droughts or water shortages,” compared to respectively 66% and 69% of Liberal Democrats. Only 15% of Conservative Republicans believe there is scientific consensus on the idea that humans are largely responsible for climate change. Liberal Democrats are more convinced: 55% of this group believes in a scientific consensus.²⁰ However, as NASA, Cook, and others have pointed out: there actually is a 97% consensus on human caused climate change.²¹

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln, “The Gettysburg Address,” accessed October 10, 2017, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm.

¹⁹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive,” November 6, 2012, 11:15AM. Tweet, accessed on October 9, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/265895292191248385>.

²⁰ Funk and Kennedy, “The Politics of Climate.” *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, October 4, 2016. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04/the-politics-of-climate>.

²¹ Cook et al., “Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature.” *Environmental Research Letters* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2013); Cook et al., “Consensus on consensus”; “Scientific Consensus: Earth’s climate is warming,” NASA Global Climate Change, <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>; <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002/pdf>.

To explain why man-made climate change remains a “public controversy” in America and explain the gap between scientific consensus and public controversy, Dunlap, McCright, Jacques, Cook, and others point to the earlier mentioned “Denial Machine.”²² In “Organized Climate Change Denial,” Dunlap and McCright comprehensively map out the workings of this Denial Machine. They explain how “contrarian scientists, fossil fuel corporations, conservative think tanks, and various front groups” work together with “a bevy of amateur climate bloggers and self-designated experts, public relations firms, astroturf groups, conservative media and pundits, and conservative politicians” to assault “mainstream science and scientists.” Dunlap and McCright compare the fossil fuel industry’s strategy to the strategy of the tobacco industry: “‘manufacturing’ uncertainty and doubt” about climate science undermines—in the eyes of the public and policy makers—the “scientific basis for (climate) policies.” The conservative media functions as an “echo chamber,” quoting self-proclaimed ‘experts’ and conservative think tanks (often financed by fossil-fuel) while reporting on “Climategate.” Dunlap and McCright argue that the success of the Denial Machine “not only threatens our capacity to understand and monitor human-induced ecological disruptions from the local to global levels (Hanson 2010), but it also weakens an essential component of societal reflexivity when the need for the latter is greater than ever.”²³

To get a clearer view of the finances behind the Denial Machine (or as Brulle prefers to call it, the “climate change counter-movement” or CCCM), “Institutionalizing Delay” offers some interesting numbers. Brulle’s findings show that “from 2003 to 2007, the Koch Affiliated Foundations and the ExxonMobil Foundation were heavily involved in funding CCCM organizations.” Since 2008, however, their contributions are no longer traceable, but “coinciding with the decline in traceable funding, the amount of funding given to CCCM organizations by Donors Trust/Capital has risen dramatically” (Donors Trust and Donors

²² J.S. Carlton, Rebecca Perry-Hill, Matthew Huber, and Linda S. Prokopy, “The Climate Change Consensus Extends Beyond Climate Scientists,” *Environmental Research Letters* 10, no. 9 (2015).

²³ Dunlap and McCright. “Organized Climate Change Denial,” 158.

Capital are “donor directed foundations”—they give companies the option to make untraceable contributions).²⁴

Recent research done by Farrell further exposes the contours of the CCCM. Using computerized text analysis, he reveals a network of “4,556 individuals with ties to 164 organizations involved in promulgating contrarian views.”²⁵

...the successful production and diffusion of contrarian information has a particular network structure and corporate influence. Network power and semantic influence is not spread evenly among organizations in the network, but is concentrated within a smaller group of organizations with ties to particular actors in the private sector.²⁶

Besides helping to explain why “climate science rejection is so pronounced in the United States compared to other developed nations,” Farrell’s findings have also “much broader implications for the privatization of science, the influence of corporate lobbying around scientific issues, and by extension, the increasing concentration of corporate wealth in the United States.” Farrell concludes that “science in the twenty-first century will be increasingly shaped by the interests and resources of the private sector”; his work raises “important questions about the privatization of science and the ways in which actors in the private sector impact the networks structure and success of scientific contrarianism.”²⁷

The Denial Machine is nothing new. In 1991, *The New York Times* reported about an advertisement plan of “coal-burning utility companies and coal producers.” Their goal, “according to one planning document,” was “to ‘reposition global warming as theory’ and not

²⁴ Robert J. Brulle, “Institutionalizing Delay: Foundation Funding and the Creation of U.S. Climate Change Counter-Movement Organizations.” *Climatic Change* 122, no. 4 (February 2014): 681–94.

²⁵ Farrell’s database contains “all known organizations and individuals promoting contrarian viewpoints, as well as the entirety of all written and verbal texts about climate change from 1993-2013 from every organization, three major news outlets, all US presidents, and every occurrence on the floor of the US Congress.” Justin Farrell, “Network Structure and Influence of the Climate Change Counter-Movement.” *Nature Climate Change* 6, no. 4 (April 2016): 370. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2875>.

²⁶ Farrell, “Network structure.”

²⁷ Farrell, “Network structure.”

fact.”²⁸ Cook quotes a 2002 memo from “political strategist Frank Luntz, who advised Republican politicians that the way to lower public support for climate policies was to cast doubt on the Consensus (Luntz, 2002)”:

Voters believe that there is no consensus about global warming in the scientific community. Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, *you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate.*²⁹

Luntz’s advice, in other words, is to keep pretending that climate scientists are still debating on whether climate change exists or not. Not only the public is misled by the Denial Machine: throughout the years, organized climate change denial has misguided US media outlets to suggesting that “substantive disagreement exists within the international scientific community as to the reality of anthropogenic climate change.” Without using terms as CCCM or Denial Machine, Antilla does argue that “powerful forces within society combine to distract both the US public and policy-makers” and “there is no question that certain business sectors benefit from this political impasse.” The financiers of this “effort to undermine public trust in climate science” are “large corporations that profit substantially from fossil fuel consumption.” While the peer-reviewed scientific community agrees on climate change, the media prominently features “a group of dissident scientists,” for this “creates drama and provides journalists ‘with a guise of objectivity.’” Thus, for the sake of *balance*, “some journalists include

²⁸ Matthew L. Wald, “Pro-Coal Ad Campaign Disputes Warming Idea.” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1991, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/08/business/pro-coal-ad-campaign-disputes-warming-idea.html>.

²⁹ Cook, “Countering Climate Science Denial and Communicating Scientific Consensus,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*. October 26, 2016, accessed on October 9, 2017, <http://climatescience.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-314>.

rebuttals by *experts* who, often through think-tanks, are affiliated with the fossil fuel industry (Gelbspan, 1998, 2004, 2005; Leggett, 2001; Lahsen, 2005).”³⁰

Journalistic balance is important, yet in the case of global warming reporting, it has led to an inaccurate portrayal of a “climate debate” that is virtually non-existent in actual peer-reviewed climate science. Journalists need to provide all *relevant* information to the public. If a person with a PhD in an irrelevant field, for example economics, disagrees with virtually all climate scientists on the issue of global warming, this is not relevant information. However, when AP’s reporting on climate change features “climate *expert*” (read: skeptic) George Taylor, it is important to note that Taylor is board member of an ExxonMobil financed study center. When *The New York Times* quotes John Christy of the University of Alabama, it is important to inform the public that he is linked to a conservative think-tank that received major financial contributions “from ExxonMobil (US\$405,000 in 2002; US\$465,000 in 2003; and US\$270,000 in 2004).” Antilla’s newspaper research shows that “news outlets repeatedly used climate skeptics—with known fossil fuel industry ties—as *primary definers*.”³¹ As a result, this quest for “journalistic balance” not only “led to bias”; it also limited the scope of “future discourse.”³²

Whether called the Denial Machine or the CCCM, this industry-sponsored resistance against climate science and scientists has led “to the current situation in which there is a significant disjunction between the public’s view of AGW (anthropogenic global warming) and those of the scientific community (Weber & Stern, 2011) as well as a policy stalemate (Pooley, 2010).” Dunlap explains that, as a result of the “constant criticism” (climate scientists being

³⁰ Liisa Antilla, “Climate of Scepticism: US Newspaper Coverage of the Science of Climate Change.” *Global Environmental Change* 15, 2015: 338–52.

³¹ Primary definers are “social actors available to the media who help to ‘frame and define not only what the issues are but also ... the terms of reference for their discussion (Hansen, 1993, p. xviii),” Antilla, “Climate of Skepticism,” 338–52.

³² Antilla, “Climate of Scepticism,” 338–52.

portrayed as “‘alarmists’ who exaggerate the degree and threat of global warming to enhance their status, funding, and influence with policy makers”), climate scientists tend to “err on the side of caution.”³³ Meanwhile, on the other side of the spectrum—in Camp Denial, that is—the non-existence of peer review reveals the absence of caution. When Dunlap and Jacques explored the connection between “Climate change denial books and conservative think tanks,” they found that 90% of the “denial books do not undergo peer review, allowing authors or editors to recycle scientifically unfounded claims that are then amplified by the conservative movement, media, and political elites.” Furthermore, they argue that these books “confer a sense of legitimacy on their authors and provide them an effective tool for combating the findings of climate scientists that are published primarily in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.” As a result, “authors of successful books critiquing climate science often come to be viewed as ‘climate experts,’ regardless of their academic background or scientific credentials.”³⁴

Dunlap and Jacques found that 39% of the denial books’ authors and editors have a PhD in *any* natural science field (not climate science per se); 19% have PhDs in others a PhD in other fields (“primarily in economics, politics, and law”); the remaining 42% has no doctorate. Of the authors with PhDs in natural science, 78% is linked to at least one CTT (conservative think tank). Of the individuals without a doctorate, ‘only’ 50% is connected; a sharp contrast with the PhDs in—for climate science irrelevant—other fields: 88% of them is linked to one or more CTTs.³⁵ Thus, many self-proclaimed “experts” lack the relevant background to contribute to a serious climate debate. The publishing of books and the links to CTTs whitewashes the credentials of these “experts,” allocating them a sort of validation in the eyes of the public, in spite of the absence of relevant scientific backgrounds. The media

³³ Riley E. Dunlap, “Climate Change Skepticism and Denial: An Introduction.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 6 (2013): 691–698.

³⁴ Riley E. Dunlap and Peter J. Jacques. “Climate Change Denial Books and Conservative Think Tanks: Exploring the Connection.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57, no. 6 (2013): 699-702.

³⁵ Dunlap and Jacques. “Climate Change Denial Books,” 710-12.

then functions as an “echo chamber,” continuing the whitewashing process by giving these contrarian scientists a podium and confirming their expert-status—whether they are so or not.

One of the reasons for the success of the Denial Machine, is that many people are welcoming of their message. Al Gore is not far off when he argues that for some

it’s just easier, psychologically, to swallow the lie that these scientists who devote their lives to their work are actually greedy deceivers and left-wing extremists – and that we should instead put our faith in the pseudoscientists financed by large carbon polluters whose business plans depend on their continued use of the atmospheric commons as a place to dump their gaseous, heat-trapping waste without limit or constraint, free of charge.³⁶

One of the reasons that the Denial Machine is so successful is that people “don’t really want to know” that the world as they know it is in great peril.³⁷ Norgaard writes that “people actually work to *avoid acknowledging disturbing information* in order to avoid emotions of fear, guilt, and helplessness, follow cultural norms, and maintain positive conceptions of individual and national identity.”³⁸ In other words: people are naturally more receptive to the message of the Denial Machine, for the scientific consensus message—that climate change is a threat to our civilization—is a disturbing one. This helps explain the marketability of the Denial Machine’s message—people want to hear that they are doing nothing wrong.

One of the reasons why right-wing conservatives are more likely to side with the contrarian scientists, is that right-wing ideology is “related to system justification – a motivation to accept and protect the status quo (e.g., Feygina, Jost & Goldsmith, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost & Thompson, 2000).” According to Häkkinen and Akrami, this motivation conflicts “with the message that prevailing social practices and

³⁶ Al Gore, “Al Gore: Climate of Denial - Can Science and the Truth Withstand the Merchants of Poison?” *Rolling Stone*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-of-denial-20110622>.

³⁷ Kari Norgaard. “Climate Denial: Emotion, Psychology, Culture, and Political Economy.” *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, 2011, 410.

³⁸ Norgaard. “Climate Denial,” 401.

arrangements, for example the way we exploit natural resources, need to change” and leads people with a right-wing ideology to reject “critique against contemporary ways of exploiting natural resources.” Häkkinen and Akrami also found that “voters on the left and right not only tend to receive different information (Dunlap & McCright, 2008; Hindman, 2009), but also react differently to the same information (e.g., Hart & Nisbet, 2012).”³⁹

All in all, the gap between scientific consensus on climate change and the climate debate in the media can be explained by a successfully waged war of ideas. The attack is built around a handful of contrarian scientists (often without the right credentials to seriously discuss climate science), self-proclaimed experts, and fossil-fuel sponsored conservative think tanks. The conservative media works as an “echo chamber” to spread the contrarian ideas, while the mainstream media also tends to quote contrarian climate “experts”, in order to provide “balanced” reporting. The war is largely financed by fossil fuel industry companies, although a recent shift to anonymous donations makes it harder to trace the funding. Climate change has become a partisan issue, where Liberal Democrats are more likely to embrace actual climate science and Conservative Republicans are more likely to be skeptical or in denial. This partisan divide is reflected in (and created by) the media landscape, with left-winged and right-winged media offering contradicting climate change discourses. With these insights in mind, it is time to explore the climate change discourses on both ends of the political spectrum, and thoroughly analyze the sources used, to measure the influence of the Denial Machine on both Liberal Democrat and Conservative Republican news publishers.

