



CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION ACROSS EUROPE

EDITED BY

Robert J. Brulle
J. Timmons Roberts
Miranda C. Spencer



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Climate Obstruction in Spain

From Boycotting the Expansion of Renewable Energy to Blocking Compassion Toward Animals

JOSE A. MORENO AND NÚRIA ALMIRON

INTRODUCTION: MORE EFFORT IS NEEDED

Spain has a long track record of environmental pollution tolerated by the political elites. Despite EU pollution directives dictating that the ‘polluter pays’, the public sector has taken responsibility for the costs and protected the polluters.¹ This principle has been applied not only to toxic discharges but also to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. For example, while most EU countries reduced their GHG emissions and complied with the Kyoto framework, Spain was one of the few that fell further short of its targets.² Specifically, GHG emissions in Spain have followed this trend, rising to almost 300 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (MMT CO₂e) by 1990, peaking in 2007 at around 450 MMT CO₂e, and then falling to around 300 MMT CO₂e at the beginning of the 2020s, as shown in Figure 12.1.

Since 2007, decarbonization in Spain has been led by the progressive dismantling of fossil fuel sources such as coal-fired power plants and circumstantial factors such as the economic crisis that put the brakes on the nation’s industry. The EU National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs)

Spain Greenhouse Gas Emissions

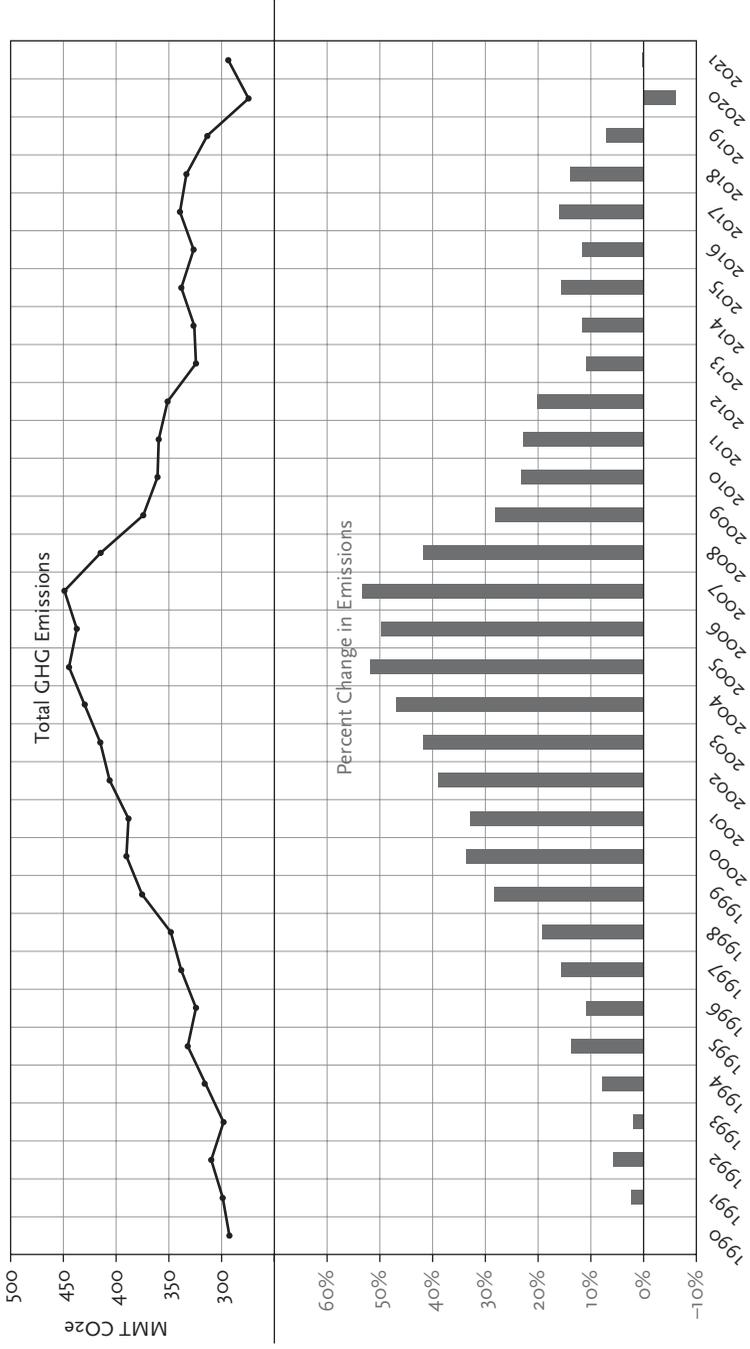


Figure 12.1 Total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (in MMT CO₂e) and percentage change in emissions in Spain between 1990 and 2021, inclusive. Source: Total GHG emissions based on data provided by Gütschow and Pflüger (2023) for Kyoto Six Greenhouse Gas Totals.

stipulate that Spain must reduce its GHG levels by 23% by 2030 compared with 1990.³ According to the Observatory of Sustainability,⁴ an independent association that scrutinizes GHG emission trends and sources in Spain, the country is likely to meet its European commitments within sectors operating in the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), such as energy production. This result is due to the planned closure of coal-fired power plants and the advancement of renewable forms of energy, the organization indicated. However, it warned that the efforts will be harder in the diffuse sectors (which represent 61% of Spain's GHG emissions), including transport (43% of the diffuse sector), agriculture (19%), residential and institutional building (14%), and waste management (7%), among others.⁵

