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Delegitimising climate policy on social media platforms: dominant narratives

Abstract

The article examines climate policy-related negative narratives circulating between February 20, 2024 and May 18, 2025, in the Polish-language social media environment. It aims to identify the dominant narrative categories used to delegitimise climate policy and to assess their potential societal consequences. The study applies quantitative and qualitative content analysis to a corpus of social media posts. It codes recurring negative and, in some cases, disinformation-related claims about climate policy in narrative frames, with attention to how they connect climate policy to social problems. The findings indicate that the most visible narratives frame climate policy primarily through classic welfare-state domains, presenting it as a threat to household, economic security, employment, and living conditions. Some narratives also express broader opposition to regulation and public intervention. The article concludes that the

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visibility of such narratives may weaken the legitimacy of climate action and intensify contestation over compensatory measures and social protection instruments linked to the climate transition. It highlights the need for climate policy to be accompanied by clearly communicated compensatory measures and social protection instruments that address distributive concerns and strengthen state legitimacy.

Keywords: social media, climate policy, social policy, public trust, negative narratives

Introduction

Climate change constitutes one of the most urgent and systemic challenges facing contemporary societies. According to the World Economic Forum, environmental risks occupy the top positions among the most severe global threats anticipated over the next decade (World Economic Forum, 2026). At the same time, climate change cannot be reduced to an environmental issue alone. It is a complex and multidimensional challenge with far-reaching effects across multiple domains, including the environment, the economy, and society (Arnell et al., 2016). The climate crisis, therefore, constitutes a new structural condition, and there is no scientific doubt that it also poses a serious challenge to welfare-state institutions and social policy (Hirvilammi et al., 2023).

Its impacts affect deepening inequalities (World Bank, 2025), public health (IPCC, 2023; World Health Organization, 2023), energy security (IPCC, 2023), and the long-term stability of national economies (Keane et al., 2025). As a result, climate governance is becoming an increasingly central issue for both public policy and social policy.

Policymakers operate in an environment characterizsed by growing interdependencies, geopolitical tensions, and the difficulty of reconciling development priorities and economic advancement with environmental stewardship (Klaassen & Opschoor, 1991; UN Environment, 2020; Belaïd, 2022; Belaïd & Flambard, 2023). Despite mounting scientific evidence and rising public awareness, governmental responses often appear insufficient in relation to the scale and urgency of the crisis (Stantcheva, 2024). This raises a fundamental question of political feasibility: why does climate action remain contested and unevenly implemented, even when the societal costs of inaction are widely recognised? Addressing this question requires not only an analysis of institutional capacity and policy-making processes, but also an understanding of the factors that shape public acceptance of climate policy.

Meeting climate targets depends on formal policy plans and coordinated implementation and sustained societal legitimacy and public acceptance. For this reason, examining the factors that shape public attitudes toward climate policy is becoming increasingly important (Łódzki, 2023).

In terms of those factors, growing importance is attributed to social media communication and narrative framing, as online platforms facilitate the rapid circulation of emotionally charged and conflict-oriented interpretations of climate policy. Some highlight their democratising potential, while others argue that social media accelerates political polarisation (Falkenberg et al., 2022).

Despite increasing recognition of climate change as a new social policy risk in scientific literature (Petmesidou & Branco, 2026), its societal implications remain still underexplored, particularly in relation to mediated public discourse. This article addresses this gap by analysing how social media narratives construct climate policy as socially and politically problematic, linking climate governance to core welfare-state concerns.

The aim of this article is to identify and analyse dominant negative narratives about climate policy circulating in the Polish-language social media environment and to assess their potential societal implications from a social policy perspective. Specifically, the article examines how delegitimising narratives emerge and circulate, framing climate action as socially and politically problematic. To guide this analysis, the study addresses the following research question: how do dominant negative narratives about climate policy circulating on social media frame climate action as socially and politically problematic, and what potential societal implications may follow from their visibility within the analysed corpus? To answer this question, the study adopts a theoretical perspective grounded in mediatisation theory, which describes the growing role of media in contemporary societies and the ways in which social and political institutions adapt to media logic (Krotz, 2007; Schulz, 2004; Thompson, 1995).

The article is empirical in nature and draws on both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Data were collected using Gerulata Juno, a digital platform for monitoring and analysing media narratives (Gerulata, 2025). The study examines a corpus of 9,656 posts published between February 20, 2024 and May 18, 2025, drawn from multiple social media platforms monitored by Gerulata Juno. The analytical procedure involved identifying recurring negative claims, including those of a disinformation-related nature, concerning climate policy and clustering them into broader narrative frames. The study combined exploratory keyword-based monitoring, qualitative analysis, clustering, and automated classification supported by a locally deployed language model, followed by a quantitative analysis of narrative visibility measured by the number of post views.

Theoretical Framework

Climate change as a social policy issue

In recent decades, climate change has become one of the key global challenges that not only alters environmental conditions but also affects economic stability and the functioning of societies. The years 2011–2020 recorded the highest temperatures in measurement history compared to the pre-industrial average. Research indicates that among human-driven factors, carbon dioxide emissions contribute the most to the observed global warming (Friedlingstein et al., 2022).

The scientific consensus regarding the anthropogenic nature of climate change is broadly confirmed in the literature, including in research by John Cook (2013) and Naomi Oreskes (2004). It is worth emphasising that although carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions resulting from human activity constitute approximately 5% of total

emissions, they are not balanced by natural absorption processes in the same way that natural emissions are. As a result, anthropogenic CO_2 accumulates in the atmosphere over time. Furthermore, CO_2 as a greenhouse gas absorbs longwave radiation, leading to warming of the atmosphere and, consequently, the Earth's surface (Kardaś, 2023; Popkiewicz & Malinowski, 2023).

With ongoing global warming, many changes in the climate system, particularly extreme weather events, are expected to gain increasing importance in the near future (IPCC, 2023). The literature already points to the intensification of wildfires, droughts, floods, and extreme heat across different regions of the world, which constitutes not only an environmental threat but also a major social concern (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Importantly, climate risks do not operate in isolation: multiple climatic and non-climatic threats can interact and reinforce one another, increasing the magnitude of impacts and making them more difficult to manage. Losses, damage, and broader social costs are projected to rise with continued warming, while the heaviest burden is expected to fall on the poorest and most vulnerable social groups (IPCC, 2023).

For these reasons, treating climate change solely as an environmental issue is no longer sufficient. The impacts of the climate crisis extend far beyond ecosystems and directly affect living conditions, health, security, and the everyday functioning of households. Consequently, climate policy and pro-climate action are closely linked to policy, both in terms of cushioning the consequences of transformation and in building justice and societal resilience. While 20th-century social policies were primarily designed to respond to the challenges of industrialisation, urbanisation, and globalisation, 21st-century social policies increasingly need to address inequalities and conflicts emerging from environmental policies, including climate policy (Arnell et al., 2016).

