

A Stronghold of Climate Change Denialism in Germany: Case Study of the Output and Press Representation of the Think Tank EIKE

JOSE A. MORENO¹

MIRA KINN

Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain

MARTA NARBERHAUS

Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain

Climate change denialist think tanks have played a major role in climate obstructionism in the United States, and we are beginning to learn that there are also certain European think tanks acting in line with their U.S. counterparts. In the case of Germany, although the most relevant climate think tanks are aligned with the scientific consensus, one denialist stronghold is represented by the Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie (EIKE). This research examines the communication frames that have been used by the think tank to build up a discourse of climate denial and delay, among which the attack on climate science stands out. In addition, this article analyzes press mentions of EIKE, concluding that the think tank's ideas have been critically received by the press. The urgency to act to mitigate the climate crisis makes it necessary to identify obstructionist actors and discourses to counteract them in the media sphere.

Keywords: climate change denial, climate obstructionism, think tanks, framing, Germany

Climate change is a scientific topic that, when discussed in the public sphere, becomes politicized and subject to controversy, opinion, and interpretation. Science is clear on the anthropogenic cause of climate change that led us to a climate crisis requiring urgent action. Despite this, however, a so-called climate countermovement (CCM) has engaged in misleading the media, public opinion, and policy makers about the causes, consequences, and actions to be adopted about global warming (Boykoff & Farrell, 2020; Brulle, 2014; McKie, 2019). This CCM is comprised of neoliberal think tanks, polluting companies, lobbies, and conservative foundations, among others (Brulle, 2014). Specifically, think tanks have played a central

Jose A. Moreno: joseantonio.moreno@upf.edu

Mira Kinn: mira.kinn92@gmail.com

Marta Narberhaus: mnarberhaus@uic.es

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role in this opposition movement, as they distribute knowledge in this regard, something that Dieter Plehwe (2014) described as the *knowledge-interest nexus*.

Although providing a definition of a think tank is complex, they do share some defining features, such as being “non-profit, non-partisan organizations engaged in the study of public policy” (Abelson, 2018, p. 42). Two key activities that define them are knowledge generation and establishing a certain political stance. Think tanks market their ideas in the public sphere to influence the public, media, and political agendas. To achieve this, they use a wide range of strategies such as “relying on print, broadcast, and social media, distributing a range of publications to policy makers and journalists, inviting presidents and members of their administration to unveil new policy proposals at their institutes, and testifying before various legislative committees” (Abelson, 2018, p. 31). Thus, communication is an essential activity for think tanks.

Despite the capacity of think tanks to promote discourses favorable to Western elites on a global scale, the communicative aspect of these organizations has been less researched in academia (Almiron, 2017). In addition, there is far more knowledge available about the activity of climate contrarian think tanks in the United States than there is in Europe. One notable contribution on Europe in this respect is the work by Almiron, Boykoff, Narberhaus, and Heras (2020), who mapped the most prominent climate action contrarian think tanks in Europe and their discourses. The aim of this article is to take a more in-depth look at one of these, the Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie (EIKE), or, in English, the European Institute for Climate and Energy.

Climate Action Contrarian Think Tanks and Climate Change Communication

It is essential for public opinion to be aware of the urgency of facing the climate crisis. However, communicating climate change is an extremely complex issue that requires strategy, expertise, and creativity (Boykoff, 2011, p. 2019). Also, the climate movement has traditionally suffered from hypocognition, which George Lakoff (2010) defined as a lack of ideas, frameworks, and interpretations to communicate something and make it understandable. Though journalists struggle to communicate the climate crisis, the CCM has disseminated discourses of climate denial (Boykoff, 2016) and delay (Lamb et al., 2020); that is, messages aimed at undermining climate policies and seeking to cast doubt on the very existence of a climate crisis. Although these discourses have lacked scientific evidence, rigor, and proper reasoning (Cook, Ellerton, & Kinkead, 2018; McKie, 2019), they have proved to be simple, direct, and understandable. Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) argued that “ignorance should not be viewed as a simple omission or gap, but rather as an active production” (p. 9). Such is the case with climate change, an issue that is hard to communicate, but also one whose public discourse has been manipulated by the public relations strategies employed by fossil fuel industries, which have been similar to those previously used by the tobacco sector (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). According to Almiron (2020), the discourses used to delay the adoption of climate policies have involved a wide range of denialist arguments that may be categorized as being either scientific (those that refute climate consensus) or ideological (those supported by beliefs such as the faith in economic growth or in technology as solutions).

Think tanks are relevant political actors in the public sphere (McGann, 2007) that are more influential in the initial stages of the policy-making process, that is, when defining problems and setting the political

agenda. To do this, they attempt to reach policy makers by using public-relations strategies and influencing intermediaries such as the media (McGann, 2007). In fact, think tanks can be considered as media agenda setters, because they introduce their point of view, interpretations, and ideology into current media debates on public affairs (Pardo, 2020). For the climate action contrarian discourse of think tanks in Europe, the work by Almiron et al. (2020) identifies the eight most prominent think tanks that publish in English, Spanish, German, and French: the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in the United Kingdom; the Institut Économique Molinari (IEM) in France; the Instituto Juan de Mariana (IJM) in Spain; the Liberales Institute (LI) in Switzerland; the Austrian Economics Center (AEC) in Austria; and the EIKE in Germany. These authors found relevant climate denial and delay discourses very similar to those produced by contrarian think tanks also aligned with neoliberalism in the United States. Strategies countering climate action ranged from criticizing activists or politicians to more radical arguments, such as denying the existence of anthropogenic climate change. EIKE stands out among these think tanks as the organization with the highest number of outputs, which, together with its focus on climate issues, makes it a noteworthy case study.

