RUPTURES IN CLIMATE DISCOURSE: DIGITAL PUBLICS, POLARISATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT IN AUSTRALIA AND BRAZIL

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Panel Overview

Australia and Brazil are on the frontlines of climate crises. Both have experienced significant warming, including intense heatwaves. Both have experienced changes in rainfall patterns, with increases in some regions and decreases in others, affecting biodiversity, agriculture, and infrastructure. Floods and largely destructive bushfires have been major events both countries dealt with in the last decade. The frequency and intensity of such extreme events like bushfires and floods are expected to increase, further increasing the impact to ecosystems and cities. Beyond suffering similar consequences of climate change, both economies rely on extractive industries (mining, agribusiness, and fossil fuels). Brazil is the sixth largest global greenhouse gas emitter, while Australia is one of the largest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases, largely due to its reliance on coal for energy and as an export commodity.

In addition to the consequences and causes of climate change, climate activism and advocacy in both countries are highly driven by indigenous and other vulnerable communities, who are also the ones suffering the most severe consequences of ecological destruction. This panel brings together papers that investigate how climate debates unfold in these two nations, focusing on digital public spheres, political polarisation, and discursive struggles over climate action. By examining data from Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, news media, and parliamentary debates, these papers reveal how climate discussions are shaped by ideological divides, strategic narratives, platforms affordances, and moments of crisis.

The first key theme in our panel is how climate discourse is shaped by the experience of extreme weather events. Paper 1 analyzes online climate discussions in Brazil, investigating if extreme weather events trigger spikes in public engagement, and if political and media framing influence whether these discussions translate into sustained

climate awareness. Similarly, Paper 2 tracks shift in Australian climate discourses on Facebook, paying attention if events such as the catastrophic 2019–2020 bushfires intensify debates on climate action.

A second key theme across our panel is the problematization of digital platforms' mediation of climate polarisation. Paper 1 and Paper 2 analyse multiple years of Facebook discourses including different types of users (e.g., news media, activists), while Paper 3 analyse far-right climate discussions in Brazilian WhatsApp and Telegram groups. Paper 4 brings another dimension by investigating Australian online news media. We then cover a wide range of online arenas, allowing a granular view on the role of different spaces for the overall climate discussions.

A third key theme is the formation of discursive alliances or coalitions (groups of actors who align around shared climate narratives) and the circulation of arguments and claims. Paper 2 employs a novel practice mapping method to identify distinct climate discourse clusters in Australia. Paper 4 extends this analysis to the political arena, mapping the alliances that form around climate issues in news reporting and parliamentary debates. Similarly, Paper 5 examines how parliamentary discourse in Brazil intersects with climate debates, particularly in discussions on land conflicts and territorial rights. It investigates weather climate narratives are weaponized to delegitimise land rights movements, aligning agribusiness interests with climate delay rhetoric.

A fourth key theme is the role of far-right actors in shaping climate discourse. Paper 3 provides an in-depth look at how Brazilian far-right groups on WhatsApp and Telegram use climate issues to reinforce political polarisation. It identifies recurring themes, including attacks on environmental NGOs, conspiratorial claims that climate change is a globalist hoax, and narratives that portray agribusiness as under siege by environmental regulations. Paper 4 finds parallel trends in Australia, where climate delay discourses have evolved from outright denial to more sophisticated tactics. Paper 5 adds another layer by examining how parliamentary actors in Brazil use climate narratives to delegitimise land struggles, further embedding climate discourse within broader ideological battles.

Finally, our panel considers the intersection of media narratives, policy debates, and public engagement. Paper 1 and Paper 2 highlight how news coverage and online engagement influence climate discussions, while Paper 4 systematically maps how claims discursively connect media reporting with public submissions to parliamentary inquiries. Paper 5 provides a historical perspective by tracing three decades of Brazilian parliamentary debates on land and climate, revealing how formal political discourse evolves in response to shifting environmental and economic pressures.

CLIMATE DISCUSSIONS IN BRAZIL: THE EXPERIENCE OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS AND THE ONLINE POLITICAL POLARISATION AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE

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Past research shows an influence of extreme weather experiences on individual perceptions, attitudes, concerns and emotions related to climate change (Demski et al., 2017; Konisky et al., 2016). Such influence is not straightforward nor absolute - Konisky et al (2016), for instance, found that the effect is more pronounced in recent extreme events in comparison to long term or temporarily distant ones. A meta-analysis by Xia et al. (2022) shows significant variations in that influence depending on the type of climate event and the nature of the study. But even with the nuances, there appears to be a link. In general, individuals who have experienced weather events may be more likely to show heightened climate change engagement, reflected in increased awareness, perceived vulnerability, and support for broader mitigation and adaptation actions (Demski et al., 2017).

Beyond individual perceptions and beliefs, there is also an effect of extreme weather events on public discussions. Sisco et al. (2017) found that extreme weather events significantly increase public attention to climate change, as evidenced by heightened activity on social media platforms. An analysis of 10,748 U.S. weather events found that climate mentions spiked immediately after events. But discussions can be disrupted or avoided if they become entangled with conflicting beliefs, disputes over responsibility or false claims gaining traction. The attention can stay only on very specific responsibilities or reacting to the immediate event, rather than addressing the broader, long-term impact of climate change.