In this context, particular importance is attributed to adaptation and mitigation actions implemented across different scales, sectors, and regions, especially those that prioritise equality, climate justice, rights-based approaches, social justice, and inclusiveness. According to the IPCC (2023), such approaches lead to more sustainable outcomes, reduce social trade-offs, support transformative change, and promote climate-resilient development. At the same time, some scholars describe climate change as a new, all-encompassing type of social risk, a "third generation" of social risks that increasingly shapes the priorities of welfare states and social policy (Gough, 2013). Existing evidence also suggests that ecosocial risks generate new inequalities, new forms of distributional conflict, and new types of injustice, within societies, between developing and developed countries, and between present and future generations (Gough & Meadowcroft, 2012).

This is important because the effectiveness of climate policy depends not only on policy design and implementation instruments, but also on how such policies are socially interpreted and evaluated. Delegitimising narratives surrounding climate policy may strengthen societal perceptions of injustice, intensify conflicts related to the distribution of goods and resources, and thereby weaken public acceptance of climate action. This makes narrative analysis a crucial element of research on climate policy. However, a significant part of the scientific literature still focuses primarily on the institutional dimensions of climate-related risks, paying less attention to the ways in which these risks are socially interpreted.

Climate policy: origins, goals, and societal dimension

For the purposes of this study, climate policy refers to both EU-level regulatory frameworks shaping Member State obligations and national strategic instruments that implement these objectives domestically, including Poland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).

Within the European Union, climate policy has gained the status of a strategic project strongly tied to energy transition, economic modernisation, and the long-term security and resilience of the EU as a whole. In this context, the European Green Deal has become the overarching political framework through which climate objectives are integrated with wider development, industrial, and social priorities. The Green Deal thus represents a set of environmental regulations as well as a broader growth strategy aiming to restructure the European economic model toward climate neutrality, reduced pressure on natural resources, and strengthened socio-economic resilience (European Commission, 2019). A key component of this architecture is the Fit for 55 legislative package, which operationalises emission reduction targets through a set of instruments addressing, among other areas, emissions trading, carbon border adjustment mechanism, social climate fund, and increase of energy efficiency.

The main components of EU climate policy can be divided according to groups of public policy instruments, which constitute their basic analytical framework. The first category includes regulatory instruments aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions (such as the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the regulation tightening CO_2 emission standards for new passenger cars). Market-based mechanisms constitute the second category within this system and include the Emissions Trading System and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Fiscal instruments, including the Just Transition Mechanism and the Social Climate Fund, form the third category, as they enable the financing of activities related to the energy transition. EU climate policy also employs informational instruments, including energy labels for household appliances, the EU Taxonomy, and the European Climate Pact, which was established to facilitate knowledge sharing and support local community initiatives. Together, the elements of this system create a coherent framework that combines environmental objectives with economic transformation and social welfare initiatives.

An important feature of the EU approach is the translation of climate objectives into national implementation strategies. Member states are required to prepare National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) to present "national contributions to the energy union and to respond to the challenges of climate change, energy dependency and aging infrastructure" (Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, n.d.). In the Polish context, this has involved the need for coherent long-term planning of energy transition in a setting shaped by specific economic structures, social conditions, and the continued prominence of the fossil fuel sector in public debate (Nadziak-Ignaszak, 2026). As a result, climate policy in Poland is not only a regulatory and strategic issue, but also a contested political domain characterised by disputes over costs, pace, and the perceived fairness of the transition.

Crucially, although climate policy targets are expressed through environmental and emission-related indicators, they are implemented through instruments with

direct societal consequences. Energy transition affects energy prices, household heating and transport costs, business conditions, and the economic situation of households, particularly those with lower incomes. In this sense, climate policy is inherently linked to distributional tensions: questions of who bears the costs of transition, who benefits from its outcomes, and how risks and burdens are compensated by the state. This highlights the fundamentally social policy dimension of climate governance, as effective climate policy requires the design of protective measures, compensatory instruments, and solutions that prevent the deepening of inequalities. Such integration of climate and social policy is also essential for sustaining public legitimacy, without which climate reforms may face strong societal and political resistance (Markkanen & Anger-Kraavi, 2019).

From both the EU and Polish perspectives, climate policy can, therefore, be understood as a process in which environmental objectives are inseparable from energy security, economic stability, and social cohesion. It is also an area particularly prone to political conflict and delegitimising narratives, precisely because it concerns everyday social practices and politically sensitive issues related to redistribution, justice, and state responsibility. For this reason, analysing how climate policy is framed and interpreted in public debate, especially within social media environments, constitutes an important step toward understanding patterns of support and opposition to climate action in Poland and across the European Union and their risks and social consequences.

Mediatisation, media logic and social media dynamics: emotions and polarisation

In contemporary societies, media no longer operate merely as intermediaries transmitting information about external reality. Instead, they increasingly constitute a social environment in which reality is framed and interpreted, shaping what becomes visible and relevant. This shift is captured by the concept of mediatisation, a theoretical framework that has been discussed in scholarship for over three decades, first gaining prominence in the study of political communication (Asp, 1986).

The notion of mediatisation initially emerged as a way to describe how political actors and institutions gradually adapted to the "logic of the media," adjusting their communication strategies, public performances, and sometimes even decision-making patterns in order to align with dominant media formats and attention structures. Over time, this analytical lens expanded beyond politics to include a wide range of social domains, while consistently emphasising the long-term impact of media logic on institutional behaviour and social practices (Schulz, 2004).

Although mediatisation is sometimes treated as a relatively new concept in academic debate, it should be remembered that it is often described as a meta-process, comparable to globalisation, industrialisation, or commercialisation. Mediatisation does not reflect a short-term trend; rather, it refers to broad and long-term societal transformations. As Krotz argues, mediatisation concerns the process of the "(inter) penetration, integration, saturation, and even colonisation of socio-cultural life" by media in its various dimensions (Krotz, 2007).

Over the past two decades, the concept has been applied in multiple research contexts, including the mediatisation of society (Mazzoleni, 2008; Hjarvard, 2008), the mediatisation of politics (Mazzoleni, 2008), the mediatisation of language (Hjarvard, 2007), the mediatisation of climate change (Mormont & Dasnoy, 1995), and the mediatisation of consumption (Jansson, 2002). However, many of these studies were conducted in media environments that existed before the emergence of social media platforms. Since then, the contemporary media ecosystem has been reshaped by the rapid expansion of networked platforms, which have altered both the speed and, above all, the scale of information circulation. These developments have also contributed to changes in communication styles and the structure of target audiences.

Trends in the diffusion of internet and social media use in Poland, as well as their increasing role in public life, are confirmed by the recurring DataReportal *Digital in Poland* reports, which track changes in user numbers and patterns of platform use over time. At the beginning of 2025, approximately 34.5 million people in Poland were using the internet, corresponding to an online penetration rate of 89.8%, while the country had an estimated 29.0 million social media user identities, equal to 75.6% of the total population (Kemp, 2025).