There is certainly room for research on the media portrayal of climate action contrarian think tanks. It is well known that press mentions of think tanks can function as an indicator of influence (McGann, 2007). If think tanks do not exert influence in the media, they will hardly have any political influence (Abelson, 2018), and in this regard, studies have been conducted on the press influence of multiple-focused think tanks, especially in terms of economic matters (e.g., Pardo, 2020). However, there is a lack of knowledge about media attention to climate action contrarian European think tanks. In the field of media reception studies, exposure to climate change denialist framing has been shown to reduce confidence in climate science and climate change mitigation measures (McCright, Charters, Dentzman, & Dietz, 2016). This effect was particularly influential in conservative profiles. Similar conclusions were reached by van der Linden, Leiserowitz, Rosenthal, and Maibach (2017), who conducted an experiment that exposed people to information about climate change together with misleading information about the climate consensus. They found that those who received warnings about stakeholders promoting fake debates on global warming processed the biased information more critically and displayed a greater perception of climate consensus. Another study adding evidence to this effect is that of Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017), which showed that media content offering false balance between climate consensus aligned scientists, and climate denialists contributed to distrust in climate science. They also found greater distrust in free market supporters. An inoculation on the flawed argumentation techniques used to misinform, and a highlighting of the high climate consensus, neutralized the effects of misinformation. This raises the question of how the press represents climate action contrarian European think tanks such as EIKE.

Although, according to Hartwig Pautz (2010), "Germany is not the best-researched country when it comes to think tanks" (p. 278); some significant studies have been carried out in this regard, such as the one by Ruser (2018), who mapped the think tank landscape of Germany with an emphasis on climate politics. Ruser (2018) stated that climate science needs to be translated into sociopolitical terms to be understood by policy makers and the public. Thus, for this author, think tanks play a vital role in understanding climate change because they make this complex issue accessible and understandable for politicians. Ruser (2018) explained that Germany is a country in which there has generally been no room for climate action contrarian organizations. Thus, the key think tanks that address climate change are

aligned with climate consensus and promote climate action, such as The Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, and the Öko-Institute. Nevertheless, the CCM embodied by think tanks in Europe has been increasingly active in recent years, one possible reason for this being the adoption of climate delay discourses by far-right parties (Almiron et al., 2020). The next section focuses on EIKE's profile, with an emphasis on its synergies with the far right.

EIKE, a Stronghold of European Climate Change Denial in Germany

The EIKE was founded in February 2007 by Holger Thuss, who chairs the organization. EIKE was registered as an association in the German city of Hannover, and has its postal address in Jena. Including the word European in the name awards it some credibility at first glance, since this could suggest it is an official institution of the European Union, something far from reality. EIKE represents "a growing number of natural scientists, humanitarians, economists, engineers, journalists and politicians who regard the assertion of climate change as solely 'man-made' as not scientifically rigorous and neglects known solar and other natural influences"² (EIKE, 2020, para. 1). EIKE defines itself as "Germany's leading private think tank on climate and energy questions" and its motto is "Not our climate is in jeopardy—Freedom is"³ (EIKE, 2020, para. 1). EIKE's mission is to counterargue the adoption of climate policies to tackle global warming, given that it denies the climate consensus.

According to its website, the organization funds itself only through voluntary contributors, members, and private donations, as well as being nonprofit (EIKE, 2020). However, when looking at the different ties between said organizations, foundations, and industries, this statement seems dubious. Although EIKE is not transparent about its funding, some investigative media (Correctiv, 2020; DeSmog, 2020a; Erneuerbareenergien, 2018) have reported it having connections with the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT) and the Heartland Institute, both U.S.-based, free-market-oriented organizations that have been recipients of funding from right-wing foundations such as Mercers or the Koch family foundations (DeSmog, 2020b; Erneuerbareenergien, 2018). CFACT is a Washington, DC-based organization that promotes free-market solutions to environmental issues. CFACT Europe is registered under the same postal address as EIKE in Jena, and EIKE's founder, Holger Thuss, is also one of the founders of this offshoot of CFACT in Europe (Erneuerbareenergien, 2018). EIKE denies having ever received funds from CFACT (DeSmog, 2020a).

More noteworthy is the partnership between EIKE and the Heartland Institute, a libertarian U.S. think tank based in Chicago of which Holger Thuss is also a member. The Heartland Institute is known for its attempts to spread climate denial ideas. In 2003, it created the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC), a platform for climate action contrarian scientists to attack reports compiled by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC; Medimorec & Pennycook, 2015). EIKE has also cosponsored several Heartland events, such as the "Climate Reality Forum" that took place during the COP25 in Madrid on December 3, 2019, to reject the climate negotiations being held in that summit. In the comparative study by Boussalis and Coan (2016), Heartland stood out among U.S. think

² Original English version on EIKE website.

³ Original English version on EIKE website.

tanks opposed to climate action as the one most focused on attacking science, while the aggregate tendency of these think tanks was to disseminate messages more focused on attacking policies. Heartland's discourse, moreover, has been characterized by a shift from attacking science to attacking scientists (Cann & Raymond, 2018). A recent investigative report exposed how the Heartland Institute has redistributed funds from different companies and economic elites in the United States to promote climate denial and delay ideas (Correctiv, 2020). EIKE constitutes one of the branches deriving from Heartland's network, receiving economic, ideological, and logistic support from this U.S. climate action contrarian think tank.

