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To cite this article: Lucas G. Christel, Ricardo A. Gutiérrez & Elisabeth Möhle (22 Jul 2025): Navigating contradictions: perceptions of climate action progress and obstruction in Argentina, Climate and Development, DOI: [10.1080/17565529.2025.2534702](https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2025.2534702)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2025.2534702>



Published online: 22 Jul 2025.



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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Navigating contradictions: perceptions of climate action progress and obstruction in Argentina

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ABSTRACT

Latin America is called to play a central role in the decarbonization of the world economy. The large strategic resources of the region appear both as an object of the deepening of extractive processes and as a potential contribution to the green economy. In the case of Argentina, contradictory trends emerge from the coexistence of a pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and a strategic reliance on the agricultural and energy sectors as key drivers of economic development. We focus on obstruction strategies that impede or delay climate policies and the energy transition. From a perspective centred on actors' perceptions and based on semi-structured interviews with a diverse array of stakeholders, carried out between 2022 and 2023, we seek to answer the following questions: What is the state of climate action in Argentina? Who are the main obstruction actors and what are their strategies and discourses? We show that most actors perceive that the progress of Argentine climate action is incipient and lacks comprehensiveness and coordination while the main obstructionist forces are specific economic actors who lobby against particular policies in a context of narrative disputes that pit the climate issue against the imperatives of economic growth.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 January 2025
Accepted 24 June 2025

KEYWORDS

Climate obstruction; climate change; Argentina; energy transition; perceptions-climate action

Introduction

Successive international climate cooperation institutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015) determined that the possibility of limiting the Earth's temperature increase requires the commitment of all nations to limit their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Bueno, 2021; Stevenson, 2021). This requires multisectoral energy transition and decarbonization processes (mobility, industry, agriculture, etc.) implemented through public policies carried out by national and subnational states. In such processes, national states play a preponderant role as they are in charge of designing and implementing climate actions and long-term decarbonization strategies.

Climate change is a global problem and, therefore, requires the cooperation of all nations. However, not all countries are in the same position. The richest countries have the greatest historical responsibility for the accumulation of GHGs in the atmosphere (Cullet, 2010), and their level of development gives them a greater capacity to respond to the impacts of climate change. Instead, countries with lower income levels are not only less responsible for the climate crisis but also have fewer resources to carry out the transition to sustainability and respond to the risks of climate change (Mildenberger, 2020).

Additionally, in Latin America, the approach to the phenomenon has some particularities that differentiate it from other regions. First, there is an urgent need for economic growth to improve decent living conditions for all citizens

(Jackson et al., 2018), which strains the complex relationship between development and the environment. Second, the region's export matrix relies heavily on the exploitation of natural resources (Bataille et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2017). Third, the region plays a minor role in contributing to global emissions. Fourth, there is a certain institutional weakness that often hampers the ability to achieve the objectives for which policies are designed (Brinks et al., 2020).

Several natural resources available in Latin American countries are fundamental to the success of the global climate fight: minerals such as lithium and copper are central to the advancement of electromobility; natural gas and the high hydro-electric potential appear as opportunities in terms of energy transition and to produce green hydrogen; ecosystems such as the Amazon are key due to their carbon capture capabilities; and agricultural activities provide both food and biofuels.

Climate policies, like environmental policies in general (Alcañiz & Gutiérrez, 2022), generate distributional effects. The particularities of Latin America add specific tensions to the decarbonization strategies of each Latin American nation. Aspects such as the weight of the agricultural or hydrocarbon sectors within the productive structure have a different impact on the configuration of actors, visions, discourses, and national policies. In the specific case of Argentina, a scenario – sometimes contradictory – is identified in which ambitious policies in terms of climate action¹ are combined with strong pressure to increase the export of natural resources (lithium, copper, oil, gas, grains, etc.) as a source of foreign exchange to overcome the external restriction, recover economic growth, and improve social indicators.

Studies on the weight of the configuration of actors in environmental policies are extensive and detailed (Alcañiz & Gutiérrez, 2022). Specifically, studies such as Mildenerger (2020) and Stokes (2020) have examined the role and strategies of different actors in climate policies and in the decarbonization strategies of national states. Although there have been specific advances and attempts to theorize the problem (Cann & Raymond, 2018; Nerlich, 2010; Poortinga et al., 2011), less attention has been paid to the study of actors seeking to obstruct or delay the advancement of climate policies. This is particularly concerning in the case of Latin American countries, where weak institutions – frequently highlighted in the literature as a characteristic of the region (Brinks et al., 2020) – seem especially vulnerable to obstruction strategies.

In this context, Argentina, the third-largest country in the region by GDP and by contributions to Latin-American greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, presents a particularly conflictive development model. This makes it an interesting case for further studies on obstruction. We conducted an exploratory study to describe the state of climate change in Argentina and to examine, from key actors' perceptions, which the main obstruction actors and their strategies and discourses are. We conducted fieldwork between 2022 and 2023. Based on the perceptions of key actors, we argue that while the progress of Argentine climate action is incipient and lacks comprehensiveness and coordination, the main strategies of climate obstruction are related to economic lobbying against specific policies, in a context of narrative disputes where the climate issue is confronted with the need for economic growth.

The analysis presented in this paper is based on 20 semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2022 and October 2023. To carry out this research, we distinguish four groups of actors that conform the environmental field in Argentina: the academic sector, environmentalism, the public sector, and the media. This selection of stakeholders allows us to capture the most relevant voices in the agenda-setting and dissemination of climate action.