In Brazil, this limitation is reinforced by political and social factors that shape how climate change is discussed publicly. Lahsen et al. (2019) show that, despite the relevance of linking extreme weather events to climate change, Brazilian environmental leaders and scientists often avoid doing so. This avoidance stems from strategic considerations, as highlighting the role of climate change can, in some cases, hinder rather than help policy action. Their analysis of media coverage of two national disasters demonstrates that emphasizing climate attribution can be ineffective within Brazil's political landscape, where socio-environmental priorities and immediate concerns often take precedence.

In this paper, we analyse online climate discourse over 6 years in Brazil, focusing specifically on the differences between everyday conversations and extreme-weather-events-related discourses, exploring the role of political polarisation in shaping these discussions.

Methods

To investigate climate discourse within the Brazilian context, this paper draws on a comprehensive dataset of Facebook posts collected through CrowdTangle from January 1, 2018, to August 10, 2024. The data collection process used a list of keywords designed to capture a wide range of climate-related discussions, including terms related to specific types of events (e.g., floods), environmental policies (e.g., environmental impact) and climate political debates (e.g., Paris Agreement). The final dataset comprises 8,096,185 distinct Facebook posts, allowing for a longitudinal analysis of public discourse over time.

To analyse the results, our Step 1 was to identify the peaks of activities in the 6 years period, in order to understand what the drivers of discussions and content were related to climate. Step 2 consisted of qualitatively close reading the 50 most engaged posts for each peak to assign an event or theme that drove each peak. The next steps will consist of content (Step 3) and network (Step 4) analysis to compare the extreme-weather-events-drove peaks with the regular time periods. As a preliminary exploratory analysis, we identified the mentions of climate change and directly related terms. This step is important as it provides an initial indication of how often climate change is explicitly referenced in public discussions, helping us understand whether extreme weather events trigger climate discourse. Preliminary results suggest that extreme weather events can drive engagement, and have an ability to spur climate change discussions, although not always - reinforcing the need for deeper content and network analyses in the next steps of this study.

Preliminary Results

Figure 1 illustrates the trend in post activity over time. The blue line (right axis) represents the total number of posts across the period, while the orange line (left axis) shows the number of posts that explicitly mention climate change or strongly related terms. A peak-identification list was produced (see examples on **Figure 2**) and compared to peaks in occurrences of climate change related terms.

Figure 1: Posts Activity and Posts Mentioning Climate Change Over Time
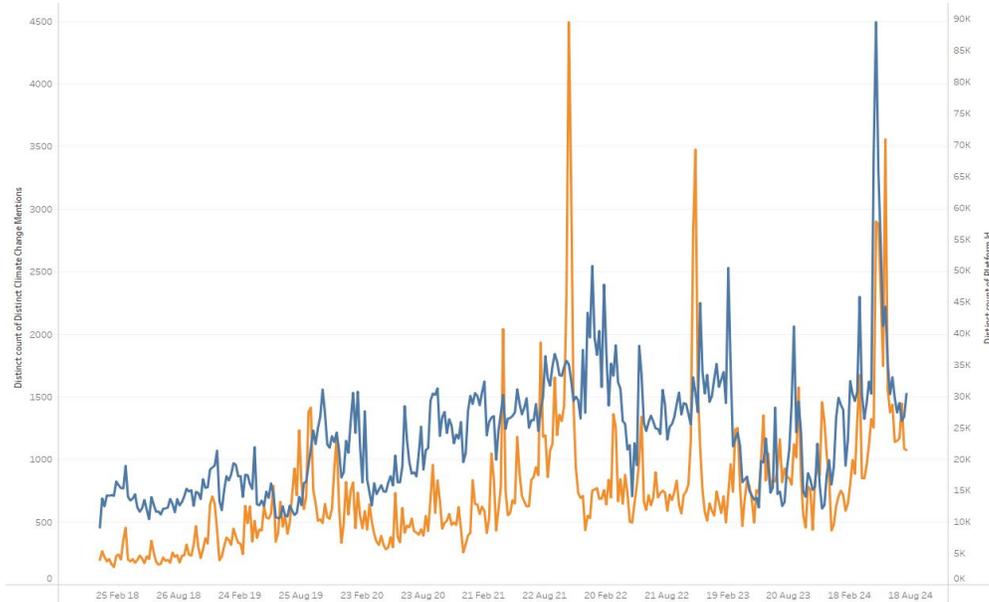
Figure 2:

Week of the peak	Event	Was it a Climate Change mentions peak too?
2018 March 18-25	**Heatwave, storms and floods South and Southeast**	Yes
2018 December 09-15 and 16-22	**Heatwave and Bolsonaro refusing to host COP-25**	Yes