These trends occur in the context of Spain's unique history. As in the rest of Southern Europe, liberal democracy, with its associated social and economic institutions, was not fully consolidated in Spain until relatively recently due to four decades of fascist leadership (1939–1975). Therefore, the country inherited both the dictatorship's economic structures and its elites and has evolved into a polarized political model. Spain is an exemplary case of majoritarian politics, in which the two major parties take turns in power and there is a substantial distinction between government and opposition.⁶ This polarization, also present in the Spanish media system,⁷ has meant that climate action and obstruction are linked to political cycles and parties in power. In this chapter, we address the successive political cycles and their climate implications and focus on the obstruction efforts of two industries: energy, the main source of GHG emissions in Spain as well as climate obstructionism throughout the country's history, and animal agriculture, due to the emerging debate over the need to reduce consumption of animal products for both ethical and environmental reasons.

CLIMATE OBSTRUCTIONISM IN SPAIN: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although development was not uniform within the country, Spain's overall industrial development occurred very late relative to other Western European countries, beginning in the 1950s. Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975) neglected the environment, a topic that also remained a non-priority during the administration of the first governments of the reinstated democracy (1977–1996). Only between 1996 and 2018 did

climate awareness emerge in the country, together with explicit climate obstructionism. And, from 2018 to 2023, climate action has been marked by culture wars.

Genealogy of environmental obstructionism in Spain (1939–1996)

Franco's fascist administration applied tactics to ignore, deny, hide, and absolve polluting industries of the environmental impacts they produced, as described by environmental historian Pablo Corral-Broto.⁸ The Franco government used experts to generate doubt about the evidence of environmental pollution, a technique that Corral-Broto notes is in line with the thesis of Oreskes and Conway's book *Merchants of Doubt*.⁹ The dictatorship sought to portray an image of modernity and industrial prosperity, a goal to which pollution complaints were an obstacle. This authoritarian past helps to explain Spain's late implementation of ambitious climate policies. Spain is one of several European countries that later freed themselves from fascism, a feature that has affected the quality of contemporary democracies in Southern Europe.¹⁰ Francoism's sociological and structural legacy reflects what Franco biographer Paul Preston¹¹ has called the 'institutionalized pillage' of the dictatorship. When liberal institutions and democracy eventually developed in Spain, they did so under the auspices of neoliberal capitalism, which placed former non-democratic elites in control of key sectors of the economy—what some authors have defined as *authoritarian liberalism*.¹² Thus, Spanish elites' ideological alignment toward the old regime's value of environmental neglect was the starting point for delay on climate action in this country.

The first democratic administrations in Spain managed key sectors, such as energy, with the economy rather than the environment as a priority. An example of this trend was the speculative bubble in nuclear energy generated during the Franco regime, which ended with a costly moratorium on the construction of new plants during the government of the social democrat Felipe González (1982–1996). The privatization of the state-owned energy company Endesa (founded in 1944) is another case of interest in this period due to its role as one of the largest GHG emitters in Spain. Part of the company's stock was sold to private investors in 1988, with the Socialist Party (PSOE) still in power, while a conservative government (Popular Party, or PP) completed Endesa's privatization in 1997.¹³ This company grew and expanded thanks to state

support but was then progressively transferred to private investors, a paradigmatic example of the impact of neoliberal policies on the energy sector in Spain.¹³

Pioneering renewables and the penalization of self-generated electricity (1996–2018)

Between 1996 and 2004, the PP governed Spain under President José María Aznar, whose administration signed the Kyoto Protocol in May 2002. Later, during José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's PSOE government (2004–2011), former Aznar administration members positioned themselves as climate sceptics. The ideological hub of the PP was, at the time, the Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies (FAES), a think tank founded by Aznar in 2002. Although this think tank has not been an overt source of climate obstruction, it published in Spanish some climate obstructionist books by relevant European politicians, such as *Planeta Azul (No Verde)* (Blue Planet in Green Shackles) by Václav Klaus (2008) and *Una Mirada Fría al Calentamiento Global (An Appeal to Reason: A Cool Look at Global Warming)* by Nigel Lawson (2009).

For a short period during the 2000s, Spain was a pioneer in installing renewable forms of energy in the European Union.¹⁴ Aznar's outgoing conservative government had established the first policy to incentivize renewable energies in 2004, in hope of promoting private investments in this area,¹⁵ and, during the next socialist administration (Zapatero's, from 2004–2011),¹⁶ incentives grew. As a result, in 2008, Spain found itself amid a renewables speculative bubble that coincided with the eruption of a global economic crisis that also affected the electricity market; consequently, the PSOE government adjusted the renewable energy subsidies. In 2012, Mariano Rajoy's PP administration introduced a moratorium on the construction of new installations and, in 2013, ended the policy mechanism designed to accelerate investment in renewables. The reasons for the dismantling of renewable energy promotion varied from poor policy design to the political economy of the sector¹⁴ but also included obstructionist strategies: 'Lobbying by the incumbent energy utility companies played a major role in driving the policy dismantling process' because 'they perceived renewables as unwanted competition and as a threat to their business models'.¹⁴