The growing importance of social media platforms in Poland was already visible in the early 2010s and was documented in industry reports examining the development of the social media market (Internet Standard, 2010). This major shift in media communication can be linked to the moment when Facebook gained widespread popularity and became a key platform for social interaction, self-expression, and everyday information exchange. According to data from the PBI/Gemius Megapanel, this happened in September 2011 (PBI & Gemius, 2011). Initially used primarily to maintain contact with friends and share personal experiences, social platforms gradually evolved into spaces of political communication and public debate. Subsequent developments included the growing relevance of Instagram as a visually oriented platform and the increasing normalisation of paid advertising and targeted content distribution, which contributed to the greater commercialisation of social media and more strategic management of content visibility.

A further transformation emerged with the rising dominance of short-form video formats, particularly through TikTok and the expansion of "reels" across multiple platforms. "If Instagram was like a photo magazine, TikTok is already a full-scale amusement park" (Kwak, 2025). This shift marked a renewed convergence between social media and television-like logic: algorithmic systems increasingly curate the content users encounter at any given moment, shaping coherent and engaging streams tailored to user attention and preferences. While television relied on editorial producers to design programming schedules, contemporary platforms depend on algorithmic recommendation systems that govern visibility and structure information exposure.

Such systems are commonly associated with the creation of so-called echo chambers. They result from social network homophily and algorithmic filtering, which limit the range of information sources individual users encounter, shielding them from content that challenges their views and encouraging the adoption of more extreme positions (Kitchens et al., 2020). It should be noted, however, that research on echo

chambers is still ongoing, and findings remain inconclusive, making it difficult to determine the exact scale of echo chambers and their overall impact on users. Nevertheless, the attention-driven dynamics of social media tend to favour emotionally charged, simplified, or conflict-oriented messages. As a consequence, online political communication may contribute to increasing polarisation, as users increasingly split into opposing camps that share fewer common reference points and struggle to sustain dialogue across political divides. In their systematic literature review, Emily Kubin and Christian von Sikorski consistently find that pro-attitudinal media exacerbate polarisation (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

A study conducted by Smitha Milli, Micah Carroll, Yike Wang, Sashrika Pandey, Sebastian Zhao, and Anca D. Dragan demonstrates that Twitter's engagement-based ranking algorithm amplifies emotionally charged, hostile content about outgroups, which users report as worsening their attitudes toward political groups outside their own (Milli et al., 2025). In such an environment, hostile forms of communication, including hate speech, may become more visible and increasingly normalised, especially when engagement metrics rise alongside escalating conflict and outrage. Higher levels of user interaction, including comments, reactions, and shares, become the mechanism through which content reaches wider audiences, reinforcing divisive narratives and accelerating their circulation.

In this way, through algorithmic work, emotionally resonant content, and the reinforcement of polarisation, social media platforms not only describe political and social reality but also shape how it is perceived and evaluated. They influence what attracts attention, which topics are framed as urgent, and how responsibility is attributed to events. These processes may distort public perceptions and contribute to shifts in public opinion, creating fertile ground for the spread of misleading or manipulative information. A particularly critical challenge within this mediatised environment is the growing prevalence of disinformation, which constitutes an important mechanism through which public understandings of climate policy can become contested and destabilised. Despite the significant contribution of this research, many analyses of mediatisation were developed within the context of earlier media environments and do not fully account for the scale, speed and algorithmic structure of contemporary social media platforms. Given the rapid pace of changing narratives and the evolution of social media environments themselves, mapping and analysing narratives is vitally important in order to understand the direction of these changes. in strategically shaping narratives within these environments remains insufficiently theorised.

Disinformation and its role in shaping climate policy perceptions

As described in the previous chapter, processes of mediatisation contribute to the increasing importance of mediated communication in how reality is perceived and interpreted. When media ecosystems become saturated with false or misleading content, the public understanding of reality can become deeply distorted, particularly in areas that require trust in expertise and complex policy knowledge, such as climate policy.

In this context, Cook argues that addressing the polarisation of public opinion on climate change requires recognising polarisation and, crucially, confronting its underlying causes (Cook, 2019). According to Cook, one of the most important drivers of climate polarisation has been decades-long ideological disinformation campaigns designed to undermine public trust in climate science and delay political action.

Wachowicz defines disinformation as a mechanism to obtain financial and political benefits, creating chaos within a given community, and promoting the desired end result of the party using disinformation (Wachowicz, 2019). Wenzel and Stasiuk-Krajewska emphasise that disinformation is typically defined through two dimensions: truth and intent (Wenzel & Stasiuk-Krajewska, 2024). From this perspective, disinformation can be understood as a strategic, long-term process of spreading false information with the aim of misleading audiences and achieving tangible benefits: political, economic, or ideological.

One of the most widely discussed examples of climate-related disinformation campaigns concerns the actions of ExxonMobil, described in the 2007 report *Smoke, Mirror and Hot Air* by the Union of Concerned Scientists. In 1998, ExxonMobil established the Global Climate Science Team and began purchasing extensive advertising space in major newspapers, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, in order to disseminate climate-related disinformation. One published advertisement, titled *Unsettled Science*, claimed that observed global warming was part of a natural cycle. Another advertisement, published in *The New York Times*, sought to undermine the credibility of scientists by questioning their ability to forecast climate change decades in advance.

In contemporary information environments, disinformation does not spread exclusively through mass media or recognisable tabloids. Already in 2013, the World Economic Forum, within its assessment of global risks, identified one major threat as "Digital Wildfires in a Hyper-connected World" (World Economic Forum, 2013). This phenomenon refers to the rapid circulation of misleading information online, especially via social media, and highlights its "serious consequences" and its potential to "cause major disruption in the real world" (World Economic Forum, 2013)

A growing body of research suggests that climate-related disinformation misleads the public, contributes to political apathy, and weakens support for mitigation-oriented climate policies or may even lead to their rejection (Brulle, 2018; Cook et al., 2018; Ding et al., 2011; van der Linden et al., 2017). Importantly, individual disinformation claims circulating online can connect and accumulate into coherent negative narratives about climate policy.

It should be emphasised that negative narratives about climate policy are not necessarily entirely false and this approach was adopted for the purposes of empirical study. In many cases, they concern socially sensitive and contested issues and may be based on real events or actual policy measures. However, they often frame these developments selectively, emphasising particular aspects in ways that amplify doubt or perceptions of unfairness. Also, same mechanism can be adopted by actors spreading disinformation who may strategically use real-world events, public statements, or excerpts from legislative documents as "grains of truth" within misleading messaging, particularly through techniques such as cherry-picking.

Such strategies can also involve amplifying selective elements of climate policy that are difficult to understand or do not constitute central components of policymaking yet are effective in triggering public frustration and symbolic resistance. A relevant example is the EU Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Directive, implemented in Poland, which requires that from July 1, 2024 plastic caps on beverage bottles of up to 3 litres must remain attached to the packaging. While the directive is real and aims to reduce plastic waste entering the environment, especially oceans, by preventing the loss of small plastic components, media coverage and public discussions around it were often dominated by negative framing. Some outlets labelled the regulation as the "cap scandal" and used it as a symbol of EU bureaucracy. Critics questioned why such changes were introduced instead of addressing "more serious" challenges, framing the policy as unnecessary interference in everyday life.