³⁹ Kirsti Häkkinen and Nazar Akrami. “Ideology and Climate Change Denial.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 70 (November 2014): 62–65.

Methodology

In order to get better insights in how climate change skepticism is fueled by the media, and how the media functions as an echo chamber for the Denial Machine, it is important to look at both the manner in which news outlets conduct their climate change reporting (their climate discourse) and at the sources they use. The study is divided in two parts: the first part analyzes the climate discourses of the *New York Times* and *Breitbart*; the second part checks the sources these media outlets used in their climate change reporting. Hence, this research is not a study of the entire political spectrum in the American media, but rather two case studies (1. the climate change reporting of *Breitbart*; 2. the climate change reporting the *Times*), both consisting of two parts (1. discourse; 2. sources). Both cases represent a pole in the political landscape: *Breitbart* the Conservative Republican pole; the *Times* the Liberal Democrat pole.

Chapter I: Discourse

Chapter I is dedicated to analyzing the climate change discourses of the *Times* and *Breitbart*. This analysis is based on a close reading of all articles with the tags “climate change” or “global warming” published between July 19, 2016 (the day Donald Trump became the official Republican candidate), and November 8, 2016 (the day Donald Trump was elected President). This period was selected because Trump illustrates how *Breitbart* and the *Times* take opposite positions in the American political spectrum: *Breitbart* fully embraced the presidential candidate, whereas the *Times* openly warned for the dangers of a Trump presidency. During this qualitative research, each article receives certain scores in different categories. These categories are:

- **Type of article:** This category focuses on whether the published pieces are written as a news article, an opinion article, or a blend of news and opinion. The possible scores are: News (0), Opinion (2), or Combination (1).
- **Consensus/Debate/Denial:** This category focuses on whether the published pieces acknowledge the scientific consensus, portray climate science as a debate, or are in full denial of climate change altogether. Because some articles lay somewhere between these options (for example, between acknowledging consensus and saying there is an even debate, there are also articles that state that there is *some debate*), two more options are added. The possible scores are: Consensus (0), Some Debate (1), Debate (2), Denialist Debate (3), Denial (4), Neutral (5).
- **“Consequences”:** There is a reason for the quotation marks around the word consequences: this thesis will not discuss whether certain natural events can be attributed to anthropogenic global warming. However, there are articles in the database that deny that these natural events happen at all. Hence, the possible scores are: Exist (0), Do Not Exist (1), Unclear (2).
- **Type of Argument:** The *Times* and *Breitbart* use very different type of arguments in their climate discourses. Hence, they both have their own possible scores.
 - The *Times*’ possible scores are: Politics (0), Science (1), Economy (2), Solutions (3), Fossil Fuel Fake Science (4), Disasters or Consequences (5), Other (6).
 - *Breitbart*’s possible scores are: Evil Scheme/Hoax (0), Economic Argument (1), Freedom of Speech (2), Natural Change (3), CO2 is Good (4), Leonardo Di Caprio (5), Natural Contradiction (6), Attack Climate Scientists (7), Other (8), “Scientific” Argument (9).

- The “Other” arguments of both the *Times* and *Breitbart* are omitted in the results, for they contain all arguments that do not fit the type of arguments mentioned above.

Entering the scores from the qualitative research in a database creates the possibility to draw quantitative conclusions. As a result, it becomes clear which writers use which type of arguments; which arguments are often used together with other arguments; to what extent both discourses acknowledge consensus or deny climate change; which arguments are the most prominent; et cetera. This combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research helps visualize *Breitbart*’s and the *Times*’ climate change reporting, and enables a more thorough discourse analysis.

Chapter II: Sources

Chapter II is dedicated to the source-use of both the *Times* and *Breitbart*. During the close reading, all sources mentioned are counted and labeled. They make it possible to see how often the *Times* and *Breitbart* refer to their own articles; how often they quote “non-expert” sources (eye-witnesses, for example); and how many sources they present as experts. Then, these “expert” sources are checked in the SourceWatch database.

SourceWatch

SourceWatch is an open-content watchdog that monitors and reports on “efforts by propagandists and public relations organizations to shape public opinion.” In his *Encyclopedia of Global Warming*, Steven I. Dutch explains the importance of the website.

SourceWatch began as Disinfopedia in March, 2003; its name “was a conscious play on Wikipedia.” Like Wikipedia, it is a “user-written and –edited” website. Climate change is

“a major area of concern,” thus, “SourceWatch has a portal dedicated to climate change.” SourceWatch can be used to “provide a quick overview of an author’s stance on political or environmental issues, as well as information about groups that sponsor the author’s work.” Dutch notes that it “is important to realize that being funded by industry, being supportive of industry, and working to influence public opinion do not automatically make someone’s ideas wrong.” Still, it “can be useful” to know whether “an organization has a secret purpose or source of funding (...) because it demonstrates the need to beware of distorted facts and arguments and the need to cross-check information against other sources.”⁴⁰

SourceWatch is published by the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), which calls it a “collaborative, specialized encyclopedia of the people, organizations, and issues shaping the public agenda.” It “profiles the activities of front groups, PR spinners, industry-friendly experts, industry-funded organizations, and think tanks trying to manipulate public opinion on behalf of corporations or government.” CMD “does not accept funding from for-profit corporations or grants from government agencies.”⁴¹ The SourceWatch database contains more than 73,000 articles.

SourceWatch Quick Scan

For in depth source checking, piece by piece, merely checking whether a source has a SourceWatch article is insufficient, for more unreliable sources exist *outside* the SourceWatch database than *inside* it. However, for analyzing *overall* source use, SourceWatch is a useful tool. The SourceWatch Quick Scan method simply means running all sources that were identified as “Expert” sources in the dataset through the SourceWatch database. If these “expert” sources have no article in the SourceWatch database, directly or indirectly (for example, through a think tank or organization that is mentioned in the database), they are

⁴⁰ Steven I. Dutch – *Encyclopedia of Global Warming*, Salem Press, 2009.

⁴¹ Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), “What We Do,” accessed on October 17, 2017, on <https://www.prwatch.org/cmd>.

marked (0). If they have a positive article (relatively scarce, since SourceWatch is dedicated to revealing sources that try to distort public opinion), they are marked (1). If they have a negative SourceWatch article, they are marked (2).

Again, this is by no means a perfect check: most sources—reliable or unreliable—are not (yet) in the SourceWatch database. Also, in some articles, sources are only brought to the stage to be attacked. Hence, there are examples of sources that have a positive SourceWatch profile that are attacked in the publication, which distorts the results. To solve this problem, a filtered SourceWatch Quick Scan is done, which filtered out misquoted and attacked sources. Hence, if combined with the right qualitative context, this Quick Scan does present the outlines of the overall source reliability of these news publishers. A qualitative analysis of the sources labeled “suspicious” then helps define whether these sources can be considered part of the Denial Machine or not.

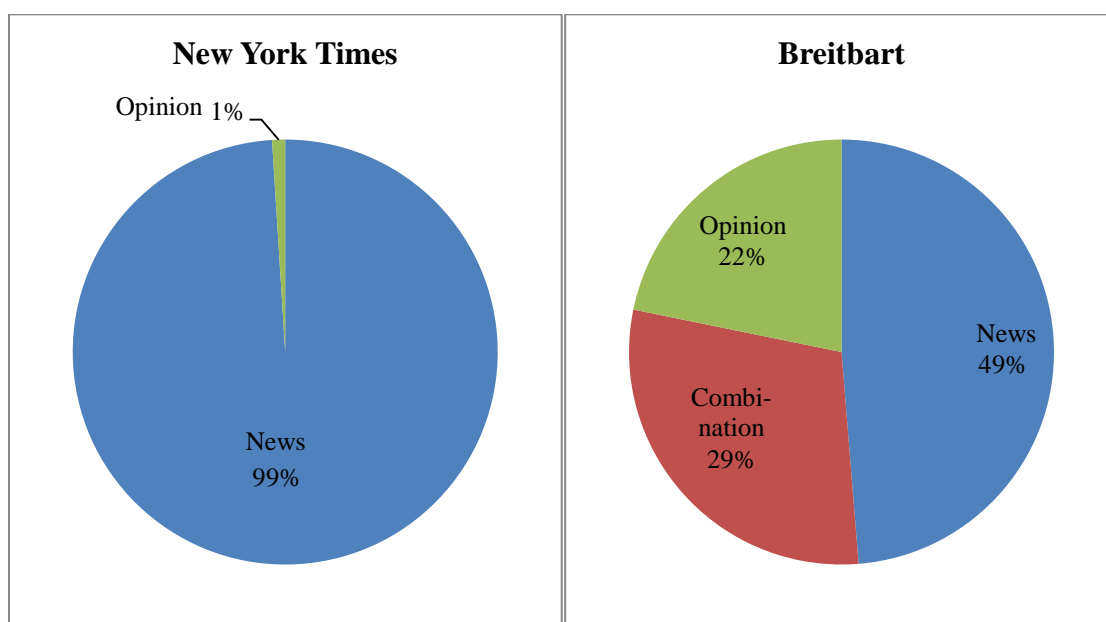
Chapter I: Discourse Results

While the overall approach is explained in the Methodology (p. 21—25), further clarification is offered in this chapter as well.

1.1 Type of Article

Whilst all reporting includes some opinion (the source selection of a journalist; the order in which a story is presented; emphasis on certain facts; et cetera), there is a clear difference between news articles and opinionated pieces. Fusions of the two exist as well. These fusions combine news stories with the opinions and ideas of the author. As Figure 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 show, there is a significant difference between the type of articles that the *New York Times* and *Breitbart* publish in their climate change reporting.

Figure 1.1.1 and 1.1.2: Type of Article



Where the *Times* mainly publishes *news articles* (99%), *Breitbart* offers more space for the personal views of its writers: more than half of *Breitbart*'s climate change reporting includes opinion (22% *opinion*; and 29% a *combination of news and opinion*). The low amount of *opinion* articles in the *Times* (merely one—which is a critical review of a documentary) arguably indicates that the *Times* does not debate the existence of anthropogenic global warming anymore, whilst *Breitbart*'s abundance of pieces containing *opinion* suggests that its authors consider global warming as a phenomenon that is up for discussion. Also, while *Breitbart* describes itself as a “News Network,” these results indicate that besides covering current events, *Breitbart*'s authors actively attempt to convince their readers of their own views on climate change.

To illustrate the differences between *combination* articles and *opinion* articles, a look at BB7 (by Thomas D. Williams) and BB24 (by James Delingpole) suffices. BB7 starts out with news facts (“U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry compared the effects of climate change to the horrors of Islamic terrorism”). Also the second paragraph is best described as news reporting. By the third paragraph, Williams starts stating his own opinion (“Kerry’s statement was all the more remarkable...”), which is further emphasized in the fourth paragraph (“Bizarrely, Kerry spoke these words in the midst of one of the most violent periods in the history of Islamic terror”). BB7 shows a certain balance between news facts and the opinion of the writer. Contrarily, BB24 lacks this balance. The post begins with Delingpole’s personal position (“Of all the climate ‘science’ scams I’ve helped expose, about the worst has got to be Ocean Acidification”). Also the second and third paragraphs are clearly opinionated writing (“Yet still this junk-science scare story refuses to lie down and die because there are so many vested interests determined to prop it up”). Only in the fourth paragraph, the reason for Delingpole’s piece becomes clear: the publication of a new article on ocean acidification in *The Marine Biologist*. However, this too is not presented as a news fact. Delingpole writes:

“Here is the latest egregious example. Published at The Marine Biologist (‘the magazine of the marine biological community’) it purports to be a damning refutation of one of my many articles calling out the Ocean Acidification lie.”⁴² The absence or minimal presence of news facts, combined with the abundance of opinionated writing, makes BB24 a clear example of an *opinion* post.