Despite EIKE considering itself a nonpartisan organization, as occurs in many think tanks, there are certain links that give an indication of the organization's orientation. In this case, an example of that is Holger Thuss, who is an active member of the German Union of Christian Democrats Party (CDU), or Horst Lüdecke and Klaus Eckart Plus, both EIKE spokespersons, who are frequent guests at events held by the political far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD; Teidelbaum, 2017). Moreover, different EIKE members have ties with free-market, right-wing, and climate skeptic foundations and parties (Lobbypedia, 2020; Teidelbaum, 2017). Helmut Alt (EIKE advisory board) is an honorary member of the Nuclear Society and a former employee of the German energy company RWE. Richard S. Courtney (advisory board) is on the advisory board of the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT). Edgar Ludwig Gaertner (advisory board) is a member of the Austrian Hayek Institute, whereas Dr. Labohm (advisory board) and Dr. Moerner (advisory board) are regional directors of the Climate Exit Committee, Labohm for the Netherlands, and Moerner for Sweden. The latter is also on the policy advisory board of the International Climate Science Coalition (ICSC), an association that portrays itself as a true alternative to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and comprises a group of climate skeptics (Sourcewatch, 2020). Although claiming to be funded only by individuals and not corporations, governments, or foundations, the ICSC received a \$45,000 donation from the Heartland Institute in 2007 (Sourcewatch, 2020). Along with Moerner, Michael Limburg, the vice president of EIKE, is also a member of the ICSC's political advisory council.

Of all these connections, the one that stands out is the link with the AfD, which involves a synergy: EIKE delivers seemingly scientific arguments for people who do not believe in anthropogenic climate change among political members and supporters of the AfD, while EIKE gains influence, and its stance on climate change even reaches the parliamentary floor. The German think tank Adelphi documented the climate contrarian stances of far-right European parties in a report (Schaller & Carius, 2019), stating that EIKE's vice president, Michael Limburg, and other contributors have held key roles in the development of AfD's stances on climate change.

Moritz Neujeffski (2019) has argued that the increasing attention over EIKE "is not a windfall but a clear strategy" (para. 6). EIKE has engaged in a strategy of increasing content production and engagement of political events to gain influence. By way of example, Neujeffski (2019) notes EIKE's interventions in the Bundestag attacking the climate consensus, including the participation of EIKE's press secretary Horst Lüdecke as a guest on a committee at the German Bundestag to attack the climate consensus in February 2019, or the participation of Nir Shaviv, a former EIKE guest, in a hearing upon the invitation of AfD in December 2018. Also, in May 2019, EIKE advocated a climate change denial symposium in the German parliament, which was coordinated by AfD (DeSmog, 2020a). Neujeffski (2019) explains that these events are chances for EIKE to legitimize its position and an example of "how think tanks and political actors try to

establish a 'counter-public' to employ rollback strategies by bringing 'expert' knowledge into a formal political setting" (para. 7). In addition to increasing outputs on its website and its political influence, EIKE has also engaged other communication strategies in its partnership with Heartland. According to *Correctiv* (2020), the YouTube influencer Naomi Seibt has attended EIKE events and worked for the Heartland Institute in the dissemination of climate action contrarian messages to reach a younger audience. She has also participated in an AfD youth organization (*Correctiv*, 2020).

The connection between EIKE and AfD has taken place in a context in which far-right populist parties are growing and displaying climate denial stances (Lockwood, 2018). This can be explained by a growing political divide, as has also occurred in the United States: "Citizens on the left consistently reported stronger belief in climate change and support for action to mitigate it than did citizens on the right in 14 Western European countries" (McCright, Dunlap, & Marquart-Pyatt, 2016, p. 1). For climate communication by far-right entities, there has been a recent convergence in the arguments of conservative, neoliberal, and far-right parties (Forchtner, 2019). Specifically in Germany, far-right outlets such as magazines and blogs share well-worn messages attacking climate consensus activists and politicians, arguing a supposed economic well-being if climate policies are not applied (Forchtner, Kroneder, & Wetzel, 2018). This climate denial is often explained by the adoption of an industrial/breadwinner masculinity in reaction to the environmental crisis, given that the measures needed to tackle it would go against such an identity (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014). It is also meaningful to note that individuals with nationalist attitudes are "more likely to be skeptical about the realities of climate change, and substantially more likely to oppose increasing taxes on fossil fuels" (Kulin, Johansson Sevä, & Dunlap, 2021, p. 17), and nationalism is one of the major traits of AfD.

An analysis of EIKE's outputs shows that this think tank became more active after AfD's arrival in the Bundestag (Plehwe & Neujeffski, 2020). The main topic of their outputs is negative campaigning against activists and politicians, and especially Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement (Plehwe & Neujeffski, 2020). Meanwhile, positive references can be found to AfD, the Heartland Institute and individuals campaigning against climate policies, such as blogger Fritz Vahrenholt and Youtuber Naomi Seibt (Plehwe & Neujeffski, 2020). Thus, EIKE can be seen as a major European think tank that promotes denial and delay discourses about climate change (Almiron et al., 2020; Plehwe & Neujeffski, 2020).

Methods

Our objectives are twofold: (1) to take a more in-depth look at EIKE's climate change messages presented in Almiron et al. (2020), and (2) to determine how EIKE has been portrayed in the European press. To do this, we have developed a framing analysis of EIKE's messages and a content analysis of its mentions in the European press.

