



---

# CSSN Briefing

## CSSN Position Paper 2021:4

# Is Climate Obstruction Different in the Global South? Observations and a Preliminary Research Agenda

In anticipation of the COP26 Glasgow United Nations Summit on Climate Change, this position paper draws attention to a series of research themes and potential questions to ask on the role of climate obstruction in the Global South. These initial research themes and questions set the foundation for a body of research that could have direct implications for nation states in the Global South and their engagement in future action on climate change.

### Background

Research on climate obstruction and delay is dominated by studies from and about the USA, Europe, and Australia. These studies examine the contours and depths of the obstruction movements that manifest within the Global North. Far less is known about climate obstruction across the Global South.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lacerda, Marina Basso (2019). *O novo conservadorismo brasileiro: de Reagan a Bolsonaro*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Zouk. Miguel, Jean Carlos Hochsprung (2020). 'Negacionismo Climático no Brasil', *Coletiva*, Dossiê 27. Milani, Carlos R. S. (forthcoming). Negacionismo climático. In: José León Szwako (ed). *Dicionário da Anti-Ciência do Governo Bolsonaro* (forthcoming, 2022). Oliveira, Rodrigo Perez (2020). O negacionismo científico olavista: a radicalização de um certo regime epistemológico, in: KLEM, Bruna Stutz; PEREIRA, Mateus; ARAÚJO, Valdei (eds). *Do Fake Ao Fato: (Des)Atualizando Bolsonaro*. Vitória: Editora Milfontes. Danowski, Deborah (2018). Negacionismos ([https://issuu.com/n-1publications/docs/cordel\\_negacionismos](https://issuu.com/n-1publications/docs/cordel_negacionismos)).

Existing studies have introduced us to the dynamics of the think tank policy network, the transnational connections between leaders and organisations with (mainly) USA think tanks and foundations,<sup>2</sup> and the roles played by governments (particularly anti-democratic leaders). There is also growing evidence of the documented considerable ties between, for example, USA, Japanese, and European financial institutions and private sector actors, with high-carbon / dirty sectors in the Global South. China and other (re)emerging powers also have a role in framing and practising development, for instance, through South-South cooperation programs, that may contribute to climate obstruction policies, but conceptual innovations and more empirical research are needed on these development-obstruction linkages.

Given the considerable research and knowledge gaps, this paper offers a preliminary overview and targets for research on climate obstruction in the Global South. We begin by offering working definitions of our three main terms: the Global South, developmentalism, and climate obstruction. In all cases, we see these as only starting points that will be refined and modified as our empirical research and thinking advance. We then offer a series of initial research topics that we believe could and should be investigated and offer some lessons learnt and insight into potential directions forward.

### Three Working Definitions

Rather than adopt a simple strata of low, medium, and high-income countries often found in World Bank and other agency reports, we use “**Global South**” as shorthand for a group of countries in particular structural relation with the larger global economy. In particular, some nations have been (violently) incorporated into the global economy as colonies to exploit their natural resources and cheap labor. Dependency, World-system, Centre-Periphery relations and other political economy theories provide important leverage in understanding both the enduring underdevelopment and overexploitation of this group of nations and their affinity built around grievances from historical and current inequality. Even without colonial occupation, influence from global North nations continues through international norm-making, foreign aid, trade, investment, corporate ownership and media, the social formation of local elites, and other cultural and political forms of dominance and humiliation. In the recent past, the notion of “Third World” used to refer to such countries, but several changes have prompted writers and scholars to adopt the Global South as a category: the end of the Cold War, the adoption of globalization as a universal end, the need to acknowledge that the South is both object and subject of international norms, the Anthropocene and the need to recognise the Earth as a global community. Therefore, the Global South is both a normative and an empirical category. Normatively, it refers to this aspirational sense of belonging to a global community, a controversial concept embedded in cosmopolitan traditions. Empirically, it connects South and North, South-South relations, and classes within the South to notions of inequality, asymmetry, and stratification. Within the Global South, larger nations are not as powerful as those in the Global North, but may be better able to resist outside domination and sometimes advance their interests at the expense of their fellow non-core nations (a category described as semi-periphery by World-system theorists). Social and economic inequalities are connected with environmental and climate injustices within the Global South (and within the Global North).