To ensure a comprehensive representation of key actors in Argentina's climate agenda, we employed a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling approach Tansey (2007), which allowed us to select interviewees who held significant decision-making roles or influence within their respective sectors. This approach combined elements of both decisional and positional sampling strategies (Hoffmann-Lange, 2005), enabling us to capture diverse perspectives within each sector. For all sectors, we ensured diversity in terms of gender, territorial distribution, and levels of responsibility. In the government sector, for example, we interviewed representatives from both national and subnational levels, focusing on individuals responsible for environmental, energy, and production-related issues. In the media sector, we sought to include journalists from different thematic areas, such as environmental journalism, energy, agriculture, and economics. Within the environmentalism sector, we aimed for diversity in terms of age, organizational types, and geographical distribution, while in the scientific sector, we included interviewees from both international and locally-focused climate research. This purposive sampling approach, together with the careful selection criteria, ensures that the voices captured in the study reflect a broad

and varied range of perspectives on climate policy and action in Argentina. While we acknowledge the importance of the economic and business sectors in shaping the climate agenda, we faced significant challenges in accessing this sector, which is why we did not include it as a primary group in our analysis. While we did conduct a few interviews with stakeholders from the economic sector, we ultimately decided not to incorporate these into the final work due to the lack of adequate representativeness, which could have compromised the reliability of our findings.

The interviews were based on a questionnaire consisting of 15 open-ended questions divided into three blocks (see Annex I). The first block inquired about the interviewee's normative vision of the link between the climate agenda and development, the role of the state, and the country's main climate challenges. The second part included specific questions on how the interviewees viewed the role of different actors in the progress or setback of the climate agenda. The last question inquired more deeply about the existence of obstruction strategies.² Informed consent in verbal form was obtained from all participants involved in the study. The interviews were coded based on the following axes: relevant actors, discourses on climate action, and obstruction strategies.² From this structuring, an analytical work of a descriptive nature has been achieved, which offers a general overview of the perceptions that key informants from the selected sectors hold about climate action and obstruction in Argentina.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we present the key concepts that frame our analysis: climate action, denialism, and obstruction. In addition, we highlight the growing attention paid to climate perceptions and how this approach can be relevant to understanding the many facets of climate action. In separate sections, we briefly contextualize the Argentine case and introduce the main results of our interviews' analysis. Finally, we discuss the main findings of our research and explore future research directions.

Climate action, denialism, and obstruction

To study the perceptions of different actors regarding the strategies of obstruction in the face of climate action, we start by defining climate action. In general terms, climate action can be understood as any type of policy, initiative or program that aims to reduce greenhouse gases and develop adaptation strategies in the face of climate change or seeks to finance and/or support such initiatives (Climate Grounds Well, ND). This definition does not focus solely on actions, but it is broad enough to include narrative discussions, as well as the enunciation of problems and/or solutions to climate change.

Once climate action is defined, two types of negative reactions appear: denialism and obstruction. In the case of denialism, what is ultimately ignored and denied is the existence of climate change as a natural phenomenon in itself and/or its anthropogenic origin. Even though the literature has recently paid significant attention to the study of climate denialism, this attention has also impaired the clarity and precision of the term and its main implications as the terms skepticism, contrarianism and denialism are usually used as interchangeable synonyms (Nerlich, 2010). To address this lack of

precision, some studies have sought to categorize these types of attitudes towards climate change. For example, Poortinga et al. (2011) distinguished between three types of climate change skepticism: trend, attribution, and impact skepticism. In the first type, doubts refer to whether global warming is indeed occurring. The second type questions the anthropogenic component of the phenomenon. The third type does not believe in the harmfulness of climate change's impact. Similarly, Cann and Raymond (2018) argue for the need to distinguish between the two main forms of skepticism. The first is epistemic in nature and questions climate change as a physical and scientific phenomenon. The second, called response skepticism, concerns doubts about the effectiveness of actions and responses to climate change.

Studies that investigate the origins and conceptual ecosystem of climate change deniers find strong links to neoliberal economic ideas and stress the fact that such actors identify scientific knowledge and climate science as an attack on economic freedom when they are used to re-arrange environment-economy relations (Almiron et al., 2022; Brulle, 2014; Dunlap & Jacques, 2013). Similarly, studies on climate change acceptance or denial have identified links between the growth of climate skepticism and political campaigns (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), economic crises and high unemployment (Scruggs & Benegal, 2012), and concerted efforts to discredit scientific work (Inman, 2012).

In contrast to denialism, less effort has been made in the conceptualization and study of climate obstruction as a different phenomenon. Perhaps, the most fundamental distinction between climate denialism and climate obstruction regards the acceptance of the phenomenon of climate change. Unlike denial, obstruction strategies are negative reactions to the advancement of climate action without questioning global warming as a climatic phenomenon or its anthropogenic origin. In this sense, climate obstruction is understood as any intentional effort to rule out or block climate action initiatives, regardless of the territorial level or the actor or group of actors promoting such initiatives. Intentional effort refers to specific actions (discourse narratives included) that an actor or group of actors may carry out to obstruct climate action through pressure on state authorities or other actors interested in mitigating and/or adapting to climate change. This way of conceiving climate obstruction makes it possible to capture both the sporadic strategies of actors as well as sustained actions over time. Thus, the obstruction to a climate action may well correspond to a sporadic, punctual, and specific strategy of certain actors, while actions involving a permanent type of blockade usually denote the sustainability of the obstruction actions over time. In our definition of obstruction, we do not restrict the territorial scale of the disputes to the national level, nor do we understand that only climate action driven by state actors can be obstructed or delayed. Thus, obstruction strategies are characterized by multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder dynamics. In other words, disputes over climate action often cut across subnational, national, and international scales and usually involve diverse actors from the state, productive, and social sectors.

In this study we do not analyse specific public policies or climate obstruction and denial strategies. Instead, we focus

on the perceptions of four groups of actors. According to Abelán López (2021), perceptions are consolidated from the experiences and beliefs that subjects develop regarding a given process. Studies of perceptions and climate change are receiving increasing attention in the literature. Recent studies have examined how people update their beliefs about climate change (Kube et al., 2024); the links between political distrust and concern about climate change (Verner, 2023); the effects of local climate change, partisanship, and political ideology on climate perceptions (Binelli et al., 2023); and local perceptions in Amazonian communities regarding change, impacts, and adaptation (Almudi & Sinclair, 2022). In line with these recent works, our focus on perceptions allows us to capture the way in which actors interpret climate change and understand climate action and obstruction. We contend that climate perceptions have important implications for climate action. Considering the knowledge, beliefs and practices of social actors regarding the impacts of climate change helps to better understand the disputes over mitigation and adaptation strategies (Pinilla Herrera et al., 2012; Ulloa, 2011).

