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Introduction

The First Portrait of Climate Obstruction across Europe

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EUROPE'S GLOBAL ROLE IN CLIMATE ACTION

Decades of effort to address anthropogenic climate change have failed to decrease the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are destabilizing Earth's life-support systems. Many theories of why we have failed have been advanced, but one reason has barely been studied: the well-organized efforts to obstruct climate action. Since the 2010s, an expanding body of investigative reporting and academic research has documented an extensive, well-organized enterprise, led by corporations and their affiliated trade associations, to interfere with progress on reducing carbon emissions.[1] Yet, for the most part, these impediments remain marginal to the public discussion on how best to address climate change.

Europe, as a cultural region and a political bloc, has taken the need to act on climate change more seriously than most other parts of the world. For decades, Europe has seen itself as a leader on climate action, and, in the more than thirty years of United Nations (UN) negotiations on the issue, the European Union (EU) has brought leading pledges and policy ideas to the table.[2] However even its efforts have been inadequate, uneven, and halting. Some climate policies in Europe have been rolled back, and others are threatened by economic crises, war, global competition, and authoritarianism. We must ask: Who are the actors and organizations obstructing

Robert J. Brulle and J. Timmons Roberts, *Introduction* In: *Climate Obstruction across Europe*. Edited by: Robert J. Brulle, J. Timmons Roberts and Miranda C. Spencer, Oxford University Press.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197762042.003.0001

climate action in Europe? What are their strategies, and how are those evolving? This volume seeks to advance our understanding of climate obstruction in the region as a whole and to learn from the significant variations across the continent.

To date, research into systematic efforts to obstruct climate action has focused primarily on the United States and been concentrated on the activities of a few major oil companies and a handful of publicly visible conservative think tanks. As a result, an inaccurate picture has emerged, centring on a few American industrial giants and organizations, particularly Exxon Mobil, the Koch brothers, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the Heartland Institute. However, the nature and extent of these organized efforts to obstruct climate action are far broader, more complex, and geographically dispersed than often portrayed. Recent scholarship has shown that they span multiple sectors, including agriculture, transportation, coal, and utilities, among others. As the essays in this book show, climate obstruction efforts take place across all of the European countries, each with its own particular characteristics. National industries and their trade organizations seek to slow climate action even in the 'greenest' countries. Research on the role of conservative think tanks, for example, reveals an increasingly coordinated and multinational effort to promulgate scientific misinformation and advocate against rapid and robust climate action by undermining confidence in renewable energy and other legitimate climate solutions.

The popular but inaccurate image of climate obstruction efforts as extremely limited in sectoral and geographic scope is both an academic and a practical concern. Addressing the lack of effective political action on climate change requires pulling back the curtain on the constellation of organized interests engaged in the contentious politics of climate change, the nature of their activities, and their impact on both public perception of the climate crisis and the policymaking process. It also requires an understanding of the actions climate advocates have taken to effectively overcome these efforts. As this volume shows for the first time, these constellations differ in important ways depending on national context, even within subregions of the continent.

Recently a growing number of scholars have moved beyond studying American obstructionism and have turned to researching various aspects of climate obstruction across Europe. This work opens up new perspectives on how various institutional actors in these nations influence climate policy based on their particular cultural and political structures. Capitalizing on this trend, the Climate Social Science Network's (CSSN) fall 2022 call for chapter proposals on the theme yielded eleven national case studies and

one focused on the European Union. The cases are not exhaustive but do include countries in Europe's four major subregions: Northern Europe, the United Kingdom (UK), Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe. These studies show that entrenched interests vary significantly by country and region and that political structures create widely different opportunities for these interests to block, dilute, delay, or even reverse required action on climate change. And they show that, after exerting influence in their national arenas, these industrial interests frequently exploit a second opportunity to slow action by working to diffuse wider efforts in Brussels, the de facto capital of the European Union and the home of the European Commission (EC). Their collected findings form the basis of this book.

This introductory chapter lays out the basics of what we already know about how climate action is being obstructed. It begins with a review of the more than thirty years of scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and how the IPCC reports have handled obstructive action against climate solutions. We then outline the types of organizations involved and the main types of short-, medium-, and long-term strategies they have developed to avoid regulation and influence public opinion. These sections describe the 'structure of climate obstruction' in very general terms, and the insights from this issue area can be useful to those seeking to understand resistance to policy on other topics. After a brief review of Europe's emissions history, we introduce the forthcoming chapters and provide a brief overview of the core arguments presented. A fuller synthesis of the twelve case studies and the lessons they offer is covered in the concluding chapter.

