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PUBLICATIONS

Green Wedge Tracker – Monitoring climate conversations

As part of the Green Wedge Project, the Green Wedge Tracker gives you a monthly overview of the social media climate conversation in 8 European countries.

Summer 2021

- With a summer notable for extreme weather events across Europe, climate change and its dramatic effects have been brought home once again. So much has happened, in fact, that our latest tracker covers the entire summer to provide a broader perspective on these debates. We will restart our regular monthly trackers from September.
- The headline act of the summer was, of course, the IPCC report. But it remains unclear, as we build up to the COP meeting in Glasgow, what impact this latest report will have.
- The catastrophic floods in Germany in July also left their mark: reshuffling German preferences for the upcoming Federal elections in surprising ways (we see little enthusiasm or trust for the two top parties in the polls (SPD, CDU) when it comes to climate for example).

#EuropeanGreenDealUpdate

EGD – a positive direction but not without obstacles

- The only discussion peak on the EGD this summer was in July with the introduction of the package of legislative proposals to accelerate climate actions to reduce emissions and keep temperature under 1.5 degree (under the hashtag #FitFor55). Although this is generally positive news for climate change and welcomed by commentators, we expect a more critical view to develop and are keeping this on our radar. For instance, some polish supporters of Orban (*Note: this is not Orban's official account*) and some polish news outlets have gained traction opposing these measures with an anti-EU populist rhetoric pointing to the financial cost and radical constraints this would place on ordinary citizens. This was highlighted as another reason to leave the EU.

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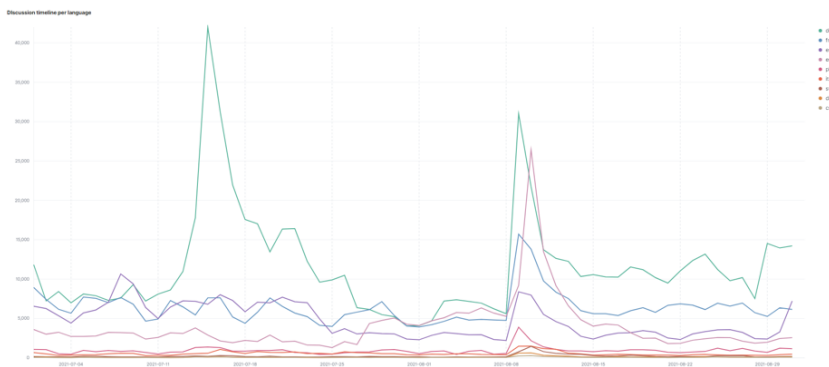
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- The Commission also focused its summer communications on the implementation of the Single-Use Plastic directive on 3/07 with the ban of some polluting and unnecessary single-use plastic items such as straws, plates, cutlery, cotton swabs...

Key Twitter Events



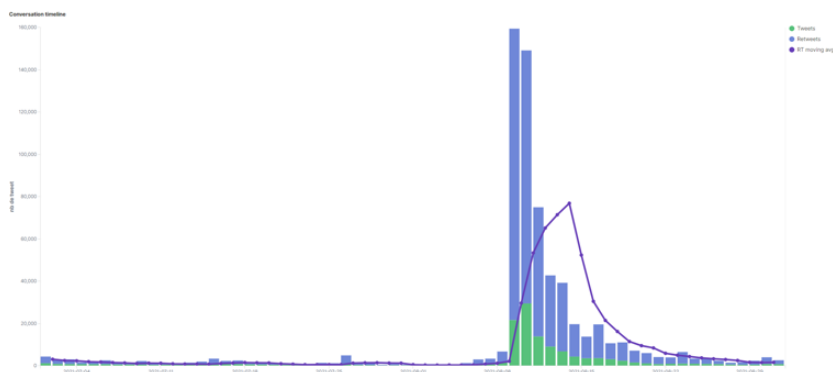
- **Mid-July** : German floods
- **Early August**: IPCC report
- **August**: Intensification of the electoral campaign in Germany and discussions on parties' climate programme.

