

FAQs Fossil Fuel Industry & Academic Research

All sources at the end. FFI = fossil fuel industry

1. Don't we need the FFI for the energy transition?

No, this argument is advanced by the FFI itself, but is factually incorrect. The FFI is the most important obstacle to the energy transition. The FFI has actively harmed the energy transition for decades, as it conflicts with their business interests, and will continue doing so. After a thorough portfolio review, this is also the conclusion drawn by pension fund ABP. The FFI is not aligned with the Paris goals, is investing only a minuscule part of their income in renewables, and has recently even reduced their climate ambitions.

2. I thought we need to cooperate with the FFI to develop carbon capture and storage (CCS)?

While most mitigation scenarios of the IPCC rely on negative emissions, the IPCC is also clear about the fact that the effectiveness of CCS is unproven at scale, despite decades of research. Due to this major uncertainty, reliance on CCS should be as limited as possible. The FFI is delaying research on CCS by not fully releasing all the relevant data it holds to researchers. This data should not be held hostage by industry with a documented history of sabotaging energy transition and scientific process. Congressional investigations have revealed that the FFI is using CCS as a way to justify delaying the phase-out of fossil fuels, thereby slowing down the energy transition.

3. Surely fossil fuels are still necessary for the foreseeable future?

The claim that fossil fuels are still necessary for the foreseeable future has no bearing on the fact that the FFI is an obstacle to the energy transition and harms both science and scientists, and is therefore not an appropriate partner for any university.

Research shows that fossil fuels must and can be phased out rapidly. The net-zero pathway of the International Energy Agency shows that energy needs can be met by renewable sources.

4. Do we need investments by the FFI to finance the energy transition?

The claim that FFI investments are needed to finance the energy transition is both incorrect and misleading. Research has shown that the green transition will likely result in net savings of many trillions of dollars, even without accounting for climate damages or co-benefits of climate policy. The FFI invests only a minuscule part of its profit in renewables, and pays out the vast majority of its profits to its shareholders.

5. But by cooperating with the FFI, we could help it to transform?

The expectation that any university could help the FFI to transform into sustainable corporations presupposes that the FFI wants to transform, which is not supported by evidence. The FFI is making record profits with fossil fuels, and has recently scaled down their already insufficient climate plans. This indicates that the FFI has no interest in being transformed. At this point, it is naive to assume that scientists will influence the FFI, and not the other way around. The FFI has actively undermined climate science for decades, and engaged in extensive greenwashing.

6. Wouldn't a decision to break ties with the fossil industry violate academic freedom?

Full dissociation from the fossil fuel industry does not restrict academic freedom in any way. Academic freedom describes the freedom to research and teach without external interference. Academic freedom does not justify unethical research practices. The FFI has a proven track record of intentionally and systematically harming science and human rights, and is therefore not a suitable partner for the university. Breaking all ties with the FFI is actually necessary to guarantee academic freedom. Research shows that FFI funding biases research.

7. Wouldn't a university decision to break ties with the fossil industry be seen as 'cancel culture'?

"Cancel culture" is a polemical, loaded term, and should be avoided in this discussion, which should be based on careful scientific and ethical considerations alone. Every university has the right and the obligation to decide against collaborations with an industry that has a proven track record of intentionally and systematically harming science and human rights.

8. But if we ban cooperations with the FFI, won't we also need to break ties with many other industries?

This argument is an example of "whataboutism", which is a problematic rhetorical tool. The logical extension of this argument would be that universities cannot make any assessment of research funds they receive, which is clearly undesirable. In no instance is the historical and public record of corporate wrongdoing and harm as clear as in the case of the FFI, with the exception of tobacco. Research shows that the FFI has a business strategy that poses an existential threat to humanity. The IPCC report clearly documents that the FFI has actively worked against the energy transition for decades, and intentionally undermined climate science. Refusing to collaborate with this particular industry is therefore warranted, while this is less obviously the case for other industries.

9. Shouldn't each researcher be free to make up their own mind about collaborating with the FFI?

Academic freedom does not include a right of engaging in unethical research partnerships. The FFI has a scientifically documented track record of harming science, and scientists. The FFI's long-running campaign of climate change denialism has contributed to a toxic atmosphere of public distrust in science. Collaborations with the FFI are liable to legitimate the FFI's long-running practice of undermining the scientific process, as well as their human rights violations. Consequently they are unethical.

Sources

The FFI has actively resisted the energy transition for decades

All quotes in this section from: IPCC Assessment Report 6 (AR6), Working Group III (WGIII): Mitigation of Climate Change.