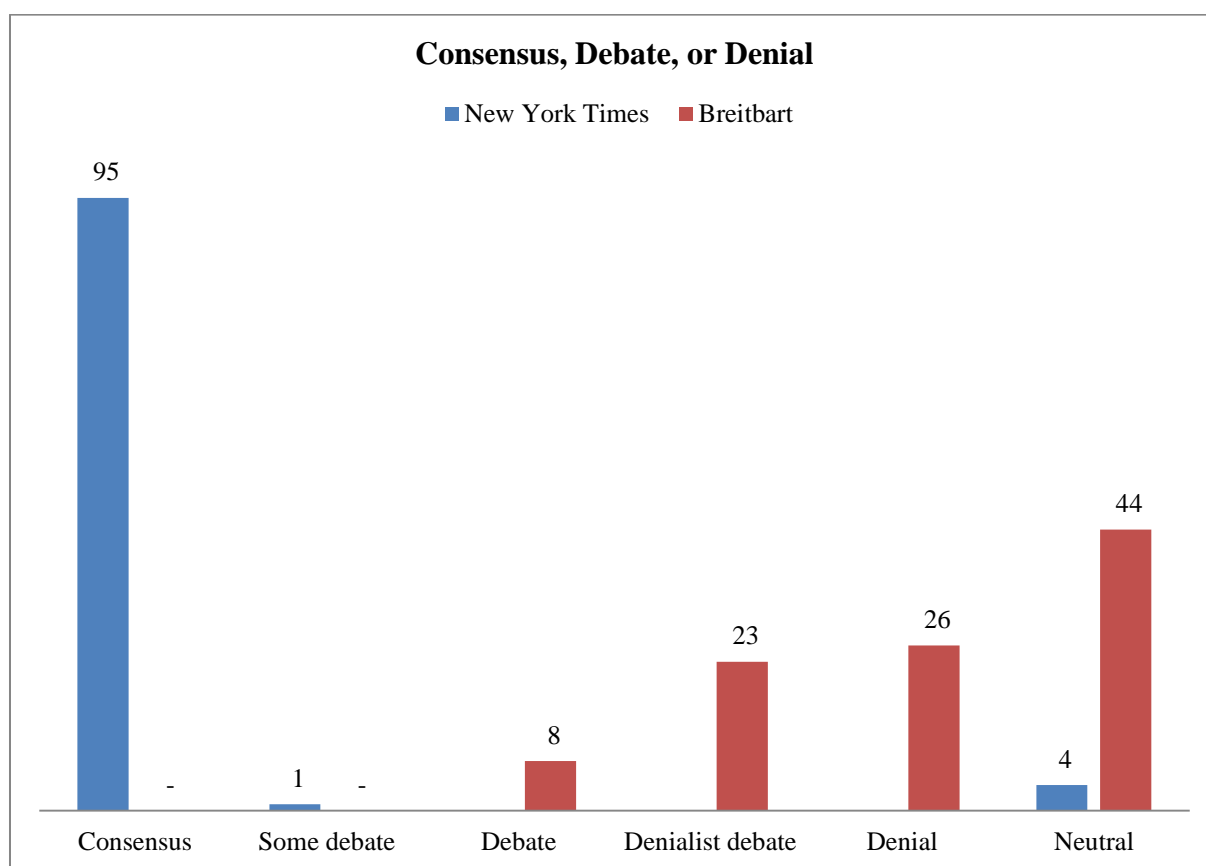
James Delingpole is responsible for most of *Breitbart’s opinion* articles (11 of the 17, or 65%); followed by Williams (4 of the 17, or 24%). Delingpole is also responsible for 13 of the 23 or 57% of the *combination* articles. Again, Williams comes in second (6 of the 23 or 26%). Of the 40 articles that include opinionated writing (*opinion* and *combination* combined), Delingpole has written 24. Thus, he is the author of 60% of *Breitbart’s* opinionated writing in the dataset. Williams’ work is good for 25% of the *Breitbart* posts that include opinionated writing.

1.2 Consensus, Debate or Denial

Despite the 97% scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, for the sake of “journalistic balance” some journalists portray climate science as an evenly split debate between scientists who believe in man-made global warming and scientists who do not believe in it. Other journalists either treat climate change as a fact, while some reject the idea of climate change altogether—they deny that it exists. To get a clearer idea of how climate change is portrayed, the options *some debate* (between *consensus* and *debate*) and *denialist debate* (between *debate* and *denial*) were also added. Hence, the full spectrum looks as follows: *consensus*; *some debate*; *debate*; *denialist debate*; *denial*. Articles that lack any indication of where their authors stand in regards to the consensus are marked *neutral*.

⁴² BB24.

Figure 1.2: Consensus, Debate or Denial



As Figure 1.2 shows, the *Times* largely acknowledges the scientific *consensus* on climate change (95%). This seems to confirm the idea mentioned in section 1.1 (“Type of Article”)—that the *Times* offers no space for opinion articles on something that is considered a fact. Four *Times*-articles make no statement in regards to whether climate change exists or not (NYT6, NYT9, NYT81, NYT100) and are marked *neutral*; while only one article portrayed the scientific field as one in which there still is *some debate* (NYT26). That article, written by Tatiana Schlossberg, arguably also accepts the consensus, but the fifth paragraph leaves room for other interpretation—hence it is marked *some debate*.⁴³

⁴³ While Schlossberg writes that “the effects of a warming planet are becoming increasingly clear,” she also states that “climate science has become more accepted.” Without an indication *who* accepts climate science (ordinary people? scientists?), it remains possible that Schlossberg considers the climate science as a field with *some debate*.

Contrarily, 0% of the *Breitbart* articles acknowledges *consensus*. The closest that *Breitbart* comes to acknowledging consensus is portraying the scientific field as a *balanced debate* (8%). Another 23% depicts climate science as a *denialist debate*, while 26% of *Breitbart* posts is in *denial* of climate change altogether. The remaining 44% of the articles make no statement on whether climate change exists or not (*neutral*).

The *debate* articles, 6 in total, are written by 6 different authors. John Binder's BB36 is a good example of a *debate* article: it puts NOAA and Princeton University scientist Karin van der Wiel, who believes in climate change, against New Orleans meteorologist Bob Breck, who does not believe in manmade climate change.

The *denialist debate* articles are mainly the work of Williams (56%), followed by Delingpole (33%). BB39 by Williams is a good example of a *denialist debate* article. Williams writes about an EcoWatch article by Michael Mann, in which he names the most dangerous climate change deniers:

Gone are the days when intelligent inquiry was lauded as a prized element of serious science. Mann accuses the skeptics of 'clouding the climate change debate' with their pesky, unanswered questions and stalling action through 'a campaign of deliberate misinformation.' (...) This past summer, a group of scientists acknowledged that one of the most touted examples of global warming, regularly pointed to by climate alarmists as a motive to cut back on fossil fuel emissions, had actually reversed itself some time ago. (...) Nature's editor noted that although the Antarctic Peninsula is 'frequently presented as a case study of rapid warming,' scientists John Turner and colleagues have now shown that warming trends have abated and 'for the early years of the twenty-first century the peninsula has in the main been cooling.' (...) Thus, the scientists admit that what was once considered one of the most remarkable cases of accelerated anthropogenic climate warming was apparently not due to human causes at all but rather to natural climate swings.⁴⁴

Williams implies that, while the scientific environment is dangerous for climate skeptics, current scientific results actually prove them right. Consequently, while admitting that there is

⁴⁴ BB39.

a debate, he presents the skeptic's point of view as more plausible than the current consensus on anthropogenic global warming.

The *denial* articles are almost entirely the work of Delingpole (85%). A good example of this is BB10: "The actual topic of Sandel's programme was very nearly as pointless, irrelevant and out of date: climate change. (...) it feels like something some starry eyed eco-activist who'd just had a tofu burger with Al Gore dashed off about 20 years ago." Later in the article, Delingpole claims that "the premise on which it is based is entirely specious" and that "rather than row back from its relentless climate change propaganda in the light of evidence, the BBC continues to pretend that (climate change is) a major problem." Hence, Delingpole completely ridicules the idea of climate change; he portrays it as some kind of specious ideology that is kept alive by tofu burger eating activists and the BBC.

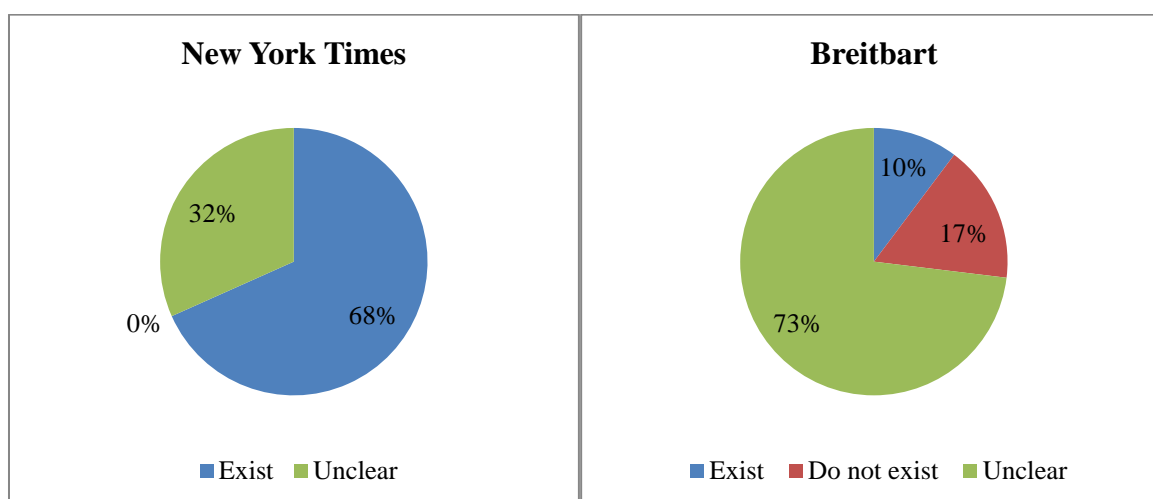
The *neutral* articles are written by 20 different authors; Daniel Nussbaum is responsible for 18%. These articles do not make claims on whether climate change exists or not.

1.3 "Consequences"

The quotation marks around the word consequences are there for a reason: this research will not discuss whether an event can be attributed to anthropogenic global warming or not.

However, especially in the articles that do not accept the scientific consensus, it is interesting to check whether only climate change theory is rejected, or measurable consequences are denied as well. Thus, the category "consequences" include changing weather patterns, rising sea levels, the growth of deserts, the dying of coral reefs, and other environmental issues that are—whether rightly so or not—attributed or linked to climate change. Note: some articles do not discuss "consequences"—these articles are marked as *unclear*. The articles that do mention "consequences" are marked as *exist* or *do not exist*.

Figure 1.3.1 and 1.3.2: “Consequences”



As the diagram in Figure 1.3.1 shows, one third of the *Times* articles in the dataset do not mention potential consequences of climate change. The other two thirds of the dataset do mention “consequences” and do not deny them. *Breitbart* has a far larger amount (73%) of articles in which it is *unclear* whether climate change “consequences” *exist* or *do not exist*. Only 8 of the articles in the dataset (or 10%) mention “consequences” and concede that they *exist*; while 13 articles (17% of the dataset) claim that the consequences *do not exist*.

The *Times*’ *unclear* and *exist* articles speak for themselves (either “consequences” are not mentioned or they are mentioned and acknowledged). *Breitbart*’s *do not exist* articles deserve more exploration. More than half (54%) of the *do not exist* articles are written by Delingpole. His *do not exist* article BB10 comments on a BBC-show that claims that

The inhabitants of The Maldives – made up of more than 1,200 islands, most of which are no more than one metre above sea level – are already feeling the effects of climate change. They are victims. But they didn’t cause the problem. Should those countries with historical responsibility for emissions be obliged to compensate The Maldives?⁴⁵

Delingpole denies that the Maldives have a problem. “No one who has done even the merest scintilla of a modicum of homework on this subject is remotely worried about the effects of

⁴⁵ BB10.

climate change on the Maldives because the Maldives are doing just fine.” BB24 is another *do not exist* article by Delingpole: in this post, he writes:

Not that Ocean Acidification is nor ever was really about “the science”. Partly it was dreamed up as a way of hoovering up some of the vast quantities of government research grant available for anything vaguely connected with “climate change”; partly, as a pals’ make-work scheme for otherwise unemployable environmental science and marine biology graduates from places like the “University” of East Anglia.⁴⁶

Thus, Delingpole denies the existence of rising sea levels and ocean acidification. In BB58, Christopher Monckton and Willie Soon claim that “the rate of global warming has not been accelerating” and that “sea level (...) has not been accelerating.” Also this is an example of not acknowledging the existence of “consequences.”

1.4 Type of Arguments

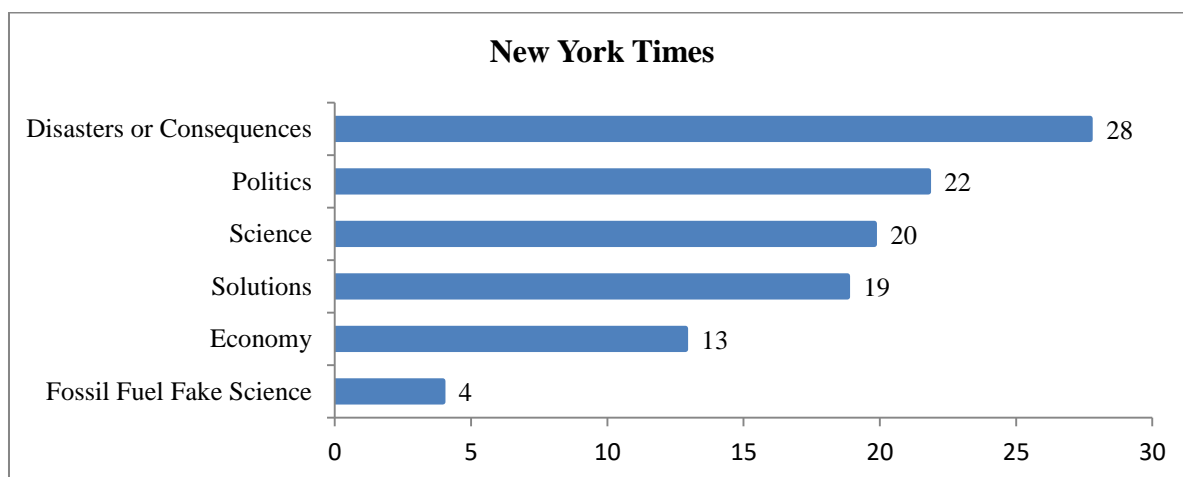
The “type of arguments” category handles the arguments linked to global warming that are employed by *Breitbart* and the *New York Times* in their climate change discourses. However, virtually all *Times*’ articles acknowledge the scientific consensus on climate change, while *Breitbart*’s reporting does not start out from this perspective. Hence, the *Times* does not make arguments *for or against* climate change’s existence, whereas *Breitbart*’s articles do contain these types of arguments. As a result, all *Times*’ arguments look similar: “Climate change exists, and (*rest of the argument*).” Nonetheless, looking at the type of arguments can still offer interesting insights: is the *Times* climate change narrative focused more on politics, economics, consequences of climate change, or solutions?

⁴⁶ BB24.