IMPROVING ASSESSMENTS

One explanation for the minimization of obstruction efforts in humanity's inadequate response to climate change has been the failure of the IPCC to focus on this important factor. Formed in 1988 to bring together scientists from around the world to summarize scientific knowledge on climate change and possible solutions, the IPCC has produced six massive 'assessment reports', achievements that have vastly improved our understanding of the issue. Capping five years of intensive research by hundreds of authors and thousands of reviewers, each IPCC report is organized around the work of three Working Groups: one documenting changes in Earth's climate and their causes, the second looking at impacts around the world, and the third focused on mitigation, or efforts to reduce the emissions causing human-caused warming.[3] Therefore, Working Group III (WG III) would be expected

to be the place where obstruction of emissions-reduction efforts is systematically reviewed and discussed.

Unfortunately, for the most part, the IPCC reports have minimized their attention to intentional efforts to hinder meaningful policy action to rapidly reduce GHG emissions. The latest IPCC Synthesis Report (AR6, released in 2023) contains no mention of organizational barriers to mitigation efforts in its Summary for Policymakers (SPM).[4] The Synthesis Report does mention unnamed 'institutional barriers' to mitigation efforts and a statement that 'developmental pathways create unintentional . . . barriers to accelerated mitigation'.[5] Both these statements lack mention of any actors and express an inevitability in the situation we face. In this way, thirty-five years on, IPCC reports still fail to clearly address intentional climate obstruction efforts in their leading summaries. Because the press and policymakers seldom examine the IPCC reports beyond the SPM, this limits the public discussion of climate obstruction.

It is hard to blame the IPCC authors for this omission in the report's summary, which is vetted by nearly every government on Earth and is frequently watered down, with key text struck from the final document before publication.[6] As de Pryck has documented, 'both authors and governments seek to have their perspectives reflected', and their interests and strategies are often in tension. As a result, we see 'the entanglement between the scientific and diplomatic rhetoric in the fabric of the SPM, which tends to construct climate change as a decontextualized and nonpolitical problem'. Still, the IPCC is under attack from right-wing organizations and media outlets that have advanced climate change denial.[7] Governments and other major economic actors would prefer to avoid attention to their failures and the ways they are being influenced. Sensitive to this, the scientists rewriting sections or wording of the report in response to government comments seek to avoid bringing up political issues and endangering the already fragile legitimacy of the organization.

Unlike the SPM, however, the full IPCC reports are not subject to government review, and important progress can be seen in their presentation of obstructive actors and practices in the most recent assessments. Though buried deep within the latest WG III report on mitigation (2022), a number of important conclusions regarding intentional efforts to oppose climate mitigation can be found. In the introductory chapter, the report concludes that 'Political and institutional dynamics shape climate change responses in important ways, not the least because incumbent actors have frequently blocked climate policy'.[8] Citing peer-reviewed studies of campaigns by oil and coal companies in the United States, Australia,

Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Norway, and Germany, the WG III authors concluded that 'One factor limiting the ambition of climate policy has been the ability of incumbent industries to shape government action on climate change'.[9] The authors also report that 'Countermovement coalitions work to oppose climate mitigation', and that 'A good number of corporate agents have attempted to derail climate change mitigation by targeted lobbying and doubt-inducing media strategies'.[10] Finally, the report notes that 'Accurate transference of the climate science has been undermined significantly by climate change counter-movements, particularly in the USA in both legacy and new/social media environments through misinformation, including about the causes and consequences of climate change'.[11]

The historic failure of the IPCC to accurately convey the extent and importance of organized efforts to obstruct climate action in its major public-facing documents hinders the global discussion of actions that can be taken to increase the pace and extent of mitigation efforts. As US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse put it, doing so is like telling the story of *Star Wars* without mentioning Darth Vader. This situation is improving, but not quickly enough. While it is clear from the full Working Group report that the IPCC is aware of this literature, the analyses of climate obstruction efforts remain buried in the text of the reports themselves and are not widely circulated in either media or policy discussions due to their absence from the key document, the SPM. Despite the aforementioned growing body of peer-reviewed research, awareness of these activities outside of the United States is limited, media coverage is still rare and mostly limited to a few news outlets, and scholarship remains scattershot throughout the social science literature. This knowledge gap limits the building of a coordinated research effort and inhibits the type of social movements and government policies that could remove major barriers to adequate and effective climate action. In turn, this lack of information allows climate obstruction efforts across the globe to continue uncontested.