Framing EIKE's Messages

The sample of EIKE texts was gathered from its website by searching for the keywords "climate change" and "global warming" ("Klimawandel" or "Erderwärmung" in German). This produced a total of 1,076 texts over a period comprising 2015–2018.

The framing analysis was based on the theory posited by Goffman (1974), who defined frames as ways in which people perceive and describe an event. Authors such as Lakoff (2010) expanded the framing theory and applied it to environmental issues, highlighting the complexity of formulating frames to communicate climate change, for example. Framing has been widely used in communication research on climate change to examine the conceptual frameworks used while producing a message (e.g., von Zabern & Tulloch, 2021).

The study by Almiron et al. (2020) looks for counter-frames in the think tank's communication output (Table 1), that is, frames that oppose the climate consensus (Dunlap & McCright, 2015). These counter-frames were developed from the ones identified by Cook et al. (2018), with additions and modifications.

Table 1. Overview of the Counter-Frames and Focuses Analyzed.

A. General scientific claims:
A1. Contesting IPCC legitimacy (implicitly or explicitly)
A2. Contesting scientific consensus and legitimacy (other than IPCC)
A3. Contesting scientific dissemination (by politicians, the media and other)
B. Specific scientific claims:
B4. It is not happening (climate change or global warming)
B5. It is happening, but we do not know how serious it is or it is not serious
B6. It is happening, but it is good/not bad (either global warming or particular issues related to it)
B7. It is happening, but it is not us, or it is not only us (other issues are also causes/main causes)
C. Nonscientific claims:
C8. It is happening, but we have other major problems
C9. It is happening, but any policy will be worse than warming
C10. Criticism of nonscientist defenders and messages and policies on a nonscientific basis
C11. The text includes a neoliberal or a neoconservative economic position (supporting economic growth as the solution, markets self-regulation, minimum government intervention, no taxation of pollution, etc.)
C12. The text includes a mention of human population as a problem
C13. The text includes a mention of animal protein diets or animal agriculture as a problem
C14. The text expresses a trust in technology as a solution to climate change or its consequences
D. Main focus of the text:
D15. Policies/Solutions
D16. Scientific approach
D17. Economic approach
D18. Ethical approach
D19. Other

Source: Almiron et al. (2020).

A binary mode (1 = appears, 0 = does not appear) was used to encode each text for these frames. That is, the repetition of a counter-frame inside a text was not counted. For longer reports of over 20 pages,

only the executive summary, introduction, and conclusions sections were analyzed. Text examples of the frames and extracts were collected while encoding.

Assessing Press Coverage of EIKE

The press analysis was based on a content analysis methodology (Neuendorf, 2017). Content analysis is one of the most popular methods for examining media outputs and consists of a "systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 19). In short, content analysis is a method based on data gathering and analysis to extract general conclusions from a corpus of texts (Neuendorf, 2017). In this case, the Factiva platform was used to gather the texts, which covers all European press available in this archive from January 1, 2007 (EIKE was founded in February of that year), to December 31, 2020. Since the naming of EIKE is not consistent in the press, we covered different spellings by using the following combination: ([EIKE *and* Michael Limburg *or* Holger Thuss *or* think tank] *or* "Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie" *or* "Europäisches Institut für Klima & Energie" *or* "Europäische Institut für Klima und Energie" *or* "Europäische Institut für Klima & Energie" *or* "Europäischen Institut für Klima und Energie" *or* "Europäischen Institut für Klima & Energie" *or* "European Institute for Climate and Energy" *or* "European Institute for Climate & Energy").

This resulted in 173 hits, 39 of which were discarded because of their being mentions not referring to EIKE (people called Eike and other wrong mentions), texts that slipped through the results that were published by non-European press, and texts in languages other than German, English, or Spanish (one in Norwegian, one Italian, and one in Portuguese). Thus, the total number of texts collected for analysis was 134.

The encoding sheet included the following sections for gathering data from the texts: Title, Newspaper, Country, Language, Date, Authorship (Press agency/Journalist/Columnist/Not signed/Others), and Reason for Appearance (Member is cited/Member is author of the text/Academic publication from the think tank/Event from the think tank/Unknown). These criteria were established after the previous review of the literature on the media impact of think tanks (e.g., Abelson, 2018; McGann, 2007). These categories are not prone to subjectivity bias because they solely require data gathering from texts.

The last category, Tone (Positive/Neutral/Negative), is the only one that allows for an interpretation of how EIKE is portrayed. Positive mentions are those that praise the think tank's work or views; mentions that are aimed at adding the stance of the think tank in a discussion, or mentions that, in general, create a good impression of the think tank in the reader. Negative mentions are those critical of the think tank's work or views; mentions that add the think tank's perspective to the text merely to criticize it; or mentions that use the think tank's ideas as a counterexample, thus generating a bad impression of the think tank in the reader. Neutral mentions are those that cannot be classified either as positive or negative because of the mention not being further developed or because it only adds technical information. Given the difficulty in defining the tone, a reliability test (Neuendorf, 2017) was performed for this variable on 22 texts in the corpus. This intercoder reliability test for tone category scored 90.91% agreement and included texts of different tone variables, which ensures the reliability of the coding.

Findings

On EIKE's Discourse

The online dissemination of climate contrarian discourse by EIKE from 2015 to 2018 included $N = 1,076$ relevant texts. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the different counter-frames in the sample. For general scientific claims, our results showed a relevant presence of all three counter-frames (A1, A2, A3) in EIKE posts, with contesting scientific dissemination (by politicians, the media, and other, frame A3) being the most used, appearing in 60.50% of all texts analyzed. The second most frequently noted here were discourses contesting IPCC legitimacy (A1). This counter-frame was found in 27.14% of the texts. In third place were discourses contesting scientific consensus and legitimacy (other than IPCC, frame A2), which were found in 21.19% of the sample.