“One factor limiting the ambition of climate policy has been the ability of incumbent industries to shape government action on climate change (Newell and Paterson 1998; Breetz et al. 2018; Jones and Levy 2009; Geels 2014). Incumbent industries are often more concentrated than those benefiting from climate policy and lobby more effectively to prevent losses than those who would gain (Meng and Rode 2019). Drawing upon wider networks (Brulle 2014), campaigns by oil and coal companies against climate action in the US and Australia are perhaps the most well-known and largely successful of these (Brulle et al. 2020; Stokes 2020; Mildenerger 2020; Pearse 2017) although similar dynamics have been demonstrated for example in Brazil and South Africa (Hochstetler 2020), Canada (Harrison 2018), Norway, or Germany (Fitzgerald et al. 2019). In other contexts, resistance by incumbent companies is more subtle but nevertheless has weakened policy design on emissions trading systems (Rosembloom and Markard 2020), and limited the development of alternative fuelled automobiles (Wells and Nieuwenhuis 2012; Levy and Egan 2003).” (1-28)

“Institutions entrench specific political decision-making processes, often empowering some interests over others, including powerful interest groups who have vested interest in maintaining the current high carbon economic structures (Engau et al. 2017; Okereke and Russel 2010; Wilhite 2016)” (1-32)

“Mitigation actions requiring a shift away from established sectors and resources (e.g., fossil fuels) entail governance challenges to overcome vested interests (SEI et al. 2020; Piggot et al. 2020).” (4-93)

“Countermovement coalitions work to oppose climate mitigation (high confidence). Examples include efforts in the US to oppose mandatory limits on carbon emissions supported by organisations from the coal and electrical utility sectors (Brulle 2019) and evidence that US opposition to climate action by carbon-connected industries is broad-based, highly organized, and matched with extensive lobbying (Cory et al., 2021).” (5-83)

“The fossil fuel energy generation and delivery system therefore epitomises a barrier to the acceptance and implementation of new and cleaner renewable energy technologies (Kariuki 2018). A good number of corporate agents have attempted to derail climate change mitigation by targeted lobbying and doubt-inducing media strategies (Oreskes and Conway 30 2011). A number of corporations that are involved in the supply chain of both upstream and downstream of fossil fuel companies, make up the majority of organizations opposed to climate action (Dunlap and McCright 2015; Cory et al. 2021; Brulle 2019).” (5-84)

[Internal Documents Show Big Oil PR Messages Still 'Mislead' Public on Climate - DeSmog](#) Show investigative journalism that, among others, highlights that CCS is only leveraged to prolong the use of fossil fuels.

The FFI has actively undermined climate science for decades

“In the US, the oil industry has underpinned emergence of climate scepticism (Farrell 2016a; Dunlap and McCright 2015; Supran and Oreskes 2017), and its spread abroad (Dunlap and Jacques 2013; Engels et al. 2013; Painter and Gavin 2016). Corporate opposition to climate policies is often facilitated by a broad coalition of firms (Cory et al. 2021). Conservative

foundations, sometimes financed by business revenues, have funded a diversity of types of groups, including think-tanks, philanthropic foundations, or activist networks to oppose climate policy (Brulle 2014, 2019). However, there is limited knowledge about the conditions under which actors opposed to climate action succeed in shaping climate governance (Kinniburgh 2019; Martin and Islar 2021).” (*IPCC Assessment Report 6 (AR6), Working Group III (WGIII): Mitigation of Climate Change, 13-27*)

“Accurate transference of the climate science has been undermined significantly by climate change counter movements, particularly in the US (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003; Jacques et al. 2008; Brulle et al. 2012; Boussalis and Coan 2016; Boykoff and Farrell 2019; Farrell 2016a; Carmichael et al. 2017; Carmichael and Brulle 2018; Almiron and Xifra 2019) in both legacy and new/social media environments through misinformation (van der Linden et al. 2017) (robust evidence, high agreement), including about the causes and consequences of climate change (Brulle 2014; Farrell 2016b; Supran and Oreskes 2017; Farrell 2016a).” (*IPCC Assessment Report 6 (AR6), Working Group III (WGIII): Mitigation of Climate Change, 13-32*)

“Ever since climate change became a political issue in the late 1980s, a number of industry coalitions have formed to oppose mandatory carbon emissions reductions. One key coalition was the Global Climate Coalition (GCC). This paper conducts a historical and empirical review of the activities of this coalition. This review shows that the GCC engaged in four distinct activities to obstruct climate action: 1) monitoring and contesting climate science, 2) commissioning and utilizing economic studies to amplify and legitimate their arguments, 3) shifting the cultural understanding of climate change through public relations campaigns and 4) conducting aggressive lobbying of political elites.” (*Robert J. Brulle (2022) Advocating inaction: a historical analysis of the Global Climate Coalition, Environmental Politics, DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2022.2058815*)