This volume is the first effort in the much-needed task of collecting and disseminating existing knowledge on the scope and nature of obstruction efforts across the nations of the world. Because research on the Continent is accelerating and the analyses contained in this volume are likely to offer fruitful lessons for policymaking, Europe was the logical choice for a first region to examine in what we hope will become a series of books on climate obstruction across the globe. Before turning to the collected essays in this volume, we first review what is already known about the major sets of actors and strategies for obstructing action on climate change.

THE PRACTICE AND STRUCTURE OF CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION

The term 'climate obstruction' covers a wide variety of social, economic, and political practices. In this volume, we define climate obstruction as *intentional actions and efforts to slow or block policies on climate change that are commensurate with the current scientific consensus of what is necessary to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system*.[12]

Starting in the late 1980s, a broad range of actors with divergent interests entered into the public arena and engaged in a struggle to control public discussion and understanding of climate change and thus define appropriate policy responses. Extensive research has shown that, despite their knowledge of climate science and its implications, many corporations and trade associations, acting in coordination with conservative think tanks, foundations, and public relations firms, mounted a long-term effort to oppose action to mitigate the carbon emissions known to be responsible for climate change.[13] However, climate obstruction manifests differently in different parts of the world and by nation and can be compared with what we know about patterns of obstruction in the United States, where the most research to date has been conducted.

Moving from left to right in Figure 1.1, the network of organized opposition to climate change action begins with and is funded by wealthy individuals (and their philanthropic foundations), corporations, and foundations. These players fund and direct advocacy groups, advertising agencies, trade associations, think tanks, and university centres. These institutions then promulgate the positions of the funders through a network of blogs, social media, book publishing, sympathetic media outlets, lobbying firms, funding campaigns, and political action committees.[14] Climate change obstruction is often part of a broader political agenda, especially the effort to stop and roll back the power of the administrative state to address social issues. This libertarian and neoliberal movement has, since before the administrations of US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, successfully shifted society's orientation away from governments and toward the rights of corporations. These various organizations act in different political and cultural arenas and employ different time horizons to achieve a range of objectives (Table 1.1). For these reasons, we cannot refer to the organized efforts to block or delay climate action in monolithic terms. Rather, these efforts stem from an amalgam of loosely coordinated groups that can be understood collectively as the climate change countermovement[15] (CCCM). Initially launched in the United States, the CCCM has taken root in other nations with histories of powerful fossil fuel industries and has been diffused