For these reasons, the present article focuses on negative narratives about climate policy, rather than solely on discrete disinformation claims. Narratives tend to circulate longer in the media environment than individual statements and may, therefore, exert a stronger influence on public opinion formation and the social legitimacy of climate policy**.** Previous research of Polish media sphere in this domain has often focused on individual false claims or specific social media platforms, rather than on the broader narrative structures that give these analyses coherence and allow for a better understanding of their evolution over time. The analysis must go beyond examining individual claims, as understanding the public perception of climate policy depends on analysing narrative structures.

Narratives and delegitimisation of climate policy

Narrative theory has a long-standing research tradition spanning several decades, during which both its analytical scope and its object of inquiry have evolved. In contemporary science, narratives are no longer treated exclusively as a literary category but have become a key concept in philosophy and the social sciences (Rosner, 1999). Rosner traces this conceptual shift by describing the move from structuralist analyses of plot and function, initiated, among others, by Vladimir Propp, toward an understanding of narrative as a fundamental structure through which people make sense of reality. In this perspective, narrative serves as a tool for organising experience in time and for constructing individual identity in late-modern social conditions (Rosner, 1999).

In public and media discourse, however, the term "narrative" is often used in a more pragmatic sense. It is understood as a repertoire of arguments, a widely shared set of interpretive schemas, or a matrix of collective imagination that helps audiences attribute meaning, responsibility, and causality to social and political events (Franczak, 2018). In practice, the term is frequently used interchangeably with "story", but it also increasingly functions as an instrument of political struggle, often as a rhetorical label or accusation (e.g., references to a "deceptive narrative of those in power"). Public actors accuse their opponents of "aligning with a narrative" perceived as illegitimate or problematic, or of "constructing false narratives" about the state, society, or

international developments. Political commentators likewise examine the "narratives" promoted by particular parties as a foundation of their communicative strategies and ideological positioning (Franczak, 2018).

In recent years, narrative approaches have also gained prominence in climate communication research, where scholars seek to understand how climate-related stories and interpretive frames shape public meaning-making and policy contestation. Researchers increasingly employ advanced methodological tools, including qualitative content analysis and machine learning techniques, to examine how climate narratives influence public interpretations of responsibility, fairness, and feasibility in climate governance. For instance, an analysis of large-scale discourse on the platform X indicates that narratives portraying the US government as a "villain" have gained visibility, while corporations have been increasingly framed as "heroes" taking action on climate change (Gehring & Grigoletto, 2023).

In the Polish context, narrative analyses of parliamentary climate debates likewise reveal recurring interpretive patterns. Based on an analysis of Sejm debates between 2015 and 2020, Biedenkopf identifies three dominant narrative axes: claims that Poland is in a "special situation" requiring exceptional treatment; or that it is following an "alternative pathway" grounded in coal-based energy and forest resources; and framings in which climate policy is portrayed as a threat to national competitiveness (Biedenkopf, 2021).

Similar dynamics have also been identified in other Central and Eastern European countries. Research conducted in Czechia and Slovakia on narratives surrounding the European Green Deal indicates that climate policy is frequently framed through concerns related to economic costs, perceptions of Germany as responsible for the severity of the energy crisis, threats to Czech self-sufficiency, and distrust toward EU institutions (Mindeková, 2023).

Taken together, findings from different national and regional contexts demonstrate that narratives operate as a key mechanism through which climate policy is interpreted, particularly in terms of justice, national interest, institutional trust, and perceived legitimacy. This is especially relevant from a social policy perspective, as climate policy is increasingly entangled with questions of inequality, protection against social risks, and the social acceptability of regulatory change. In this article, the analytical focus on social media narratives enables the identification of dominant narratives through which climate policy is framed as socially and politically problematic. By examining these narratives, the study contributes to understanding how climate policy is largely structured around classical welfare state domains and its implications for the future of social policy.

Methodology

Research aim and data collection

The study aimed to identify and analyse negative narratives about climate policy in the Polish-language social media environment and to assess their potential societal

implications. Content analysis was selected as the primary method, as it allows for the systematic examination of communication through relatively objective identification and extraction of formal or content-related elements, as well as estimating their occurrence and supporting comparative inference, which enables the exploration of broader determinants and conditions of the communication process (Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2004). In the first step, the study focused on identifying recurring negative and, in some cases, disinformation-related claims about climate policy. In the next step, claims were clustered into broader narrative frames used to delegitimise climate policy.

The research was conducted using Gerulata Juno, a digital platform designed for monitoring, classification, and analysis of media narratives (Gerulata, 2025). The platform enabled the collection and filtering of large volumes of content and supported both exploratory and structured approaches to content analysis. In particular, it made it possible to combine qualitative analysis of social media posts with scalable, tool-assisted monitoring of thematic trends over time.

The dataset was built using content monitored across multiple platforms supported by Gerulata Juno. These included Facebook posts, Facebook group posts, Instagram posts, Reddit posts, Telegram channel posts, Telegram messages, TikTok videos, VKontakte posts, web feed articles, website articles, X posts, and YouTube videos.

At the time of the study, the platform stored tens of thousands of sources under active monitoring, with several thousand additional sources available but not continuously tracked. Poland remained among the countries with the highest level of source coverage within the active monitoring framework.

Gerulata Juno operates on a crowdsourcing model, meaning that once a user adds a new channel or account for monitoring, content from that source becomes accessible to other platform users. This structure supported flexible and adaptive monitoring, allowing users to actively expand the pool of sources across platforms depending on the needs of a given research design.

The platform enabled content retrieval through advanced search functions, including logical queries based on Boolean operators such as AND and OR. This functionality made it possible to capture both broad discussions about climate policy and more specific disinformation-related claims by combining general keywords with phrases characteristic of particular claims.

Exploratory analysis and time frame selection

The first stage consisted of an exploratory scan of climate-policy-related content published across monitored channels. A broad set of general keywords was applied to capture the widest possible range of discussions about climate policy. The initial keyword list included phrases such as “Green Deal”, “Fit for 55”, “energy transition”, “climate policy” and other terms frequently used in public debate.

To determine the time frame for analysis, Gerulata Juno was used to generate a heat map visualising the intensity of published posts over time. Based on this output, the study selected the period characterised by the highest narrative intensity: from February 20, 2024 to May 18, 2025. The starting date corresponded with the farmers’

protests in Poland, while the end date corresponded with the presidential election day in Poland.

The time frame selection was guided by three main considerations. First, it covered a period of heightened socio-political and media salience, during which climate policy was repeatedly framed as a source of social conflict and economic pressure. Second, it ensured sufficient topical proximity to everyday social concerns present in public debate, such as inequality and rising cost-of-living pressures. Third, it allowed the study to capture how concrete real-world developments shaped the emergence and amplification of negative narratives, especially in moments when climate-related policies were linked to social grievances and expectations of public intervention.

Qualitative content analysis

After the exploratory phase, the keyword list was systematically expanded. The refinement process was based on the actual language observed in social media content, including colloquial expressions and formulations used by online users, rather than relying exclusively on expert terminology. The final keyword list was stored in the Gerulata Juno system and applied in all subsequent queries and data extraction procedures.