For specific scientific claims, the counter-frame acknowledging that climate change is happening but that humans are not the cause or are not the single cause (B7) is the most common (43.49%). On another note, the frame that climate or global warming is not happening (B4), one of the most radical denialist arguments, was present in 23.88% of the texts. The frames with the least presence were B5, that of "it is happening, but we do not know how serious it is, or it is not serious" (18.87%), and B6, which states that "it is happening, but it is good/not bad (either global warming or particular issues related to it)" that appears in 11.80% of the texts.

As for the nonscientific claims, 76.49% of the texts included a criticism of nonscientist defenders and policies on a nonscientific basis (C10). The attack on climate policies (C9) is an important feature of EIKE's discourse, as 48.14% of its texts include this counter-frame. The link to neoliberal and conservative ideology (C11) was found in a relevant percentage of the sample, 41.82%, including claims supporting economic growth as a solution, market self-regulation, minimum government intervention, or criticism of a tax on pollution. Less common is the argument that other problems are more important than climate change and should be given priority (C8), which appears in 10.22% of the texts. Mentions of overpopulation (C12) and diet (C13) were almost nonexistent in the entire sample of EIKE texts (2.42% and 0.74%, respectively), and the claim that technology (C14) was a solution had a very low presence (5.30% of all texts).

The main focus of the texts analyzed from EIKE's website (Figure 2) was the scientific approach (D16), with 46.84% of texts including this focus as the primary stance and far ahead of the political approach (D15; 26.49%). Economics (D17; 20.07%) and ethics (D18; 23.88%) are the least encountered approaches.

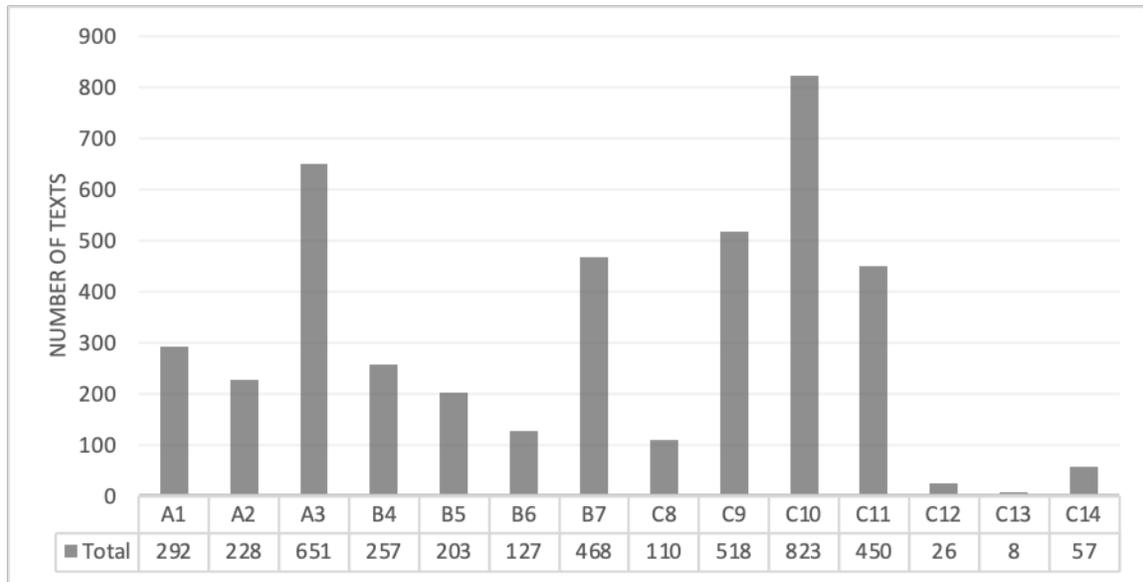


Figure 1. Climate counter-frames in EIKE's outputs.

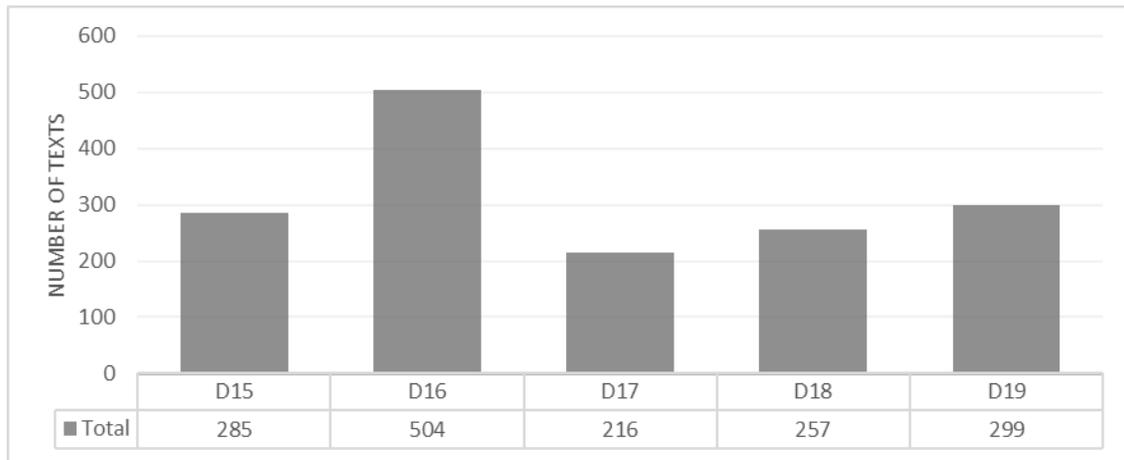


Figure 2. Main focus of EIKE's texts.