The 2010s in Spain were characterized by the austerity government of Mariano Rajoy's conservative party (2011–2018). Rajoy had a poor understanding of climate science, as shown by his previous statements. For

example, in 2007, when his party was the political opposition, he said that he trusted his cousin—a physicist sceptical about anthropogenic climate change—and that if humans can barely predict the weather, how much more difficult must it be to predict the climate?¹⁷ Once in office, Rajoy's government instituted a tax on solar photovoltaic self-generation (the 'sun tax') in 2015. The 2012 moratorium on renewable energy development combined with the brake on self-generation paralyzed the development of renewables, especially photovoltaics, in Spain.¹⁸ Critics argued¹⁹ that this decision favoured the interests of the energy oligopoly—a market controlled by a few companies, such as Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy, Repsol, and Energias de Portugal (EDP)—which could continue to operate their existing power plants profitably and for whom household PV self-generation could be a threat.

The climate culture wars (2018–2023)

One of the first decisions taken by Pedro Sánchez's first PSOE administration when it came into power in 2018 was to repeal the 'sun tax'. This period has been marked by the diversification of climate measures at various political levels, which in turn increased opposition and delay-based obstructionism. Although Sánchez's government can be considered the most ambitious administration on climate issues in Spain's history, it wasn't without controversy. An example of this was the poor reception of COP 25, organized by Chile in Madrid in December 2019. On this occasion, Spain presented itself as an international flag-bearer in the fight against climate change while allowing the country's most prominent GHG-emitting energy companies, such as Endesa and Iberdrola, to sponsor the summit. COP 25 did not produce any substantial results, negotiations between countries were unsuccessful, and the summit received criticism for greenwashing.²⁰

Nevertheless, Spain eventually acted during this period. One of the milestones of the second Sánchez administration, in coalition with the left-wing party Unidas Podemos (2020–2023), was the approval in 2021 of the Climate Change and Energy Transition Bill. This law set the goal of achieving a 23% reduction in Spain's emissions levels compared with 1990 by 2030, as required by the European Union. The law aroused both enthusiasm and mistrust from environmental groups, who considered it necessary but insufficient. During the legislative process, the conservative PP abstained from supporting the law, and the far-right party Vox

emerged as an obstructionist stakeholder. In 2020, the latter presented a controversial amendment to the entire law, which repeated the denial, delay, and policy sceptic arguments disseminated for years by the climate countermovement.²¹

In addition to the central government, other Spanish governments, including autonomous communities and city councils, implemented strategies to tackle climate change during this period. A relevant case was the creation of low-emission zones, restricted traffic areas based on vehicle pollution levels in the urban centres of large cities, including Madrid and Barcelona. This measure also became a politically polarized cultural flashpoint. In Barcelona, Mayor Ada Colau (2015–2023) of the left-wing *Barcelona en Comú* party focused on pedestrianizing streets and banning high-emissions vehicles from entering the city. In Madrid, left-wing Mayor Manuela Carmena and her *Ahora Madrid* coalition pursued the same strategy between 2015 and 2019. However, since the 2019 elections, conservatives used the growing fight against car bans as a marker of right-wing identity. For example, in the 2023 municipal elections, the campaign of right-wing parties in some cities turned the elimination of bike lanes into an ideological issue.²²

Thus, climate action in Spain became a polarized cultural issue from which all sides sought political capital. This process occurred with the help of equally polarized media and interest groups. Unsurprisingly, the conservatives (PP) and the far right (Vox) pushed the culture war narrative most actively. For example, PP's president of Madrid's region, Isabel Díaz Ayuso (2019–), positioned herself against the upcoming ban on combustion cars in 2035, arguing that the environment 'cannot be an excuse' to control the population.²³ Ayuso also used retrograde tropes of climate obstructionism, such as the idea that climate change is natural or that climate action favours communism, as her discourse in Madrid's regional parliament on 10 November 2022 showed.²⁴

In short, although climate awareness grew in Spain during the period, socioeconomic privileges, political polarization, and entrenched habits still played a major role in a country where neoliberalism had merged with a fascist inheritance. As might be expected to be the case in the Southern European context, the history of climate obstructionism in Spain has been interlinked with politics and neoliberal authoritarianism. Over time, power distribution among obstructionist stakeholders and their strategies have varied. However, the obstructionists all share an outdated notion of progress that places economy and ideology ahead of the environment.

THE FIVE TYPES OF OBSTRUCTIONIST STAKEHOLDERS IN SPAIN

Politicians

The first group of obstructionist stakeholders in Spain is politicians. The conservative PP stands out for rejecting climate policies and even casting doubt on the scientific evidence on climate change, as noted in this chapter's history section. This is the party that inherited the values of the previous authoritarian regime, including corruption and use of administration and state at the service of the country's economic elites—though the latter trait is also shared by the socialist party, PSOE. As described earlier, the conservative party rode the sceptic wave in the 2000s, obstructed electricity self-generation in the 2010s, and made political capital from the culture wars on climate change in the 2020s.

In this vein, the emerging far-right party Vox stands out for its populist climate obstructionist discourse. Vox's electoral platform in the national elections of July 2023 reaffirmed the party's position of the harshest form of obstructionism: it included the abandonment of the Paris Agreement and the derogation of the Climate Change Law, arguing with nationalist rhetoric that climate measures are against the interests of Spain and especially of its rural areas. However, Vox's climate discourse was contradictory until 2023,²⁵ the last period studied, so it remains to be seen whether it will moderate its position to capitalize on eco-nationalism as other similar parties have done in Europe.