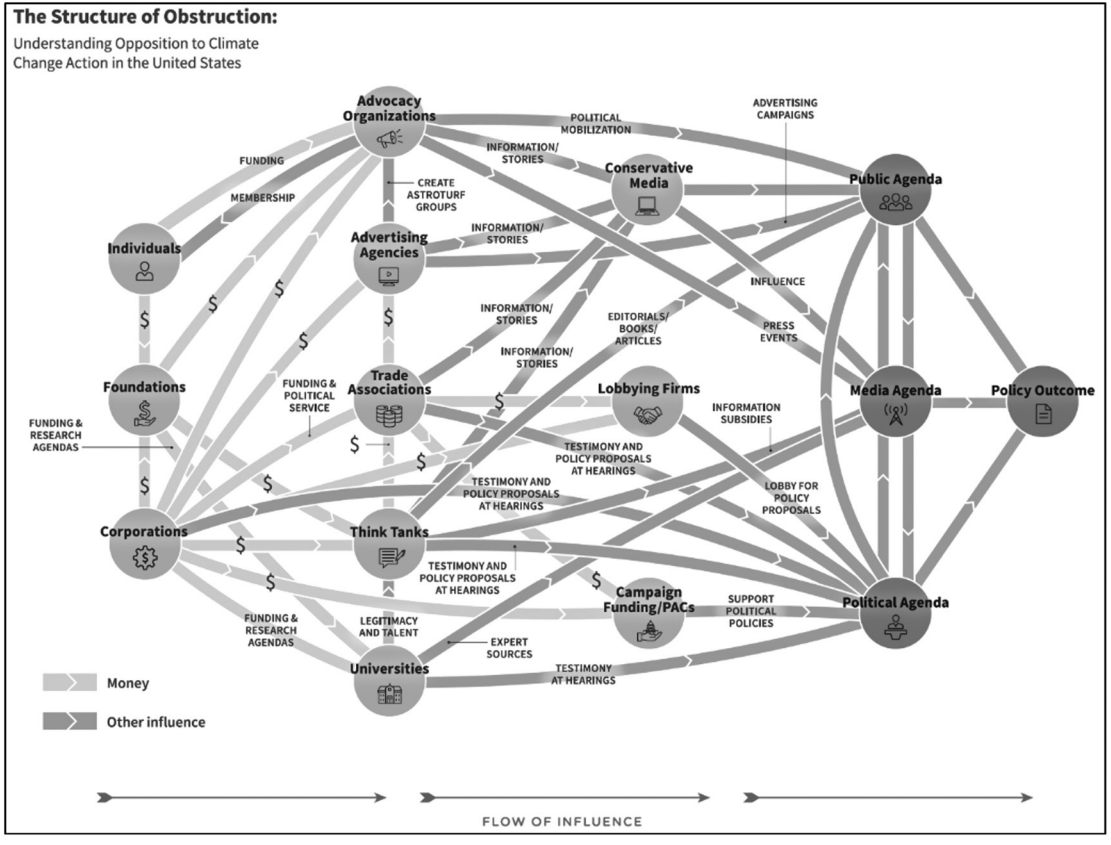

Figure 1.1 A visualization of the networks of relationships between agents and organizations seeking to obstruct climate action and the methods they use to do so (money and/or influence).

Table 1.1 THE OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, AND PLAYERS IN CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION OVER THREE TIME FRAMES, WITH EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZED EFFORTS OPPOSED TO CLIMATE ACTION

Time frame	Objectives	Activities	Conservative movement institutions involved	Corporate institutions involved	Examples
Long-term 20 years to 5 years	Development/promulgation of specific worldview	Provision of elementary/secondary school curricula	Foundations think tanks	Corporations, trade associations, public relations firms	Heartland Institute publication, circulation
	Steering of academic activities	Creation/funding of academic curricula and research programs	Foundations	Corporations, corporate foundations	Stanford University 'Global Climate & Energy Project'
		Corporate & industry image promotion		Corporate public relations departments, public relations firms	API 'Fueling It Forward' campaign
Intermediate-term 5 years to 1 year	Circulating proposals & specific worldview in media	Development/promotion of specific worldview & policy actions	Think tanks, advocacy organizations	Corporate public relations departments	ExxonMobil proposed carbon tax
	Fostering desired government actions	Delegitimation of opposing worldviews and policy proposals	Think tanks, advocacy organizations		Climategate effort
Short-term 1 year to 6 months	Carrying out political action Elections Legislation	Lobbying		Lobbying firms	$8.6 million ExxonMobil spent on lobbying 2018
		Legislative issue advertising		Public relations firms	Accce 'Cold in the Dark Campaign'
		Citizen mobilization	Conservative political groups	Public relations firms, front groups	Americans for Prosperity
		Campaign contributions	Political action committees	Political action committees	Freedom Partners Action Fund

internationally primarily via networks of conservative think tanks. This countermovement, grounded in corporate interests seeking to maintain a fossil fuel-based energy system and its economic benefits, is augmented by a range of neoliberal ideological interests that are opposed to government regulations. Together, they are waging a concerted war against restrictions on carbon emissions.

A common tactic employed by these obstructive actors has been to deny the seriousness of anthropogenic climate change by manufacturing uncertainty about the scientific evidence, attacking climate scientists, and portraying climate science writ large as a controversial field—all of which are designed to undercut the perceived need for policies to address this crisis.[16] Starting in 1989, several conservative think tanks opposed to government regulatory action, often assisted by a small number of contrarian scientists, joined fossil fuel corporations in generating scientific misinformation about climate change. This information was then spread, and continues to be spread, by conservative media, sympathetic politicians, and other actors.[17] As climate impacts have accelerated, these efforts have placed more focus on delaying action and attacking proposed climate solutions such as renewable energy as expensive, unreliable, or even dangerous.