The Argentine case

Before delving into the perceptions of our key informants, we present a brief overview of Argentina's productive structure, sectoral contributions to GHG emissions, and the country's main climate commitments. This information is important as this general framework influences the perceptions of actors and, in turn, shapes the interests of different sectors about climate action.

Argentina is a middle-income country located in the south of the American continent. Its large territorial extension provides it with vast and diverse natural resources. It has consolidated a development model in which activities related to natural resources, particularly agriculture and increasingly hydrocarbons, play a key role in the production and export baskets. However, significant industrial development has also been achieved, mainly in the food and beverage, chemical, and automotive sectors.

Thus, a productive model was created in which both industry and commerce contribute 20% of the GDP each (see Figure 1). They are followed by business services, agriculture and public administration and defense with around 10% of participation each. Next are education, transportation and communications, health, oil and mining and construction. The final group, with less than 4% participation each, includes financial intermediation, cultural services, hotels and restaurants, electricity, gas and water, domestic service, and fishing (Figure 1).

This productive matrix is partially reflected in the sectoral distribution of emissions. According to the former Ministry of Environment (2019), the main sectors contributing to greenhouse gas emissions in the country are (see Figure 2): (i) energy: about 53% of total emissions, with a significant contribution from transportation (14%) and electricity generation (13%); (ii) agriculture, livestock, forestry, and other land uses: contributing 37% of emissions, with enteric fermentation (15%) and land use change (10%) as the main contributors;

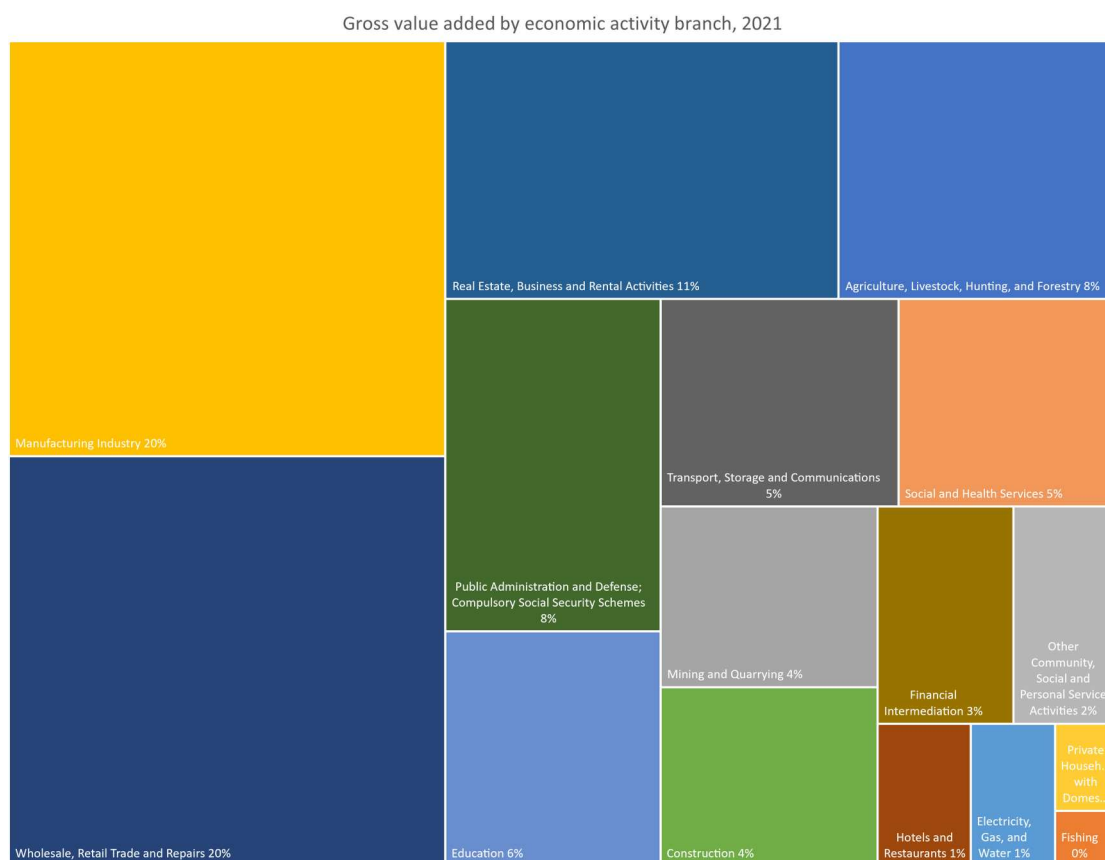


Figure 1. Gross value added by branch of economic activity, 2021. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Income Generation Account and Labor Input, National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina⁵.

(iii) waste: 4% of emissions; and (iv) industrial processes and product use: about 6%.

The sectors with the highest contribution to emissions do not correspond exactly to those that contribute the most to the national value added. However, when considering the

composition of the export basket a closer correspondence is found, especially with regard to the agricultural sector. [Figure 3](#) shows that manufactures of agricultural origin accounted for 33.5% of exports in 2021. Primary products of agricultural origin represented 26.8%. Together, these two items account for 60% of exports and show the major role played by agro-industrial complexes in the generation of foreign currency. Industrial manufactures accounted for 20% and 11% came from services. Finally, energy accounted for 5% and mining accounted for 3.6% ([Figure 3](#)).

This configuration of the production and export matrix involves a series of economic, social, territorial, and environmental challenges. In particular, compliance with the commitments made in the framework of the Paris Agreement requires a strong decarbonization effort in all productive sectors, particularly energy and agriculture.