Although not comparable with the aforementioned parties, the socialist party PSOE can also be counted among the obstructionist stakeholders in Spanish politics. Despite its climate policymaking efforts during the two Sánchez administrations, including the first Climate Law, the outcomes were mixed. These efforts seemed to be more a response to the need to 'jump on the EU bandwagon'—including the push and funding from the European Union for climate action—than to a strong commitment.²⁶ They were described as unambitious by environmental activists; this lack of ambition can be seen in the PSOE's support for an expansion of Barcelona's airport despite the need to decrease aviation due to its climate impact and the possibility that it could affect protected land.²⁷ Indeed, the coalition government was sued for climate inaction in 2020 by three green nongovernmental organizations, although that lawsuit was dismissed by the Supreme Court in 2023.²⁸ In Spain, unlike in other European countries, there is no standalone Green Party. Factions of this type tend to form coalitions with left-wing parties such as Podemos, which has had some influence as part

of the PSOE coalition government with Sánchez, but not enough to implement strong and decisive climate policies.

Industry

A second set of obstructionist stakeholders comprises the most polluting industries, usually organized into trade groups. Among the most influential are the Spanish Electricity Industry Association (AELEC, formerly UNESA), which holds a dominant position in the market by representing the interests of major companies such as Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy, and EDP; the Nuclear Forum, which unites the interests of the eight active nuclear plants in Spain; Sedigás, which represents the interests of the gas sector for all transportation, storage, and marketing phases; Carbuni3n, which covers the coal mining sector and lobbies to delay the closure of coal-fired plants; and the Spanish Association of Oil Product Operators, which represents oil companies such as Repsol, Cepsa, and BP. Through these trade organizations and their individual public relations strategies, the energy sector has historically lobbied for energy regulation in Spain to be more favourable to their businesses than to environmental criteria.

Animal agriculture is another significant emissions-intensive sector with extensive lobbying activity. In this area, Interporc stands out in defending the interests of the pig farming sector, one of the most prominent in both revenues and pollution generated.²⁹ Another relevant organization is ANICE, the National Association of Meat Industries in Spain, which represents slaughterhouses and meat-processing plants. The lobbying success of such animal trade groups is demonstrated by the fact that they continue to be subsidized by the Spanish state and the European Union despite the environmental, ethical, and health impacts of their business. To maintain direct and indirect economic EU aid from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of their main goals.³⁰

Think tanks

A third set of climate obstructionists can be found among think tanks. These organizations have had less relevance in Spain than in other countries but still have been able to influence or align with political parties and industry to distract the climate debate. Most think tanks are neo-liberal and libertarian, with a focus on the dissemination of anti-state

interventionist ideas. Notable ones include FAES, the think tank linked to the conservative PP; the Juan de Mariana Institute, the most prominent in Spain for generating explicitly climate-obstructionist content; and the Civismo Foundation. The latter two are linked to the Atlas Network, a US-based network of conservative international think tanks. There are also think tanks directly related to industry. One such is Enerclub, which spans different companies from the Spanish energy sector, including the most polluting ones such as Repsol, Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy, and EDP. Enerclub prepares reports and analyses and makes recommendations to advance these companies' positions and increase their profits in the electricity market. Another case is that of InLac, the Interprofessional Dairy Organization, which not only lobbies policymakers to serve their interests but also strives to convince the population of the need to consume dairy products daily.

Media

The fourth obstructionist stakeholder in Spain is the news media. In the Spanish press, climate scepticism has been limited, at least until the 2020s (i.e. it was concentrated within conservative or economics-oriented publications and within the opinion genre).³¹ In general, political parallelism—in which the media system reflects the structure of the political system—has resulted in the topic of climate change being subject to a polarization of views in the press similar to that found in politics. The media landscape has become a breeding ground for obstructionism, with some media content depicting climate action as an ideological issue to legitimize inaction when discussing, for example, private car use versus bicycle lanes, or meat consumption. Additionally, Spanish media coverage has followed the same cycles of attention and neglect seen in other countries of the Global North.³² Political summits, mobilizations, and scientific breakthroughs have dominated the media's focus. This event-driven coverage has avoided deeper explorations of the systemic nature of the climate crisis and possible solutions, such as the connection between dietary choices and the condition of the environment. This link has been a commonly shared omission in all media until recently. The *carnist* mindset—defined by psychologist Melanie Joy as the cognitive bias that makes us think of meat-eating as normal, natural, and necessary³³—has produced climate coverage in some Spanish media in which the environmental impact of animal agriculture has been neglected and, at times, even ridiculed.³⁴

Citizens

The fifth sphere of obstructionism in Spain is its citizenry. According to Eurobarometer, 81% of Spaniards see climate change as a fundamental problem (3% above the EU average), but the proportion of people who change their habits accordingly is much lower.³⁵ The most significant climate action Spaniards perform is recycling (78% say they do so, compared with 75% for the EU average). In contrast, more impactful activities such as reducing meat consumption are undertaken by only 15% in Spain (31% in the European Union); sustainable mobility is practiced by 26% (30% in the European Union), and only 3% practice sustainable tourism when planning a trip (11% in the European Union). The lack of cultural deconstruction of their polluting privileges—acknowledging that car use, meat consumption, air travel, and even faith in economic growth as the definition of progress can be harmful to the environment—makes Spanish citizens believe they are engaging in climate action when they are actually delaying decisive changes.

