

World's worst climate denial groups, climate policy obstructors, and fossil fuel PR firms granted access to COP28

Introduction

Since its inception in 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has set the stage for international cooperation on climate action. However, after an entire generation's equivalent of negotiations, the UNFCCC process has little to show for itself in the face of record temperatures, astronomical profits for the oil & gas industry, and persistently rising oil & gas production and expansion. The UNFCCC process has faced persistent challenges that impede its effectiveness in delivering meaningful climate action, not least of all a total lack of strong mechanisms to prevent the participation and influence of Big Polluters in its processes. This absence of robust regulations contributes to a weakened UNFCCC system and allows these entities to shape and manipulate the negotiations, influencing outcomes in ways that align with their profit-driven motives rather than the overarching goal of reducing emissions and avoiding climate catastrophe.

Research by Corporate Accountability illustrates that it's not just fossil fuel corporations that flooded the [halls of COP28](#). Other climate obstructors—including climate change denial front groups, climate action policy obstructors, and disinformation PR firms that sowed doubt on climate science—were also given access to the U.N. climate talks in Dubai. What's more, many of these climate obstructors have been attending UNFCCC COPs for over 20 years, since at least COP6 in 2000.

Many of the below groups are officially accredited observed organizations, meaning that their presence has been given the official stamp of approval by the UNFCCC. Despite having evidenced histories of climate denialism and obstruction, their delegates are allowed to engage in the negotiations in the same way a public interest civil society group would. This points to the more fundamental failure of the UNFCCC to protect the talks from the

insidious influence of climate deniers, and bolsters calls from civil society for an [Accountability Framework](#) that ensures those representing climate denial or the fossil fuel industry cannot actively manipulate and undermine the outcomes of these talks, and future ones.

Top climate denial & climate obstructor groups at COP28

[American Petroleum Institute \(API\) - US](#)

[At COP28 as its own accredited observer delegation](#)

API represents hundreds of corporations that produce, refine, and distribute petroleum. It is considered one of the most influential U.S. oil and gas industry trade groups, [misleading the public](#) on climate change since the 1980s. In fact, API has repeatedly blocked efforts to pass domestic legislation that sought to [limit GHG emissions](#), and is the engine behind Energy Citizens, a front group that for numerous years [coordinated strategic](#) climate denial and pro-fossil fuel campaigns aimed to look like grassroots movements, a textbook industry playbook move known as “astroturfing.”

API has a history of financially supporting organizations that promote [climate change denial](#) such as the Heartland Institute, a ‘think’ tank that rejected the scientific consensus on climate change and has sent hundreds of thousands of climate denial [textbooks to public schools](#) since 2017.

[Competitive Enterprise Institute \(CEI\) - US](#)

[At COP28 as its own accredited observer delegation](#)

The former longtime director of CEI’s Center for Energy and Environment and now Senior Fellow, Myron Ebell, is known as one of the world’s most prominent [climate change deniers](#). Ebell was head of Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency transition team and one of the main architects of the U.S. withdrawal from the [Paris Agreement](#). Though he did not register for COP28, he has attended many previous COPs (see below).

In 2023, CEI attempted to discredit the widely respected Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) latest scientific findings on the climate crisis, baselessly claiming its urgent warnings were ideologically motivated. CEI’s 2nd biggest funder is DonorsTrust, a

dark-money fund that has a history of financing far right hate groups including VDARE, a white supremacy and white nationalism media outlet. The institute, and often Ebell, have also attended COP6, COP11, COP15, COP16, COP19, COP20, COP21, COP23, COP24, COP26, and COP27.

Edison Electric Institute (EEI) - US:

At COP28 as its own accredited observer delegation

Edison Electric Institute is one of the world's largest climate denial groups. It has [promoted climate denialism](#) since the 1990s, and has a history of [delaying and obstructing](#) climate action. EEI played a [leading role](#) in the formation of the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), an industry group that aimed to cast doubt and disinformation on climate change. Earlier in 2023, EEI worked to [block emissions reductions policies in the U.S.](#)

As of January 2024, EEI's president-elect is [Dan Brouillette](#), former Energy Secretary under Donald Trump, who publicly questioned the [scientific consensus](#) on climate change in 2020. In addition to being present at COP28, the Edison Electric Institute has also attended COP11, COP13, COP15, COP16, COP17, COP18, COP19, COP20, COP21, COP22, COP23, COP24, and COP25.

Top climate disinformation PR firms at COP28

Edelman (U.S.)