---

<sup>2</sup> Brulle, Robert., Hall, Galen., Loy Loredana, Schell-Smith, Kennedy (2021) Obstructing Action: Foundation Funding and U.S. Climate Change Counter-Movement Organizations. *Climatic Change*. DOI: [10.21203/rs.3.rs-178750/v1](https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-178750/v1)

“**Development**” as a concept and in practice has been debated for decades, particularly in developing countries and in the aftermath of the Second World War. In a context marked by anti-colonial movements and waves of new sovereign states in the developing world, modernization theories first dominated the debates: development was then defined as a linear trajectory based on economic growth, technological progress and Western-led models of state-society relations. Nature, the environment, and local cultures were relegated lower in the order of priorities in global debates. In a nutshell, two main critical visions have emerged to denounce the limits of modernization theories: dependency theory, which emphasized centre-periphery relations and the lack of material autonomy in the Third World to conceive of and promote their own development, leading to the New International Economic Order discussions in the United Nations; the postcolonial and decolonial scholars who criticized the cultural dimensions of domination, the neo-coloniality of knowledge and power in development conceptions and practices.<sup>3</sup>

While it stresses the role of the state in regulating market-state relations, the mainstream conceptualizations of **developmentalism** tend not to consider nature, the environment and indigenous cultures (particularly in Latin America) as critical elements of an autonomous development model. **Environmentalism** is often pitted against developmentalism, which tends to ignore the agency of Global South countries, often confronted with structural conditions imposed by the Global North.<sup>4</sup> Both are in a way tributary to these two relevant criticisms of development as modernisation; however, there have seldom been dialogues between them, despite both referring to limitations of development as structurally dependent and culturally as an imported reality. Despite evidence of potential synergies, especially through the pursuit of socially-just sustainable development programs, the tensions between the two have contributed in different ways to avoid the emergence of new development models that would move beyond the zero-sum game between socioeconomic development and environmental protection.<sup>5</sup> Even progressive governments within the recent Pink Tide in South America, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, have been trapped in between neo-extractivism strategies, emphasis on the role of the fossil fuel economy, the need to generate foreign revenue to guarantee some autonomy in foreign policy decision-making, and in implementing socially sensitive public policies in profoundly unequal societies.<sup>6</sup>

“**Climate Obstruction**” in the existing literature best refers to a highly developed network of corporate actors including fossil fuel corporations, ‘public relations firms,’ government/state-based departments and individuals, conservative foundations, partisan, libertarian and neoliberal think tanks, trade associations, research institutes and universities, and other individuals, who have actively sought to prevent global and/or national action on climate change over the past four decades.<sup>7</sup> Their efforts have delayed adequate climate action using organised media campaigns, lobbying and funding politicians and political campaigns, disseminating climate scepticism, denial and delaying discourse. In turn, these decisions manifest within public debates which can affect political support and collective mobilization to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bresser-Pereira, Luiz Carlos (2019). From classical developmentalism and post-Keynesian macroeconomics to new developmentalism, *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, v. 39, n. 2, p. 187-210.

<sup>4</sup> Such a binary view relies on a somewhat simplistic view of both environment and development, while ignoring their politics and their complex intersections. See, Hochstetler, Kathryn, and Margaret E Keck. 2007. *Greening Brazil: Environmental Activism in State and Society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press and Kashwan, Prakash. 2017. *Democracy in the Woods: Environmental Conservation and Social Justice in India, Tanzania, and Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press. Kapoor, Ilan. 2008. *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. Routledge, London/New York.

<sup>5</sup> For the case of Dominica, see the politics of on-going North-South dependency as it relates to climate. Grydehoj, Adam, and I. Kelmna, I. 2020. “Reflections on conspicuous sustainability: creating small island dependent states (SIDS) through ostentatious development assistance (ODA)?” *Geoforum*, 116, 90-97. DOI:10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.08.004.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, Guy, Robers, Timmons, J (2015) *A Fragmented Continent: Latin America and the Global Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge, MIT Press.