Emissions by economic sector, 2016

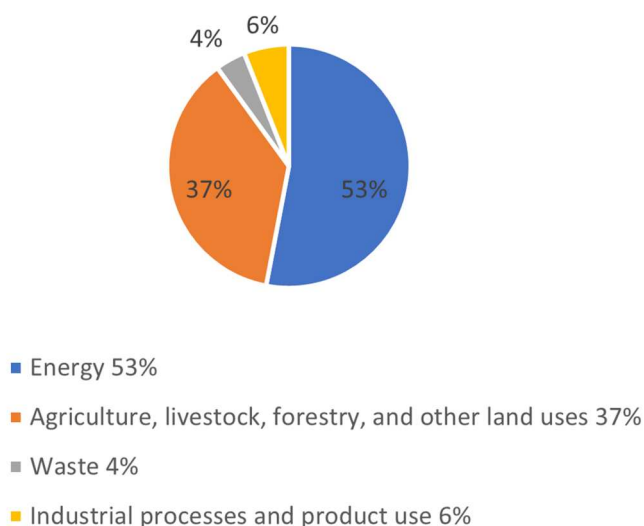


Figure 2. Sectoral contribution of emissions, 2016. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory, 2019⁶.

Perceptions about climate action and obstruction in Argentina

In this section, we analyse key informants' perceptions of climate action progress and obstruction strategies in Argentina. We start by exploring each group's views on other groups and then summarize their insights on the challenges, narratives, and solutions related to climate action. Finally, we underscore the main perceptions regarding the strategies used to obstruct climate efforts in the country.

Sectoral composition of exports, 2021

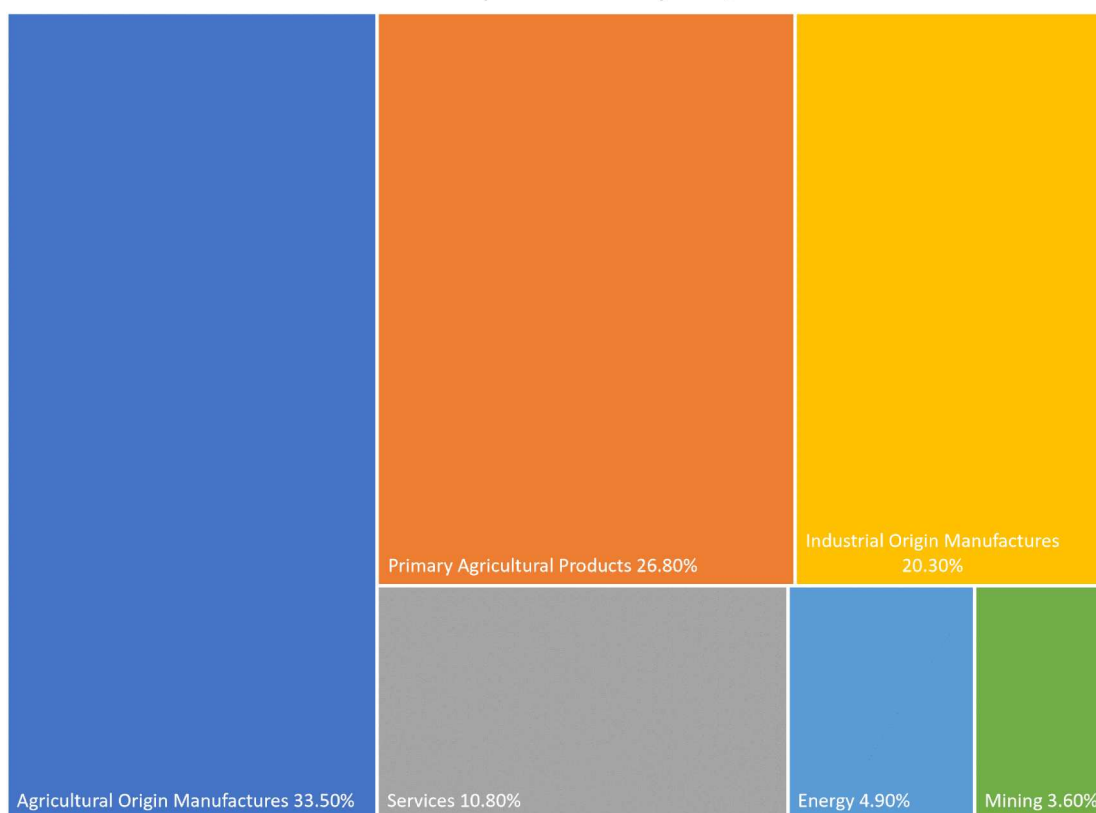


Figure 3. Sectoral composition of exports, 2021. Source: Prepared by the authors based on Export Complexes, National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina⁷.

Perceptions on the actors

Regarding the **state**, there is general agreement on the importance of its role in leading the transition process and on the difficulties encountered in carrying out this task.

Interviewees from the environmental sector believe that the state should play a leading role in the transition strategy, as well as in controlling and regulating the economy. However, they perceive the state as weak. Even though they acknowledge that some areas work hard to advance the climate agenda, they see these efforts as lacking in strength.

Interviewees from the media also believe that the state should take the lead in advancing climate actions:

“The private sector can and should promote measures, but the state has to be the one that channels these discussions and pushes the private sector to carry out this transition.” (Media sector informant 1, 2022).

As expected, interviewees from the state also think that the state should lead climate action:

“The state has to lead and give signals, set regulations and limits, to define where it wants to move the economy” (State sector Informant 1, 2022).

However, they also point out the lack of clear signals within the state and significant disparities at different government levels and administrative areas. Reinforcing the diagnosis of weaknesses referred to by key environmental informants, they note a lack of strength for climate action.

Finally, academic interviewees also attribute a central role to the state, viewing it as the arena where the dispute over how the transition should be carried out takes place.

“The state plays a central role in the transition process, especially in middle-income countries like ours, to establish the agenda and direction of the development strategy. However, I do not believe that this discussion is clear for the political elite, and therefore the Argentine state is a scenario where there is a dispute of conceptualizations and different interests and priorities about what the transition agenda should be” (Academy sector informant 1, 2022).

When asked more specifically about **political actors**, all interviewees agree on the lack of concern and understanding throughout the political spectrum regarding the importance of the climate agenda, except for the most radicalized sectors, both on the right and left. While the left advocates for incorporating climate action into the political agenda, a particular far-right leader (Javier Milei) denies the importance of climate change altogether.