Examples of Weekly Peaks Identification

Figure 3: Correlation Between Post Activity and Climate Change Mentions
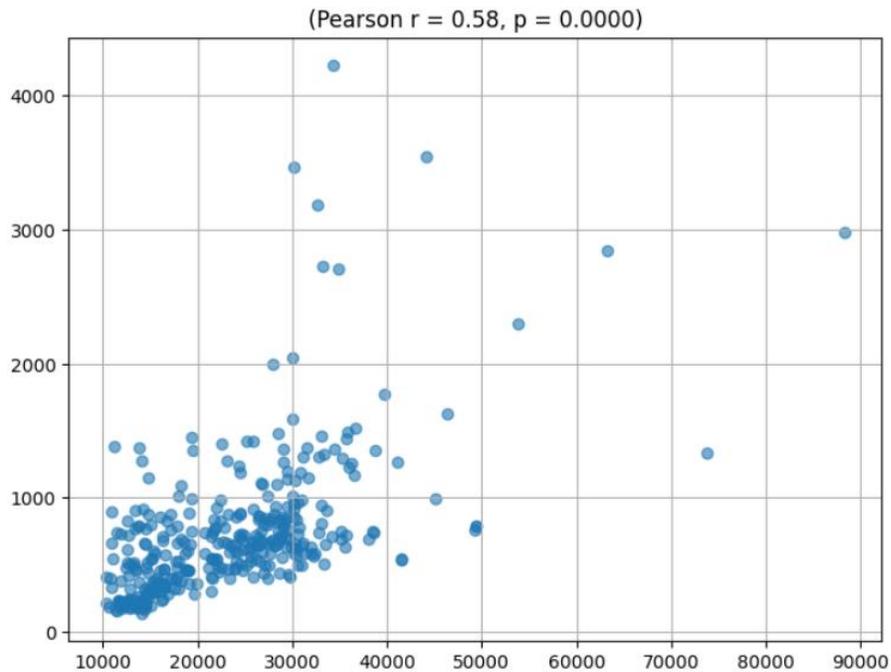
As **Figure 1** shows, most peaks in activity also correspond to peaks in mentions of climate change (or directly related terms), but not all of them. **Figure 3** illustrates the relationship between the total number of posts per week and the number of climate change mentions per week. The scatter plot displays a moderate positive correlation, as indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.58$), suggesting that as the total number of posts increases, the number of climate change mentions also tends to rise. The correlation is statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$). This graph indicates that although many weeks have relatively low climate change mentions, there are instances where higher total posting activity corresponds with a notable increase in climate-related discussions. This analysis suggests that climate-related discussions tend to scale with overall posting trends, but the strength of the correlation also implies other influencing factors may be at play.

For example, consider the first two peaks. In the week of March 18-25 (2018), a peak corresponded to storms and floods following a heatwave in the South and Southeast. There was also a peak in climate change-related terms. One post that week, from the activist page ONG Ambiental Amigos do Rio Correntes, connected National Climate Change Awareness Day to real experiences of Brazilians: "*Deforestation in the Amazon has a direct impact on our weather.*" However, a few months later, during Environment Week (June 2018), while climate change mentions spiked, overall activity did not.

In the weeks of December 09-15 and 16-22 (2018), another heatwave occurred as Jair Bolsonaro's government withdrew Brazil's offer to host COP-25. In the most engaged post of that period, Bolsonaro stated: "*We gave up hosting the UN World Climate Conference because it would cost Brazil more than R$500 million and would be held*

soon, which could force the future government to adopt positions that require more time for analysis and study." Meanwhile, other posts reacted to the heatwave, some humorously, others more critically. Sharing the news that "*Temperature sensation in city on the coast of Paraná reaches 65°C,*" the page Quebrando o Tabu linked the heatwave to climate denial, posting ironically: "*Nature is fine, people. Temperatures are normal. There is no global warming. This conversation about climate change is a communist one.*"

The correlation test and these examples show that extreme weather influences climate discussions, but not uniformly. Extreme weather can act as a catalyst for climate discussions, but it is not the only driver. The next steps of this analysis will systematically measure the link between extreme weather events and climate change discussions, enriching and validating these preliminary findings. Additionally, we will explore what other topics drive public discourse during these peaks, identifying themes that may either amplify or silence climate change discussions.

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TRACKING SHIFTS IN DISCURSIVE ALLIANCES: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSES ON FACEBOOK THROUGH PRACTICE MAPPING

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Introduction

As global heating continues, public debates about climate change also shift. Faced with mounting evidence of more frequent and extreme weather events around the globe, narratives opposing climate action have moved from outright climate change denial to delay tactics. These storylines can variously shift the onus of action from developed to developing nations; amplify concerns about the impact of necessary climate action on national economies; and dismiss meaningful and available approaches to climate change mitigation in favour of yet-to-be-developed breakthrough technologies (Lamb et al., 2020; Painter et al., 2023). Conversely, advocates for climate action are making increasingly forceful arguments for urgent practical interventions, which are beginning to resonate with populations experiencing increased climate stress from natural disasters and related impacts.

Such discursive strategies can be observed in many nations, yet Australia makes for an especially useful case study: it is particularly exposed to the consequences of climate change, has experienced increasingly severe disasters including cyclones, floods, and bushfires across its diverse climatic zones; and features a parliamentary political system which spans the full breadth from outright climate change denial (amongst elements of the conservative Liberal/National Coalition) through support for modest incremental initiatives (from Labor) to calls for urgent action (by the Greens). Following the particularly devastating bushfires during the 2019/20 summer, and the Coalition-led federal government's lacklustre response at the time, the country has also seen the emergence of a new group of loosely networked independent political candidates, backed and funded

by the Climate 200 initiative (Holmes à Court, 2023). Collectively known as the Teal independents because of their campaigning colour scheme, the grouping blends pro-business and environmental values, and in recent state and federal elections has successfully challenged a number of incumbent Coalition MPs perceived to be stalling climate action (Hendriks & Reid, 2024). They are predicted to maintain and extend these gains in the coming federal election, to be held in April or May 2025.