<sup>7</sup> Brulle, Robert, Dunlap, Riley, E. (2021) *A Sociological View of the Effort to Obstruct Action on Climate Change*. Footnotes, American Sociological Association Magazine. Available at: <https://www.asanet.org/sociological-view-effort-obstruct-action-climate-change>

## Unveiling Obstruction: Initial Research Themes

We offer here an initial and non-exhaustive list of working themes that we believe could and should be investigated. Some will be quite difficult to definitively assess, but initial findings could be instructive for future data collection. The point is that understanding climate obstruction in the Global South is a largely unexplored field and there will be value moving from descriptive studies to elaborating and testing causal hypotheses. Clearly, research on climate obstruction in the Global South should take account of the entanglements of exogenous and endogenous actors and interplay of national and transnational actions.

**Theme 1: Developmentalism, Discourses, and Actions of Delay:** Frustrated by decades and centuries of residual shortcomings in social advancement, the vast majority of countries in the Global South have prioritized economic development, leading to the sidelining of climate and other environmental policies.<sup>8</sup> In turn, this “national project” requires the dismissal of the urgency of climate action, and often claims of improving well-being through economic growth do not characterize how benefits are often captured exclusively by economic and political elites, both nationally and transnationally. This proposition would be supported by evidence of key actors downplaying climate concerns, or framing the impacts as out in the future, or manageable. India, for example, justifies the continued use of dirty coal to enhance its economic growth. Recent research shows that despite its incredible progress in generating power from renewable energy sources, India has also increased coal’s use in its overall energy mix.<sup>9</sup> Echoing the logic of developmentalism, its delegation to the United Nations Climate Conference in Paris in 2015 argued that poor countries like India should be allowed to continue carbon emission to grow their economies. India characterized its position as championing ‘climate justice’ for poor countries.<sup>10</sup> Vietnam’s new energy development plan emphasizes the use of coal power to ensure the country’s energy security.<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh brushes aside national and transnational critiques of its actions to build several large coal-fired power plants (some near ecologically critical areas like the Sundarbans, world’s largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO world heritage site) arguing that coal power is required for its economic development.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that the commitments of climate vulnerable countries in South and Southeast Asia, especially their efforts to mitigate carbon emission, are not adequate to meet the targets set out in the Paris Agreement and their nationally determined contributions.<sup>13</sup> National production of total or historic greenhouse gases will likely be presented as negligible (often despite examples of very high per capita emissions, at least among certain groups), and the responsibility of only developed or large developing nations.

**Theme 2: Obstruction, Political Leaders and Coalitions of Support:** The international political economy and the nation-state are critical in creating the conditions and the arenas, both internationally and nationally, in which developmentalism and practices of unsustainable development steer the emergence of climate obstruction. Research on these relations can help identify if and when types of

---

<sup>8</sup> We are aware of the fact that a critical stance on “developmentalism” does not necessarily imply slipping into “post-developmentalism”, which is often very poorly grounded in global South realities.

<sup>9</sup> Roy, Brototi and Anke Schaffartzik. 2021. “Talk Renewables, Walk Coal: The Paradox of India’s Energy Transition.” *Ecological Economics*, 180 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106871>

<sup>10</sup> Doyle, Alister, and Tommy Wilkes. 2015. “Fuelling its growth with coal, India champions the poor in Paris.” Retrieved July 18, 2021

(<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-climatechange-summit-india/fuelling-its-growth-with-coal-india-champions-the-poor-in-paris-idUKKBN0TOOS720151206>)

<sup>11</sup> Minh, Anh, and Dat Nguyen. 2020. “Vietnam to rely on coal for decades to come.” Retrieved July 18, 2021 (<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/economy/vietnam-to-rely-on-coal-for-decades-to-come-4158660.html>)

<sup>12</sup> Bangladeshi Prime Minister at a plenary session on ‘a new chapter for climate action’ at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in 2017.