Interviewed environmentalists believe that no political leader stands out positively or negatively regarding climate action, except for Javier Milei (leader of *La Libertad Avanza*, a right-wing political party), whom they see as an opponent to the advancement of the climate agenda:

“You do not see any kind of leadership on these issues in any of the political actors. It is not an issue that is in anyone’s priorities”. (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

Similarly, key media informants observe no major differences between the then ruling party (*Frente de Todos*, centre-left) and the main opposition (*Juntos por el Cambio*, centre-right).³ Although there is no direct political rejection of the climate agenda, they see it as lagging behind:

“There has been great progress in incorporating the climate agenda into politics, as reflected in legislation and political discussions over the last few years. But without the push from civil society, I believe the political sector would be even further behind on the climate agenda. This lag is due to several factors, including the lack of training among political leaders. Additionally, it is challenging to shift the agenda in a country accustomed to dealing with frequent socioeconomic crises” (Media sector informant 1, 2022).

The diagnosis of key state informants is similar: they believe that no political actor prioritizes the climate agenda because there are always other urgencies, and the importance of the issue is not yet fully understood. Finally, from the academic interviewees’ perspective, there are no major differences among political actors, except for some nuances between the then two major coalitions (*Juntos por el Cambio* and *Frente de Todos*) that approach the issue with their ideological imprint.

One interviewee argues that within the centre-left coalition there is a dispute over how the transition should be, while within the right-wing coalition there is a corporate capture. There is also a generalized consensus among all sectors that the left-wing party (*Frente de Izquierda y los Trabajadores*, FIT) supports the climate issue in a more comprehensive way, while Javier Milei’s right-wing faction appears to be directly against it.

“I do not see a big difference between the ruling party and the opposition. There may be actors within each coalition that have more defined positions. Other political actors, more at the extremes, have positions that are more clearly differentiated. On one hand, it seems that Milei, if this political sector consolidates, could adopt a Bolsonaro-type discourse. On the other hand, the Trotskyist left has a well-defined view on sustainability from an anti-capitalist perspective. Their positioning is clearly differentiated, but within the major coalitions, there are only nuances without a programmatic element that sets them apart” (Sector academy informant 1, 2022).

Overall, most key-informants agree that the advances in the agenda are due more to social pressure than to the initiative and commitment of political actors.

Perceptions of **economic actors** present disparate views. While almost all interviewees identify business actions contrary to climate action when sectoral interests are affected, some also note that exposure to internationalization forces companies to adopt the agenda, even before regulatory requirements arise in the country.

Among interviewed environmentalists, there is a certain consensus that the main economic sectors have largely opposed the climate agenda, employing strong lobbying against any ambitious environmental policy. At the same time, they acknowledge that these sectors are necessary for the transition but argue that they are so “over-ideologised” that they often obstruct policies that are not significantly contrary to their interests:

“The role of the main economic sectors (agriculture, energy, mining) has been completely counterproductive, with a strong

lobby against any kind of ambitious environmental policy” (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

“I don’t like to demonize the private sector because this transition will be difficult for all actors. But I do say that we have a very over-ideologised economic sector, and there is sometimes an unfounded fear from these sectors that any environmental policy will destroy productivity. Obviously, they are protecting their interests, but it seems to me that they are not very intelligent in approaching other sectors and negotiating” (Environmental sector informant 2, 2022).

Interviewees from the media sector see the private sector a little differently, especially internationalized companies, which are more interested in the climate agenda than the state sector and political leaders:

“For many companies, the climate agenda arrived before the state because, in many cases, economic sectors that export to other countries found it necessary to adapt” (Media sector informant 1, 2022).

Key-informants from the public sector express a mixed view: companies only adjust to environmental requirements when it is convenient for them. However, internationalized companies are already required to make the transition and are therefore at the forefront:

“It seems to me that those looking outwards already have it clearer. In fact, there are relevant export companies that are already certifying different issues related to sustainability” (State sector informant 2, 2022).

In line with key environmental informants, academic interviewees place greater emphasis on corporate positions with the capacity to influence or determine public policy decisions:

“There is a very strong corporate sector in Argentina that we know is the one that ends up forcing an important part of the political decisions”. (Academic sector informant 2, 2022)

The greatest agreement is found in the perceptions about the **academic sector**. All interviewees diagnose a lack of connection between academia and the social and productive needs of the country, both due to a lack of external calls and to a lack of willingness to get involved:

“As with everything that happens in academia, it is somehow encapsulated. There is a lack of transfer from academia to production, from academia to public policy, from academia to society”. (State sector informant 2, 2022)

Regarding **environmentalism**, there is general agreement among interviewees on its growing prominence in recent years, as well as on its heterogeneity and the difficulty this implies for articulating a consensual and strong narrative.

Interviewed environmentalists see themselves as a diverse sector with many different visions. They do not view this diversity as a strength, but rather as a weakness due to the lack of a unified discourse and of the capacity to attract the population at large.

Key media informants agree that there are tensions within the environmental sector regarding which agenda to promote or which narrative to set. However, they also note that environmentalism has grown significantly in the last decade and has managed to position itself as a valid interlocutor:

“Environmentalism has grown a lot in the last decade in Argentina, it has managed to position itself very strongly, especially in the youth sector, and I believe that today it has established itself as a valid interlocutor. However, there are tensions within the sector regarding which agenda to promote or which narrative to set. When we look at the youth environmental sector reflectively, different branches appear. Each one pushes towards a certain side, and that does not end up helping much in terms of discourse and the promotion of issues. If there were a clearer argumentative line, it would help a lot, not only the sector itself, but also in exerting an influence on others” (Media sector informant 1, 2022).

Interviewed public officials, on the one hand, see environmentalism as being disconnected from the country’s needs. But on the other hand, they are beginning to see environmentalism as more attentive to the economic situation.

Perceptions about the **media** tend to be negative. Interviewees agree that, although coverage of climate issues has increased in recent years, there is still no comprehensive approach to the subject.

