

Climate Claims in Data Center Politics

Water Claims

Energy Claims

Pollution Claims

Political Claims

Infographic and Reference Sheet, with [Annotated bibliography](#).

Presented by:

[Website & Resources](#)



Introduction

Claims about the climate effects of data centers are made by people who want to build a data center or to support it politically. Lacking nuance, some claims may seem more legitimate than they are in reality. With nuance, these claims can lead to very different political outcomes.

This infographic is for community organizers, city officials, journalists, educators, and investors. It provides a quick reference to common claims and the nuance needed for unpacking them. The accompanying [annotated bibliography](#) provides citations for further utility.



1/12

The Water Cycle Nuance

CLAIM

"Even if water evaporates, it rains back down."

NUANCE

When water evaporates during cooling, **it leaves the local watershed** and precipitates elsewhere (1.1, 1.2, 1.3).



2/12

The Just Passing Through Nuance

CLAIM

"Water is a cycle, it goes back into the system after it passes through the data centers."

NUANCE

Construction in drought-prone regions undermines water-table viability and **causes water-system pressurization failures** that **leave farms short of water** (2.1, 2.2, 2.3).



3/12

The "Nothing Is Added" Water Nuance

CLAIM

"The data center's usage doesn't dirty the water."

NUANCE

Water faces both **chemical and biological pollution** (3.1, 3.2). Data center **developers hide pollution** information (3.3).



4/12

So-Called Closed-Loop Systems

CLAIM

"They are water efficient/use clean power because they are closed-loop."

NUANCE

Efficiency **increases pollution** at a slower rate. **Trading water for dirty power**. The water eventually **gets dumped**. (4.1, 4.2, 4.3).



5/12

New and Advanced Nuclear Energy

CLAIM

"Nuclear energy can decarbonize the energy supply for data centers."

NUANCE

Nuclear power plants are **too expensive** (5.1), **too slow** (5.2), and in many cases **not ready for deployment** (5.3).

CLAIMS ABOUT ENERGY



6/12

The Clean Nuclear Energy Nuance

CLAIM

"Nuclear power is clean."

NUANCE

Nuclear power's fuel cycle **produces fossil fuel emissions** (6.1). **All types of reactors (fission and fusion) generate radioactive waste** (6.2, 6.3).

CLAIMS ABOUT POLLUTION



7/12

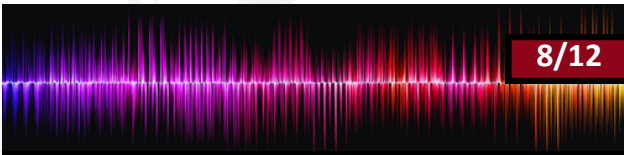
The Tale of the Smokeless Data Center

CLAIM

"Data centers do not cause any air pollution."

NUANCE

Gas turbines used to provide on-site power to data centers **emit toxic nitrogen dioxide fumes** (7.1, 7.2).



8/12

The Tale of the Silent Data Center

CLAIM

"Data centers cause minimal amounts of sound pollution."

NUANCE

Data centers **emit noises in a range of frequencies** (8.1, 8.2). Even low-frequency noises can **harm human health and wellbeing** (8.3).



9/12

AI Will Save Us from Ourselves

CLAIM



“AI will save the world faster than it exacerbates problems.”

NUANCE



Efficiency ≠ sustainability. We can't clean up a pool at one end while polluting at the other (9.1, 9.2, 9.3).



10/12

The Community Prosperity Nuance

CLAIM



“Data centres bring your community prosperity to help fight climate change.”

NUANCE



Data center-driven community wealth is a **fiscal illusion**: municipal tax breaks, low job creation, power grid expansion cost shifted to residential ratepayers (10.1, 10.2).



11/12

Eco Trickle-Down Claims

CLAIM



“AI tech companies finance the green revolution.”

NUANCE



Energy sources are **increasingly fossil fuels use over renewables** (11.1, 11.2). There is greenwashing and **disregarded climate targets** (11.3).



12/12

Claims that Data Centers are Inevitable

CLAIM



“AI is happening, so we need more data centres.”

NUANCE



There are aspects that are **too destructive**, and they **have to be controlled through political actions** (12.1, 12.2, 12.3).

See the annotated bibliography at:

<https://theaulafellowship.org/climate-claims-in-data-center-politics/>

THE **AULA** FELLOWSHIP

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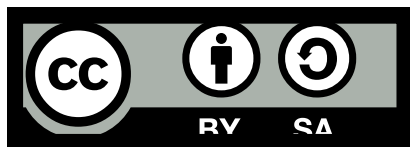
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