<sup>13</sup> See Overland, Indra, Haakon Fossum Sagbakken, Hoy-Yen Chan, Monika Merdekawati, Beni Suryadi, Nuki Agya Utama, and Roman Vakulchuk. 2021. “The ASEAN Climate and Energy Paradox.” *Energy and Climate Change* 2 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egycc.2020.100019>

political regimes and leadership may lead to climate obstruction modalities and trajectories. In turn, this might lead researchers to examine the architecture of climate obstruction in different countries and to what extent developmental trends are influencing climate obstruction politics.

A particular hypothesis should be developed and examined focusing on different types of (extractive, industrial, service, tourism-dependent, etc.) economies leading to different types of climate obstruction strategies, discourses, and organizational structures (such as trade groups with significant influence over ministries and parliaments). Argentina has recently played a more proactive role at the UN climate talks in support of the 1.5 degree Celsius goal and put forward more ambitious emission reduction pledges. Yet at the same time, it has pushed to increase oil and gas production as a way to rescue its economy even though this move will increase emissions and undermine its climate goals.

**Theme 3: North-South/Transnational Links:** Given the historic economic and resource interests from the Global North in countries in the Global South, key (economic) actors and existing global North climate obstruction actors will be present in the developmentalism and obstruction strategies in the Global South. Alternatively, China is rising as the favored source of development financing because it is seen as unlikely to demand environmental, governance, human rights and labor/social criteria tied to secure loans. This does not mean, either, that Global North countries using such criteria have not bypassed them for national strategic or security motivations.

For instance, in various Latin American countries, China has supported multiple projects which have resulted in severe environmental damage, pollution and led to social conflicts with affected communities. Countries in the Global South have been willing to forge closer ties with China in response to Western patterns of political conditionality perceived in many developing countries as overly burdensome, a lack of respect or form of humiliation. European, Canadian and U.S. state and non-state actors have also promoted carbon-intensive and environmentally destructive projects across the Global South despite their national governments' official positions on the urgent need to implement the Paris Agreement.

Normative practices (North-South, South-South) are different, but if they result in emerging similar practices when it comes to climate obstruction is an important issue that we want to investigate. In turn, identifying characteristics of obstruction actors in the existing literature may not address these transnational relationships. To this end, research could seek to identify the different types of transnational links between obstruction organisations considering these different sets of geopolitical partnerships.

**Theme 4: Sovereignty Claims and Responsibility:** The extreme (and sometimes formalistic) defense of sovereignty, as though it were disconnected from responsibility, arises when threats to unsustainable development practices arise. Environmental protection and support to indigenous cultures from national and international NGOs are often presented as (unwelcome) external intervention in domestic affairs. State leaders emphasize sovereignty rights as an instrument to convince national public opinions of their bet on developmentalist projects, seeking to downplay or erase their adverse environmental and cultural spillover effects. Such narratives and practices in the Global South also gain national and international legitimacy because of hypocritical behavior patterns of Global North actors, who stress sovereignty and responsibility in their own national settings but not overseas.

For example, in Nigeria, the establishment of the Nigeria State following British Colonialism shifted resource and land ownership from indigenous peoples to the state.<sup>14</sup> Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the "Declaration of the Right to development" including the participation and

---

<sup>14</sup> Umejesi Ikechukwa (2015) Collective memory, coloniality and resource ownership questions, the conflict of postcolonial Nigeria, *African Review*, New Delhi, 7(1) 42-54.

contribution to economic, social, cultural and political development, where people can exercise sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources. Sovereignty both as an economic and political right to exert self-determination is entangled in human rights conflicts for the indigenous peoples right and ownership of the same land, addressing adverse environmental impacts, the universalism of human rights laws, involvement of international NGOs, multinational corporations involved in oil and gas exploitation, and resource-based criminal activity (piracy and corruption).<sup>15</sup> To this end, researchers can explore the following questions: how does climate obstruction benefit from such an “organised hypocrisy” North and South of the international system? How does obstruction relate to the role of the state (or state-market relations) in the Global South?