1.4.1: *New York Times* climate change arguments

The following types of argumentation stood out in the *Times* climate change reporting:

Figure 1.4.1: *New York Times* Climate Change Arguments



“Disasters or Consequences” Arguments

The “Disasters or Consequences” argument is used in 28% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

The “Disasters or Consequences” arguments mainly focus on extreme events like floods, draughts, wildfires, and, if possible, links them to global warming. These arguments can also focus on “slow” consequences of climate change, like the melting of ice-sheets, or the expansion of deserts.

“Political” Arguments

The “Political” argument is used in 22% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

The “Political” arguments focus on political news related to climate change. “Political” arguments are found in pieces about the Paris Agreement; in reporting on the issue of climate

change in Trump’s and Clinton’s Presidential campaigns; on plans and policies of the Obama administration; et cetera.

“Science” Arguments

The “Science” argument is used in 20% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

The “Science” arguments focus on developments in the world of science related to climate change. They are often combined with “Disasters or Consequences” arguments (5), for example in articles on the growth of deserts; the increased number of draughts, wildfires and floods; or the decrease of ice in the Arctic.

“Solutions” Arguments

The “Solutions” argument is used in 19% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

“Solutions” arguments focus on improvements and solutions for environmental problems. It can be found in articles on cutting emissions; on planting small forests; on how to deal with old fridges; on how air-conditioning in India is necessary against the increased heat while it simultaneously stimulates more warming; et cetera.

“Economic” Arguments

The “Economic” argument is used in 13% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

The “Economic” arguments focus on climate change and the economy. It can be found in articles on the consequences of (fighting) climate change for the economy—for example the impact on the fossil fuel industry and transport industry; but also articles on economic

opportunities created by the need to change current economic norms—for example on how Tesla is changing the norms in the car industry, or the increased demand for electric cars.

“Fossil Fuel Fake Science” Arguments

The “Fossil Fuel Fake Science” argument is used in 4% of the NYT articles in the dataset.

“Fossil Fuel Fake Science” arguments can be found in articles that focus on investigations into Exxon Mobil’s funding for groups that promote doubts about climate change, but also in reporting on a dubious PowerPoint presentation at a coal mining industry meeting.⁴⁷ These arguments are used to explain conscious attempts to discredit climate change science by institutions financially dependent upon the continuous consumption of fossil fuels.

Altogether, it becomes evident that the *New York Times*’ climate change discourse mainly focuses on the consequences of climate change, including predicted consequences and contemporary natural disasters; the politics of climate change; the scientific developments that help understand the consequences of climate change; and potential solutions for climate change related problems. There is some attention for the economic implications of climate change (for the fossil fuel sector, the automobile sector, the aviation sector, et cetera), and an occasional article about the Exxon Mobil court cases, which basically means that the *Times*’ sometimes writes about the Denial Machine. However, this is not a main pillar in their climate change reporting. Furthermore, almost all *Times*’ articles in the database acknowledge consensus and leave no room for debate on the existence of anthropogenic climate change. Hence, they do not offer arguments for or against the existence of global warming; that debate

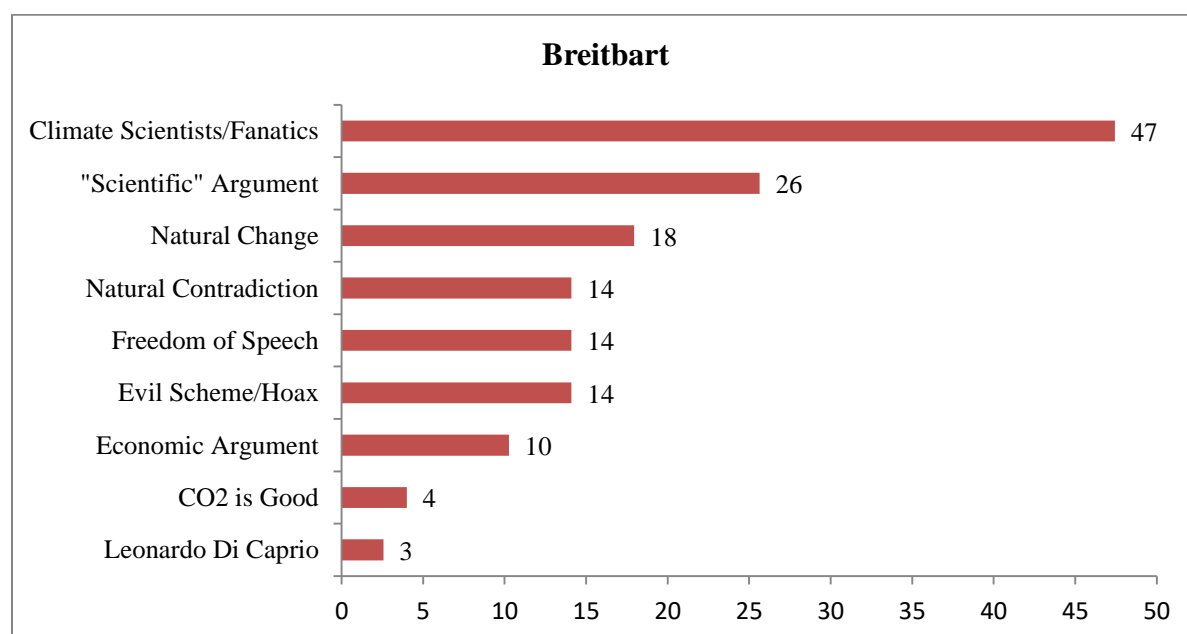
⁴⁷ The presentation in question stated that the fossil fuel sector should learn from how the tobacco industry sowed doubts about the risks of smoking. This tactic should be employed to make people doubt that climate change exists.

lies, according to the *Times*, in the past. As mentioned in the Introduction and the Literature Discussion, 55% of Liberal Democrats believe there is consensus on anthropogenic global warming. The *Times*' discourse fits this group of Liberal Democrats.

1.4.2 Popular arguments of *Breitbart* Writers

Breitbart writers employ many different types of arguments in their climate change discourse.

Figure 1.4.2: *Breitbart* Climate Change Arguments



“Climate Scientists/Fanatics” Arguments:

The “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” argument is used in 47% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The basis of the “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” argument is: climate scientists are leftist fanatics; climate change science is like religion to them. It is not an argument that directly handles climate change, but rather an attempt to discredit the scientists (and sometimes

others) that agree with the consensus on anthropogenic global warming. Hence, these scientists are portrayed as “political activists,” “alarmists,” “climate loons,” and so forth, who, instead of “scientific truth,” proclaim “quasi-religious dogma and totalitarian error.”⁴⁸ The “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” argument is used to discredit the scientists’ reputation and to trigger a sense of being deceived.

Breitbart writers all use different words to come to the same conclusion: climate scientists cannot be trusted. In BB14, Delingpole writes that

One of the worst consequences of the global warming scam is the corrupting effect it has had on science – to the point where even senior professors and heads of department no longer appear to understand what science actually is. Take this week’s climate prat of the week, Professor Jonathan Butterworth of the Physics and Astronomy Department at University College London. Butterworth has just been caught red-handed trying to prevent one of his colleagues holding a conference for climate sceptics because, in his opinion, their views are ‘rather fringe.’⁴⁹

In the same article, Delingpole calls Butterworth a “left-wing agitator, preeningly self-righteous bloviator and magisterial cockwomble.” In the title of BB72, Delingpole suggests that “When You Hear a Scientist Talk About ‘Peer Review’ You Should Reach For Your Browning.” Other authors are more subtle in their accusations. The writers collective behind BB51 for example, refrain from verbal abuse. Rather, they start 13 of the 19 paragraphs with: “The activists say ...”⁵⁰ With “activists,” they refer to 377 members of the National Academy of Sciences, including 30 Nobel laureates, who wrote an open letter “to draw attention to the serious risks of climate change.” In BB67, about research that aims “to minimize the noxious effects of cow-belching on the environment,” Thomas D. Williams, writes “that climate

⁴⁸ BB51.

⁴⁹ BB14.

⁵⁰ In some cases, different phrases are used, like “The activists are wrong,” or “the activists complain.”

fanatics are getting so preposterous in their proposals that it is harder and harder to distinguish serious climate news from satirical pieces in the Onion.”

The discrediting of scientists with “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” arguments is often combined with “Scientific” arguments (37% of articles with “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” arguments also use a form of the “Scientific” argument). The “Evil Scheme/Hoax” and “Natural Change” arguments share a second place—they are both used in 24% of the articles that include “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” arguments.

Delingpole is responsible for 51% of the “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” arguments, followed by Williams (24%). This means that in 70% of his articles, Delingpole tries to discredit climate science and scientists. Williams does this in 60% of his articles.

“Scientific” Arguments:

The “Scientific” argument is used in 26% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The “Scientific” argument is based on disproving the consensus idea on anthropogenic global warming by presenting ideas, theories, reports, and opinions of scientists, experts, and others. While these arguments are in some cases based on science, *Breitbart* authors also refer to pseudoscientific blogs, weathermen, diving instructors, et cetera.

BB51 is a post written by a collective of *Breitbart* writers. It is written as a response to 377 members of the National Academy of Sciences who wrote an open letter “to draw attention to the serious risks of climate change.” BB51 is written by Christopher Monckton, William M. Briggs, David R. Legates, Anthony Lupo, Istvan Marko, Dennis Mitchell, and Willie Soon. Only Marko and Mitchell have no article on SourceWatch dedicated to them; the rest of the authors can be considered suspicious. Their post quotes a lot of “scientific” articles—mostly written by the *Breitbart* writers themselves. The first “scientific” article that

is quoted is written by Legates, Soon, Briggs, and Monckton. Their article claims that, instead of 97%, there only is a 0,3% consensus on anthropogenic global warming, contradicting research by NASA, Cook et al, and others.⁵¹ Later in BB51, another Monckton piece is quoted, this time a publication on the weblog wattsupwiththat.com, the website of weatherman Anthony Watts. According to SourceWatch, Watts lacks “a university qualification and has no climate credentials other than being a radio weather announcer.” Nonetheless, he is on the payroll of the Heartland Institute, which itself is funded by fossil fuel industry giants. Watts’s blog is quoted multiple times in the article, combined with more “scientific” articles published by the authors of BB51, and some cherry-picked articles that are compatible with their contrarian points of view.

In BB23, an article dedicated to countering a scientific report on coral bleaching, Delingpole quotes two dive operators who claim that the Great Barrier Reef is in pristine condition. He admits that the dive operators “have a vested interested in keeping the tourist industry alive.” However, wonders Delingpole, “what about all the marine biologists and environmental activists whose funding is dependent on catastrophism and junk-scientific environmental scares like ‘ocean acidification’?” Thus, based on the ‘expert opinion’ of two dive operators, Delingpole concludes that Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is “doing just fine.”

BB6 proves that *Breitbart* not only relies on pseudoscientific blogs and other doubtful ‘experts’. In this article, Williams quotes a *Nature* article by John Turner et al that concludes that the Antarctic Peninsula has been cooling since the late 1990s, consistent with natural variability.⁵² Turner’s research is quoted in 7 *Breitbart* articles (BB6, BB7, BB13, BB46,

⁵¹ Cook et al., “Consensus on consensus”; “Scientific Consensus: Earth’s climate is warming,” NASA Global Climate Change, <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>; <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002/pdf>

⁵² Turner, John, Hua Lu, Ian White, John C. King, Tony Phillips, J. Scott Hosking, Thomas J. Bracegirdle, Gareth J. Marshall, Robert Mulvaney, and Pranab Deb. “Absence of 21st Century Warming on Antarctic Peninsula Consistent with Natural Variability.” *Nature* 535, no. 7612 (July 20, 2016): 411–15. doi:10.1038/nature18645.

BB68, BB73, BB78), of which BB13 is the only one not written by Williams; Delingpole is responsible for the exception.

Delingpole is responsible for most publications that use the “Scientific” argument: 55% of all posts that contain this type of argument are written by him. He uses the argument in 41% of his publications in the dataset. Williams wrote 30% of the publications containing “Scientific” arguments; he uses it in 40% of his climate change reporting.

“Natural Change” Arguments:

The “Natural Change” argument is used in 18% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The basis of the “Natural Change” argument is: yes, climate changes, for the climate is, like weather, a natural process. However, like the weather, mankind has little or no influence on the climate; it is a natural process. The “Natural Change” argument is often (7x) combined with the “Natural Contradiction” argument (6), and is largely based on the argumentation that climate, like weather, is bound to change, or as Thomas D. Williams, PH.D., writes in BB73: “After all, whether cooler, warmer, wetter, drier or windier, one thing the climate can be counted on to do is change.”

To prove this point, writers often refer to historical events. For example, when Thomas D. Williams writes about the expansion of Chinese deserts in BB71, he points to “the massive droughts that produced the dust bowl” in the 1930s, which “had nothing whatsoever to do with global warming.” Williams uses natural extremes in history to explain that current extreme natural occurrences are merely natural phenomena that have always existed. In simpler words: all throughout history there have been natural disasters and changes, so the disasters and changes that are now happening are also natural.

Other *Breitbart* articles use contrarian scientific theories to explain “natural climate change.” In BB59, Delingpole explains the changing climate and the hotter temperatures as a natural event by pointing to “a run of strong El Ninos. When these give way to a run of strong La Ninas, we can expect temperatures to drop below average.”⁵³

Other posts quote findings of scientific research that conclude that certain events might not be linked to climate change after all, like Eric J. Steig’s letter in *Nature* in which he states that, according to his research, the “Antarctic Peninsula has been warming for many decades, but an analysis now reveals that it has cooled since the late 1990s.” Steig suggests that “this is consistent with natural variability.”⁵⁴

Thomas D. Williams is the most enthusiastic user of this type of argumentation: he is responsible for 50% of all “Natural Change” arguments in the dataset and uses it in 47% of his articles. James Delingpole wrote 36% of the “Natural Change” arguments, but on average he uses it much less than Williams (19%).