Interviewed environmentalists have an ambivalent view of the media: on the one hand, they believe that climate issues are poorly communicated; on the other hand, they acknowledge that there are open spaces in the media for environmental communication, although these remain niches areas with little time for elaboration.

Key media informants see some progress in environmental communication within the media, but they say that it continues to be a sectoral issue that is not addressed transversally.

Interviewees from the state sector agree that there is a lack of serious and transversal communication committed to sustainability in the large media, although it is appreciated that some small media have taken the lead:

“We have a hard time seeing serious communication on this. The media do not give it any attention. Now comes the COP, we will see a couple of articles and some tweets, but there is no real approach to these issues. Paradoxically, environmental and climate change-related news are increasing. If you see this week the loss of the wheat crop or the decrease in corn planting, what that is going to mean in terms of loss of foreign currency should increase the relevance of the agenda, but there is a lack of understanding” (State sector informant 3, 2022).

Interviewees from academia mention that climate change-denialist discourses have almost no presence in the Argentine media and that the coverage of climate change tends to be more linked to the occurrence of international events, such as the COP, or environmental emergencies, without being a priority in the media agenda:

“There are some studies that show that climate change denialist discourses have almost no presence in the Argentine press. Coverage of climate issues tends to be more linked to international events or the occurrence of environmental emergency events.” (Informant sector academy 2, 2022).

Perceptions on problems, solutions, and narratives

Regarding the **main challenges of the climate agenda** in Argentina, all interviewees identify a series of elements that limit the progress of climate action and/or create a favourable context for climate obstruction efforts.

For the environmentalists interviewed, the main challenge is that the difficult economic situation, combined with the international demand for hydrocarbons, supports a narrative of gas as a transition fuel and as a tool to alleviate economic hardship:

“The global and national macroeconomic situation, as a result of the Russian conflict in Ukraine, the energy crisis and the debt crisis that we are going through, is a huge challenge for the climate agenda. It once again strengthens narratives that extractive policies must be deepened to increase exports and pay the debt. Given that the rest of the world will have a greater demand for gas, there is a sense of an opportunity that should not be wasted. This entire narrative is completely counterproductive for the socio-environmental agenda and for the possibility of considering truly transformative transitions” (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

Key media informants hold that the main challenge lies in the state’s role as the primary actor, which barely achieves continuity between administrations and areas of work and fails to establish a clear strategy on the energy transition and the climate agenda.

Interviewees from the state sector diagnose a lack of public and political awareness, as well as insufficient information and financing from the state to effectively carry out the climate agenda.

Finally, academic key-informants point to a lack of integration between economic development policies and the climate perspective. One interviewee specifically mentions a lack of space to consider alternatives:

“I believe that we can have options even within the same development logics. For example, (in the Climate Change Advisory Council) only one scenario of increased gasification was proposed, while the alternative of increased electrification with renewables to reduce the reliance on gas, which is where the world is heading, could also be considered. It is a problem of the status quo and is linked to a very strong corporate view in Argentina, associated to the oil and industrial sectors” (Academic sector informant 2, 2022).

Regarding the **link between development and the climate agenda**, there is a nearly universal agreement that they should go hand in hand, both for Argentina’s sake and to support international policies.

Among interviewees from the environmental sector, there is a wide range of opinions on this point. While one interviewee holds that development and climate action do not have to be linked, another highlights the lack of a fundamental discussion on what development truly means, and a third argues that the two issues must unquestionably go hand in hand:

“One thing has nothing to do with the other. That is ideology. It is a narrative that to develop as societies we must destroy everything. And it’s a pernicious narrative that has brought the whole world to the point of collapse. We must find other ways to live as human societies, allowing nature to return” (Environmental sector informant 2, 2022).

“In many cases it seems that there is a divorce between one thing and the other, but our economic development has to be framed within the global policy of decarbonization, we have a space (to develop), but it is not infinite”. (Environmental sector informant 3, 2022).

“There is a fundamental debate that is beginning to take place on how we think about development and how we define progress.

This is starting to be discussed in certain spaces” (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

Key media informants agree with the latter perspective: both agendas must be connected. The same is understood by interviewed public officials: the climate and the development agendas should be central to each other.

Likewise, interviewees from academia believe that both agendas are inseparable, although some actors may perceive environmental protection as an economic risk:

“There is a perception among certain actors of the political and economic elite that it is possible to articulate an economic development agenda with environmental protection. However, this view is not yet predominant. The prevailing view in the productive sector, and especially in the agricultural one, is to perceive the climate agenda as a risk, as a threat” (Academic sector Informant 1, 2022).

Perceptions on climate obstruction

Interviewees were asked about both denialism and obstruction in Argentina. The responses regarding the existence of **denialism** in Argentina are coincidental in identifying right-wing politician Javier Milei of *La Libertad Avanza* as an actor who has made statements contrary to climate action, but without making it the core of his discourse.

In general, interviewees from the environmental sector do not identify denialism as a relevant concern in Argentina.

“If you are referring to active disinformation campaigns or groups trying to promote climate denialism, I believe we do not have such a serious problem yet” (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

Nevertheless, one interviewee does state that “perhaps denialists are not seen in discourse, but in practice, they act as such” (Media sector informant 2, 2022).

Among key media informants, it is understood that many shortcomings in climate communication may be due more to ignorance and/or lack of training than to an active intent to promote a denialist agenda.

Interviewees from the public sector hold that the only denialist group is the extreme right (e.g. Javier Milei and *La Libertad Avanza*) and that the main concern regarding this political space is the lack of democratic commitment, but it does not have a significant level of organization concerning the climate agenda:

“There is no organized group regarding climate change beyond the extreme right, but it is worrying because they do not believe in the democratic system; climate is just one more aspect, not their main-agenda. So, yes, there are actors who are against certain environmental acts, but they usually overlap with those who oppose advances in social matters. But I don’t see them organized to deny climate science or wanting to banish the issue from the media” (State sector informant 1, 2022).