To focus the analysis on the most influential and persistent sources of negative and disinformation-related claims about climate policy, a list of 253 source accounts was compiled. These accounts met at least one of the following criteria: they had been previously identified in external reports as connected to disinformation narratives; they published a large volume of climate-related content during the analysed period; or they represented actor types particularly active in shaping public debate, including politicians, journalists, and media outlets.

The accounts were also analysed in terms of their connectivity to other disinformation channels through upstream and downstream amplification patterns. These relationships were assessed using account relationship graphs available on the Gerulata Juno platform.

Based on the refined keyword list and the identified account set, a detailed review of posts published within the selected time frame was conducted. The final dataset consisted of 9,692 posts.

After compiling the full corpus, an inductive qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify recurring claims and develop a coherent coding system. The goal of this phase was to capture the dominant ways in which climate policy was presented as problematic in the analysed material. The selection of narrative categories and claims was not arbitrary but grounded in the theoretical framework. In particular, the analytical focus on narratives draws on literature emphasising the role of interpretive frames in shaping public understanding of complex policy issues (Franczak, 2018; Rosner, 1999), as well as research on the social dimensions of climate policy and its links to inequality, distributional conflict, and welfare-state dynamics (Gough, 2013; Markkanen & Anger-Kraavi, 2019). Moreover, the emphasis on mediated communication reflects insights from mediatisation theory, which highlights the role of media logic in structuring public discourse (Krotz, 2007; Schulz, 2004).

Consequently, the coding framework was designed to capture recurring narrative patterns through which climate policy is framed as socially and politically problematic, through classic welfare-state domains, including income maintenance and social security, health care, personal social services, education and training, employment, and housing (Bochel & Daly, 2021). These dimensions correspond to key areas identified in the literature as central to the societal interpretation and contestation of climate policy.

The identification of claims was performed iteratively. Posts were analysed to detect recurring semantic patterns and similarities in the construction of arguments or interpretive frames that delegitimised EU and national climate policies. Individual claims were defined as distinct, recurring statements expressing specific criticisms or consequences attributed to climate policy. Claims were recorded when they appeared repeatedly across different profiles and platforms and when they served a similar delegitimising function, even if couched in different linguistic forms.

In the initial round of coding, 48 recurring claims were identified and documented with representative quotes. These statements were then grouped into broader narrative categories based on thematic similarity and the type of social concerns they evoked (e.g., threats to economic stability and of ideological nature, interference with autonomy). This process resulted in the identification of 12 overarching negative narrative categories that constituted the initial version of taxonomy.

Quantitative content analysis and classification procedure

At this stage of analysis, we utilised a local LLM-powered automation that allowed systematic identification and classification of climate-policy-related disinformation on the whole corpus of 9,692 posts. The automated procedure consisted of two main stages. First, each unit of content (post) was assessed in order to determine whether it concerned climate policy. At this stage, the language model evaluated whether the post included references to the climate policy of Poland or the European Union. Posts that did not contain climate-policy-related content were excluded from further analysis. Second, for entries classified as climate-related, the language model was used to conduct a multidimensional analysis aimed at capturing message meaning, narrative framing, and thematic categorisation.

For each climate-policy-related post, the script generated a short description limited to 10 words, intended to summarise the core meaning of the entry with particular attention to disinformation logic. Additionally, the script extracted up to five keywords from each post, selected to reflect the most salient concepts and references present in the text, including vocabulary associated with climate policy, the energy transition, and EU directives and regulations. Each post was then assigned to one of 12 predefined narrative categories (see: the previous section) related to the European Green Deal.

The language model used in the process of automated analysis was Gemma 3:12B, run locally via an Ollama server. The model was configured with a temperature value of 0.0 to enhance output stability and ensure greater consistency across the dataset. The script processed text collected from two input fields in the input database: the

"Title & Body" column containing the main textual content, and the "Media Text" column containing additional text extracted from embedded media. Prior to analysis, both fields were combined into a single input string to preserve the semantic context. The model returned outputs in a structured JSON format and included a binary indicator specifying whether the post contained climate content, along with the message description, extracted keywords, and narrative category. Posts that did not match any predefined narrative were classified as "other".

A number of reliability and quality-control mechanisms were included in the automated workflow. The script verified the presence of required columns in the input file, checked whether model outputs followed the expected JSON format, and handled cases in which the model generated missing or unexpected values. The script also included automated start and stop routines for the Ollama server to ensure stable processing. The automated approach was intentionally constrained in order to generate standardised and comparable outputs across posts. Message descriptions were limited to 10 words, and keyword extraction was limited to five terms per entry. Classification was further constrained by the use of predefined narrative taxonomies. The final output was saved as an Excel file containing the original content and additional analytical columns.

A validation stage was conducted to assess the quality of automated classification. Narrative assignments were largely accurate, as the model consistently captured the sense and intended meaning of the messages. The procedure was conducted in several iterations. Posts initially classified as "other" were qualitatively reviewed by researcher to assess whether they reflected genuinely residual content or indicated missing categories. This process led to the identification of additional recurring claims and the refinement of narrative boundaries. As a result, the final taxonomy was extended to 54 claims grouped into 13 narrative categories. At this point, the procedure of automatic analysis was repeated with updated list of claims and categories. The iterative process was concluded once analytical saturation was reached, that is, when further review did not yield substantively new narrative frames but only repetitions of existing ones. Ultimately, only 302 posts were not assigned to any narrative. A further review of unassigned posts showed that most of them consisted of general political attacks rather than content directly related to climate policy.

Finally, a quantitative analysis was conducted by counting the number of views generated by posts assigned to each narrative category within the dataset of 9,692 posts. This made it possible to identify the narratives with the greatest visibility and potentially the strongest societal impact within the monitored corpus. Based on this metric, a ranked list of dominant narratives was produced.

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Results

The dataset consisted of a sample of 9,656 Polish-language social media posts published between February 20, 2024 and May 18, 2025, which were assigned to 13 narrative

categories. Narrative visibility was assessed quantitatively using the aggregated "view" values associated with posts classified within each narrative category. This indicator was treated as an approximate measure of narrative exposure within the analysed corpus, rather than as an objective measurement of actual reach across the broader social media ecosystem. It should be emphasised that these data serve an indicative purpose and are primarily intended for relative comparisons between narratives within the study sample, rather than for comparisons across different studies.