Data and Methods

This paper examines the evolution of Australian public debate on climate action over the course of nearly seven years, from January 2018 to August 2024 (and therefore including the major natural disasters in 2019/20 and subsequent years, as well as a change of government at the federal level in May 2022). We draw on data from Meta's now-defunct CrowdTangle tool for data access to public discussions on Facebook, filtered specifically for public pages from Australia and for posts that contain one or more of a long list of climate change- and climate action-related keywords. We chose Facebook for this analysis because it remained the most popular social media platform in Australia during this timeframe (e.g. Park et al., 2022: 85), with a broader and more diverse userbase than Twitter (even before that platform's takeover and decline under Elon Musk). Our data gathering approach captures post content and engagement data from official political pages (parties, politicians, candidates), news outlets, civil society groups, activists, local community pages, and a wide range of other actors. The total dataset contains some 4.8 million posts from these Australian pages.

We conduct a longitudinal analysis of this dataset using the novel practice mapping method (Bruns et al., 2024), which is proving especially useful in this context: CrowdTangle data about Facebook posting activities do not contain readily available interaction network information. Practice mapping instead constructs networks between individual actors (in our case, public pages on Facebook) by systematically comparing them for similarities in their posting practices: this includes general language choices; specific climate change claims; references to other actors and entities; embedded links, images, and videos; and other discursive features that can be extracted from the post content – which we define collectively as a Facebook page's *posting practices*. Individual pages are then clustered into larger groups based on the strength of affinities between their posting practices, which in turn also enables us to determine the relative alignment or opposition between these larger clusters.

A preliminary practice mapping network for our dataset, using only a limited set of content features, is shown in fig. 1, illustrating the detection of distinct discursive clusters. For now, this work-in-progress visualisation remains overdetermined by pages that appear as aligned because they represent the same locations or organisations, however; further data processing will adjust the weighting of individual practices in the practice mapping process to give greater emphasis to thematic similarities. However, even this initial analysis already points to the presence of opposing climate advocacy and denialist clusters, as well as a more neutral grouping that regards the climate as a media spectacle.
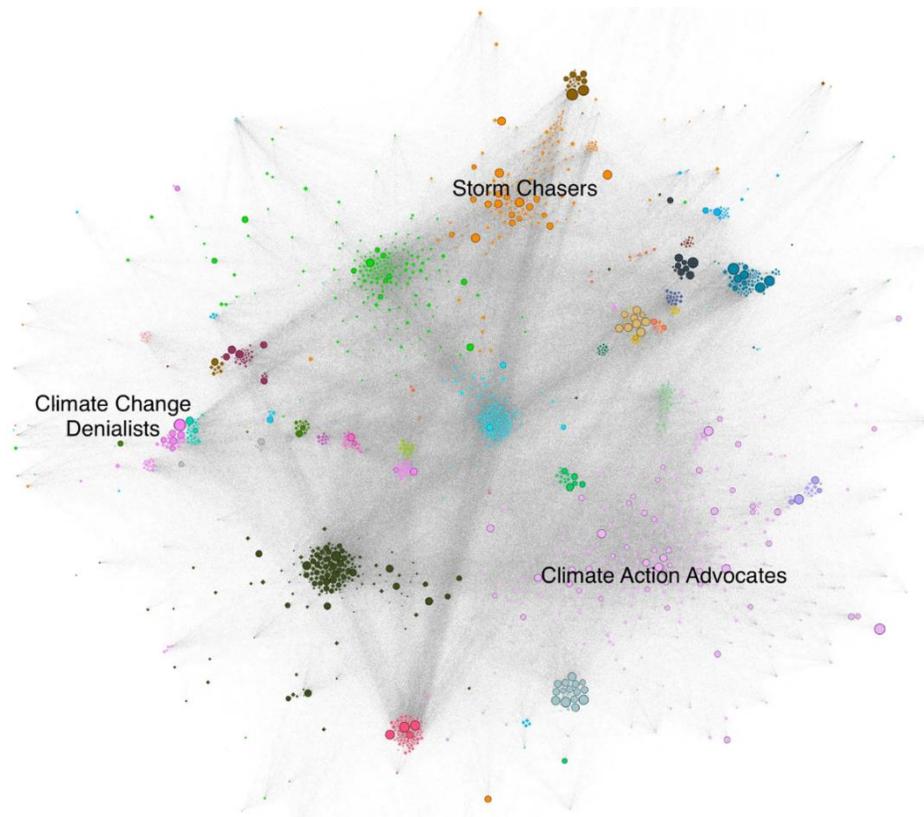
Fig. 1: A map of distinct practices in the dataset, highlighting groups of pages engaging in climate action advocacy, climate change denial, and storm chasing. Other clusters tend to have a specifically local or regional focus (e.g. for the Northern Territory or Brisbane).

Practice mapping networks typically show several distinct clusters, representing closely aligned actors that can be understood as representing a particular discursive position; these clusters are in turn often grouped into a number of larger discursive alliances that each stand for a broader agenda (e.g. for or against immediate climate action), and which are engaged in an antagonistic and potentially polarised discursive struggle with each other.