At COP28 via various delegations: UAE, Host Country Badges* – UAE, Malaysia, Canada, Global Ethical Finance Initiative Limited

*Note: COP Presidency teams often have PR firms as part of their teams to boost their image and on host country badges and are often exposed in the press for having PR firms with dirty reputations. That this was the case this year is not new or unique to the UAE presidency, but part of a broader culture that enables and allows this sort of practice.

Edelman, one of the world's most powerful PR firms and often described as "the dominant PR firm for trade associations that promote an anti-environmental agenda," has regularly created PR campaigns to [block climate legislation](#). Edelman and its subsidiaries have a history of working for the world's largest fossil fuel companies and organizations (such as

ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, TotalEnergies, the American Petroleum Institute, and American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers).

The PR firm was behind a campaign that falsely created the illusion of public support for the [Keystone XL pipeline](#), on behalf of TransCanada. In 2021, ExxonMobil ran a Facebook ad campaign called *Exxchange* that would have helped weaken climate legislation. Edelman was [accused of](#) playing a role in the campaign. In a U.S. congressional hearing about the role of PR firms in delaying climate action in 2022, a [former Edelman executive](#) stated that “fossil fuel marketers have shifted from denying or minimizing the science behind climate change to falsely suggesting that oil and gas are a central part of the climate-solutions mix.”

Edelman’s CEO Richard Edelman registered for COP28 under the Host Country Badges—and disclosed his affiliation as having “a paid relationship/contract with the nominating entity.” From available UNFCCC data, his PR firm has also attended COP6, COP26, and COP27.

[WPP \(UK\)](#)

[At COP28 via various delegations: UAE, Host Country Badges – UAE, Executive Office of the Secretary General, Bloomberg Philanthropies](#)

As of 2023, WPP had 55 contracts with fossil fuel companies through its holding companies, reportedly [more than](#) any other PR firm in the world. For years, this leading fossil fuel PR giant has been running campaigns for [major oil and gas companies](#) including Saudi Aramco, Equinor, Emirates National Oil Company (ENOC), BP, Shell, ConocoPhillips, Woodside, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Enel, Petrobras, and TotalEnergies.

According to an investigation on climate disinformation, WPP’s clients (BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, and TotalEnergies) made up [nearly 98% of all greenwashing](#) and fossil fuel disinformation advertisements on Facebook from 1 January to 31 October 2023. Through its holding companies, WPP has six distinct contracts with BP, making it one of its most represented clients. One of WPP’s companies known for promoting oil & gas industry interests that registered for COP28 is [Hill+Knowlton Strategies](#), the PR firm in charge of COP27.

The company continues to represent Big Polluters despite [global demands](#) to cut its fossil fuel ties.

FTI Consulting (US)

At COP28 via The Climate Registry and the Canadian Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Association delegations. FTI Consulting's [clients include](#) the likes of ExxonMobil, Eurogas, Sasol, and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline. FTI is perhaps best known for being one of the most ruthless fossil fuel PR firms, reportedly going as far as [attacking climate scientists](#). According to the [Climate Investigations Center](#), "FTI remains a major, major contractor to the fossil fuel industry. They run front groups, fake news channels, they pose as reporters, they write reports about activists."

In 2020, FTI Consulting was caught [creating fake pro-fracking](#) and gas exploration websites that appeared to represent citizens and grassroots movements. In 2022, the company was [under investigation](#) by the Democratic House Natural Resources Committee's Oversight and Investigations panel for its repeated deceptive PR tactics to mislead the public on climate change and advance fossil fuel interests. FTI is currently considered one of the mastermind PR firms behind the two most powerful [European hydrogen lobby](#) groups, Hydrogen Europe and the Hydrogen Council. Its staff registered for COP28 via the Climate Registry and the Canadian Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Association.

Conclusion

These findings only scratch the surface of a deep-rooted and heavily polluted network of fossil fuel industry enablers allowed at UNFCCC negotiations with a track record of denying climate change, deceiving the public, and delaying climate action. Other major climate denial and obstructor groups that registered to attend COP28 include Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT), US Chamber of Commerce, and BusinessEurope. Meanwhile, other major climate disinformation and fossil fuel PR firms (according to [Clean Creatives' F-List](#)) that also attended COP28 include Teneo, CARMA, OMNICOM, Brunswick Group, and All About Brands.

The fact that these entities are allowed to influence all-too-critical negotiations punctuates the need for an [Accountability Framework](#), which the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) currently lacks. This framework would include a conflict of interest policy and therefore restore integrity and credibility, prevent undue influence, and protect the public interest, not to mention the millions of lives that depend on the only international institution established to address the threat of climate change. Without it, Big Polluters and their networks of climate denial groups and disinformation firms will continue shaping negotiations and decisions in ways that serve their own interests, potentially undermining the overall effectiveness of the international climate governance process.