Table 1 presents the full ranking of the 13 narrative categories ordered by overall visibility. The resulting ranking suggests that delegitimising discourse surrounding climate policy concentrated around a limited number of dominant interpretive frames, while the remaining narratives achieved comparatively lower visibility. Throughout the narrative labels, the term European Green Deal is consistently used, as it frequently appears in user-generated social media content as a shorthand reference for a broader set of EU- and Poland-level climate policy measures. Using this term in the final narrative framework also supported semantic consistency during automated clustering and classification. However, as noted in the theoretical and methodological sections, the underlying keyword set and data retrieval strategy covered a wider range of climate-policy-related terms and regulatory frameworks, including both EU-level policies and national climate and energy policy instruments, rather than being limited solely to the European Green Deal.Top of Form

Table 1. Ranking of climate policy-related negative narratives by total visibility (views) in the analysed corpus (N = 9,656)

Rank	Narrative category	Views
1.	The European Green Deal as a threat to the economy, industry, and the labour market	108,791,572
2.	The European Green Deal as a harmful left-wing ideology	80,494,987
3.	The European Green Deal as a driver of a rapid increase in the cost of living	48,226,648
4.	The European Green Deal as a set of absurd and oppressive regulations	15,185,598
5.	The European Green Deal as a threat to agriculture and traditional food production	12,440,687
6.	The European Green Deal as weakening the European Union in favour of third countries	11,653,130
7.	The European Green Deal as a threat to individual freedom and property rights	6,563,359
8.	The European Green Deal as a threat to national security	2,323,669
9.	The European Green Deal as a tool of global elites aimed at controlling ordinary citizens	2,065,513
10.	The European Green Deal as a threat to infrastructure and its reliability	1,041,493
11.	The European Green Deal as a mechanism for enriching "green business"	896,927
12.	The European Green Deal as ineffective and having no impact on the climate	562,835
13.	The European Green Deal as promoting inefficient energy technologies	418,740

As shown in Table 1, the highest visibility was achieved by the narrative framing the European Green Deal as a threat to the economy, industry, and the labour market (108,791,572 views). The next most visible narratives portrayed the Green Deal as a harmful left-wing ideology (80,494,987) and as a driver of a rapid increase in the cost of living (48,226,648). High visibility was also observed for narratives pointing to allegedly absurd and oppressive regulations (15,185,598) and to threats to agriculture and traditional food production (12,440,687).

Further positions in the ranking included interpretive frames referring, among others, to the weakening of the European Union in favour of third countries, threats to individual freedom and property rights, national security concerns, and the control of citizens by global elites. The lowest visibility was recorded for narratives suggesting that the Green Deal promotes inefficient energy technologies (418,740) and that climate policy is ineffective (562,835).

Table 2 and Table 3 presents selected examples of recurring claims and excerpts from posts within the five most visible narratives. These examples demonstrate that debates on climate policy were often translated into simplified and highly emotionally charged messages emphasising conflict, threat, or injustice, thereby shaping the interpretive environment in which climate policy is socially evaluated.

Table 2. Selected recurring claims from posts across the five most visible narrative categories

Narrative category	Recurring claim (statement)
The European Green Deal as a threat to the economy, industry, and the labour market	The European Green Deal causes bankruptcies of Polish businesses
	Climate regulations lead to rising unemployment
The European Green Deal as a harmful left-wing ideology	The European Green Deal is based on ideology rather than science
	EU climate funds are used to support left-wing NGOs
The European Green Deal as a driver of a rapid increase in the cost of living	Climate policy drives price increases and higher household bills
	Climate policy costs are framed as a loss of ordinary people's private money
The European Green Deal as a set of absurd and oppressive regulations	Climate policy bans the use of gas stoves
	The EU will force citizens to eat insects under the European Green Deal
The European Green Deal as a threat to agriculture and traditional food production	The European Green Deal aims to replace traditional food with synthetic products
	The European Green Deal will lead to food shortages

Table 3. Selected illustrative excerpts from posts across the five most visible narrative categories

Narrative category	Illustrative post excerpt (translated quote)
The European Green Deal as a threat to the economy, industry, and the labour market	*"We need to reject the European Green Deal because the European Green Deal is bringing the Polish business down".*
	"Two thousand people will lose their jobs because of the European Green Deal".
The European Green Deal as a harmful left-wing ideology	*"In the name of a new religion, the European Green Deal".*
	"To fund left-wing non-governmental organisations! The goal of these actions was to defend the European Green Deal and silence European right-wing forces as part of a secret influence operation".
The European Green Deal as a driver of a rapid increase in the cost of living	*"I was at the store today to buy a few basic products and I spent almost 100 PLN! Politicians are responsible for everything getting more expensive! We need to make sure the European Green Deal gets rejected!".*
	"The state – you also added your own huge money to this, money that you could have spent on holidays if they didn't make you pay, often you don't even know that you're paying for it, simply for all these green stupidities, it's your enormous work".
The European Green Deal as a set of absurd and oppressive regulations	*"Just wait until they raise the tax on having gas stoves and blinds on the windows – you own a home, but you'll be banned from smoking on the balcony or terrace".*
	"And yet the EU says we will be eating bugs already, they are showing that they want to shut down those barns because the cow has warmth or something else, holding it".
The European Green Deal as a threat to agriculture and traditional food production	*"The European Green Deal is aimed at eliminating family farms and food grown in soil and replacing it with synthetic laboratory food".*
	"The European Green Deal means hunger and flooded fields".

The excerpts are translated from original Polish-language posts and retain the informal style and linguistic characteristics of user-generated social media content. Overall, the most visible narratives consistently framed climate policy in terms of economic insecurity, distributive injustice, and broader social and political threats, such as food security, suggesting that societal contestation over climate policy is shaped primarily by its perceived everyday consequences.

To further interpret the societal significance of the identified narratives, the dominant frames were analytically mapped onto classical welfare-state domains discussed in the theoretical framework. This allows for a more systematic assessment of how climate policy contestation extends beyond environmental issues and becomes embedded in

broader concerns related to social protection, employment, housing, institutional legitimacy, and everyday economic security. Table 4 presents the relationship between the dominant 5 narratives and the principal welfare-state domains they mobilise.

Table 4. Dominant narratives mapped onto main domains

Narrative category	Main domain	Secondary domain	Social policy concern
Green Deal as a cost-of-living increase	Income maintenance and social security	Housing	Household budgets, energy poverty
Green Deal as a threat to economy/labour market	Employment	Income security	Job loss, livelihoods
Green Deal as oppressive regulations	Housing / public intervention	Legitimacy of public intervention	Autonomy, state intervention
Green Deal as a threat to agriculture/food	Income security	Employment	Rural livelihoods, food security
Green Deal as a left-wing ideology	Legitimacy of public intervention	Institutional trust	Polarisation, distrust

While Table 4 demonstrates the substantive social-policy areas through which climate policy is contested, the analysed material also reveals recurring mechanisms through which these narratives delegitimise climate action in public discourse. Beyond the specific thematic content of individual narratives, similar rhetorical and interpretive strategies repeatedly appeared across the corpus. Table 5 summarises the principal delegitimisation mechanisms identified in the analysed material, the ways in which they operate, and their potential societal implications.