STRATEGIES TO OBSTRUCT CLIMATE POLICIES

In this section, we summarize the main strategies used in Spain by the top obstructionist stakeholder, polluting industries. These include influencing regulation and/or public opinion directly or indirectly through the media. The main tactics used by these climate-obstructionist industries include lobbying ('in house' by the company itself, externally by hired firms, and in coalition with other organizations in the sector), gaining access to politicians' influence via 'revolving doors', giving policy briefings; sponsoring favourable scientific research, disseminating favourable information (by, e.g., generating it through think tanks), media ownership infiltration, threatening legal action, and jumping on the climate bandwagon through greenwashing, corporate advertising, and publicity stunts. Though their tactics have been varied, the following are examples of some of the more prominent and effective of these tools.

Lobbying

The main strategy used by industry is lobbying policymakers to create the best regulatory atmosphere for their business needs, including preventing regulations from being passed and promoting or amending certain regulations. To help ensure success, companies hire former legislators or

regulators and/or promote some of their corporate members to run for office or work in the administration. This close relationship between the private sector and the government—almost nonexistent among green non-governmental organizations (NGOs) lobbying for climate action—grants companies privileged access to the administration and its functioning. This revolving-door reality has been described as a common practice among the most polluting industries in Spain.³⁶

Since the restoration of democracy, the two major parties that have taken turns leading the government have assumed power positions in energy companies before and after holding office. For example, the first president of the PSOE government ended up on the board of Gas Natural (Naturgy), and the first president of the PP government became an advisor to Endesa after leaving public office. Many cabinet members of various governments since 1977 have been directors, board members, or advisors of Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy, Repsol, and Enagás, dominant companies in the fossil fuel sector in Spain. According to criminologist Mònica Pons-Hernández,³⁶ ‘the lack of experience, the high remunerations, and the previous connections with the private companies lead to questioning whether individuals involved in revolving out are selling their access or expertise.’

Legal action

A second industry tactic, important to mention because of its novel use in Spain, is legal action as a form of climate obstruction. Litigation is not as ingrained in Spanish culture as it is in English-speaking countries, but it is emerging amid the culture wars over issues such as meat eating. Recently, the animal agriculture lobbies have begun to use legal action to prevent widespread dietary changes and thereby reinforce the meat culture in Spain. In 2021, for example, the meat lobbies Provacuno and Interporc brought³⁷ a vegan food company, Foods for Tomorrow, to court over its campaign promoting vegan ‘hamburgers’ as a more climate-friendly dietary option via the slogan ‘A meat hamburger pollutes more than your car’. The meat trade groups denounced the campaign, saying that it constituted unfair and misleading advertising, and, in 2022, a court ruled in its favour, arguing that the slogan met the criteria for misleading advertising and constituted a denigration of meat products. Foods for Tomorrow was forced to withdraw the campaign (although it was no longer running) and ordered never to repeat similar statements. The court also stated that the evaluation of the environmental sustainability of production processes is too complex for a vegan company to be able to state definitively that their products have

a smaller environmental impact than meat products.³⁷ The Spanish meat lobbies thus successfully prevented a brand from communicating to the public the environmental externalities of meat and created a threat against anyone trying to do the same.

Media co-optation

A third industry tactic involves the media sector. Through ownership, sponsorship, and advertising, the Spanish media system has become vulnerable to corporate interference. This problem has been compounded by deteriorating working conditions due to the 2008 economic crisis, resulting in precarious jobs and a lack of expert staff in newsrooms, including a lack of expertise in issues such as the environment. This situation has made the media vulnerable to the power of vested interests, including those of the polluting industries, either directly or through their lobbies and funded think tanks. For example, Grupo PRISA, one of the largest media groups in Spain, has long incorporated stakeholders with fossil fuel interests among its shareholders.³⁸ Also, during the COP 25 event hosted by Madrid and Chile, Endesa and Iberdrola were both sponsors and dominated many media outlets by, for example, purchasing ads on the front pages of the country's newspapers and generating coverage marked by greenwashing.¹⁸

Another example of a tactic used by obstructionists' industrial interests in Spain is attempting to pass responsibility for GHG emissions on to the public. While the citizenry, through changing consumption patterns and other habits, can play a key role in climate protection, most of the responsibility and power to act rest with industry. However, under the guise of knowledge dissemination and climate education, some industries try to delegate this responsibility to individual citizens. For example, the Spanish oil company Repsol, one of the biggest GHG emitters in Spain, in 2022 launched the Green Engine emissions compensation project.³⁹ Under this initiative, citizens can calculate their GHG emissions and offset them by supporting reforestation projects. This type of project seeks to instill in citizens the responsibility to act while the company continues to profit from the extraction, refining, and commercialization of fossil fuels.