For the purposes of this paper, we construct such a practice mapping network for the entire multi-year dataset in order to identify broad overall patterns of agonism and antagonism (Dehghan, 2020) in Australian climate debates, but also trace the positioning of individual actors (i.e. pages) and groups of actors in our dataset across this map over time – month by month and year by year. This enables us to chart the evolution of climate change discourses in Australia over time: for instance, actors engaged in outright climate change denialism at first might move towards climate action delay tactics as denial becomes untenable in the face of the evidence; actors calling for modest global action might move towards support for more urgent local initiatives.

In this analysis we pay particular attention also to the impact of major unforeseen developments (such as natural disasters) and regular events (the annual global COP climate summits as well as the Australian federal elections in 2019 and 2022) on

discursive practices. Additionally, we also cross-reference these practices with the level of engagement from Facebook users that these pages and their posts receive: this enables us to examine whether audience preferences for specific stances towards climate change also evolve over time, and potentially even whether this evolution precedes or lags behind discursive changes at the page level.

Contribution

Using the innovative practice mapping approach as applied to a large-scale longitudinal dataset, this paper makes a unique contribution to the study of discursive shifts in public debate at a national level. Our work is able to document the diachronic contingency of discourses depending on endogenous or exogenous events; whether polarisation on climate action has deepened or lessened in Australia during this timeframe; and what arguments for or against urgent climate action appear to be connecting with the broader public. More generally, it also serves as a blueprint for similar longitudinal studies of public debates on other platforms, and across them.

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Paper 3

ANTI-SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVES IN CHAT APPS: WHAT SHAPES THE BRAZILIAN FAR-RIGHT DISCUSSION ABOUT SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN WHATSAPP AND TELEGRAM

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This study examines how socio-environmental issues are framed and disseminated in far-right WhatsApp and Telegram groups in Brazil. By collecting 248,307 messages and 279,297 hyperlinks shared from 2023 to 2024, we identify how the sustainability agenda is instrumentalized to deepen political polarization. Using a mixed-methods approach, we applied topic modeling to identify key themes and conducted qualitative analysis to categorize hyperlinks shared by group participants. Results suggest that environmental discussions in these groups are often intertwined with broader cultural war narratives and economic interests, particularly agribusiness. Disinformation, conspiracy theories, and attacks on environmental policies, activists, and NGOs are common strategies used to undermine sustainability efforts. The study highlights the role of chat apps in facilitating the spread of anti-environmental narratives due to their decentralized and encrypted nature. Additionally, the findings suggest that hyperlinking practices within these groups contribute to the legitimization of misleading narratives by repeatedly circulating information from biased or unreliable sources.

Introduction

Although Brazil plays a central role in the international debate on climate change, the country has faced a series of challenges in advancing discussions and engaging more decisively with the environmental agenda (Issberner & Lena, 2018; Campos, 2024). This applies to institutionalized political debates within the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and to public opinion, both influenced by the agribusiness lobby in institutional politics (Medeiros et al., 2024; De Olho nos Ruralistas, 2022). As a result, although 95% of Brazilians claim to be aware of climate change (Costa, 2024), a significant portion of

the population remains skeptical about the severity of its consequences (Spektor, Fasolin & Camargo, 2023).

In Brazil, as in several other contexts around the world, the far-right has consolidated an online media ecosystem, with chat apps emerging as the predominant channels for the dissemination of political and environmental disinformation (Ozawa et al., 2023; Santini et al., 2021; Santini et al., 2024). These platforms facilitate the rapid spread of content, often bypassing traditional fact-checking mechanisms and enabling the circulation of misleading claims (Santini, Salles & Barros, 2022).

In this research, we examine how socio-environmental issues are framed in far-right WhatsApp and Telegram groups in Brazil, analyzing messages and hyperlinks to reveal how these debates are used to reinforce political polarization and promote agribusiness interests.

Material and methods

We collected 202,412 messages on socio-environmental issues from 467 public WhatsApp groups and 45,895 messages from 136 public Telegram groups and channels, published between January 2023 and March 2024, focusing on far-right political discussions. Data collection followed platform-specific methodologies: Garimella & Tyson (2018) for WhatsApp and Telethon, a Python client library for the Telegram API (Urman & Katz, 2020). To identify the sources referenced on the messages, we extracted 279,297 shared links from 3,803 sites.

Using a mixed-methods approach, we applied BERTopic for topic modeling (Grootendorst, 2022) to identify key themes and conducted qualitative analysis to categorize websites shared (Santini, Salles & Barros, 2022). We then cross-referenced the topics with the website categories to identify the sources associated with each topic. This analysis enabled us to pinpoint the most frequently cited sources for each topic and to examine how they contribute to shaping public perceptions of environmental issues.

Results and discussion

The study identifies nine dominant themes in these discussions: Attacks on the Lula Government environmental policy, Attacks on the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), Conspiracy theories, In defense of Agribusiness, Attacks on NGOs, Bolsonaro Helped the Environment, Forest fires, and Ukraine War and fertilizers. The first is the most prevalent topic, which accounts for 32.3% of analyzed messages. These messages primarily targeted government representatives and emphasized alleged government inaction in addressing deforestation and forest fires.