Table 5. Main delegitimisation mechanisms in dominant narratives

Delegitimisation mechanism	How it operates	Narratives where it appears	Potential societal implication
Economic threat framing	Presents climate policy as causing costs, inflation, unemployment	Narratives 1, 3, 5, 13	Lower acceptance of transition costs
Injustice framing	Suggests costs fall on ordinary citizens	Narratives 11, 12	Perceived distributive injustice
Coercion/control framing	Frames regulation as state/EU oppression	Narratives 4, 7, 9	Distrust in institutions
Cultural threat framing	Presents climate policy as attack on tradition/normality	Narratives 2, 5	Polarisation and identity conflict
Sovereignty/external imposition framing	Presents EU policy as imposed by distant actors	Narratives 6, 8, 10	Resistance to EU/ national climate policy

The analysis presented in Table 5 demonstrates that negative climate-policy narratives circulating on social media create coherent interpretive frameworks that portray climate action primarily as an economic threat, a social injustice, a form of political coercion, a cultural threat, and a threat to national sovereignty. The repeated occurrence of delegitimisation mechanisms across different narratives indicates that conflicts surrounding climate policy concern not only specific policy measures, but also broader struggles over public trust, the distribution of resources, and the role of the state in conditions of social change. In the long term, this phenomenon is particularly dangerous, as it is not merely about undermining individual regulations. Once a specific public policy becomes part of a political and communicative struggle in which elements of the welfare state are challenged, the long-term consequence may be a decline in citizens' trust in state institutions and their mechanisms of operation. Such a loss of trust is extremely difficult to rebuild in a short term.

Discussion

To structure the discussion from a social policy perspective, the societal implications of dominant climate-policy, narratives are interpreted through classic welfare-state domains, including income maintenance and social security, health care, personal social services, education and training, employment, and housing (Bochel & Daly, 2021).

As shown in Table 4, the most visible narratives framed climate policy primarily through welfare-state domains related to (1) income maintenance and social security, (2) employment, and (3) housing, while other domains such as health care, education and training, and personal social services were less salient. This indicates that contestation over climate policy rarely remained limited to technical or strictly environmental considerations, but instead focused on its perceived consequences for the everyday socioeconomic realities of households. At the same time, the qualitative examples presented in Table 2 and 3 suggest that some narratives extended beyond economic and social risks and were framed as opposition to regulation and state intervention as such. From a social policy perspective, this is particularly significant, as such narratives may weaken public acceptance not only for climate action, but also for broader instruments of public policy based on redistribution, social protection, and compensatory measures aimed at cushioning the social costs of transition.

One of the dominant frames strongly emphasized a narrative portraying climate policy as a harmful left-wing ideology, which shifted the debate from the level of public policy instruments to the level of an axiological conflict. Within this framing, the European Green Deal was criticised as economically costly and also as a project perceived to threaten social "normality" and the traditional social order, thereby activating dynamics of polarisation and antagonisation.

In the following subsections, these implications are discussed in greater detail by interpreting the dominant narratives in relation to the three most salient social policy domains, as well as the broader issue of the legitimacy of public intervention.

Income maintenance and social security

The most visible narratives are linked to the welfare-state domain of income maintenance and social security by framing climate policy as a direct source of financial loss for "ordinary citizens". Within this perspective, the European Green Deal and related regulatory instruments were presented as mechanisms driving rising prices of goods and services, higher household bills, including increased energy costs, and an overall deterioration of household material conditions. It should also be emphasised that even if certain climate-policy instruments may temporarily contribute to higher energy costs, their long-term objective is to accelerate the transition toward cheaper and more stable sources of energy, thereby reducing households' exposure to future price shocks. Negative narratives, however, tend to privilege short-term cost framings and reinforce short-sighted evaluations of public policy, which may undermine public acceptance for reforms that are designed to deliver substantial benefits in the longer run.

In addition, portraying climate policy as a threat to traditional agriculture highlighted the risk of income loss and even the collapse of the agricultural sector, while at the same time linking climate regulations to broader concerns such as food security. From a social policy perspective, this implies that climate transition is framed not as a protective response to long-term environmental risk, but primarily as a threat to economic security. As a result, the public may reject the trade-offs necessary for effective transition due to perceptions of injustice, stemming from the shifting of costs onto economically more vulnerable groups and concerns about the stability of their material conditions. Moreover, such framing encourages a negative perception of the state as an actor that intervenes in market dynamics, imposes additional financial burdens, and simultaneously fails to develop adequate compensatory and protective instruments. This may further contribute to the erosion of institutional trust and deepen the legitimacy crisis surrounding climate reforms.

Beyond the economic context described above, these narratives also reveal a broader problem in how the dilemma between long-term collective benefits and short-term risks at the level of individual households is presented and perceived. Climate policy is often framed through anecdotal experiences related to rising prices and increasing financial burdens, while at the same time the benefits resulting from the energy transition remain temporally distant, difficult to understand, and less visible within public discourse.

The literature also points to a strong relationship between feelings of fear and vulnerability to disinformation or misleading content (Pan et al., 2021). If individuals perceive their economic situation as unstable and feel highly sensitive to price increases, they are more likely to listen to and believe narratives that directly address these concerns. As a result, narratives emphasising immediate financial losses have a greater chance of gaining visibility and public resonance than those referring to avoided future costs or to the more abstract concept of long-term societal resilience. This may contribute to an asymmetry in public debate, in which the short-term distributive costs of the energy transition become exaggerated, while its future savings and long-term benefits remain underrepresented.

Employment

The second salient category within the dominant narratives concerned employment, the labour market, and broader economic stability. In the analysed corpus, climate policy was frequently portrayed as a source of constraints on economic activity, ultimately leading to business closures and rising unemployment, and thus as a direct threat to workers and socio-economic stability.

Such messages delegitimise climate action by mobilising a particularly socially sensitive issue, namely, "the risk of losing one's job" and source of livelihood, by presenting it as a real and unavoidable cost of transition. From a social policy perspective, this constitutes a significant risk, as it may contribute to increasing poverty exposure, widening social inequalities, and deepening exclusion, thereby raising demand for public benefits and social services.

Although job losses, especially in sectors directly linked to fossil fuel processing, such as mining, may indeed be a real consequence of transition, the high visibility of narratives emphasising employment threats can strengthen public opposition and hinder the formulation of policies that simultaneously address mitigation and adaptation goals while ensuring just transition conditions for groups most vulnerable to the costs of transformation**.**

What is also worth emphasising is that employment-related narratives may be particularly influential in regions that are economically dependent on carbon-intensive sectors. In such places, the energy transition is not perceived as a response to the climate crisis, but rather as a threat to local traditions, the continuity of occupations known for generations, and overall stability. In these regions, narratives about job losses may function as expressions of fears connected to declining socio-economic security. Therefore, resistance to climate policy should not be interpreted solely as opposition to pro-environmental regulations, but also as a reaction to underlying uncertainties regarding the future of employment and the preservation of local traditions.

Housing

The third classic welfare-state domain, particularly salient in the qualitative examples, concerned housing and the material security associated with owning and using property. Within the analysed narratives, climate policy was linked to a vision of imposed regulations regarding building standards and energy requirements, whose non-compliance was allegedly portrayed as potentially leading even to the loss of property rights. Such framing touches on a highly emotional and socially sensitive area, as housing constitutes one of the fundamental goods underpinning life stability and a sense of security.