Greenwashing

A final major obstruction tactic is greenwashing. Many industries have jumped on the bandwagon of climate concern in their corporate rhetoric and

public discourse while also lobbying against degrowth and sustainability—the very things needed to protect the environment—behind the scenes. For example, Spain’s tourism sector officially holds a very pro-climate-action position and has partnered with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to combat climate change through its World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the industry’s largest international lobby. However, some of WTTC’s members continue to lobby for increased tourism despite its large environmental footprint. A remarkable example of the success of this trend is the millions in subsidies Ryanair, the ultra-low-cost Irish tourist airline, has received from Spanish authorities.⁴⁰

THE DISCURSIVE FRAMINGS DISTORTING THE CLIMATE DEBATE

Overt obstructionist discourse has been deployed in Spain mostly through the use of discursive frames similar to those used in other European countries and the United States. We focus here on two cases,⁴¹ one involving the right-libertarian think tank Juan de Mariana Institute (JMI) and the other the animal agriculture lobbies, to exemplify these tactics. The first occurred during the period of direct opposition to climate action in the 2000s and 2010s; the second, during the climate culture wars of the 2020s.

Juan de Mariana Institute: Right libertarianism and climate obstruction

Because of its international networking, the JMI has played a role in the global climate countermovement. In 2009, with Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Madrid), the JMI published a report ‘Study of the effects on employment of public aid to renewable energy sources’, arguing that the ‘green employment’ policies of Zapatero’s socialist administration had been a fiasco. These policies encouraged industries such as energy, construction, and transportation with subsidies to meet certain environmental criteria. The US Institute for Energy Research (IER), a think tank whose work focuses on fossil fuel interests, sponsored the study.⁴² Obstructionist organizations in the United States, such as Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and the American Energy Alliance, used the report to oppose then-President Obama’s environmental policies.⁴² The ‘Spanish case’ also inspired other obstructionist think tanks to produce similar reports in Germany, Denmark, Italy, and the United States. The circulation of these European reports generated tensions in these countries’

embassies in the United States as they tried unsuccessfully to manage this flow of misinformation.⁴²

The JMI has become the most overt and prolific think tank in Spain in disseminating obstructionist messages about climate action. As a right-libertarian organization, the JMI supports free market capitalism, civil liberties, individual rights, and minimal government intervention. Its concern over the concentration of political power is evident in its first criticism of climate action: a 2005 opinion piece (op-ed) about the Kyoto Protocol, which criticized climate science on the grounds that it would lead to a global government. Between then and April 2022, the institute published approximately 180 articles concerning climate change, mostly op-eds. Through an inductive analysis⁴³ of the focus on climate issues in JMI's blog posts, we found recurrent themes: undermining climate science (33% of the texts), questioning climate policies (22%), and criticizing climate action supporters (22%). The publication of these texts peaked in 2007 and again in 2009, with another, smaller rise in 2019.

As for its critique of climate science up to the 2020s, the institute has maintained almost the same frames it has used since its inception, though it published many fewer texts after 2010. For example, in 2005, the JMI was featured at the 'Global warming: myth or reality' seminar held by the Rafael del Pino Foundation on 16 May in Madrid. There, the JMI president co-moderated a session with the president of the Science and Environmental Policy Project, a US advocacy group that aims to undermine climate science and helped to organize the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC), a group of climate science contrarians. As recently as 2015, their blog⁴⁴ featured a counterargument appealing to the myths they promote, namely that the planet has been warm in other past periods; CO₂ is not the most common GHG; extreme weather events are less common now than in the past, not more; CO₂ is not a toxic environmental pollutant; and scientists' agreement on the anthropogenic cause of climate change is not true. In the discourse of this think tank, climate science is a religion, as expressed in a 2019 blog post.⁴⁵

The frames the JMI has used to criticize climate policies (the main focus, as noted, of 22% of the 180 blogs we analysed) show a recurrent pattern of opposition to such measures on the grounds that they would involve state intervention—a theme that repeats across time. The texts range from a 2007 article 'The fight against climate change costs a lot of money'⁴⁶ to a 2019 op-ed, 'Taxes on sin and climate change',⁴⁷ in which taxes in general, including climate taxes, are defined as 'robbery' and thus harmful to the economy.

JMI's targeting of activists and politicians promoting climate action (the main approach of another 22% of the blog posts studied) includes questioning the climate actions of members of the PSOE government, activists from environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, and international figures such as Greta Thunberg and Al Gore, the latter of whom the think tank severely criticized⁴⁸ in the mid-2000s, the period during which his documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* was in movie theaters.

Other frames (the remaining 23% of the blogs analysed) included 12% that mentioned climate change governance without a specific obstructionist focus, such as commentaries on social and political events. Also, 4% of the texts reflected nuclear expansionism and techno-optimism as their primary framing, despite the unfeasibility or unavailability of these technologies. In addition, 3% of the texts question renewable energy because of its cost or alleged non-viability—especially during the 2000s, when the speculative bubble in renewables emerged in Spain. Similarly, another 3% of the texts used frames centred on the idea that current lifestyles require fossil fuels.