Another dominant theme was the criminalization of the MST (27.5% of messages), which gained traction during a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) into the movement's activities. Messages portrayed MST members as "terrorists" and accused them of land invasions and environmental destruction. Similarly, attacks on NGOs (2.1% of messages) peaked during the CPI of NGOs, with right-wing politicians amplifying narratives that framed these organizations as corrupt entities that exploit indigenous communities and

misappropriate environmental funds. These narratives align with broader far-right strategies that seek to undermine civil society actors engaged in environmental protection (Goldberg et al, 2020; UNESCO, 2024).

Conspiratorial narratives account for 16% of the messages analyzed and are more prevalent on Telegram than on WhatsApp, suggesting that the former serves as a more conducive space for spreading conspiratorial claims (Silva, 2024; Hoseini et al., 2023; Schulze et al., 2022). These conspiracies include claims that sustainability initiatives are part of a covert plan for global governance and that climate change is a hoax designed to control populations. These theories have been instrumentalized as part of broader campaigns of disinformation and public opinion manipulation, contributing to climate skepticism and hindering efforts to mobilize public support for environmental policies (Del Vicario et al., 2016; Halpern et al., 2019; Santini, Salles & Barros, 2022).

The study also highlights the centrality of agribusiness narratives within far-right discourse. Messages defending agribusiness constitute 18.7% of the dataset, positioning the sector as essential for Brazil's economic stability and global food security while dismissing concerns about its environmental impact. These messages frame environmental regulations and indigenous land demarcation as threats to national sovereignty and economic development. This perspective aligns with historical efforts by the Brazilian agribusiness sector to oppose environmental regulations and promote greenwashing strategies that downplay the industry's role in deforestation and biodiversity loss. This industry uses strategies of corporate marketing and greenwashing to hide anti-ecological practices, manipulate public opinion and delay energy transition policies and product traceability (Budó, 2017; Regattieri, 2023; Medeiros et al., 2024). As a result, it has consolidated itself as a hegemonic economic, political and social force, in dispute with the agroecological discourse in the debate on the country's development (Bittencourt et al., 2022).

Additionally, our hyperlinking analysis reveals that the majority of shared links come from *Social Media* (35.3%), *Junk News and Disinformation* sites (30.9%), and *Minor news Brands* (25.5%). The dominance of junk news sites underscores how disinformation is systematically integrated into far-right environmental discourse. These sites played a crucial role in reinforcing ideological narratives, often republishing content from each other to create an echo chamber effect (Sakhiya & Rathod, 2024). *Major Brands*, which include established journalistic outlets, accounted for only 4.7% of shared links, reflecting the systematic rejection of mainstream media in these groups. The circulation of links to alternative media and hyperpartisan sources contributes to an ecosystem where disinformation is legitimized through repetition and networked amplification.

The research also identified that different types of hyperlinks were associated with specific themes. For instance, *Conspiracy theories* were largely disseminated through *Social Media* and *Junk News* sites, with 40.6% of messages linking to content from social media platforms. Meanwhile, *Minor Brands* play a significant role in promoting agribusiness narratives, as many of these outlets specialize in regional or sector-specific news that aligns with industry interests. The reliance on social media as a primary source of information further reinforces the fragmented and self-referential nature of far-right

digital communities, where similar or the same contents circulate across multiple platforms, which helps build credibility and engagement (CGEE, 2024).

In the far-right groups analyzed, sustainability is often framed through a "loss perspective" (Homar & Knežević, 2021). However, instead of the losses caused by climate change, the messages emphasize the supposed harms caused by environmental policies to economic growth and national sovereignty. Thus, these messages mobilize resistance against sustainability initiatives while reinforcing neoliberal perspectives that prioritize market-driven solutions over regulatory interventions. By examining the communicative dynamics within chat apps conservative groups, this study highlights the ways in which far-right actors manipulate environmental issues to serve political and economic interests and deepen political polarization. Our analysis expands the understanding of how these platforms are used to reinforce political and economic agendas, exacerbating the polarization of the environmental debate.

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DIVISION AND DELAY IN AUSTRALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCUSSIONS: AN LLM-ASSISTED ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE COALITIONS ACROSS NEWS REPORTS AND PARLIAMENTARY SUBMISSIONS

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Climate action is a divisive topic in many parts of the world, with ongoing debates about issues such as renewable and nuclear energy, carbon taxes, and electric vehicles. Australia's polarised attitudes to climate change and the stymieing and subversion of climate and energy policy to satisfy the interests of an influential alliance of fossil fuel industry, political, and partisan media actors are well-documented (e.g., Chubb, 2012; Crowley, 2021; Holmes & Star, 2018; Stutzer et al., 2021; Taylor, 2014; Wilkinson, 2020). Yet more work is needed to understand the dynamics of these discursive power struggles in contemporary online communication spaces, which are key sites of opinion formation, assertion, and contestation.

Using Large Language Models (LLMs) to study these divisive dynamics at scale, we investigate two distinct communications spaces that influence public and political opinion: (a) mainstream and alternative news media, and (b) public submissions to energy-related Australian Parliamentary Committee inquiries. In each of these arenas, we identify actors, stances, and claims. For news content, we developed a codebook with multiple human

coders and used it to train an LLM to classify text published by mainstream and alternative media in Australia. For committee submissions, we worked through an iterative process with an LLM to identify actors, stances, and claims and co-develop a codebook, which we then applied at scale to identify claims in nuclear energy-related public submissions to a recent Australian Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Nuclear Power Generation in Australia. We then use the actors, stances, and claims in both arenas to map distinct discourse coalitions (Hajer, 1995), revealing patterns of alignment and contestation across multiple discursive sites.