“Natural Contradiction” Arguments:

The “Natural Contradiction” argument is used in 14% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The basis of the “Natural Contradiction” argument is: how can we speak of global *warming* if it is getting *colder*? It focuses on the contradiction between the idea of a warming planet and reports of colder weather, or other contradictions. The argument poses the question whether it is logical that temperatures drop when the world is warming. Delingpole uses this

⁵³ “El Niño and La Niña are opposite phases of what is known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle. The ENSO cycle is a scientific term that describes the fluctuations in temperature between the ocean and atmosphere in the east-central Equatorial Pacific (approximately between the International Date Line and 120 degrees West). La Niña is sometimes referred to as the cold phase of ENSO and El Niño as the warm phase of ENSO. These deviations from normal surface temperatures can have large-scale impacts not only on ocean processes, but also on global weather and climate.” in “What are El Nino and La Nina?”, NOAA, revised July 6, 2017. Accessed December 14, 2017, on <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ninonina.html>.

⁵⁴ Eric J. Steig, “Climate Science: Cooling in the Arctic.” *Nature*, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v535/n7612/full/535358a.html>

contradiction in BB13, when he writes that the “West Antarctic has become yet another victim of global cooling.” Thomas D. Williams uses a similar form of the argument in BB73

A new international study on climate change predicts that Europe and North America will be experiencing bouts of very cold weather, while insisting that the freezing temperatures will be the result of global warming.

A variation of the “Natural Contradiction” argument can be seen in BB29 and BB47, in which Delingpole ridicules a “Ship of Fools” that “was supposed to show how amazingly navigable the Arctic Circle has become now that climate change is supposedly melting the polar ice caps at a dangerous and unprecedented rate.”⁵⁵ The Arctic expedition that Delingpole discusses was confronted with “unexpectedly large quantities of a mysterious substance apparently made of frozen water.” While at first sight it might seem to be a different type of argument, it is based on the same contradiction: the mission (showing that the polar ice caps are melting at a “dangerous and unprecedented rate”) was meant to show “warming” and the result (being confronted with large quantities of ice) illustrates “cooling.”

Thomas D. Williams, PH.D, is the *Breitbart* author most likely to use this argument: he is responsible for 55% of the articles that use “Natural Contradiction” in the dataset and uses it in 40% of his posts. Delingpole wrote 36% of the posts that included “Natural Contradiction” arguments, but only uses it in 15% of his posts.

“Freedom of Speech” arguments:

The “Freedom of Speech” argument is used in 14% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The basis of the “Freedom of Speech” argument is: a healthy scientific method needs discussion, but the people that disagree with the consensus on anthropogenic climate change

⁵⁵ BB47.

are constantly silenced by dominant climate alarmists. The argument is often combined with “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” arguments (7), and sometimes includes historical references to Nazi Germany (BB25) or the communist witch-hunts in the McCarthy era (BB46). Most posts containing this type of argument do not elaborate on climate change itself, but focus on the Second Amendment and/or on the need for scientific debate.

BB25 by Delingpole embodies the “Freedom of Speech” argument. The title (“U.S. College Professors Tell Students: ‘Climate Skeptics Verboten!’”) seems to refer to the anti-Jewish signs in Nazi-Germany (“für Juden verboten”), insinuating that the professors teaching the climate course are acting like Nazi’s (and arguably attempting to place skeptics in the role of mistreated, persecuted Jews). The introduction of Delingpole’s article is as follows:

Three U.S. professors teaching an online course called Medical Humanities in the Digital Age at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs have told students that the “*science*” of climate change is not up for debate and have asked anyone who thinks otherwise not to join the course. (my emphasis)

By placing quotation marks around “science,” Delingpole hints that he does not think much of the so-called science. The professors in question state that the “point of departure for this course is based on the scientific premise that human induced climate change is valid and occurring”—pointing to a 98% consensus by climate scientists. “The ‘other side’ of the climate change debate” will not be “taught or discussed in this course”—a premise that Delingpole labels “alarmist zealotry.”

In BB46, *Breitbart* writer Thomas D. Williams writes:

In a move *reminiscent of a wild-eyed, 1950s Commie hunt*, EcoWatch has published a list of the most dangerous heretics from climate change orthodoxy, including Donald Trump, Congressman Joe Barton (R-TX), and Marc Morano. *For the crime of questioning the science* behind current global warming theories, especially regarding human causality and radical proposals of CO2 reduction, EcoWatch writer Michael Mann has *branded these freethinking skeptics as “deniers”*—in an intentional reference to those who repudiate the *Jewish Holocaust*.

Gone are the days when intelligent inquiry was lauded as a prized element of serious science. Mann accuses the skeptics of ‘clouding the climate change debate’ with their pesky, *unanswered questions* and stalling action through ‘a campaign of deliberate misinformation.’ (my emphasis)

Like Delingpole in BB25, Williams evokes compassion with climate skeptics in the historical role of the unjustly persecuted. “Freethinking skeptics” are being portrayed as “deniers” for “the crime of questioning the science”—questions that thus far remain unanswered, that is.

James Delingpole is responsible for 55% articles that use “Freedom of Speech” arguments; Williams for 27%. Delingpole uses it in 22% of his articles; Williams in 20%.

“Evil Scheme/Hoax” arguments:

“Evil Scheme/Hoax” arguments can be found in 14% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The idea behind the “Evil Scheme/Hoax” argument is: crooked scientists, left-wing media and politicians, other elitist elements, and/or China, are heavily invested in, or financially dependent on, making people believe that climate change exists. Hence, they publish lies to confuse people so that their scheme remains alive and their money stream (for further “research”) does not run dry. In this argument, “the people” are betrayed by a money- and power-hungry elite—hence it triggers a sense of paranoid distrust of science, politicians, the media, China, the elite, et cetera.

A good example of the “Evil Scheme/Hoax” argument comes across in BB24, an article in which James Delingpole responds to news reporting on ocean acidification. According to Delingpole, Phil Williamson (the author of the news report) “is the embodiment of Upton Sinclair’s dictum that ‘It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.’” Williamson is based at the University of East Anglia (“aka Climate Alarmism Central, heavily featured in the Climategate scandal”) and is

“Science Coordinator of the UK Ocean Acidification research programme”—a project that has received around “£12.5 million of UK government funding, most it provided by the Natural Environment Research Council (for which conveniently Williamson also works).” After Delingpole is done with crucifying Williamson, he widens his scope to science in general. According to him, “there are as many chancers and charlatans with science degrees as there are with arts degrees,” and “scientific research, being often dependent on the values and aims of those who are funding it, is prone to corruption and politicization.” The terminology used by Delingpole does not leave much to imagination: climate change is a “\$1.5 trillion” scheme, kept alive by “crooks, greedheads, scamsters and shills” that want access to “some of the vast quantities of government research grant available for anything vaguely connected with ‘climate change’”. Also, the idea of ocean acidification is a “handy theory which ensures that even if global warming doesn’t happen, there will still be plenty of snout-space at the trough” for the schemers.⁵⁶

In BB75, an article on how cute puppies are used to bribe voters for Hillary, a similar perspective is offered: “the global warming industry is worth an annual \$1.5 trillion – and most of that money is not earned the hard way but rather dispensed, in the manner of some monstrously corrupt 17th century court, by the state to its most slavish courtiers.”⁵⁷ BB59 attacks journalist Tom Chivers for quoting “three of the climate scientists currently growing fat on the climate science gravy train by promoting the accepted climate science narrative” without asking critical questions, “while they explain to him how yes, global warming really is as bad as the scientists are saying, in fact it’s probably worse, much much worse...”⁵⁸ In BB63, climate scientists (“a bunch of disgraceful, money-grubbing, charlatans”) and their methods are compared to “what gangs of Muslim taxi drivers in Rotherham are to 13-year-old white schoolgirls.” BB50 offers a slightly different form of the “Evil Scheme/Hoax”

⁵⁶ BB24.

⁵⁷ BB75.

⁵⁸ BB59.

argument: it focuses on how China is fooling the rest of the world. Delingpole argues that “China does not give a damn about renewable energy except insofar as it provides an excuse to curry favour with and extract money from all those Gwailo nations gullible enough to buy its wind farm technology.”

All except one of the articles containing “Evil Scheme/Hoax” argumentation are written by James Delingpole (93%). He uses it in 48% of his climate change publications.

“Economic” arguments:

The “Economic” argument is used in 10% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The idea behind the “Economic” argument is: we are not at all sure that climate change exists, so why are we wasting so much money on a problem that probably does not exist anyway? It is sometimes combined with the “Climate Scientists/Fanatics” argument (7), but can also be found alongside arguments that make man-made climate change seem unlikely (such as the “Natural Change” argument (3) or the “CO2 is Good” argument (4)), or the “Leonardo Di Caprio” argument (5). Some “Economic” arguments focus on the loss of (fossil fuel industry) jobs. Simply put, the argument is based on the “*if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it*” motto.

A good example of this argument is BB22, about California’s ambitions to limit carbon emissions to “40 percent less than in 1990” by 2030.

An effort to extend the 2006 climate change legislation fell 4 votes short of passing in June, due to bipartisan opposition from moderate Democrats in the State Senate. Most Sacramento observers had predicted earlier this month that the opposition to *the job-killing legislation* was unbreakable.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ BB22.

According to one source, this “job-killing legislation” will “have an annual direct financial cost of \$35.3 billion and destroy another 262,000 skilled middle class jobs.” This climate change legislation, combined with other taxes and regulations in the “not-so Golden State’s ‘hostile’ business environment” leads to an exodus of companies leaving California, and a sharp increase in the poverty rate.⁶⁰ As Delingpole portrays it, the legislation’s primary aims are killing jobs, creating poverty, and costing money, rather than limiting carbon emissions.

In BB57, Delingpole quotes “alarmist scientist” Katharine Hayhoe:

Hayhoe, meanwhile, was there to lend the event the veneer of scientific credibility. She was certainly right on one thing. The bit where she said: “We are pouring all of our money, all of our effort, all of our prayers into a bucket and the bucket has a hole in the bottom. That hole is climate change.”⁶¹

BB58 claims that the “cost of compliance with the Paris climate agreement has been estimated at \$90 trillion over the next 14 years. Yet that monstrous sum – four times the entire federal debt – would not even reduce global temperature by a tenth of a degree.”⁶² In BB74, Delingpole writes that conservatives “on the right are naturally suspicious of any ‘problem’ which can only be apparently fixed by massive state intervention, higher taxes, increased regulation, policing by nanny-ish busybodies,” thus “bombing the economy back to the Dark Ages.” He argues that the “whole ‘climate change’ scare” is pointless—and in the (in his eyes unlikely) event that one day the climate does change, mankind will deal with it on that day, if necessary. For now, Delingpole repeats, the climate “ain’t broke” so “don’t fix it.”⁶³

To summarize, “Economic” arguments claim either that climate change does not exist, or that it uncertain whether it exists. The “evidence” that exists for climate change is so vague, that it is unwise to spend so much money on something that might not even be

⁶⁰ BB22.

⁶¹ BB57.

⁶² BB58.

⁶³ BB74.

happening. Also, climate change regulations are job-killers, mainly in the fossil-fuel industry, and they are responsible for business-unfriendly environments.

Delingpole wrote 4 of the 8 articles containing the “Economic” argument, so he is good for 50% of the publications containing this argument. Another 25% is written by Chris W. Street; he used the “Economic” in both his articles in the dataset.

“CO2 is Good” Arguments:

The “CO2 is Good” argument is used in 4% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The basis of the “CO2 is Good” argument is: CO2 is good for plants and our planet is becoming greener thanks to CO2 emissions. The reasoning behind this argument is as follows: 1. plants need CO2, so; 2. more CO2 equals more plants, so; 3. more CO2 equals a greener planet. Take BB51 for example:

On the scientific evidence to date, it is abundantly clear that the original predictions made by the totalitarians were extreme exaggerations; that, though the world may warm a little, it will not warm a lot; that *adding CO2 to the air will be of benefit to plants in reducing their need for water*, which is why the world’s desert regions are beginning to green⁶⁴

Joel B. Pollak also uses the “CO2 is Good” argument in BB44, when he describes how politicians and the media “continue to show an inability to distinguish between emissions—which largely concern *carbon dioxide, a harmless and environmentally necessary gas*—and pollution involving substances posing immediate danger to health and habitat” (my emphasis). While describing CO2 as “environmentally necessary” is true—plants need CO2—calling it “harmless” is an absurd claim. CO2 is a “heat-trapping (greenhouse) gas”

⁶⁴ BB51.

which is responsible for trapping warmth of the sun that would otherwise be reflected back into space (thus, responsible for global warming).⁶⁵

“Leonardo Di Caprio” Arguments:

The “Leonardo Di Caprio” argument is used in 3% of the Breitbart posts in the dataset.

The “Leonardo Di Caprio” argument is funded on a sense of hypocrisy: if global warming is really happening, why then is Leonardo Di Caprio premiering his climate change movie in St. Tropez, France? If he really cares about climate change, he would not let hundreds of Hollywood celebrities fly in on private jets—burning massive amounts of carbon dioxide. The argument is used to illustrate that people that claim to care about the environment do not always practice what they preach.

Daniel Nussbaum uses the “Leonardo Di Caprio” argument in BB3.

As *Breitbart* News previously reported, DiCaprio may have hurt his own cause by hosting the gala in St. Tropez, France, far away from where many of its attendees live in Southern California. If just one of the celebrities who attended the event traveled the 12,000-mile round trip from Los Angeles to France by private jet, they would have burned enough fossil fuel to emit approximately 86 tons of carbon dioxide. The average American, for comparison, puts out around 19 tons of carbon dioxide on airline flights per year.