To illustrate these data in qualitative terms, there follows a comment on some extracts from texts for each group of frames (general scientific claims, specific scientific claims, and nonscientific claims). For the general scientific claims and contesting IPCC legitimacy (A1), the following translated text clearly illustrates distrust in the IPCC as a scientific institution:

We can be sure that the people from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change know what the CO₂ parameters for the climate are; we just have to believe their advice and do what they want us to do. Some of the commentators could do with a little more reverence and humility. Then maybe they will give us early spring-like February temperatures again this year. (Kowatsch, 2015, para. 7)⁴

Another example of A1 is portrayed by the following: "Green energy technologies do not exist [. . .] except in classrooms, computer models, IPCC reports, Al Gore lessons and advocacy literature" (Driessen & Wojick, 2018, para. 20). Also, the following excerpt provides a clear example of contesting scientific consensus not related to the IPCC (A2): "I know people who have said that there is a significant scientific consensus on this issue, but I have also heard very reasonable debates on this principle" (Noon, 2016, para. 17).

The A3 frame, that of contesting scientific dissemination by politicians, the media, and others, is perfectly illustrated by this statement: "Do not allow yourself to be unsettled by the media and political climate hype! What is going on is pure nonsense dressed up with arguments that are not factually valid" (Mueller, 2015, para. 24).

Concerning specific scientific claims, it is worth noting the following text, assigned to frame B4 (climate change/global warming is not happening):

Hurricanes and tornadoes, storms, droughts, polar ice and sea levels are all within the historical range. There is nothing about them that is "unprecedented" and certainly nothing that justifies dismantling our carbon-based energy system, restructuring our economy or redistributing our hard-earned wealth to countries not bound by any of the energy or emissions reductions agreed in Paris. (Driessen, 2016a, para. 7)

Below is another clear example of such a claim, in this case casting doubts on the seriousness of climate change (B5):

The global average temperature has only increased by 0.7 degrees since the beginning of industrialization, from around 1850 until 1998. And since 1998 the trend has stagnated (see figure), although the CO₂ content of the atmosphere has continued to rise. (Blach, 2016, para. 2).

As for nonscientific claims, the EIKE communication outputs appear to have established a discourse of climate change as ideology rather than scientific fact. For example, EIKE frames climate change as a "fetish-like cultural affair like abortion and same-sex marriages" (Doran, 2015, para. 11), and tends to blame climate defenders, who are depicted as "climate warriors" who "have stopped behaving civilly a long time ago" (Tol, 2015, para. 7). A further example of nonscientific claims, this time fostering discourse from a neoliberal/neoconservative position (C11), and playing with existential angst, is revealed in the following text:

⁴ The quoted excerpts are the authors' own translations from the German originals.

Those who seek to regulate our lives, our livelihoods and our standard of living, want us to pay more for virtually everything, especially the energy we use to heat our homes, cook our food or drive our cars, which they would like to prohibit us from doing. (Driessen, 2016b, para. 13).

On Press Portrayal of EIKE

A total of 134 valid texts were obtained from our content analysis, of which 89.55% were in German, 8.21% in English, and 2.24% in Spanish. They were published in 60 different European newspapers indexed in Factiva, among which the German *TAZ* (9.70%), *Der Spiegel* (7.46%), *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* (7.46%), *Der Schwarzwälder Bote* (5.22%) and *Die Welt* (5.22%) stood out. Table 2 provides a summary of the features of the texts.

Table 2. Features of Press Texts Mentioning EIKE.

Tone in which EIKE is portrayed	Number of texts	Percentage
Negative	87	64.93%
Positive	30	22.39%
Neutral	17	12.69%
Total	134	100%
Text authorship	Number of texts	Percentage
Journalist	82	61.19%
Not signed or generic	31	23.13%
Other	14	10.45%
Press agency	4	2.99%
Columnist	3	2.24%
Total	134	100%
Reason for EIKE's appearance	Number of texts	Percentage
Unknown	61	45.52%
Member is cited	54	40.30%
Member is author of the text	13	9.70%
Event organized by the think tank	6	4.48%
Total	134	100%

One notable finding here is that most of the texts portrayed EIKE negatively (64.93%). That is, the newspapers mentioned EIKE to criticize its activity. One example of this can be seen in an article by the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which questions the credibility of the organization: "Nevertheless, the websites of the so-called 'climate sceptics' are constantly haunted by the thesis that global warming is over—for example, the small but active lobby group with the imaginative name 'European Institute for Climate and Energy'" (Rahmstorf, 2012, para. 2).

Another example of the negative news coverage garnered by EIKE can be found in the newspaper *inSüdthüringen*, highlighting the organization's populist character: "But neither is a climate researcher a

member of EIKE, nor do association members participate in the scientific expert discussion. EIKE is aimed exclusively at the public" (Avram, 2011, para. 7). An excerpt from the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, written by the same author, confirms this negative press image and questioning of EIKE as a scientific organization: "The claims of these people and organizations obviously have more to do with their worldview—often with a strong aversion to government measures such as climate protection or coronavirus prevention—than with a science debate" (Rahmstorf, 2020, para. 18).