“A newly discovered archival document shows the American Petroleum Institute was promulgating false and misleading information about climate change in 1980, nearly a decade earlier than previously known, in order to promote public policies favorable to the fossil fuel industry.” (*Benjamin Franta (2021) Early oil industry disinformation on global warming, Environmental Politics, 30:4, 663-668, DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2020.1863703*)

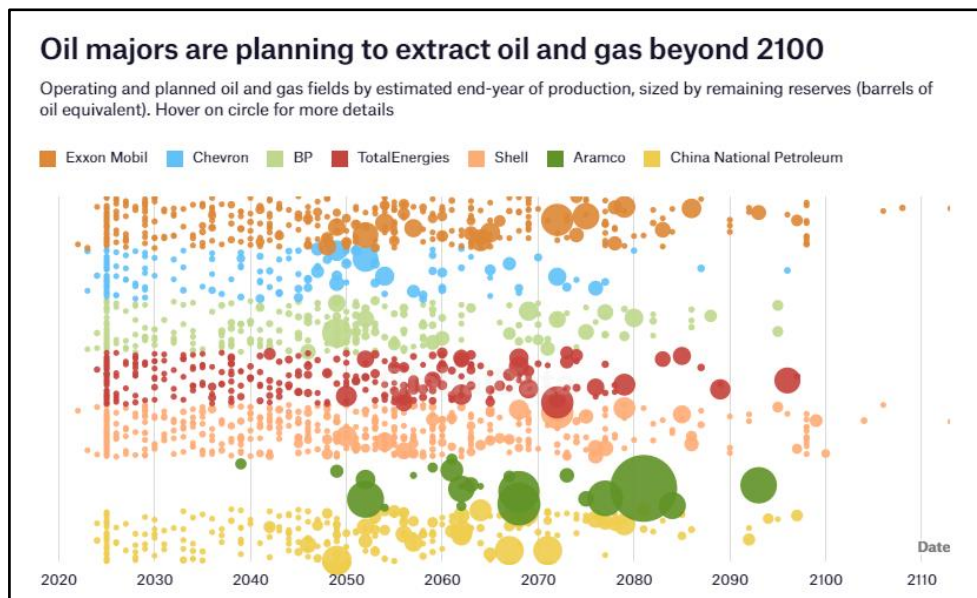
FFI industry emission reduction targets and actions not aligned with Paris objectives

“In this paper, we present a forward-looking method of estimating the life-cycle carbon emissions intensity of O&G producers based on their public disclosures, and we use it to compare companies’ targets with international climate goals. The sector is not on track. Recent trends in emissions intensity have been mostly flat. Nearly half the companies we assess have yet to set emissions targets or provide sufficient clarity on them. Of those that have set targets, most are either too shallow or too narrow.” (*Dietz et al. How ambitious are oil and gas companies’ climate goals? Science 2021, Vol 374, Issue 6566, pp. 405-408*)

“Moreover, the financial analysis reveals a continuing business model dependence on fossil fuels along with insignificant and opaque spending on clean energy. We thus conclude that

the transition to clean energy business models is not occurring, since the magnitude of investments and actions does not match discourse. Until actions and investment behavior are brought into alignment with discourse, accusations of greenwashing appear well-founded.” (Li M, Trencher G, Asuka J (2022) *The clean energy claims of BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell: A mismatch between discourse, actions and investments*. PLoS ONE 17(2): e0263596)

“The way fossil fuel companies frame climate change in their annual sustainability reports shines light how the fossil fuel industry is addressing pressure from stockholders, investors, and the public to become less environmentally harmful. [...] Together, the frames are a subtle form of climate change denialism that acknowledges climate change as a problem without diagnosing the root cause of the problem (ideological denial), conceals environmentally harmful actions with the rhetoric of environmental friendliness (greenwashing), and justifies the status quo as necessary (reification).” (Megura M, Gunderson R. *Better poison is the cure? Critically examining fossil fuel companies, climate change framing, and corporate sustainability reports*. Energy Research & Social Science Volume 85, March 2022, 102388)



(Source: GlobalData, EnergyMonitor)

FFI funding biases research agendas and outcomes

“We found that fossil-funded centres are more favourable in their reports towards natural gas than towards renewable energy, and tweets are more favourable when they mention funders by name. Centres less dependent on fossil funding show a reversed pattern with more neutral sentiment towards gas, and favour solar and hydro power.” (Almond, D., Du, X. & Papp, A. *Favourability towards natural gas relates to funding source of university energy centres*. Nat. Clim. Chang. 12, 1122–1128 (2022))

“The obvious conflicts of interest—oil and gas companies funding research to end fossil fuel use—have caused researchers to cry foul and question whether the oil and gas industry—or any industry for that matter—can really be trusted to finance its own death.” (*Thacker P D. Stealing from the tobacco playbook, fossil fuel companies pour money into elite American universities BMJ 2022; 378 :o2095*)