**Theme 5: Climate Specialists and Foreign Affairs Ministries:** Climate change specialists who participate in national negotiating teams at the United Nations Climate conferences play a critical role in shaping domestic policy agenda vis-a-vis climate actions and energy policy choices. Their prescriptions are often considered as ‘authoritative views’ on a particular policy agenda. In the case of climate obstruction, it is their view, which policymakers reiterate in national and global forums, that many climate-vulnerable countries in the Global South bear little or no responsibility to address carbon emission because of their historically lower contribution to global warming than advanced industrial countries. Therefore, their continued reliance on fossil fuel and their lack of interest in increasing the use of clean energy due to its intermittent nature are supported by both policymakers and climate change specialists.

Some specialists claim that many climate-vulnerable countries like Bangladesh do not have a moral obligation to reduce carbon emissions. In other cases, countries in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) have explicitly stressed their country’s climate vulnerability which in turn requires significant financial contributions from the Global North to fund adaptation, mitigation and energy transitions. As a result, limited financial support from Global North actors may limit and even stall in-country efforts to create and/or meet international climate agreement targets. Research on climate obstruction in the Global South then should take into account the role of climate change specialists and foreign affairs ministry staff, especially their developmentalist views, which champion economic growth-centric narratives over climate actions alongside observing transactional agreements laid out in the Paris Agreement.

**Theme 6: Domestic Energy:** Domestic energy policy is often seen as the main driver of climate delay i.e., the continued use of coal in many Asian countries.<sup>16</sup> This policy choice is incompatible with the goal of the Paris agreement. The UN Secretary-General recently urged Asian countries to end their ‘coal addiction’.<sup>17</sup> If and how does colonial history, land/resource ownership, and sovereignty help us understand energy transitions in the Global South? Researchers should look into the intellectual origin of such domestic policy in many countries in the Global South. More often than not, many domestic policies in the Global South are influenced by technical assistance projects implemented by their development partners (donors).

For example, in the case of Bangladesh, its coal-dependent Power System Master Plan is an outcome of the influence of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which in the late 1990s, was a key actor promoting the coal industry. Japan’s official development agency (Japan International Cooperation Agency) is another significant external donor, which expands new business opportunities for its coal

---

<sup>15</sup> Nwalozie, Chijiokwe J. (2020) Exploring Contemporary Sea Piracy in Nigeria, the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea, *Journal of Transportation Security*. 13: 159-178.

<sup>16</sup> Gallagher, Kelly Sims, Rishikesh Bhandary, Easwaran Narassimhan, and Quy Tam Nguyen 2021. “Banking on coal? Drivers of demand for Chinese overseas investments in coal in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Vietnam.” *Energy Research and Social Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101827>

<sup>17</sup> BBC News. 2019. “Climate change: Asia ‘coal addiction’ must end, UN chief warns.” Retrieved July 18, 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50276983>)

technology corporations in developing countries. It is interesting to note that Japan, the only Asian G-7 country, promotes its financing of “efficient” coal power in Asian countries as its contribution to climate finance.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the role of exogenous actors, domestic energy policy is also the outcome of authoritarian policy-making processes. Civil society actors can hardly play any direct role in countering the dominant role of external donors and their allies within governments.

**Theme 7: Religion, Ethics and Climate Governance:** Religions, religious beliefs and religious organizations influence the nature of civil society and state and legal structures. There is vast differentiation between and even within countries across Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous and other religions. Bolivia serves as a useful example, where non-humans, including plants, animals, and landscape features, are bestowed with rights and standing. Climate policies then must interface with and consider impacts to other beings and non-human forms of life. Another example with different connotations is Brazil, where evangelicals form part of the loose coalition backing President Jair Bolsonaro whose administration has gutted environmental protections with disastrous consequences for deforestation in the Amazon and indigenous peoples residing there.