In December of the same year (2020), *Der Spiegel* further highlighted the strong link between EIKE and the far-right political party AfD:

What the AfD party programme says about climate change coincides in terms of content, partly even literally, with what EIKE, the European Institute for Climate and Energy (EIKE) based in Potsdam, says. And EIKE is proud to be sponsored by the American coal, natural gas and oil industry—one example among many. (Weiland, 2020, para. 47)

Some 22.39% of the texts portrayed EIKE positively, praising its views or comments, as in the following news item taken from *The European*, for example. This will come as no surprise, as the author of the piece also writes for EIKE itself. The excerpt is from an interview with EIKE member Holger Thuß, who stated that: "Above all, we wanted to give the critics of the theory of man-made climate catastrophe a voice. They have been increasingly marginalized and discriminated against since the early 2000s" (Thuß, 2018, para. 2). Another example of positive coverage comes from *Die Welt*, which, in 2009, referred to EIKE as "a think-tank of critical scientists" (Bolzen, Kulke, & Miersch, 2009, para. 7). There are also texts that have directly provided a space for EIKE's members to spread their view, as in the case of an article published by the newspaper *Die Weltwoche*: "Climate change skeptics Holger Thuss and Michael Limburg have no money, no publicity, and no mainstream respect. But they are confident that the Germans, too, will come to their senses. At the latest after the next electrical blackout" (Koydl, 2019, para. 1). It is also interesting to note that 12.69% of the texts employed a neutral tone toward EIKE, including those published by newspapers such as *The Business Insider* and *El Confidencial*.

As for the authorship of the texts, most were written by journalists (61.19%), followed by 23.13% of unauthored texts. The latter could be attributed to undetermined journalists from the newsroom or even press agencies, which account for a scarce stated authorship of 2.99% of the texts. What is more intriguing for the purposes of this analysis is the reason for EIKE's appearance in the texts. Although we cannot measure why a newspaper decided to refer to EIKE and, in many cases, there is no clue (45.52%), in some cases such information was disclosed. This occurred when a member was cited, which happened in 40.30% of the texts. That is, statements made by EIKE members often ended up appearing in the press as a feature of the coverage, most of the time to be criticized. Though events organized by the think tank aroused little interest (4.48% of the texts), that EIKE members authored 9.70% of the texts was also relevant. This was usually in the form of letters to the editor reflecting the organization's stance on a current issue, such as this one by Michael Limburg, EIKE's vice president:

Not only do the so-called climate sceptics know that almost all of the IPCC's proclaimed temperature calculations for the second half of the 20th century are based on manipulated data sets selected according to heat development, but also that almost all conclusions drawn from these data regarding the presumed rise in sea levels triggered by climate change or even famine catastrophes in Africa are purely imaginary statements made by interested lobby groups like Greenpeace, the WWF and other participants of the eco-industrial complex. (Limburg, 2010, para. 20)

If we consider the distribution of the texts by year, we find that most (53.73%) were published between 2019 and 2020, as Figure 3 shows. Only a few pieces of positive press coverage were found for EIKE in this period, published by newspapers such as *Die Weltwoche*. However, *Die Weltwoche* also started covering EIKE negatively in 2019 (once). It is also worth noting how newspapers that had covered EIKE in a more positive or neutral way previously, such as *Die Welt*, were now also starting to cover it in a more negative light.

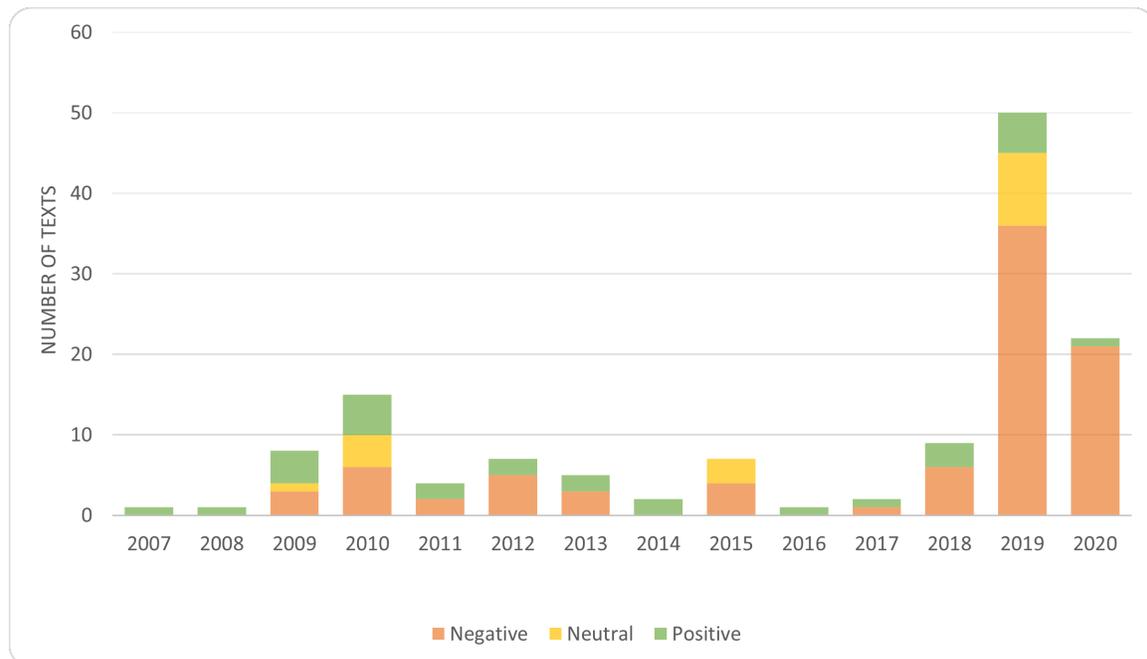


Figure 3. Distribution of the texts by year.