Mainstream and Alternative News Media

We analyse news content about climate change using a mixed-methods content analysis framework designed to assess polarisation across different dimensions (including ideological, affective, and value-based). To do so, we identify the positions taken and claims made by societal actors appearing in the news articles: for instance, their reported views and statements on renewable energy, fossil fuels, or carbon emissions.

To identify these, we first conduct a standardised manual content analysis of a sample of 350 Australian news articles, to identify key indicators: actors, stances, and claims. The articles were selected through constructed weeks and stratified random sampling, focusing on news coverage surrounding two significant events. The first constructed week spans from 9 November 2023 to 27 December 2023, covering the period around the COP 28 climate summit in Dubai. The second constructed week spans from 19 June 2024 to 6 August 2024, covering debate about the Australian federal opposition's controversial proposal to introduce nuclear power into the country's energy mix.

Building on this manually coded dataset, we then test and train a Large Language Model to extend this content analysis over a larger dataset of climate change news coverage in Australia during 2023 and 2024. Evaluated against our human-coded data, this produces a comprehensive catalogue of societal actors and their stances and claims in relation to climate debates; we further refine and consolidate these results by amalgamating similar claims and grouping actors who represent the same entities.

Parliamentary Submissions

Having already examined general public debate as covered in news reporting, the second part of our analysis specifically examines 850 public submissions to the 2024 Australian Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Nuclear Power Generation in Australia. Substantial scholarship has identified overall climate denial claims and (to a lesser extent, due to the complexity involved) policy delay claims and discursive tactics (Coan et al., 2021, Lamb et al., 2020; Martínez Arranz et al., 2024; Painter et al., 2023). But we still need more empirical data on what claims are being made in Australia, and in the context of climate-related policy deliberations. This also needs to consider which actors make what claims, in concert with which allies, and explore what this means for public and political support for climate policy and action.

Considering the broader socio-political context of these public submissions, we introduce LLM-assisted discourse analysis to classify actors, stances, and claims in the

submissions to the Inquiry. We use Claude chat interface to collaboratively develop a codebook of claims that relate to Australia's nuclear energy debate. This interactive process involves refining a detailed and multi-stage prompt, also providing contextual documents about previous nuclear energy inquiries and a live codebook of claims encountered to date, which is iteratively refined and expanded in response to the ongoing analysis. Once accuracy is established, we then train the LLM to perform the analysis over the entire 850-submission dataset.

Contrary to previous studies' approaches, this identifies all claims in the documents, not just claims that could be considered obstructive to climate action. This approach responds to the challenge of identifying delay claims, which can be heavily nuanced and context-dependent – what could be a delay claim in one context could be a reasonable argument in other. For example, while established nuclear energy generation may reduce fossil fuel use in some countries, in Australia it cannot be built in time to support the nation's Net Zero by 2050 target and exploring it as a solution means extending the life of high emissions energy sources like coal (Climate Change Authority, 2025). Further, our identification of all claims also helps to produce results that can be integrated with the results of the news analysis, which similarly captures all actors, stances, and claims relating to climate change and climate policy.

Assessing Discursive Practices and Discourse Coalitions in News Reporting and Parliamentary Submissions

Finally, we combine the results from the two datasets. By identifying all claims (not only contrarian claims), and focusing on the alignment of actors with each other via these claims, across our analyses of both news media reporting and public submissions to the parliamentary inquiry, we are able to determine who is discursively aligned with or opposed to whom, and how this network of discursive alliances could influence Australian attitudes towards and responses to climate change. In particular, the identification of discourse coalitions across these two communicative spaces highlights potential intersections and divergences between media coverage, political influence, and public engagement in climate discussions.

Through this integrated perspective, this study provides a broader view of climate policy debates in Australia. Aiming to address the nuance and complexity of these debates, we argue that mapping the actors, stances, and claims involved in these debates as 'discourse coalitions' (Hajer, 1995; Leifeld, 2017) is particularly useful for analysing nuanced energy transition debates that have technical, economic, scientific, and affective claims, with their validity (i.e., whether they can be deemed obstructive to policy and action or not) very much dependent on country and current context.

We consider these findings in conjunction with what we already know about the determinants of belief in climate change and support for action (e.g., Colvin et al., 2024; Fielding et al., 2012; Kousser & Tranter, 2018; Pearson et al., 2024; Tranter et al., 2023). In doing so, we aim to inform interventions that can be customised for segments of the Australian population.

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DELEGITIMIZATION AND CLIMATE CRISIS: THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA IN PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSES ON LAND CONFLICTS

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The struggle for the right to the land and territory is framed by numerous theorists and political actors as one of the most profound and enduring conflicts of the modern era, intricately linked to the political and social formation of nation-states across the globe, including Brazil. In a country where patterns of land ownership and territorial distribution were defined even before the arrival of European colonizers — formally established by the Treaty of Tordesillas — the struggle for emancipation from colonial domination and the articulation of an autonomous national project have remained inextricably tied to the fight for access to, preservation of, and the right to use the land. Given the centrality of this issue within the national discourse, it is not surprising that diverse political, social, and identity-based collectives — spanning a broad ideological spectrum — engage in public contestation over the meaning, legitimacy, and implications of land and territorial rights within Brazil's political, economic landscapes. The pursuit for land and territorial justice have mobilized heterogeneous actors into a convergent national political struggle, in a coalition that encompasses peasant communities, Indigenous peoples, traditional settlements, landless collectives, and socio-environmental refugees.