Delingpole uses it more subtly in BB57:

DiCaprio was there mainly to promote *his new National Geographic disaster-porn documentary Before the Flood in which he tours the world by private jet talking to celebrities who agree with him on climate change* (...) all testifying in a range of languages and accents that, yes, man-made climate change really is the worst thing ever and they can see its effects all around them.

⁶⁵ NASA, “Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet: Carbon Dioxide.” Accessed December 14, 2017, on <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/>.

The sarcasm used by Delingpole (a “disaster-porn documentary” for which DiCaprio “tours the world by private jet talking to celebrities who agree with him on climate change”) emphasizes the sense of hypocrisy.

Altogether, *Breitbart*’s climate change discourse denies the consensus on anthropogenic global warming as well as certain measurable consequences such as rising sea levels or ocean acidification. The amount of opinionated publications (51%) is remarkable, especially for a website that refers to itself as “News Network.” *Breitbart*’s discourse mainly focuses on discrediting and attacking climate scientists—this happens in nearly half of the *Breitbart* articles in the dataset. This is combined with offering alternative “scientific” explanations, which vary widely in their conclusions (ranging from the climate is not changing at all to CO₂ is good for the planet, et cetera). In *Breitbart*’s discourse, *climate* and *weather* are often presented as similar terms. Hence, since the weather is constantly changing, logically, the climate changes as well. While it is true that climate has also changed before human presence, *Breitbart*’s argumentation skips the element of human influence altogether. The consensus theory does not deny natural change, it only states that mankind is now accelerating climate change in a dangerous manner. This nuance is not mentioned in *Breitbart*’s discourse. At times, *Breitbart*’s writers try to draw the debate about climate change into the freedom of speech sphere, by portraying consensus scientists who warn about the dangers of climate change deniers being Nazi’s, silencing the few critical voices that are left. About one in seven articles portrays climate science as an evil scheme or hoax by an elite that wants to steal money from hardworking people. *Breitbart*’s authors also play with *natural contradiction*, by using terms as “global warming” in combination with news of record low temperatures. By focusing on *local* drops in temperature, *Breitbart*’s writers attempt to make *global* warming seem unlikely. About one in ten articles contains economic arguments. These are mainly

based on the presumption that it is not sure whether climate change exists—why spend money on something that might not even exist at all? Combined, these and other arguments do not have one main point—their conclusions vary. However, they do exactly what the Denial Machine does: sow doubt.

Discourse Conclusions

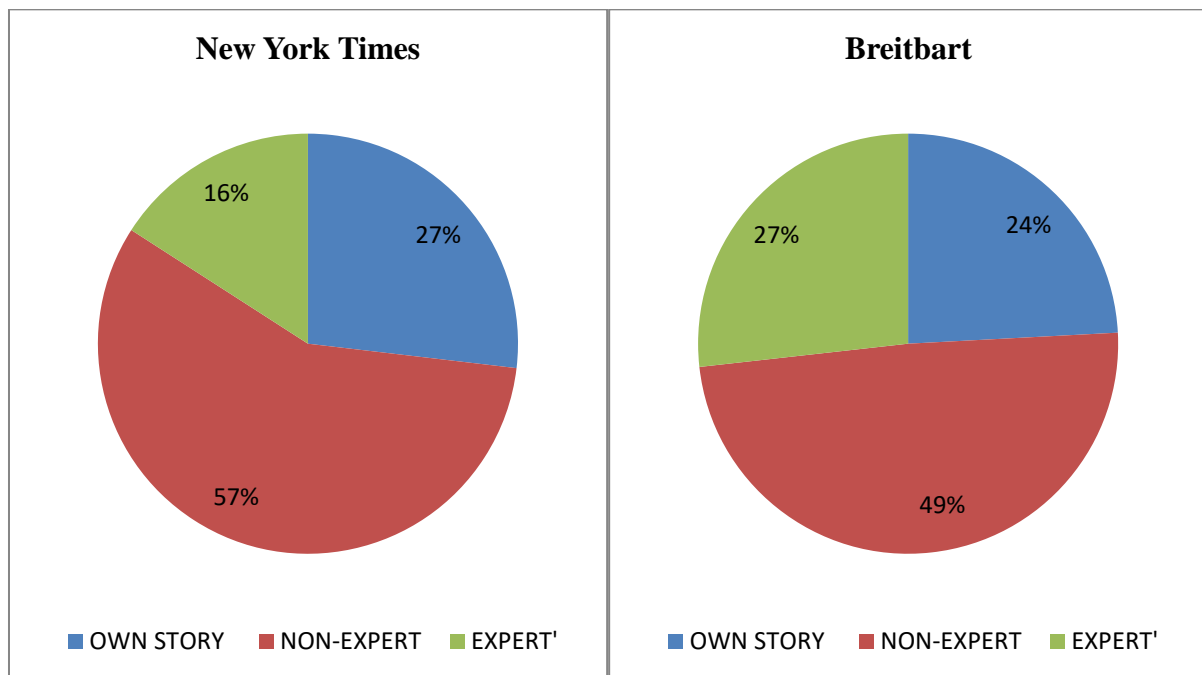
Breitbart's and the *New York Times's* climate change discourses take place on completely different levels, without overlapping each other. *Breitbart* appears literally stuck in denial, hence also doomed to remain on the debate level, whereas the *Times* has followed the scientific world and has moved on to consensus reporting. Consequently readers of *Breitbart* receive a discourse that is extremely skeptical of the possibility that anthropogenic climate change exists; readers of the *Times* receive a discourse that leaves no room for discussion whether global warming exists or not—current natural disasters are placed in a climate change context. Hence, *Breitbart's* discourse appears to be stuck in denial, while the *Times's* discourse is mobile and follows scientific developments.

Chapter II: Sources and Writers

While the overall approach is explained in the Methodology (p. 21—25), further clarification is offered in this chapter as well.

2.1: Type of Sources

Figure 2.1.1 and 2.1.2: Type of Sources

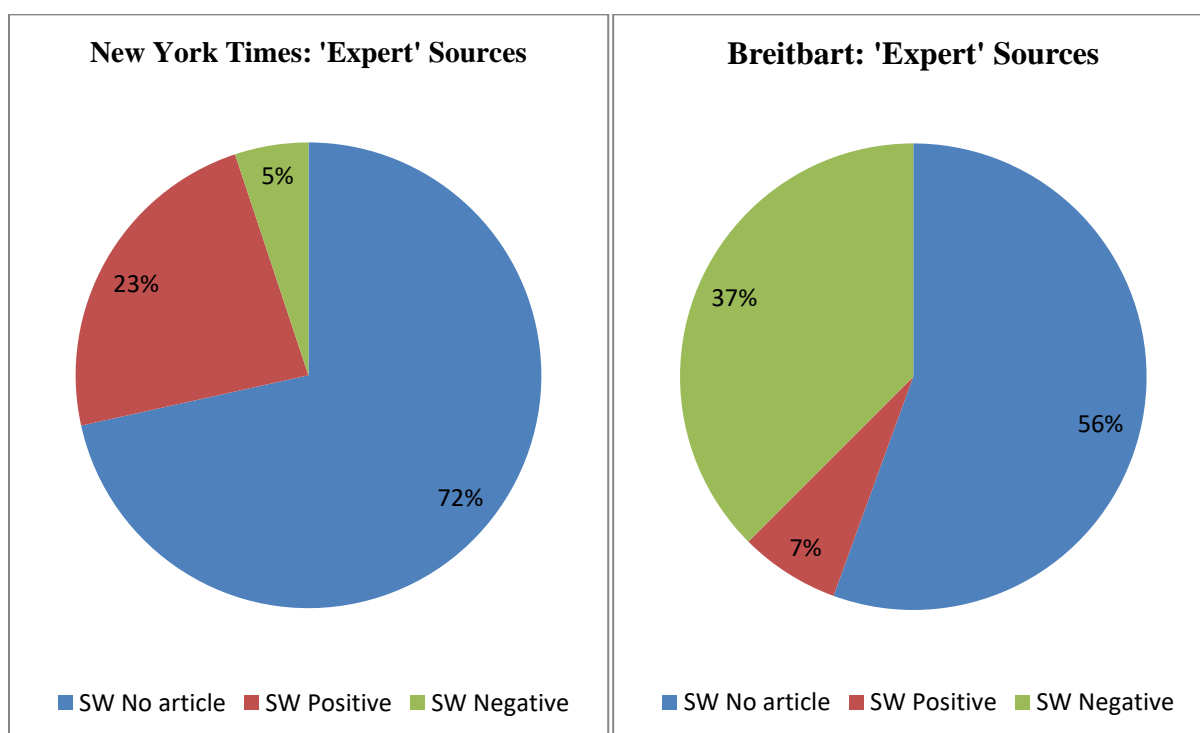


When it comes to source use, in a total of 78 *Breitbart* posts, 269 sources were identified; an average of 3.4 sources per article. Of all sources, 24% were hyperlinks to other *Breitbart* posts or “own story” sources; 49% were “non-expert” sources; and 27% were presented as “expert” sources. The *Times* has a higher average, with approximately 8.4 sources per article (849 sources identified in 101 articles). Like *Breitbart*, about a quarter of these (27%) were “own story” sources. The *Times* gives relatively more space to “non-expert” sources (57%) and less to “expert” sources (16%). This difference can be attributed to the different styles of both news outlets: the *Times* publishes longreads on natural disasters and consequences of

climate change and offers a lot of space for eye-witnesses and other personal accounts. *Breitbart*'s higher number of sources portrayed as "experts" can be linked to their anti-consensus position: these "experts" are meant to make their contrarian viewpoints seem more legit. Using relatively many "expert" sources makes their contrarian ideas seem more legit. Nonetheless, on average, the *Times* still uses more "expert" sources per article: *Breitbart* quotes 0.9 "experts" per article, the *Times* 1.3.

2.2: The SourceWatch Quick Scan—"Expert" sources

Figure 2.2.1 and 2.2.2: SourceWatch Quick Scan—Sources



As can be seen in Figure 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, the SourceWatch quick scan shows large differences in the reliability of the sources used by the *Times* and *Breitbart*. In this scan, no news is good news (meaning no SourceWatch article means the source is not automatically considered unreliable). This goes for 72% of the *Times* sources. Another 23% of the *Times* sources has SourceWatch articles that are positive (or, at least, not negative) in relation to climate change

science, meaning that 95% of their sources seem to be reliable—5% of the sources used by the *Times* deserves a closer look. Contrarily, 56% of *Breitbart*'s sources have no SourceWatch article. Combined with the 7% that has a positive article, this means that 63% seems reliable—37% is suspicious. However, a closer look at some of these seemingly reliable sources revealed that, despite their absence in the SourceWatch database, many still were suspicious.

Take Tony Heller for example and his Real Climate Science website (quoted in BB4, BB29, and BB64; both not mentioned in SourceWatch). Heller calls his website “The Deplorable Climate Science Blog,” wearing “deplorable” almost as a badge of honor. Under the pseudonym “Steven Goddard,” Heller has regularly published posts at Anthony Watts’ *WattsUpWithThat* blog. Hence, while Heller or his weblog is not mentioned directly on SourceWatch, he is directly linked to Anthony Watts. Watts is “a blogger, weathercaster and non-scientist, paid AGW denier who runs the website wattsupwiththat.com. He does not have a university qualification and has no climate credentials other than being a radio weather announcer.”⁶⁶ Publishing contrarian ideas on a fossil fuel sponsored weblog disqualifies Heller as a reliable source. Paul Homewood (quoted in BB29, BB47, and BB59) is a similar example. Homewood and his weblog *NotALotOfPeopleKnowThat* are not directly mentioned on SourceWatch. However, like Heller, Homewood publishes contrarian ideas on *WattsUpWithThat*. This disqualifies Homewood as a reliable source.

Furthermore, many of the sources that come out of the SourceWatch quick scan as “not suspicious” are only in the *Breitbart* posts to be attacked. Peter Wadhams, Cambridge University professor in Ocean Physics, is attacked by *Breitbart* author Delingpole in BB29 and BB47. Delingpole refers to Wadhams as “Cambridge University’s house climate loon”

⁶⁶ “Anthony Watts,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Anthony_Watts, accessed on December 14, 2017.

and only quotes him to ridicule his predictions of a melting Arctic.⁶⁷ Karin van der Wiel, scientist for the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI), is attacked in BB36 and BB39; Southampton University's Biological Sciences professor Phil Williamson in BB24; EcoWatch and Michael Battaglia in BB67; Terry Hughes, director of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies in BB23. *Nature* declared Hughes one of the "10 people who mattered" in 2016;⁶⁸ Delingpole refers to his research as "a survey by a local environmental activist, Professor Terry Hughes whose National Coral Bleaching Task Force is naturally somewhat dependent on proving there is a major problem."⁶⁹ Furthermore, while depicting Hughes as a person financially dependent on proving there is a problem with the coral reefs, he quotes two local tour dive operators, stating that the Great Barrier Reef is "doing just fine."

Some reliable sources are not directly attacked, but rather misquoted, like Ranga Myneni in BB65, or Katharine Hayhoe in BB57:

Hayhoe, meanwhile, was there to lend the event the veneer of scientific credibility. She was certainly right on one thing. The bit where she said: 'We are pouring all of our money, all of our effort, all of our prayers into a bucket and the bucket has a hole in the bottom. That hole is climate change.' This is probably the truest, wisest, cleverest thing any climate alarmist scientist has ever said in history – even the truth only came out by accident and not in the way she intended. But yes, the whole climate change industry is indeed like pouring trillions of dollars (and hope and effort and prayers, etc) into a bucket with an almighty hole in it.⁷⁰

Hayhoe tries to explain that, despite the overwhelming nature of the issue, mankind should not grow desperate and give up the fight against climate change. However, Delingpole

⁶⁷ BB47.