#NewsOfTheSummer

#IPCC – A code red from the IPCC that doesn't go unheard



- It is not every day that climate change makes it onto the front pages. The IPCC report also led to significant reactions and visibility on social media, although these were short-lived. **The surge in discussion only lasted 5 days.**



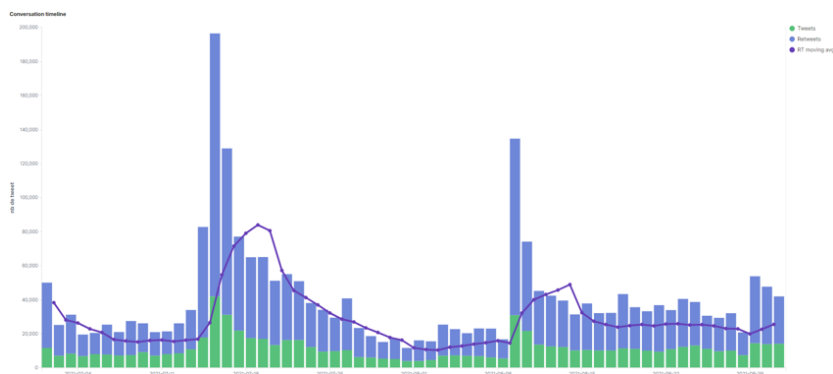
- The vast majority of tweets about the IPCC report were about raising awareness of scientific research and calling for climate action, often quoting or sharing news articles or environmental videos. However, there is a non-negligible part of the tweets that questioned the results, the references used, or that openly spread fake news on the report – namely some lobby groups, and radical right newspapers and TV channel (for example: cnews in France).
- It is unsurprising that 35% of the conversation on the IPCC report happened in English and 31% in German given the traumatic floods a few weeks earlier. But it was also central to the French discussion representing 20% of the overall conversation. This again reveals geographical/linguistic disparities on the climate debate, with only a few percent of the conversation in Spanish or Italian.

Focus on Germany

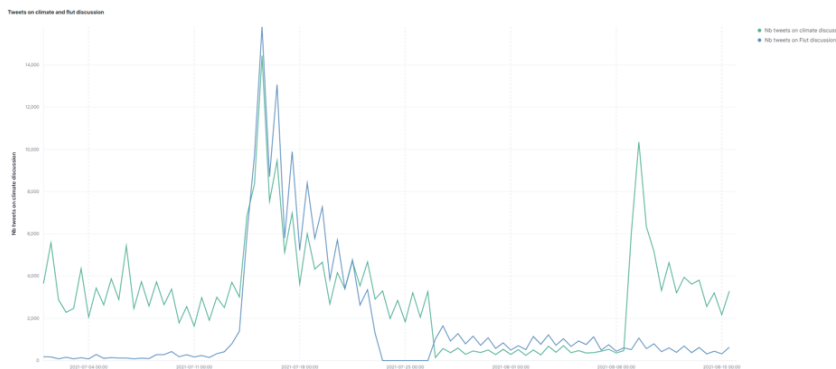
Top hashtags Germany (+10,000)



#Floods and #Election in numbers



- The mid-July German floods in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) triggered 120,000 tweets in Germany.
- While more than 6,000 tweets discussed the floods in relation to CDU candidate, Armin Laschet, less than 700 were about Green Party leader, Annalena Baerbock. An interesting indication of the reception of candidates' reactions and comments on the floods.
- The discussion about floods was closely correlated to the discussion on climate – thereby highlighting the consensus that climate change results in extreme weather events.



Laschet under attack has limited impact on polls.

- German floods in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) mid-July triggered a lot of climate discussions ahead of the election and tested the candidates. A large number of reactions focused on Laschet: 1) who was seen laughing behind the Federal President during the first official reaction to the German floods; 2) who behaved condescendingly and inappropriately calling a TV presenter *#JungeFrau*; 3) who stuck with the CDU political platform and did not consider amending it in light of these traumatic events *"Just because today is such a day, doesn't mean you change your politics."* 4) and ignored flood warnings from scientists in NRW, the region he represents.
- The general message was often related to the inability of Laschet to become chancellor hoping traditional CDU voters or undecided would refrain from voting for the CDU candidate.



Merkel: "If you have to laugh again, please go to the basement"

Laschet: "But it is still under water"

Merkel: "Still".