Interviewees from the academia also share concerns about Milei and the extreme right-wing space:

“What worries me is that Milei is trying to position himself politically from an adversarial, climate change denialist position. In Argentina, there had not been an openly denialist position. Compared to Brazil, here the agricultural and hydrocarbon sectors are strongly represented in the two traditional coalitions. I do not know how much Milei could represent it especially” (Academic sector informant 1, 2022).

When asked about **obstructionism** in Argentina, it is important to note that the term does not resonate very much with the interviewees, so the answers to the related questions should be interpreted with caution. The perception of the state as largely weak may explain why interviewees predominantly focused on economic actors when discussing obstructionism, leaving politicians aside. Additionally, Milei, the main denialist mentioned, had not yet been elected nor had an active legislative agenda, which is why he was not referred to in these discussions.

Interviewees from the environmental sector identify the narrative that focuses on the economic crisis and practically “forces” the extraction of resources (particularly energy and mining) for export as the most obstructive action. At the same time, they note that certain *over-ideologized* actors carry out obstructive actions, even without being significantly affected, and that they face a weak state lacking the strength to push the agenda:

“One of the ways in which they act as blockers is by promoting a narrative where it seems as if it is the only alternative for economic development. These narratives are based on activities that have a long history in Argentina, such as oil ... So, you have a very strong memory based on those kinds of activities. All this generates positive feedback that makes us always follow the same path, making it very difficult to change course (Environmental sector informant 3, 2022).

“These are narratives that are installed to continue with the current model, built on many premises that are not true. For example, it is assumed that we will extract as many hydrocarbons as we can because it is the last chance, and we have to export them. This is extremely problematic because it generally does not imply solving issues of inequality, economic crisis, or access to energy. This is a very important problem because it prevents us from discussing alternatives” (Environmental sector informant 1, 2022).

Key media informants argue that there is no obstruction if understood as intentionally blocking climate action measures for the sake of blocking them. However, they acknowledge that there could be obstruction depending on its definition:

“It depends on how we define obstruction. If we understand it as intentionally blocking climate action measures for the sake of blocking them, I would say no. But we do have obstruction in terms of not being ambitious enough” (Media sector informant 1, 2022).

“If a company talks about sustainability but its main activity is fracking and building pipelines to transport gas, no matter what they say, they are contributing to the planetary crisis” (Media sector informant 2, 2022).

Interviewees from the public sector say that nobody acts explicitly against the agenda because it is very costly. However, there is a very clear actual power behind the fact that certain laws cannot be passed; it is evident how certain actors play a very strong role in obstructing the progress of legislation:

“Explicitly, no one acts against the climate agenda because it is very costly. But, when lobbying against a law to protect forests or wetlands, it ends up obstructing the environmental agenda” (State sector informant 2, 2022).

Academic key informants state, on the one hand, that they detect a strong lobby from the livestock and the energy sectors, to avoid changes or policies that affect them. On the other



Figure 4. Word cloud about climate obstruction. Source: Elaborated by the authors.

hand, they say it is necessary to differentiate between obstructionism and the discussion on what the transition is or how it should be, whether there is a right to development or not, etc.:

“A very loose definition of the term ‘obstructionism’ does not allow us to see the difference in the nuances of what is discussed. For example, situations that are not against the advancement of a climate action agenda but speak differently to diverse perceptions of sustainability or of where the transition should go” (Academic sector informant 1, 2022).

Based on the codification of these interviews, a word cloud was generated to reflect the perceptions of the interviewed actors regarding the concept of climate obstruction (Figure 4). This visual representation is based on the respondents’ answers and highlights the most recurring terms and concepts in their discourse. The word cloud provides an initial view of common patterns and approaches in the participants’ perceptions. As we can observe, the most highlighted words are “negationist”, “narrative”, “power”, “lobby”, “development” and Milei. This aligns with the previous analysis where the two most important obstruction strategies mentioned by our interviewees were a narrative dispute regarding development and sectoral lobbying to impede the advancement of environmental regulations. Additionally, Javier Milei was characterized as the only figure strictly linked to the denial of climate change.

Conclusions

Although exploratory in nature, this study provides important insights into Argentina’s current climate action landscape, highlighting key findings while identifying areas that warrant further in-depth exploration and analysis.

First, the study reveals that most of the interviewed actors perceive Argentina’s climate action as still in its early stages, characterized by a lack of comprehensiveness and coordination. Although various policies have been implemented

and some advances are important, these are often seen as fragmented and insufficiently integrated into a national strategy. Many of the interviewees pointed to a lack of clear, cohesive leadership on climate issues, where different sectors or levels of government are not sufficiently aligned in their approaches, leading to a piecemeal approach to climate action. This perception suggests that there is an urgent need for greater policy coherence and institutional coordination if Argentina is to meet its climate goals effectively.

Second, there is a consensus among the interviewees that climate denialism is not a major concern in Argentina, contrary to trends observed in some other countries. The participants, however, pointed out that while climate denialism does not play a significant role in the public or political discourse, the views expressed by specific political figures, such as Javier Milei⁴, who has downplayed the urgency of climate change, stand in contrast to this general consensus. Milei’s rhetoric, which is sometimes framed as skeptical of climate action, introduces a potential risk of bringing climate denialism to the forefront of political debates, especially given his prominence in the national political scene. Nonetheless, the overall national narrative has yet to be dominated by climate denialist arguments, as the public and most political actors do not seem to consider them central to the debate.

Third, the research identifies two primary mechanisms of climate obstruction in Argentina: economic lobbying and narrative disputes. Economic lobbying focuses on opposing specific climate policies or laws, particularly from powerful sectors such as agriculture and energy. These actors argue that those measures would harm economic growth, job creation, and sectoral competitiveness. This lobbying, however, operates within the larger framework of narrative disputes about the nature of the transition to a low-carbon economy. In this context, climate action is often framed as a threat to economic development, and the competing narratives reflect differing views on the pace, scope, and cost of the transition. While some actors advocate for a more gradual and economically balanced approach, the interviewees do not perceive a singular, linear obstructionist narrative consistently opposing climate action.