⁶⁸ "Nature's 10 – Ten people who mattered this year," December 19, 2016. Accessed on October 17, 2017, on <http://www.nature.com/news/nature-s-10-1.21157>.

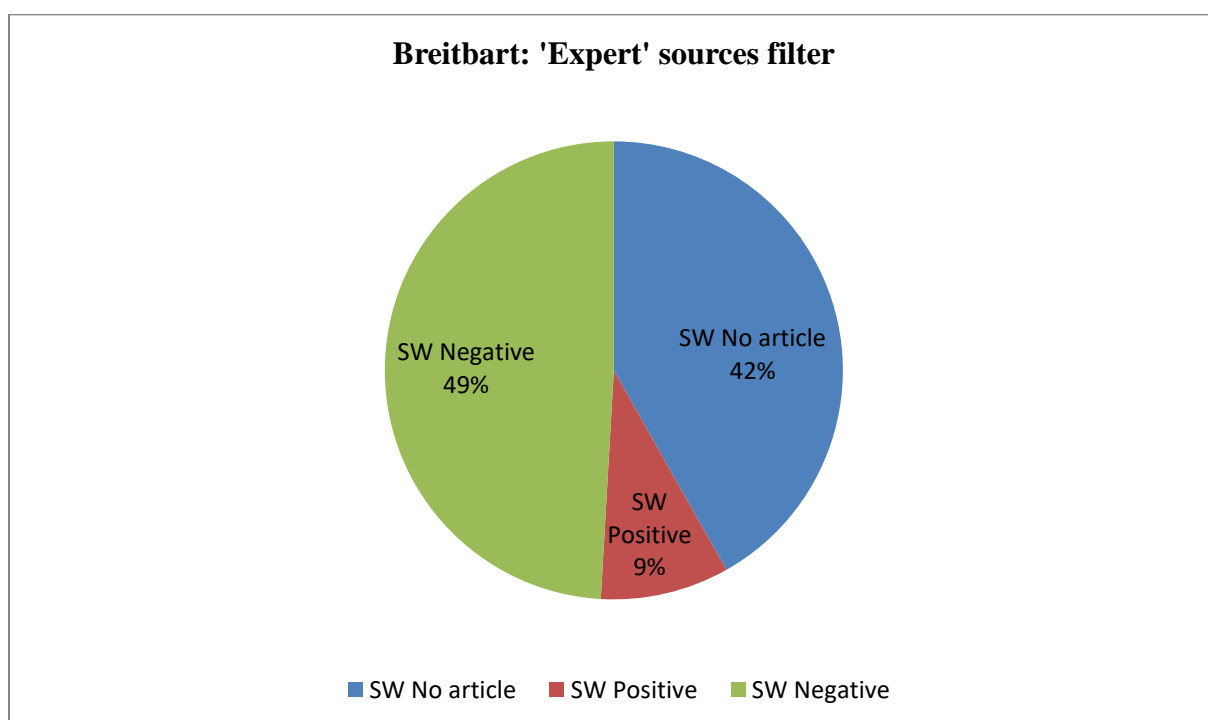
⁶⁹ BB23.

⁷⁰ BB57.

chooses to cherry-pick only a small part of Hayhoe’s statement, so he can portray fighting climate change as a waste of money.

Once these attacked (9), misquoted (2), and other clearly suspicious sources (6) are not counted, the total suspicious source ratio of *Breitbart* lies even higher. Then their graph would look like this:

Figure 2.2.3: SourceWatch Quick Scan—*Breitbart* filter



Hence, after applying the SourceWatch quick scan while filtering sources identified as “obviously suspicious,” “misquoted,” or “attacked,” almost half of *Breitbart*’s remaining “expert” sources are “suspicious.”

How suspicious?

The nature of the *Times*' suspicious sources and those of *Breitbart* also differs. The *Times*' "expert" sources that are suspicious according to SourceWatch include the Energy Information Administration (NYT13, NYT65), which

has been critiqued for its methods of collecting data: the EIA relies on research from outside consultants, who often have ties to the fossil fuel industry. Some of the consultants pull the data they supply to the government from energy company news releases and annual reports. Projections are therefore based in part on some guesswork and modeling, in ways that have been found favorable to coal and gas, and unfavorable to renewables.⁷¹

Another "suspicious" *Times*' source is the Environmental Protection Agency (NYT14, NYT20), which "became controversial and politicized" under "Christine Todd Whitman of George W. Bush's administration" for rejecting the Kyoto Protocol and covering up "asbestos and e-waste dangers in Manhattan after September 11, 2001." SourceWatch also notes that E.P.A. sometimes relies on "industry funded" studies and (perhaps as a result) comes up with "industry friendly laws."⁷² With regards to the Denial Machine, especially the industry friendliness is a problem. However, the industry friendly-critique dates back to the George W. Bush administration. Arguably, both of these governmental agencies have a relatively fluctuating reliability, for their leadership changes with every other President.

The *Times* also quotes Nature Conservancy (NYT59), which is described on SourceWatch as "a Big Green environmental group," that "sits on nearly a billion dollars (...) thanks to a tidal wave of corporate donations, much of it from notorious polluters such as Arco, Archer-Daniels-Midland, British Petroleum, DuPont, Shell and Freeport-McMoRan." SourceWatch writes that "the group violated its apolitical policy to concoct the compromise

⁷¹ "Energy Information Administration," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Energy_Information_Administration, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁷² "U.S. Environmental Protection Agency," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/U.S._Environmental_Protection_Agency, accessed on December 14, 2017.

rewrite of the Endangered Species Act with a secret coalition of corporations and trade associations, including the National Homebuilder's Association and timber giant Georgie-Pacific.”⁷³ The *Times* also quotes the International Energy Agency (NYT99), which has “systematically underestimated the potential of renewable energy sources like wind and solar, because of its ties to the oil, gas and nuclear sectors.”⁷⁴ The last “suspicious” *Times*’ source is the Australian Climate Institute, which supported “clean coal” in an “alliance with mining companies and unions.”⁷⁵ While the SourceWatch articles about the three sources above give more than enough reason to critically evaluate everything stated by the sources above, none of these sources were actively denying climate change. Hence, while the sources might be unreliable, calling them part of the Denial Machine would be a stretch.

Looking at some of *Breitbart*’s “suspicious” sources leaves less room for interpretation. Take Matt Ridley of the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF) for example. Ridley is “a coal baron, science writer and AGW denier” who “earns an estimated £4.1 million each year from opencast coal mines on his Blagdon Estate.” While having completed a zoology doctorate at Oxford in 1983, Ridley “has no expertise or training in climate science.”⁷⁶ The organization he represents, the GWPF, protects its donors with anonymity. SourceWatch writes that up until July 31, 2010, only 1.6% of the GWPF’s income comes from membership fees. However, in 2012, the *Guardian* linked the GWPF “to coal-fired power companies in

⁷³ “The Nature Conservancy,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/The_Nature_Conservancy, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁷⁴ “The International Energy Agency,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/International_Energy_Agency, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁷⁵ “Climate Institute (Australia),” [https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Climate_Institute_\(Australia\)](https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Climate_Institute_(Australia)), accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁷⁶ Matt Ridley,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Matt_Ridley, accessed on December 14, 2017.

Europe,”⁷⁷ including “the Belchatow coal-fired power station in Poland,” also known as “Europe’s biggest source of carbon pollution.”⁷⁸

Christopher Monckton is another “suspicious” *Breitbart* source (and writer). Monckton is “a non-scientist AGW denier” who has “made various false claims in the past such as that he is a member of the British House of Lords, a Nobel Prize winner, inventor of a cure for HIV,” et cetera. He has received funding by the fossil fuel industry such as the “Australian Association of Mining and Exploration Companies” and “coal mining billionaire and AGW denier Gina Rinehart.” At a conference in America, Monckton referred to Australia’s climate change advisor Ross Garnaut as a Nazi for having stated that the “outsider to climate science has no rational choice but to accept that, on a balance of probabilities, the mainstream science is right in pointing to high risks from unmitigated climate change.” Monckton called this a “fascist point of view.”⁷⁹

Dr. Willie Wei-Hock Soon is a Malaysian aerospace engineer and part-time researcher at the Solar Stellar Physics Division of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. According to SourceWatch, “U.S. oil and coal companies (...) have contributed more than \$1.2 million over the past decade to his research. According to Greenpeace, every grant Dr. Soon has received since 2002 has been from oil or coal interests.” Soon has received money from “ExxonMobil, the American Petroleum Institute, Koch Industries, Peabody Coal, and the world’s largest coal-burning utility, Southern Company.” His work is refuted again and again by other scientists, including NASA climatologist Gavin Schmidt. “In 2003, Soon testified on the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works where he claimed that the climate of the 20th century was not extreme.” In 2013, he testified to the Kansas State

⁷⁷ “Global Warming Policy Foundation,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Global_Warming_Policy_Foundation, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁷⁸ Damian Carrington, “Lord Lawson’s links to Europe’s colossal coal polluter,” *The Guardian*, March 6, 2012, accessed on October 17, 2017, on <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2012/mar/06/climate-change-sceptic-lawson-coal?newsfeed=true>.

⁷⁹ “Christopher Monckton,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Christopher_Monckton, accessed on December 14, 2017.

Legislature and claimed that “there is no experimental data that exists that supports the view that the Earth’s climate is changing in any dangerous way.” In 2015, he “was cited by Senator James Inhofe, who called ‘catastrophic global warming’ a ‘hoax’ and stated that ‘natural variability, not fossil fuel emissions, is the overwhelming factor influencing climate change.’” Inhofe then grouped Soon with “scientists that cannot be challenged.”⁸⁰

Former chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Judith A. Curry, is a regular contributor at Anthony Watts’s climate change denial blog *WattsUpWithThat*, and receives funding from fossil fuel industry.⁸¹ John R. Christy is linked to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which has “long ties to tobacco disinformation campaigns and more recently to climate change denial” and has received funding from Texaco and the Koch brothers.⁸² Other *Breitbart* sources are linked to conservative think tanks like the Heartland Institute (Susan Crockford and Indur Goklany). SourceWatch quotes a July 2011 *Nature* editorial about the reliability of this think tank.

Despite criticizing climate scientists for being overconfident about their data, models and theories, the Heartland Institute proclaims a conspicuous confidence in single studies and grand interpretations....makes many bold assertions that are often questionable or misleading.... Many climate sceptics seem to review scientific data and studies not as scientists but as attorneys, magnifying doubts and treating incomplete explanations as falsehoods rather than signs of progress towards the truth. ... The Heartland Institute and its ilk are not trying to build a theory of anything. They have set the bar much lower, and are happy muddying the waters.⁸³

⁸⁰ “Willie Soon,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Willie_Soon, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸¹ “Judith Curry,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Judith_Curry, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸² “John R. Christy,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/John_R_Christy.

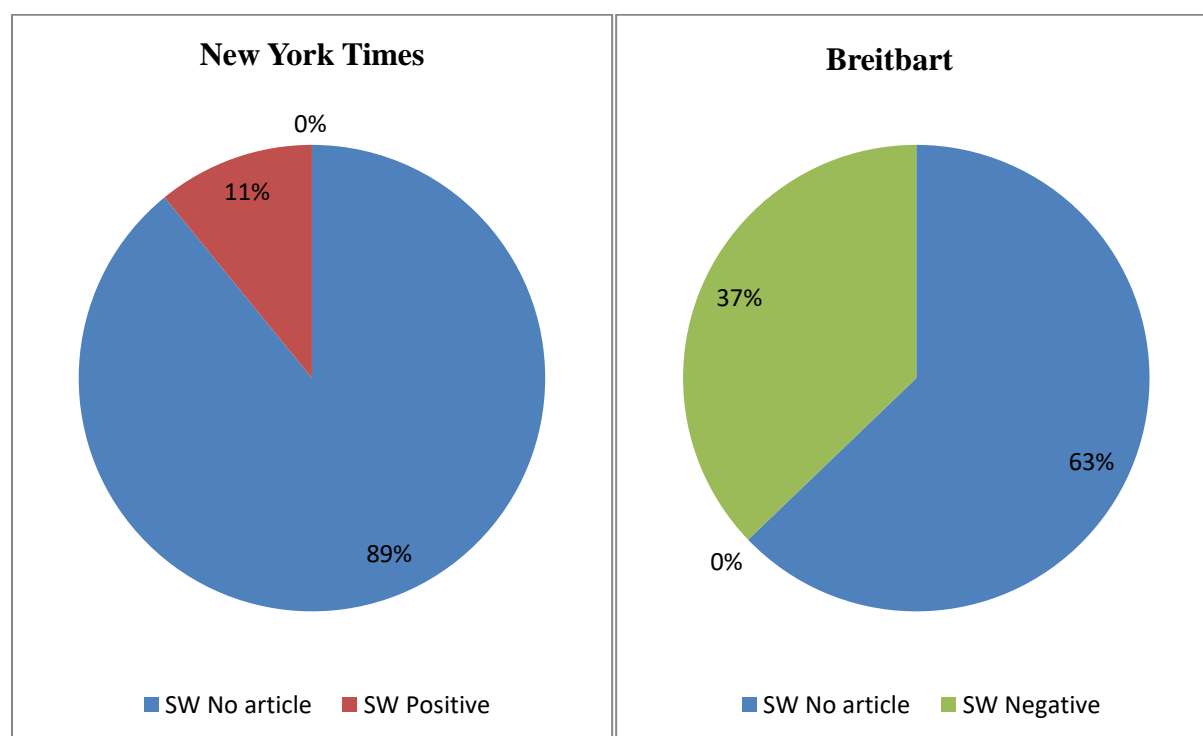
⁸³ “Heart of the Matter,” *Nature*, July 28, 2011, accessed on October 17, 2017, on <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v475/n7357/full/475423b.html?foxtrotcallback=true>.