More recent scholarship aimed at understanding the forces that have thus far blocked effective efforts to reduce carbon emissions has broadened, focusing on funding for think tanks espousing denial and delay[18] and the larger network of actors involved in promoting climate change misinformation in which the think tanks and their funding sources are embedded.[19] Further research has shown that the promotion of scientific misinformation is only part of a much larger, integrated effort to develop and promulgate a consistent ideological message praising and defending fossil fuel use, which is then used to pressure decision-makers to limit efforts to reduce carbon emissions.[20]

From the beginning of organized opposition to climate action, coordinated information and influence campaigns, typically designed by advertising and lobbying firms, have been widely used by CCCM members (corporations, trade associations, and advocacy organizations) to achieve their political objectives—through either direct persuasion or generation of political pressure to influence the decision-making process.[21] This organizational strategy employs sophisticated public relations campaigns to simulate the appearance of a unified front that comprises diverse voices advocating for a uniform position. This perception is reinforced through the use of various communication strategies to reach different audiences, from members of parliament and prime ministers to influential media figures and key segments of the public at large.

In the next section, we provide an overview of climate obstruction by briefly reviewing the current literature on the practice and structure of climate obstruction efforts to establish a baseline from which to view the nature of climate opposition in Europe. The early research on the Global South indicates that different types of societies produce different forms of climate obstruction, including different discursive practices, organizational structures, and interactions among governing institutions.[22] This pattern is likely to emerge in the examination of European climate obstruction. Again, the material in this volume is based largely on the research conducted on climate obstruction efforts in the United States and offers only a preliminary perspective on the nature and extent of efforts to delay attempts to meaningfully address climate change.

The practice of climate obstruction

As noted earlier, key research has uncovered an integrated network of organizational relationships (sometimes termed the 'denial machine') that exists to influence the public, media, and political arenas to slow, stop, or reverse effective climate action. This countermovement is highly sophisticated, operates in multiple institutional arenas, and pursues a wide variety of coordinated strategies. These activities also operate in three distinct time frames: long term, intermediate term, and short term.[23] Table 1.1 provides an overview of these activities. As there are some variations in the activities of corporations and the conservative movement, that division of labour is noted in the figure.

Long-term activities

The first set of activities comprises long-term efforts ranging from five years to decades in duration. Their goal is to build and maintain a cultural and intellectual infrastructure of organizations that supports the development of ideas and policies favourable to conservative or industry viewpoints. One aspect of this effort is creating and maintaining academic programs at institutions of higher education, endowing academic chairs, and providing educational support for students in these programs.[24] In the United States, both corporations and the conservative movement engage in such efforts, which are only beginning to be documented in Europe. We can see their outcome in the proliferation of programs in economics and law that advocate Chicago School theories of neoliberal economics, which promote the

value of a 'free market'.[25] Additionally, both fossil fuel corporations and conservative think tanks attempt to promulgate conservative ideas and support for fossil fuels in public schools, as exemplified by the Heartland Institute's circulation of misleading materials to secondary school science teachers.[26]

Another set of long-term activities in which corporations and affiliated trade associations engage is the development and implementation of corporate or industry-sector promotional campaigns to enhance their cultural legitimacy and thus defuse potential regulations. Such campaigns include sponsorship of cultural events and forums, one of the best-known examples of which is Mobil Oil's decades-long sponsorship of Masterpiece Theatre, the dramatic television series distributed by the Public Broadcasting Service.[27] This approach is known as 'affinity of purpose' advertising and seeks to improve the corporation's public image by associating it with scientific and cultural achievements.[28] Mobil also developed an aggressive public relations campaign. In 1970, the company began buying advertising space on *The New York Times'* editorial pages.[29] The campaign's overarching viewpoint was the purported need for growth in energy (oil) use and the economy.[30] Additionally, corporations engage in extended promotional advertising campaigns. To establish and enhance their legitimacy, these companies attempt to promote themselves as representing norms of rationality, progress, and appropriate conduct. Excellent examples of these sorts of campaigns are the American Petroleum Institute's 'Fueling It Forward' television and magazine ad campaign and BP's early 2000s' 'Beyond Petroleum' campaign. As of this writing, all of the major oil companies have ongoing major corporate promotion campaigns of this type, and, as this volume shows, other industries do as well.