In 2019, two state elections were held in the German federal states of Saxony and Brandenburg, returning the best results the far-right political party AfD had achieved to date, coming second in both states, with 27.5% in Saxony and 23.5% in Brandenburg. In addition, it was in 2019 that the link between AfD and climate sceptics became especially clear. In June of that year, the now coleader of the AfD, Alice Weidel, stated: "I don't think the human impact is significant" (Zeit Online, 2019, para. 1), also referring to and criticizing the IPCC as "lobby politics." The newspaper *Sueddeutsche* draws a line between EIKE and

the AfD, stating that the organization "is close to the AfD" and that EIKE is a dangerous organization for our democratic system: "[. . .] 'as this organization spreads dangerous propaganda and is contrary to our basic democratic values'" (Staebler, 2019, para. 2).

Discussion and Conclusions

According to Ruser (2018), there is no room for climate action contrarian organizations in Germany. This article shows that EIKE is a stronghold of climate action obstructionism in Germany. However, press analysis reveals that the think tank's popularity is marginal, which is consistent with Ruser's analyses about climate action obstructionist organizations not having a place in the German context. EIKE's large output resonates with well-worn climate change denial arguments studied in the United States (Cook et al., 2018). Its relationship with the far-right political party AfD makes this think tank relevant enough to be included in the discussion on the climate countermovement and its influence, especially given that the press popularity of this think tank has been mostly linked to this relationship.

The counter-frames most used by EIKE include nonscientific arguments such as condescending criticism and attacks (frame C10, present in 76.49% of the texts studied). The second most-common counter-frame used by this think tank is that of criticism on politicians and media defending the climate consensus and action (frame A3, which appears in 60.50% of EIKE's texts). Thus, we can sustain that EIKE's discourse is in line with what Oreskes and Conway (2011) described as a common strategy employed by the climate countermovement: discrediting scientists and climate campaigners so as to undermine their message. Furthermore, about the focus of EIKE's texts, the scientific perspective (D16; 46.84%) prevails over the political one (D15; 26.49%). This resonates with studies on think tanks such as Heartland Institute, which focused much more on casting doubt on scientific uncertainty (Boussalis & Coan, 2016) but now is progressively switching to attacking scientists (Cann & Raymond, 2018). Other common counter-frames used by EIKE are those of humans not causing climate change or not causing it alone (B7; 43.49%), and the idea that any policy will be worse than global warming (C9; 48.14%). This stance could be explained by the existence of identities and beliefs linked to an industrial thinking that does not acknowledge the flaws of modernization about the environment (e.g., Anshelm & Hultman, 2014).

EIKE's press relevance is concentrated mainly in the German press and scarce. From our press findings we can conclude that, despite it being a stronghold of climate change denialism in Germany that produces large outputs, EIKE's press presence is low and mostly negative. This critical portrayal of EIKE's activities and statements invites reflection on the role of the press about climate change inoculation, as discussed by van der Linden et al. (2017). In this case, we can state that the press is inoculating people against the misinformation disseminated by EIKE, given the criticism the think tank receives in the newspapers. Although some positive and neutral coverage remains, it is a good sign that criticism toward climate change denialism predominates. This result is aligned with Ruiu's (2021) findings for British newspapers: Although there is a majority consensus narrative on climate change, skeptical views still appear in the press. In our analysis, that remnant is exemplified by the positive and neutral views of EIKE's activities expressed in these texts.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of criticism toward climate change denialism, it cannot be taken for granted that this countermovement is in decline; quite the opposite, in fact: it is on the rise in certain sectors under the auspices of the extreme right. We attribute EIKE's press coverage during 2019 and 2020 to its alliances with the far-right party AfD. Although this coverage is mainly negative, increasing relevance is being awarded to this think tank and its views (to the point of reaching the parliamentary floor). Thus, we can state that EIKE seems to have abandoned the path of gaining a positive assessment in the mainstream press in favor of a close affiliation with the AfD cosmos. Abelson (2018) stated that "media exposure cannot, and should not, be used as the sole indicator, or, indeed, even a reliable indicator, of policy influence, even at the most preliminary stages of the policy-making process" (p. 35). Thus, having now researched EIKE's communication and the press portrayal of this think tank, future research on this subject could follow a political science path. Although EIKE has a low impact in the press, and therefore low visibility when it comes to public opinion, its relationship with AfD is awarding it greater relevance. To what extent its links to the AfD give the think tank some influence is an open question that can be addressed in future research. What this press analysis provides is insight into EIKE's communication strategy. This article shows how alliances with the far right do not provide the think tank with great visibility but bring the think tank into certain circles of visibility. Perhaps research in alternative media that is close to the far right or in social media can shed more light on the visibility and influence that this think tank is achieving with this strategy. Also, further research could aim to examine other think tanks in other contexts, to determine whether other climate action contrarian think tanks in Europe receive the same bad press or, contrarily, their claims are echoed in the media.

To sum up, we can state that EIKE represents a hard core of climate change denialism in Germany that enjoys little popularity in the press. However, its political ties with the far-right party AfD are allowing its ideas about climate change to be introduced into minority streams of the political sphere, which must be carefully guarded against in this context of climate crisis. Now more than ever, we need journalists who are willing to warn their audience about these links between climate action contrarian organizations and pursue scientific and ethically led communication.

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