The Heartland Institute has received considerable funding from Exxon and the Koch brothers.⁸⁴

Altogether, comparing *Breitbart*'s (overload of) "suspicious" sources to the (few) sources labeled "suspicious" in the *Times*' reporting, it becomes clear that not only the number of, but also the nature of these sources are very different. While the *Times*' "suspicious" sources are suspected of conflict of interests and relying on industry advice, many of *Breitbart*'s sources receive funding (directly, indirectly, or both) from fossil fuel industry and deny or question the consensus on anthropogenic global warming. Hence, where many of *Breitbart*'s "suspicious" sources may rightly be called components of the Denial Machine; those of the *Times* may not.

2.3: The SourceWatch Quick Scan--Writers

Figure 2.3.1 and 2.3.2: SourceWatch Quick Scan—Writers



⁸⁴ "The Heartland Institute," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Heartland_Institute, accessed on December 14, 2017.

The writers also underwent a SourceWatch quick scan. The *Times* has a 0% unreliability score (89% of their articles are written by an author that is not mentioned on SourceWatch; 11% is written by a writer with a positive article). *Breitbart*'s articles are written by less reliable writers: 37% of the articles is written by an unreliable writer. The lion's share of these articles comes from the hands of James Delingpole. Other "suspicious" writers are Christopher Monckton (discussed earlier in the 2.2: *The SourceWatch Quick Scan—"Expert" sources*), William M. Briggs⁸⁵ (linked to the Heartland Institute,⁸⁶ which has received funding from Exxon Mobil and the Koch brothers), David R. Legates⁸⁷ (published at multiple fossil fuel sponsored think tanks, including the National Center for Policy Analysis,⁸⁸ the George C. Marshall Institute,⁸⁹ and the Competitive Enterprise Institute⁹⁰), Anthony Lupo (linked to the Heartland Institute), and Willie Soon (discussed earlier in the 2.2: *The SourceWatch Quick Scan—"Expert" sources*).⁹¹

Sources Conclusions

All source-related findings considered it becomes evident that the *Times* no longer functions as echo chamber for the contrarian voices of the Denial Machine. On the other side of the spectrum, *Breitbart* is a Denial Machine echo chamber. Furthermore, *Breitbart* does not

⁸⁵ "William M. Briggs," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/William_M._Briggs, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸⁶ "Heartland Institute," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Heartland_Institute, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸⁷ "David R. Legates," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/David_Legates, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸⁸ "National Center for Policy Analysis," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/National_Center_for_Policy_Analysis, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁸⁹ "George C. Marshall Institute," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/George_C._Marshall_Institute, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁹⁰ "Competitive Enterprise Institute," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Competitive_Enterprise_Institute, accessed on December 14, 2017.

⁹¹ "Willie Soon," https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Willie_Soon, accessed on December 14, 2017.

simply stop there. The website does not only quote voices of the Denial Machine frequently; they also let sponsored, contrarian voices directly publish on *Breitbart* on a regular basis. This indicates that *Breitbart* not only functions as an echo chamber for the Denial Machine, but also as *vocal chords* for this Denial Machine.

Conclusions

This study has focused on two media outlets that represent two poles of the political spectrum. However, there are many more colors on the pallet, both politically speaking and format-wise. Because this study compares two media outlets, no universal conclusions can be drawn about Conservative Republican or Liberal Democrat American climate change discourses or source use. In order to draw stronger conclusions regarding climate change discourses and the influence of the Denial Machine on these discourses, a broader look at the American media landscape is needed. How do moderate news media report on climate change? How do television news channels report on climate change, and how much influence does the Denial Machine have there? Also, with the *Times*' change in reporting (from influenced by the Denial Machine to consensus-reporting) in mind: how do these discourses develop over time? A deeper dive into the rhetoric of both discourses can also lead to interesting observations. One might expect the *Times* to offer a discourse mainly based on *logos* (for they follow scientific consensus) versus a *pathos*-based discourse at *Breitbart* (for they portray climate change as an evil scheme in which the elite betrays the people). However, during the close reading it became evident that the *Times* regularly appeals to the emotions of their readers, for example by regularly giving room to the voices of global warming victims. And while *Breitbart* often appeals to a sense of betrayal by a crooked elite (*pathos*), there is remarkably much space reserved for *logos* in their reporting, namely in their extensive reasoning why the consensus-view on global warming is incorrect. Although based on contrarian ideas, *Breitbart* clearly appeals to their readers' reason. These observations deserve further exploration. Hence, there are many interesting possibilities for further research.

Despite its restrictions, studying *Breitbart*'s and the *New York Times*' climate change discourses and source use does provide interesting results and new insights. First, this study

shows that *Breitbart* and the *New York Times* conduct their climate change reporting on different levels, without overlapping. *Breitbart* is stuck in the debate-stage, a level that both the scientific world and the *New York Times* have long passed. *Breitbart* has no clear climate change narrative: some articles claim that the climate is changing but that humans do not contribute to global warming; others deny climate change altogether; some admit that consequences exist; other consequences are denied; et cetera. The thread that comes back in most articles, however, is a sense of betrayal by “the elite.” Scientists, politicians, Hollywood, other elitist elements, and of course China, are trying to keep the “climate change scheme” alive in order to hold the American people down and squeeze money out of Average Joe’s pockets. The fact that some of *Breitbart*’s authors are denying measurable events that are currently happening (like ocean acidification and rising sea levels) implies that *Breitbart* is stuck in denial. It appears that no proof, no matter how overwhelming it is, can convince *Breitbart*’s authors. Thus, it can be expected that *Breitbart* remains stuck in this debate level for as long as there are fossil fuel industry companies willing to invest in this disinformation campaign. The *Times*, on the other hand, has clearly left the debate level behind and is now actually reporting climate change. Their reporting focuses on the consequences of climate change (both potential consequences and current consequences that can be attributed to a changing climate); the politics of climate change; scientific developments; potential solutions; et cetera. In short: the discourse of the *Times* is mobile and follows scientific developments; *Breitbart* appears stuck in denial.

Second. Dunlap, McCright, Jacques, and others have argued that the media—mainly the conservative part—functions as an echo chamber for the contrarian voices of the Denial Machine. Normally, this echoing is done by quoting and interviewing contrarian scientists and conservative politicians—amplifying their messages. Usually, there is a journalist standing between the contrarian scientist and the reader, and, if he takes his task as a journalist

seriously, this journalist offers some context to the readers. This study illustrates that *Breitbart* often goes further than merely echoing; they regularly let sponsored contrarian “experts” publish directly on their platform. This means that the contrarian voices are not only echoed on *Breitbart*; they often also originate there. Hence, *Breitbart* fulfills a dual role: as both echo chamber and “vocal chords” for the Denial Machine. While undoubtedly there have been news articles written by sponsored contrarian scientists before, the amount of room given to these “experts” at *Breitbart* is not yet been noted in earlier literature on the Denial Machine. Arguably, this indicates that *Breitbart* takes a more political activist stance than traditional conservative media. Furthermore, it illustrates the potential of the internet in regards to polarization: politically motivated voices have easier access to large crowds. Since large portions of these crowds only follow news platforms that confirm their own world-views, it is unlikely that *Breitbart* readers are confronted with critique on these sponsored “scientists.” This, of course, has serious implications—it reveals a glimpse of the possibilities that the internet offers for disinformation campaigns. In short: *Breitbart* goes further than other conservative media by not only functioning as echo chamber but also as vocal chords for the contrarian voices of the Denial Machine, by regularly giving space to contrarian “experts” to publish directly on their platform.

Third, Antilla wrote that not only the conservative, but also mainstream and progressive news outlets, including the *New York Times*, have been guilty of quoting Denial Machine voices for the sake of “journalistic balance.” This study indicates that, in the time-frame of the study 1.) the *Times* did not portray climate science as a debate on whether anthropogenic global warming exists, and 2.) the *Times* did not quote components of the Denial Machine. The contemporary climate change reporting of the *New York Times* acknowledges consensus, treats anthropogenic global warming as a phenomenon that is already happening, and mainly focuses on the consequences of climate change. None of the

relatively few “suspicious” sources that were quoted by the *Times* denied climate change, at least not at the time of publication. Hence, while industry influence might be present with some sources, it can be concluded that these sources were not part of the Denial Machine.

Looking at the numbers of Americans that are skeptical of climate change, or even the numbers of Liberal Democrats that believe that there still is serious debate, one can ask whether the consensus-discourse of the *Times* might be too rational for its readers. Arguably, also people at the *Times* were wondering this, when they appointed Bret Stephens in 2017. Stephens, a conservative columnist who has been skeptical about the dangers of climate change in the past, used his debut column to compare the “certitude” of Hillary Clinton’s advisers who were sure that she would win the 2016 election to the “certitude” of climate scientists.⁹² This caused a serious backlash. Critique came not only from concerned readers; also “several of Stephens’s new colleagues in the newsroom” felt the need to respond via social media. Critical readers said they did not “understand giving a platform to a columnist” who is “intentionally casting doubt on climate science”; someone “whose point is to destabilize the current science on climate change.” While “few readers question the notion of having a conservative on the Op-Ed pages,” it is clear that for many readers, some issues are considered too “flammable” for “alternate viewpoints.”⁹³ Also scientists responded with sharp critique. Stefan Rahmstorf, head of the Earth System Analysis at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, wrote that he enjoys reading opinions that differ from his own, “but this is not a matter of different opinions.” The *Times* defended the column by stating that “millions agree with Stephens,” which made Rahmstorf wonder: “What’s next—when are you

⁹² Bret Stephens, “Climate of Complete Certainty.” The New York Times, April 28, 2017, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/opinion/climate-of-complete-certainty.html>.

⁹³ Spayd, “Bret Stephens Takes On Climate Change.”

hiring a columnist claiming that the sun and stars revolve around the Earth, because millions agree with that?”⁹⁴

Stephens’s appointment and debut column made “many readers” threaten “to cancel their subscription.”⁹⁵ #ShowYourCancellation, initiated by climate scientist Michael E. Mann, became a trending topic on Twitter. Cancelling a newspaper subscription based on one column may seem like an overreaction to some, but is easier understood when one considers that Trump’s E.P.A. administrator (with fossil fuel industry ties⁹⁶) Scott Pruitt used Stephens’s column to defend America’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.⁹⁷ The example of Stephens’s appointment, his column, and the reactions to these events, is revealing of many things. It shows how one contrarian message (the column) can be used by politicians like Pruitt to promote their agenda, even when it was the first skeptical *Times* piece on climate change science in months, maybe years. The reaction to Stephens’s column also highlights the tension between the debates on climate change and freedom of speech. When stakes are high, emotions run high. While the *Times*’ choice for Stephens can be understood in the context of offering multiple viewpoints, it also emphasizes the need for more future research, for only time can tell whether Stephens’s column can be considered an incident, or a first step away from consensus-reporting.

⁹⁴ Stefan Rahmstorf (@rahmstorf), “Why I cancelled my @nytimes subscription. @BretStephensNYT” April 27, 2017, 9:01AM. Tweet, accessed on January 13, 2018, https://twitter.com/rahmstorf/status/857625862933540864?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

⁹⁵ Liz Spayd, “Seeking More Voices, Even If Some Don’t Want to Hear Them.” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2017, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/22/public-editor/seeking-more-voices-even-if-some-dont-want-to-hear-them.html>.

⁹⁶ “Scott Pruitt,” https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Scott_Pruitt#Ties_to_Fossil_Fuel_Industry, accessed on January 13, 2018.

⁹⁷ Scott Pruitt, “White House press briefing,” June 2, 2017, <https://youtu.be/PjLtRQg0ko8>, accessed on January 13, 2018.

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Appendix C: Datasheet and Legend

The *Breitbart* and *New York Times* datasheets are available at <https://goo.gl/Xnqcjm>.

Each number in the datasheet represents a value. This value differs per column. Use the legend below to read the datasheet. If the title of a column ends with “#,” this means the number in that column represents a numerical value, for example the amount of sources. The only exception to this is the first column, in which “#” stands for the article number.

Type Reporting:

News = 0

Combination = 1

Opinion = 2

Consensus—Denial Scale:

Consensus = 0

Some debate = 1

Debate = 2

Denialist debate = 3

Denial = 4

No Side=5

“Consequences”:

Do exist = 0

Do not exist = 1

Unclear/not mentioned = 2

Type Argument (*New York Times*):

Politics = 0

Science = 1
Economy = 2
Solutions = 3
Fossil Fuel Fake Science = 4
Disaster/consequences = 5
Unclear = 6

Type Argument (*Breitbart*):

Evil Scheme/Hoax = 0
Economic Argument = 1
Freedom of Speech = 2
Natural Change = 3
CO2 is Good = 4
Leonardo Di Caprio = 5
Natural Contradiction = 6
Climate Scientists/Fanatics = 7
Unclear = 8
“Scientific” Argument = 9

SourceWatch Quick Scan:

Not present in SourceWatch database = 0
Present in SourceWatch database, positive = 1
Present in SourceWatch database, negative = 2

Note: Sources or writers that are mentioned in the SourceWatch database are written **in bold**.

If the sources are *not in person* mentioned in SourceWatch, but through the organization they represent, and this organization *is* mentioned, then the organization is written **in bold**. If both are mentioned, they are both written **in bold**.

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