From a social policy perspective, delegitimising climate policy through references to housing may reinforce concerns about the need to bear high modernisation costs, misunderstandings of the objectives and underlying logic of regulations in this domain, and the belief that climate transition entails interference in the most private spheres of everyday life. This issue is particularly sensitive in Central and Eastern Europe, where historical experiences, such as war, forced displacement, and post-socialist restitution

processes, were associated with housing insecurity and remain present in collective memory.

Narratives of this kind may weaken public support for building renovation and thermal modernisation measures, which carry both climate and social potential (e.g., by reducing energy poverty). As a result, housing becomes one of the key arenas of social conflict surrounding climate policy, and the buildings directive is framed as an "expropriation directive" and a threat to the stability and autonomy of households.

The strong emotional charge associated with housing also illustrates how climate policy becomes perceived as a negative phenomenon when viewed through the lens of privacy and personal control over everyday life. Compared to abstract emissions, which cannot be seen with the naked eye, discussions concerning homes or property rights are more easily translated into the public imagination and intensify feelings of fear, which, as noted above, gives them greater persuasive potential. In this perspective, housing ceases to be merely an issue related to material goods and instead becomes a symbolic arena through which broader anxieties concerning sovereignty, state intervention, and loss of control are expressed. This may help explain why building-related regulations have become so highly visible in online debates compared to other, often more technically significant, dimensions of climate policy.

Opposition to regulation and public intervention

The analysed material not only revealed narratives that did not focus exclusively on economic costs, employment, or housing, but also expressed a more fundamental opposition to the idea of regulation and public intervention instead. Within the corpus, climate policy was sometimes portrayed as a purely ideological and oppressive project, or as a tool for controlling citizens and privileging elites, which reinforced the delegitimisation of public institutions' pro-climate actions.

From a social policy perspective, this constitutes a particularly serious challenge, as undermining the legitimacy and authority of the state to intervene weakens not only the capacity to implement climate policies, but may also have far-reaching consequences for the functioning of the welfare state. Such narratives undermine public acceptance of core social policy instruments, including redistribution, social protection, and compensatory measures designed to cushion the social costs of transition and prevent the deepening of inequalities.

As a result, these narratives may contribute to the erosion of institutional trust and to declining social legitimacy for state intervention, both in the context of transformation and in times of crisis. This, in turn, complicates the development of public policies that integrate environmental objectives with the minimisation of social costs, the protection of vulnerable groups, and the strengthening of social cohesion. More broadly, such narratives may weaken societal capacity to accept and sustain long-term, strategic, and complex policy mechanisms that span multiple domains of public policies simultaneously.

From a broader perspective, such narratives may also be interpreted as reflecting a transformation in the relationship between citizens, the scientific community, and public institutions. Climate policy often relies on technocratic knowledge. It is

connected with long-term actions and complex public policy instruments that cannot be tested under laboratory conditions before implementation. All of this may contribute to declining trust in pro-climate measures, particularly among groups characterised by low trust in public institutions, limited dialogue resulting from social polarisation, or environments where knowledge is not primarily acquired through formal education but through social media platforms, where algorithms tend to amplify controversial content rather than reliable and expert-based information.

The analysed narratives indicate that contestation of climate policy on social media is based less on disagreements concerning climate science itself and more on competing interpretations of social risk, fairness, and state legitimacy. This suggests that resistance to climate policy is becoming increasingly rooted in broader conflicts concerning redistribution, public intervention, and the future role of the welfare state. Consequently, climate-policy narratives become part of wider societal struggles over how the costs, responsibilities, and protective mechanisms associated with large-scale transformations should be distributed within modern societies.

Conclusion

This study examined how dominant negative narratives about climate policy circulating in the Polish-language social media environment frame climate action as socially and politically problematic, and what potential societal implications can be inferred from their visibility within the analysed corpus.

The findings of this study both confirm and extend existing research at the intersection of climate change and social policy. In line with earlier work emphasising the social consequences of climate transition (Gough, 2013; Markkanen & Anger-Kraavi, 2019), the results demonstrate that climate policy is increasingly interpreted through the lens of economic insecurity, inequality, and social protection. At the same time, the analysis advances this literature by showing how these concerns are not only structurally embedded, but also actively constructed and amplified through mediated narratives, particularly by non-state actors operating in digital environments. Furthermore, the findings resonate with emerging ecosocial policy perspectives (Hirvilammi et al., 2023), while also suggesting that the key challenge lies not only in designing socially just policies, but in maintaining their legitimacy in the face of narrative-driven contestation.

The findings indicate that the most visible narratives rarely challenged climate policy primarily on technical or environmental grounds. Instead, they constructed it as a direct threat to citizens' everyday lives and economic stability. Climate policy was consistently framed through the lens of high costs, distributive injustice, the risk of job losses, and perceived threats to living conditions and household autonomy. At the same time, some narratives went beyond material concerns and portrayed climate governance as an ideological, oppressive, or fundamentally illegitimate project, thereby expanding the conflict over climate policy into a broader debate about the role of public regulation and state intervention. The article contributes to research by demonstrating that online contestation over climate action is largely structured around classic welfare-state domains and thus overlaps with core areas of social policy concern.

Several limitations should be noted. First, while the dataset covers a large sample of social media content, it does not represent the full universe of climate-policy-related communication online. Therefore, visibility indicators should be treated as approximate and applicable primarily to internal comparisons within the analysed corpus, rather than as objective measures comparable across studies. Second, data collection relied on keyword-based logical queries, which entails an unavoidable risk of missing relevant content, retrieving false positives, or excluding posts in which meanings are expressed indirectly, ironically, or through informal and non-standard language. These limitations are characteristic of large-scale online content monitoring and highlight the importance of transparent reporting, iterative validation procedures, and methodological reflexivity. Last but not least, important limitation emerges from the use of LLM in the analytical algorithm. Large language models are inherently non-deterministic, meaning that identical inputs may produce varying outputs across runs, which poses challenges for scientific reproducibility even when using low temperature settings. This limitation is amplified when using smaller, locally-deployed models like Gemma 3:12B, which have reduced capacity for nuanced interpretation tasks such as detecting irony, sarcasm, or implicit disinformation narratives. Additionally, local deployment introduces further variability through differences in hardware configurations, software versions, and model quantisation levels, potentially compromising cross-study comparability.

Future research could extend this approach by conducting comparative analyses of climate-policy narratives across other European countries during the same period, which would enable the assessment of transnational similarities and the identification of frames specific to particular socio-political contexts. In addition, it would be valuable to examine audience exposure and acceptance of specific claims, e.g., by measuring how frequently respondents encountered selected statements and whether they consider them credible. This direction will be pursued in the next stage of the author's research project.

From a public policy perspective, the findings suggest that strengthening the social legitimacy of climate action requires not only communicating scientific evidence and environmental arguments, but also embedding communication in everyday social realities and designing visible compensatory instruments that address perceived fairness concerns, the distribution of costs, and the protection of households most exposed to transition-related risks. Equally important is sustained communication about the existence and purpose of such measures in order to reduce fear and negative emotions, and to gradually rebuild institutional trust and perceptions of the state's capacity to deliver a just transition.

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