"We have to learn to live with it"

The SPD last minute come back – but why?

The post-flood period has led to the stagnation of the CDU and Greens in the polls. Somewhat surprisingly, however, it has benefited the SPD: which was quasi invisible before July and had been in a slump since the last elections.

The SPD's growing support in the polls doesn't come with a lot of excitement for SPD candidate, Olav Scholz, however, nor for the party itself in climate-related social media debate (except around Karl Lauterbach, Deputy Chair of the SPD): There is an open effort on Twitter to remind the German population of the SPD's lack of climate action at both governmental and city level (Scholz was the former mayor of Hamburg) and their support for polluting industries over the past 20 years as part of the coalition with the CDU.

Many commentators equate Scholz with Laschet for his lack of climate ambitions and inconsistent position. The two days with by far the most engagement on Scholz and the SPD (19/08 & 29/08) focused on criticizing: 1) the rejection of phasing out coal (#Kohleausstieg) before 2038 (against scientific advice); 2) the fear of backlash on climate policy from lobbies and the older generation distracting from the necessary and urgent climate actions (#Triell).

So Scholz's campaign efforts to appeal voters as an experienced politician, can in this context work as a double-edge sword. Yes, he can play the card of continuity (and almost position himself as the heir to Merkel's steady hand), but with that comes the cost of not having acted in favour of climate protection.

Despite criticisms about their lack of climate action, the SPD's campaign seems to be

working. So why is there a comeback? Is it that despite everything Germans are creatures of habits? And that in the context of an appetite for some change, Olav Scholz represents both change and continuity?



Baerbock: relentlessly targeted

- Baerbock's mistakes have dominated the social media debate—the inaccuracies in her CV, the alleged plagiarism, or her bonus income from the party. More radical anti-Greens commentators were just plain misogynistic in their comments, while others made fun and discredited Baerbock's ideas, innocence, or mistakes.
- However, and compared to Laschet's faux-pas, Baerbock's reaction to the floods met with relatively low engagement. The limited negative reactions originated from criticisms related to : 1) the lack of action of the Greens that have taken part of the NRW government for years; 2) the instrumentalization of the floods by Baerbock to promote faster environmental action.
- The catastrophic events did not boost the Greens in the polls, despite their clear climate platform.

Other Key Conversations

Continuous division on environmental awareness in Poland

- Continuing a trend from the June tracker: floods are being used in Poland as much to raise awareness of climate change as to questioning it. Many blame the Polish media for publishing biased and non-scientific content criticising research on climate change. Others are rejecting the link between extreme floods and climate change, going as far as to say

that it is a 'socialist idea' driven by ideology.

- Highlight these inconsistencies are the two measures taken by the Polish government in July:
- On the one hand the announcement of EUR 500M subsidies allocated to support household purchases of electric cars;
- And on the other, the adoption of draft legislation that makes it possible to sell forested land for infrastructure investments. This without going through the required legislative and consultation processes.

Poland: #MemeOfTheMonth

We see a growing momentum behind a perceived value-change from the EU and the imposition of rules opposed to Polish energy interest and cultural values.



EU before: Free market, flow of goods, Christian community

EU now: Tolerance for 56 sexes, abortion, let's immigrants in, let's celebrate Marx's birthday, severe anti-terrorism

Spain: Unusually, environment is a topic of large debate

- There was uproar on 8/07 after the Minister of Consumption, Alberto Garzón, recommended to reduce red meat consumption for health and environmental reasons following scientists and OMS advice. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez backed Minister of Agriculture, Luis Planas, in defending the meat sector for its economic and job contribution to Spain and for the unfair focus on that field. Farming and meat lobbies have naturally also vocally riposted to the recommendations. We see a divided society on this issue: while some on social media see the restrictions on people and the economy as going too far, others are blaming the government for not following advice and going against its own and first climate law dating only from May 2021.

The monthly tracker is brought to you by our Climate & Protest Programme Director Cloé Ragot.

See you next month !

Previous Trackers

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▼ June 2021 [PDF, 3.6MB]

- ▼ **May 2021 [PDF, 2MB]**
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