Medium-term activities

The second set of climate opposition activities focuses on the intermediate time horizon of one to five years. This stage involves the translation and promulgation of scholarly ideas into concrete policies. One key example is Exxon's 2017 proposal for a carbon tax, which would have placed a small tax on carbon emissions while rolling back other regulations and indemnifying fossil fuel companies from civil suits related to their culpability for climate change. Such campaigns employ a wide range of channels to distribute their messages, from mass media to published books, and provide testimony at government hearings to influence legislation. The major institutional actors utilizing this time frame are think tanks, advocacy organizations, and

public relations firms, which recruit credible third-party spokespersons to boost the legitimacy of their policy arguments.[31] Public relations firms play a further role in securing medium-term objectives by developing and disseminating materials that support policy objectives and by securing media coverage. Additionally, these same organizations seek to undermine the science of climate change by attacking the veracity of climate science and high-profile climate scientists. An example of this tactic was the 2009 'Climategate' affair, which involved denigrating several important climate scientists based on misinterpretations of their stolen emails.[32]

Short-term activities

The third set of climate obstruction activities focuses on short-term (six months to one year) political outcomes such as elections or pending legislation. Actors put considerable effort into influencing public opinion around climate change. One style of public opinion management is to promote positive perceptions of fossil fuel corporations through the extensive use of advertising campaigns. A second tactic involves citizen mobilization and/or the creation of front groups to demonstrate popular support for a political position. A third approach involves lobbying activities, either directly (by corporations or trade associations) or indirectly (through employing public affairs firms to influence legislative outcomes). In the United States, one notable example was the high levels of fossil fuel company spending in 2009 and 2010 to defeat the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (known as Waxman-Markey).[33] A fourth activity is targeted giving of political contributions via political action committees.

Information and influence campaigns are also used, which straddle the medium- and short-term time frames. Information and influence campaigns take the form of 'systemic, sequential and multifaceted effort[s] to promote information that orients the political decision-making process toward a desired outcome', either through direct persuasion or persuading other parties to bring pressure on decision-makers.[34] And as media outlets have proliferated, the bases of a public consensus have fragmented, and it can no longer be assumed that there is a commonly accepted position defining the basis of public discourse. 'Public discourse is fragmented structurally and culturally as different, incommensurable forms of interest come into competitive play'.[35] In this situation, organizations have powerful incentives to engage in activities to set the terms of the debate to favour their preferred policy outcomes.[36] Information and influence campaigns are highly sophisticated and coordinated actions that have now become a

routine component of the political process. They are comprehensive, well-designed efforts that start with an analysis of the factors that impinge on the decision-making process and then bring pressure to bear to shift that decision in the desired direction. These campaigns involve communication, action, and relationship objectives all designed to manage the outcome to the advantage of the protagonist (client), in this case the opponents of climate action.

The structure of climate obstruction

The rapidly growing body of social science research reveals much about the major actors in the CCCM: not only who is responsible for obstructing efforts to mitigate climate change, but also their interrelationships and the strategies and tactics they employ. As discussed earlier, Figure 1.1 illustrates the organizations to which these actors belong and their relationships within the CCCM 'ecosystem'. These organizations seek to drive the overall policy agenda on climate change by influencing three arenas: (1) public opinion and what is seen to comprise the public agenda, (2) the media agenda; what and how the media cover climate change, and (3) the focus of political action and which actions politicians propose as their own political agendas. The following list describes the key actors in the US CCCM, the most-studied case against which the European CCCM players and national structures of obstruction can be compared.

1. *Corporations*. Since the early 1990s, individual corporations, especially fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil, have engaged in efforts to obstruct climate action. These efforts include a wide range of activities, such as funding major misinformation campaigns[37] and large-scale corporate promotional advertising efforts,[38] along with traditional lobbying and political campaign contributions.
2. *Conservative foundations*. Several foundations have provided major funding to neoliberal think tanks that produce and disseminate climate change misinformation, challenging the need for government action on the crisis.[39] Research has shown that think tanks receiving foundation funding receive more attention in media and policymaking circles than do think tanks not receiving such funding.[40]
3. *Individuals*. When staging events in support of fossil fuels, the CCCM often uses corporate employees (and sometimes paid actors) as their spokespeople. However, some individuals exert enormous influence on their own, such as Charles Koch and the late David Koch. While

Koch family-affiliated foundations have played central roles in funding other actors, the brothers' personal and corporate networks provide numerous additional avenues of influence on policy issues such as energy and climate change.