Although the JMI is not highly visible in the media, it has gained some popularity in the niche world of the liberal economic press. This pattern can be demonstrated by the fact that up to 61% of the blog posts on climate change on the JMI website were reprints of articles first published in other media outlets by think tank members. Here, the online newspaper *Libertad Digital* stands out for having published 51% of the 180 texts in question. Several members of the JMI are regular columnists for *Libertad Digital*, which could explain why they have been able to introduce their discourse in the newspaper. This online outlet is another proponent of neoliberal libertarianism that adheres to criticism of climate science. For example, after the controversy over the emails from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia ('Climategate'), *Libertad Digital* published a column by a JMI member stating that 'In Spain we have been alone for many days informing readers of this pseudo-scientific scandal subsidized by politicians'.⁴⁹

Provacuno and Interporc: Fuelling meat culture in Europe with public funds

The meat industry is Spain's largest revenue sector within the agri-food business⁵⁰ in a country with the highest meat consumption per capita of all EU member states.⁵¹ The animal-food industry promotes and protects the meat culture that sustains this high consumption in Spain. Animal-rich

diets everywhere are the outcome of technological changes and marketing efforts in the twentieth century allowing for widespread production of animal-based foods and triggering a ‘meatification’ of diets.

In Spain, meat consumption has been in a slow but steady decline since 2008 (except for 2020). Industry lobbies have been making considerable efforts to counteract the increasingly negative image of their products among consumers in what has already become another culture war. This industry has been spreading a counter-discourse to undermine the scientific evidence connecting meat consumption to health problems⁵² as well as to climate change: the meat industry accounts for 70% of all agricultural emissions in Spain.⁵³ A relevant episode occurred in July 2021, when the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, under the control of the Unidas Podemos political coalition, launched a campaign on reducing meat consumption. Industry associations tried to distort the debate using arguments about the alleged environmental sustainability and social importance of meat production⁵⁴ while the prime minister himself, Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), ridiculed his government partners’ campaign, declaring that steaks are ‘unbeatable’.

A case of particular interest in the greenwashed reframing of the meat industry’s role in Spanish society is the discourse used in the ‘Proud of EU beef’ campaign, promoted by Provacuno in Spain and APAQ-W in Belgium under the financial sponsorship of the European Commission.⁵⁵ In 2019, the EU Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development granted €3.6 million to this project, of which more than €2 million were allocated to the Spanish lobby ‘to incite the consumers not to have a stereotyped idea about red meat and to enable them to be again confident about their consumption decision’. The campaign aimed to cleanse the industry’s image in the wake of the criticism the meat sector had increasingly received during the last decades for its animal exploitation, the human health impacts of its products, and, more recently, its contribution to GHG emissions. The campaign targeted Spain, France, Portugal, Germany, and Belgium. As the organizers stated, their aim was not only to show the ‘benefits of the product but to make the consumer feel identified and supported in its choice regarding it’. In their description, they acknowledged that information about meat consumption had affected consumers and that they wanted to make people feel comfortable again about eating animals.

The controversial nature of this campaign prompted thirty-four MEPs to issue in 2020 a letter of protest⁵⁶ led by Portuguese MEP Francisco Guerreiro, a member of the Greens/European Free Alliance. The letter pointed out the campaign’s incompatibility with the Commission’s objectives in its Farm to Fork and Green New Deal strategies, albeit it was

approved shortly before the launch of these green agriculture programmes. In particular, the letter noted that the campaign was against the interests of the EU because Spain ‘has the highest per capita meat consumption per year (over 100kg), meaning national consumption of meat would need to drop by 76% by 2030 to keep our climate goals within reach’.

The campaign also received harsh social criticism, prompting the organizers to change their approach slightly. Previously, the campaign included advertising content that reflects the thesis of Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*,⁵⁷ which discussed the objectification of the female body in meat-oriented communication. For example, one ad had featured a close-up of a woman wearing lipstick biting into a piece of meat; another pictured a slim, feminine-looking waist to try to sell the idea that a meat-based diet is balanced and healthy—images that Provacuno later withdrew.⁵⁸ In another example, a poster shows a woman with cooking utensils and a picture of a salad with meat on top, on one side, and, on the other side, a seated man being served a big steak accompanied by a few vegetables.⁵⁹

The strategy of obtaining public funds to promote meat consumption was also followed by Interporc, which, in coalition with other meat industry lobbies in Portugal and France, obtained more than €2 million from the European Commission.⁶⁰ In this case, the campaign ‘Let’s talk about pork’ warned that pig flesh consumption is decreasing for sustainability and animal compassion reasons. Accordingly, the campaign sought to inform the public ‘about the reality of production in the entire pork chain’. Specifically, it aimed to show ‘the conditions of production in the farms with scrupulous respect for the highest standards of animal welfare, and then proving the sustainability of the production process’.⁶⁰ The campaign’s target age group was people under 35 years old, and Interporc based their strategy on a display contrasting ‘true and fake messages’, jumping on the bandwagon of purportedly debunking false claims. Inspired by the news media trend of fact-checking and debunking actual misinformation, Interporc’s public relations team took this trend as an opportunity to ‘debunk’ any information that harmed its reputation.⁶⁰

Provacuno and Interporc have been very active in different arenas, from political lobbying to media and educational advocacy including, as we have shown in a previous example, taking legal action against vegan companies that dare to compare plant-based foods’ GHG emissions with those of animal-based foods. The Spanish meat industry has not been alone in framing its products as sustainable; the PP and PSOE governments have lent their full support to these companies’ efforts.⁶¹ However, and most revealingly, these two lobbies have gone from competitors to allies within the

meat market, both trying to debunk facts that may engender climate action and thus disrupt their business.