**Theme 8: Education and Cooptation of Expertise:** Research universities and climate-focused degree programs tend to be fewer in Global South nations, for instance in Tanzania and some other relatively young states. This has a significant impact on the production and uneven application of climate expertise. Primary educational institutions - for instance, those with recently launched climate research institutes - can be targeted by developmentalist states (and corporations) to direct their research, skills-building, teaching, and hiring to serve and benefit the state and state-friendly corporations and organizations. How and to what degree does cooptation of educational institutions and their associates and expertise enable climate obstruction and diffuse resistance in the Global South?

**Theme 9: Green Technology's Socio-ecological and Social Justice Impacts:** The harvesting, mining, processing, and disposal of raw materials for green technologies and climate solutions have novel ecological and social impacts, including on vulnerable communities in rural parts of the Global South.<sup>19</sup> Local communities that host renewable energy installations often feel significant impacts as well, especially where land tenure rights are uncertain.<sup>20</sup> Rural farming communities consider foreign investments-driven renewable energy projects as a threat to their livelihoods. Foreign companies, in collaboration with local and central governments, select vast tracts of fertile farmland for solar energy projects, thus leading to discontent among farming communities and strong political opposition to the green energy agenda particularly in land-scarce countries like Bangladesh.<sup>21</sup> These are crucial issues that need to be addressed in the transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy and other climate-altering production. However these novel impacts are increasingly being raised by critics, while not discussing the social and ecological impacts of fossil fuel extraction, processing, combustion and disposal. Research on these impacts and how they are utilized in national and international debates by leaders as reasons not to make efforts to decarbonize economies are important areas for rigorous social science.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ritter, Karl, and Aijaz Rahi. 2015. “Japan Uses Climate Cash for Coal Plants in India, Bangladesh.” Retrieved July 18, 2021 (<https://apnews.com/article/19006063900b4acdb2412f6b62a40e3e>)

<sup>19</sup> See Howe, Cymene. 2019. *Ecologics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Riofrancos, Thea. 2021. “The rush to ‘go electric’ comes with a hidden cost: destructive lithium mining.” Retrieved September 23, 2021 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/14/electric-cost-lithium-mining-decarbonisation-salt-flats-chile>)

<sup>20</sup> See Boyer, Dominic. 2019. *Energopolitics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Islam, Syful. 2021. “German solar developer faces demonstration in Bangladesh.” Retrieved September 23, 2021. (<https://www.pv-magazine.com/2021/03/15/german-solar-developer-faces-demonstration-in-bangladesh/>)

**Theme 10: Media:** Major media outlets tend to be fewer and less diverse in Global South nations. This has a significant impact on climate awareness, action and obstruction efforts. States can strongly influence broadcast, print, and social media content in-country, in part because national newsrooms are thinly staffed. Beyond capacity issues, there is fear: individual journalists and media entities have real and imagined anxiety about the implications of reporting issues in a way that would contradict the framing of the state or powerful economic actors. We see two ends to this spectrum: on one end, how are media outlets connected to obstruction actors in Global South nations?<sup>22</sup> On the other end, examples are raised of journalists facing threats from extractive interests or the state. This area of research should go beyond the traditional media to both the spread of misinformation and impacts to citizen reporting of climate-related issues on social media platforms where extractive firms have increasingly invested in advertising over social media and traditional media platforms.<sup>23</sup>

### Lessons Learnt

Given the limited knowledge on climate obstruction in the Global South, country-level case studies, triangulating data collection and analysis could be used to understand in-country climate obstruction activities. Beginning with a list of target participants, researchers can undertake interviews with (investigative) journalists working in the field of environment, climate change, commodities, politics and related subjects, environmental activists/activist groups and related representatives, previous political representatives and Climate/environmental related scientists. These may provide indicators of key obstruction actors from which researchers can engage in further data collection. Secondary data will be valuable to further explore obstruction and could include; 1) energy, environmental and agricultural industry financial and board member data; 2) national, bilateral, regional and international climate agreements or related treaties and voting behaviours by politicians; 3) current and archival media sources; 4) speeches made nationally and on international platforms related to energy and climate-related policies by political leaders; 5) reviews of climate education programs; 6) historical data on the structure, funding and potential relocations of environment or climate-related offices to other areas in the judiciary or government (to obscure); 7) the location and licencing of extractive industries permits through time; 8) texts or other media produced by climate sceptics or obstruction actors. 9) Speeches and texts made by religious leaders on environmental and energy issues.