While the concept of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, the underlying logic of the narrative disputes identified in this study strongly resonates with it. In this regard, Argentina, as a developing country, should not bear the same level of responsibility for climate action as industrialized nations – a perspective that aligns with the core principles of CBDR. This argument often frames climate policies as externally imposed and potentially unfair, reinforcing skepticism towards ambitious climate action. However, this raises a critical challenge: distinguishing between legitimate concerns about the feasibility and socio-economic impacts of climate policies and obstructionist strategies that leverage these concerns to delay or weaken climate action to protect sectoral or individual interests. This dynamic is relevant in the Global South, where climate debates are deeply intertwined with broader developmental priorities. Unlike in some Global North countries, where climate obstruction often takes the form of outright denial or well-coordinated lobbying against

regulation, in Argentina and similar contexts, opposition frequently emerges through contestation over economic justice and the right to development. By linking climate obstruction to these structural inequalities in the international system, this study makes a theoretical contribution, showing that in developing countries, opposition to climate policies is often framed through disputes over economic justice rather than outright denial. This suggests that climate obstruction in the Global South may operate through more diffuse and subtle mechanisms – such as fragmented narratives and conflicting policy priorities – rather than through explicit anti-climate agendas. Recognizing this pattern is crucial for developing strategies that not only counteract obstruction but also integrate climate action into broader economic and social objectives in a way that resonates with domestic priorities.

To further deepen the understanding of climate obstruction in Argentina, at least four key areas deserve further investigation. First, a more systematic analysis of sectoral lobbying against climate policies is necessary. While this study has identified economic lobbying as a central mechanism of obstruction, further research should provide a more detailed mapping of the specific actors, strategies, and influence networks involved. Engaging with voices from the productive sector will be essential – not only to understand their perspectives but also to analyse how their practices, visions, and narratives intersect with climate action.

Second, the distinction between climate obstruction and denialism requires both theoretical and empirical refinement. While this study highlights that outright denialism has not played a major role in Argentina's climate politics, there is a need to better understand how obstructionist strategies function in the absence of denialism. Developing a clearer framework to differentiate obstruction from skepticism and legitimate policy concerns would help identify the nuanced ways in which climate action is delayed or weakened.

Third, future research should examine the evolving role of climate denialism in Argentina, particularly in the context of Javier Milei's presidency. While this study found that denialist discourses have not been a dominant force in Argentina's climate debates, Milei's rhetoric – marked by skepticism towards climate policies – raises questions about whether this dynamic may shift. Researching the political, cultural, and institutional factors that have historically limited the influence of climate denialism in Argentina, as well as the potential for its expansion under Milei's leadership, would provide valuable insights into how climate narratives evolve in different national contexts. His presidency may mark the beginning of a more polarized climate debate, with new tensions between pro-climate and obstructionist positions, potentially influencing both domestic policy and Argentina's international climate commitments.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a broader understanding of climate obstructionism in the Global South by highlighting how narrative disputes and sectoral interests shape climate action in Argentina. By advancing this research agenda, future studies can refine the theoretical tools needed to analyse climate obstruction beyond traditional denialist frameworks, offering a more comprehensive view of the challenges and possibilities for climate policy in developing countries.

Author contributions statement

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, the analysis and interpretation of the data, the drafting of the manuscript, and the critical revision of the intellectual content. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript to be published and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical statement

The research has been conducted in compliance with the ethical standards established by the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM), Argentina, and the funding institution, Brown University, United States of America.

Acknowledgment

This article is part of the project “*Clashes in Paradise: Development Models and Climate Obstruction in Argentina and Brazil*”, funded by Brown University and The Climate Social Science Network (CSSN).

Notes

1. For example, an ambitious pledge to reduce GHG emissions by 2030 established in the 2020 NDC; the expansion of installed renewable capacity reaching a generation of approximately 15%; the institutionalization of an inter-ministerial cabinet on climate change, the presentation of a climate change adaptation and mitigation plan to 2030 elaborated among all substantive areas.
2. See Annex I for the questionnaire.
3. At the time of the study, the ruling party was Frente de Todos (center-left), with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as a key leader – although Alberto Fernández was the president-, while the main opposition was Juntos por el Cambio (center-right), a coalition including Unión Cívica Radical, PRO, and Coalición Cívica, under the leadership of Mauricio Macri.
4. At the time of our interviews, Milei was seen as an eccentric outsider politician, with expectations limited to a marginal role. His election as president in November 2023 took the entire political system by surprise.
5. Available at: <https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Nivel4-Tema-3-9-49>
6. Available at: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/inventario_de_gei_de_2019_de_la_republica_argentina.pdf.
7. Available at: <https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Nivel4-Tema-3-2-39>

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Brown University.

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Appendix

This is the interview that was used to question different respondents, adjusted according to the relevance of each case.

Environmental field interview

In your opinion, what are the main challenges of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

In your opinion, how should the climate agenda relate to the country's need for economic development?

In your opinion, what should be the role of the State regarding the climate agenda in Argentina?

How do you assess the role of Argentine political actors in the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

How do you assess the role of Argentine economic actors in the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

How do you assess the role of Argentine academic actors in the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

How do you assess the role of Argentine media and social media actors regarding the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

How do you assess the role of Argentine environmental activists regarding the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

Do you consider that there are other relevant actors in the progress or setbacks of the climate agenda in Argentina today?

- a. Key figures
- b. Main strategies

In English, the term “climate obstruction actors” is used to describe leaders and institutions committed to obstructing or delaying the development and implementation of the climate agenda. If you had to identify these actors with a Spanish expression, how would you do it?

Do you consider that any of the previously mentioned actors engage in obstruction strategies?

- a. How they operate
- b. Key leaders
- c. Main institutions
- d. Key areas of work
- e. Funders
- f. How they interact with scientific literature on the climate emergency

In the United States and the European Union, the role of climate denial and climate skeptic groups is a growing concern. Do you identify such actors in Argentina? If so, please describe key figures and strategies.

In general, how is the field of pro-climate policy advocates organized?

What strategies do they use to counteract obstructionism and/or climate denial in Argentina?

Regarding how to deal with obstructionism and/or climate denial in Argentina, what is still not being done by pro-climate policy advocates that, in your opinion, should be done?