CONCLUSION

Climate obstruction in Spain involves politicians, industry, the media system, and everyday citizens and has continued to evolve. In Spain, obstructionism directed at any major shift in the energy model, particularly the rise of solar power, was substantial in the 2000s and 2010s, while today (the early 2020s) the advances in deployment of renewable energy have been remarkable.⁶² The greatest controversy during this later period has been over dealing with diffuse (non-energy) GHG emissions, especially in areas such as transport, diet, and tourism because they involve important business interests and entrenched ideological stances.

To unpack the Spanish climate obstructionism context, we have here identified three main factors: ideology, industry, and privilege.

Regarding ideology, we have shown how the Spanish political system of alternating majorities and political parallelism has produced a polarization of stances on important issues. Climate concern, like environmental concern generally, was first neglected and then instrumentalized by the country's political and economic elites via greenwashing and to fuel culture wars. In this system, the media mirrors political divisions, further contributing to polarizing opinions on climate change among the public.

In such a polarized political landscape, where topics such as the defence of car use or meat consumption have become identified with conservatism, it is worth considering what climate communications specialist Maxwell Boykoff said about the need to find common ground—finding shared values and concerns—which he notes is essential to facing the climate crisis.⁶³ According to Boykoff, while there are no magic formulas for effectively communicating the climate crisis and reaching this common ground, adapting messages to different audiences and their needs will be vital. One potential way to reduce political polarization may be to find ways to show how closely aligned environmental concerns are with religious,⁶⁴ conservative, and centrist interests and values.⁶⁵ In short, we need not let the culture wars frame the climate problem as merely the concern of a 'green [leftist] ghetto', to paraphrase Boykoff. That approach may help us to avoid a situation in which, with each new political cycle, political polarization again threatens the little progress already made on climate.

As for industry, the late establishment of democracy in Spain may not be the only cause of this country's climate inaction, but it is a substantial

one, in our view. A combination of late industrialization, which accelerated during the Franco dictatorship, and a subsequent restoration of democracy that merged a fascist legacy with neoliberalism resulted in a weak form of democracy guided by authoritarian liberalism. This political context has led to obstruction of climate action in the energy sector, with the practice of revolving doors between industry and government jobs serving as a main exponent of the vested interests between business and politics. The corruption of politics involves turning it into a lifetime career, as happens so often in Spain, thus creating an entrenched, privileged political class that makes decisions not for the public good but according to their career needs. Addressing this problem may require limiting the practice of allowing revolving doors.

Some measures to move us in this direction may include requiring more transparency in the management of polluting companies and their links to politicians as well as strict ‘cooling off’ periods before and after holding political posts. Reducing political corruption and the economic privileges of the elites in general may also result in a reduction of parallelism among political, social, and economic interests in Spain. That change may, in turn, promote a media system that is truly independent from the political system and the financial economy. There is a direct connection between the economic dependence of the media on polluting companies, the increasing precariousness of journalism jobs, and media coverage of climate change.

As mentioned above, however, polluting industries, policymakers, and media are not alone in perpetuating the climate status quo. Citizens, mostly in their role as consumers, are empowered to either sustain or reject social privileges. We believe the case of animal agriculture exemplifies this principle very well. Although this sector combats emerging concerns about the role of animal compassion and climate change in our dietary choices, it does so by tapping into an existing cultural substratum of Spanish society. Thus, although the meat business enjoys the privilege of being able to conduct communication and public relations campaigns, the reluctance of citizens to change their lifestyles underpins climate inaction.⁶⁶

Reducing economic privileges (e.g. ending subsidies for polluting industries) encourages governance in the public interest rather than for the benefit of corporations. The resources gap between NGOs advocating for the ethical treatment of the environment and nonhuman life and powerful corporations lobbying for the right to exploit both is so vast that it has created a two-tiered democracy in Spain. Limiting resources devoted to corporate lobbying can be achieved partly by limiting the public relations expenditures of large corporate players, but perhaps the most feasible and urgent solutions involve transparency. In Spain, the regulation of

lobbying activity is still pending as there has not yet been a parliamentary agreement on the matter. Political discussions on possible laws governing this issue have included options such as transparency registers, codes of conduct, transparency in the participation of interest groups in drafting legislation, and (once again) stricter control of revolving doors.⁶⁷ It would be desirable to advance such legislation to better control the lobbyists' activity, thus empowering the media and citizens with the information needed to better scrutinize them.

Finally, education is the best tool any society possesses to overcome the entanglements that produce environmental inaction and societal privileges, and this is particularly the case for Spain. In our view, an effective twenty-first-century education curriculum would include not only such basics as science, technology, and media literacy but also a foundation in the humanities, which have increasingly been devaluated in today's schools and universities. In particular is the need for training in a form of universal ethics that produces empathy and respect for all types of life.

As for citizen action, Spain needs to move beyond recycling to promote real mindset changes in all lifestyle areas including diet, leisure, and mobility. The goals should be to avoid political polarization, promote understanding and cooperation, and foster respect for all beliefs while providing the skills to identify and cease rewarding vested interests. Such a complex scenario involves overcoming different types of entrenched inertia that feed off one another, revealing that climate obstruction is based not just in scientific scepticism but also in attempts to protect an institutionally and culturally embedded network of interests.

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