Participants could include corporate and current political representatives. However, a researcher may encounter barriers to accessing these participants, limiting the researcher's data. Moreover, the very nature of obstruction research carries with it safety risks for researchers. Social leaders, journalists, and environmental actors are disproportionately murdered in the Global South, underlining the considerable risks to those resisting, investigating or challenging high-carbon or dirty projects with severe climate impacts. The tension between access with policymakers and level of criticism means it is plausible that researchers and activists in the Global South, especially those *without* backing from international organizations, may be reluctant to compromise their access to policymakers, media leaders or private sector actors by discussing sensitive topics if it were to jeopardize their relationship or work. To navigate restrictions, researchers can document that the examination of the 'problem' can align with the interests of participants. They can make it clear that the participant has the right to withdraw from the study and undertake a risk assessment to determine if the researcher faces any physical risks. While these may not be ideal scenarios for meeting the aims and objectives of the research, they provide opportunities to obtain otherwise unobtainable data. In all cases, researchers must uphold any institutional ethical standards.

---

<sup>22</sup> Santini, Rose Marie et al. There's no smoke without fire: comparing legacy media coverage and junk news narratives on the Amazon fire season in Brazil. In Sadia Jamil, Ramon Tuazon e Therese Patricia S. Torres (eds). *Environmental Journalism in the Global South*. Londres: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Treen, Kathie M. d'l., Hywel T.P. Williams, and Saffron J. O'Neill. 2020. "Online misinformation about climate change." *WIREs Climate Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.665>.



## Future Steps

Particularly after the 2020 elections in the USA, there has been a resurgence and series of commitments to tackling the climate emergency, where world leaders have verbally agreed to implement strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate changes. The European Union, China and the USA (under the Biden-Harris administration) have announced broad green development programs dealing with infrastructure, housing, urban mobility, renewable energies, and so forth. However, climate obstruction movements, including institutional and non-state actors, corporations and conservative think tanks who played a consistent role in delaying several commitments in the past, may bounce back with strength. As argued in this paper, far less is known about the manifestation of climate obstruction in the Global South, and its linkages with national governments, corporations, and international think tanks. Given that countries in the Global South play an increasingly relevant role in supply demands in global commodity chains, including resources and labor, and possess a wealth of nature and knowledge under threat from natural resource-intensive and renewable energy development projects, the role of obstruction actors needs further attention.

---

## Authors and Contact Information

Carlos R. S. Milani, Associate Professor of International Relations, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: [crsmilani@iesp.uerj.br](mailto:crsmilani@iesp.uerj.br)

Guy Edwards, independent consultant and former research fellow and co-director of the Climate and Development Lab at Brown University

Jonathan R. Walz, Associate Professor, Division of Climate and Environment, SIT-Graduate Institute, Vermont, USA and Zanzibar, Tanzania: [jwalz.us@gmail.com](mailto:jwalz.us@gmail.com)

Kathryn Hochstetler, Department of International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom: [K.Hochstetler@lse.ac.uk](mailto:K.Hochstetler@lse.ac.uk)

M. Omar Faruque, Department of Global Development Studies, Queen's University, Canada: [m.faruque@queensu.ca](mailto:m.faruque@queensu.ca)

Prakash Kashwan Associate Professor, Political Science, University of Connecticut: [prakash.kashwan@uconn.edu](mailto:prakash.kashwan@uconn.edu)

Pamela McElwee, Rutgers University, USA: [pamela.mcelwee@rutgers.edu](mailto:pamela.mcelwee@rutgers.edu)

Ruth E. McKie, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, De Montfort University, UK: [ruth.mckie@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.mckie@dmu.ac.uk)

Timmons Roberts, Professor, Department of Sociology and Institute at Brown for Environment and Society, Brown University, USA: [timmons@brown.edu](mailto:timmons@brown.edu)