This article investigates the potential effects of the process of political contestation and confrontation against social movements and the land agenda. For understanding the climate issue in Brazil, more precisely, it examines how political elected representatives frame the climate crisis when dealing with the land conflicts. To do so, we analyze how the climate agenda emerges in parliamentarian discourses contesting and delegitimizing the land struggle in Brazil, uttered in the Chamber of Deputies over the last three decades (1994- 2024). The analysis of this material employs assisted content-analysis techniques, adapted with training for Large Language Models (LLMs), artificial intelligence tools used to ensure meticulous coding criteria while maintaining the scalability of the analyses.

This article offers an innovating account dealing with delegitimating processes as a shared project to challenge and negotiate the historical frameworks that have institutionalized land and territorial rights in the country´s historical process. In the context of contemporary Brazilian politics, historical land struggles — particularly those driven by Indigenous, quilombola, and landless communities — have occupied a

prominent position in national disputes. It worth noticing that political and juridical recognition of land rights was ensured by the 1988 Federal Constitution, which include provisions mandating environmental preservation (Art. 225), the right to demarcate Indigenous lands (Art. 231, § 1), the titling of quilombola territories (ADCT, Art. 68), the eradication of hunger and poverty (Art. 3, III), and the promotion of agrarian reform (Arts. 184 and 186). Nevertheless, despite the legal guarantees in the 1988 Constitution, continuous processes of delegitimization still find formal and informal channels to undermine, materially, legally, and socially, the struggle for land and those who fight for it in the contemporary political arena. While the daily reality of rural activists involves violations of their physical integrity and social delegitimization, formal political contestation continues to operate by reducing or eliminating the rights historically secured through their struggle.

Conceptualizing the material struggle for land in Brazil requires recognizing that this issue transcends the immediate limits and interests of any singular group. Rather, it is articulated through a complex matrix of claims, arguments and meanings in dispute, comprising multiple fronts of political action that negotiate the recognition of land and territorial rights. In this sense, our central claim is that the entanglement of the climate crisis topic with the land conflict in Brazil is also deeply related with the nation's historical and political formation. Peasant movements advocate for land redistribution and agroecological practices as strategic responses to hunger and the exacerbation of climate change (Campo Unitário, 2022; CONTAG, 2023; MST, 2022). Concurrently, traditional communities claim for the preservation of natural territories and promote sustainable human-environment relations as forms of cultural and political resistance (APIB, 2024; CONAQ, 2024). In a context of overlapping struggles, the present analysis, by revealing the intersection of this agenda with the land and territorial struggle, its actors, and the process of delegitimization that surrounds them, contributes for better understanding how the climate crisis emerges (or is even omitted) in debates in Brazil

The National Congress is a privileged arena where parliamentary discourses associated with established interests and demands for social transformation have a decision-making power (Habermas, 1996; Maia, 2012; Quirk, Bendix & Bächtiger, 2018). The legislative arena has served not only as a platform for the articulation of public policies related to land but also as a space aimed at delegitimizing the actors and causes advocating for a fairer redistribution of territory. In this sense, this study aims to explore how the relationship between the land agenda and the climate issue may, or may not, influence the public, political, and formal perception of climate crises as a matter of common interest.

This study is based on transcriptions of over 40,000 parliamentary discourses delivered in the plenary of the Chamber of Deputies between February 1, 1994, and December 20, 2024, first and last days of legislative activities within this timeframe. Using a list of 43 keywords, all related to the land struggle and its advocates, we employed web scrapping tools to collect in full all speeches that contain at least one of these keywords throughout the analyzed period (n = 47,167), with all 'metadata' related to each. Access

to the full discourses is provided through the Speech Database (*Banco de Discursos*), a tool for consulting the stenographic records of legislative sessions, linked to the website of the Chamber of Deputies. This platform allows advanced searches for speeches, filtered by the different categories of 'metadata', like speaker's name, political party, federal unit of representation, date of pronunciation, topics, or even excerpts from each speech, encompassing both plenary and committee sessions. Moreover, the choice of artificial intelligence tools is driven by their ability to process and generate natural language within a contextual framework. These models enhance analytical capabilities by identifying complex patterns, synthesizing information, and detecting linguistic nuances in an automated manner, provided they are properly trained. The integration of technical precision with contextual interpretation offered by LLMs is especially valuable for qualitative and quantitative research.

In the first stage of this study, the content analysis is beneficial for revealing the substantive dimensions involved in the intersection between the delegitimization of the land struggle and the political approach to the climate crisis in the Brazilian context. This effort focuses on identifying which topics or axes of contestation against the land struggle most frequently interact with the emergence or omission of the climate issue by parliamentarians. Furthermore, by cross-referencing the coded data with their respective metadata, a second stage will conduct a longitudinal analysis of the frequencies and variations of these interactions, as to elucidate how the intensification of debates on the land struggle and its actors intersects with the construction of climate crisis urgency in the National Congress.

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