4. *Advocacy coalitions*. Numerous corporations and trade associations from industry sectors facing threats of government regulation have banded together to form advocacy coalitions. These coalitions consolidate resources and engage in collective lobbying and public persuasion efforts to stop or slow regulatory action on climate change.[41]
5. *Advertising firms*. With the rise in concern over global climate change, fossil fuel interests have hired advertising firms to develop comprehensive public relations campaigns to both promote a positive image of their clients and discredit climate change mitigation efforts, including by designing campaigns against proposed legislation.[42]
6. *Trade associations*. Trade associations serve as mechanisms for corporations in similar industrial sectors to pursue collective political strategies by acting as command centres that help individual corporations pool resources, share information, and act as a collective political force.[43]
7. *Conservative think tanks*. As previously noted, by the early 1990s, many conservative think tanks had begun producing and disseminating climate change misinformation intended to sow doubt and confusion about global warming and the need to reduce carbon emissions. Global networks of think tanks—especially the Atlas Network—have also played a key role in diffusing denial internationally. Besides issuing press releases, policy reports, and books, think tanks' spokespersons have written op-eds, testified at congressional hearings, and given radio and television interviews to advance their goals.[44]
8. *Universities*. Major oil companies such as ExxonMobil, Shell, and Chevron Corporation fund large energy research programs at major universities over which they have considerable influence, leading these programs to take more industry-friendly approaches to addressing climate change.[45] Conservative foundations and individuals make major contributions that seek to support ideologies aligned with slowing climate action.
9. *Campaign funding/PACs*. Increasingly, corporations have been funding political action committees (PACs) as a way of influencing climate change legislation. Research has shown that targeted PAC funding significantly decreases the odds that candidates will take pro-climate stances. These committees have emerged as significant actors in shaping political discourse and potential legislation on climate change.[46]

10. *Lobbying firms*. There is an extensive and well-funded lobbying effort to prevent legislative action on climate change. Research in the United States has shown that fossil fuel interests outspend renewable energy corporations and environmental groups by a ratio of 10 to 1, providing these interests an overwhelming advantage in the crucial strategy of lobbying members of Congress.[47]
11. *Conservative media and denial bloggers*. Conservative media, including talk radio, TV and online sources, conservative newspapers, and widely circulated columnists, have become major amplifiers of climate change misinformation.[48] Users of these media show significantly lower levels of concern about the issue than individuals who didn't use those media outlets to learn about climate change.[49] A variety of social media and online outlets are also tools in the diffusion of climate change misinformation.

CLIMATE OBSTRUCTION IN EUROPE

The nations of Europe have their own distinct vested interests, coalitions, discourses, and strategies for blocking stronger climate action, but they have been scantily documented and never systematically compared with one another or with those of the United States. Europe is a critical area for the success or failure of global climate policy for several reasons. The countries that comprise it account for 8% of all production-based GHG emissions; more, if emissions are measured by the products consumed within a nation but produced elsewhere (a process known as *consumption-based emissions accounting*).[50] The European Union emits the fourth-largest quantity of GHGs in the world, followed by Russia, with the United Kingdom the eleventh-largest global emitter.[51] The distribution of GHG emissions among the countries examined in this book are illustrated in Figure 1.2.

As the figure shows, the largest quantity of emissions (3,460 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, or MMT CO_2e) emanates from the twenty-seven EU countries collectively. Of this total, 2,254 MMT CO_2e, or 66% of the total emissions of the European Union, are covered by the EU members discussed in this volume. The remaining 1,206 MMT CO_2e in the EU countries not discussed in this book amounts to 33% of total emissions. So, although the book includes only nine of the twenty-seven countries in the European Union, it does cover most of the major emitting countries. On a country-by-country basis, Russia, with a total of 2,160 MMT CO_2e, is by far the single largest contributor. Germany is the second-largest GHG emitter, with a total of 763 MMT CO_2e; followed by the United Kingdom,

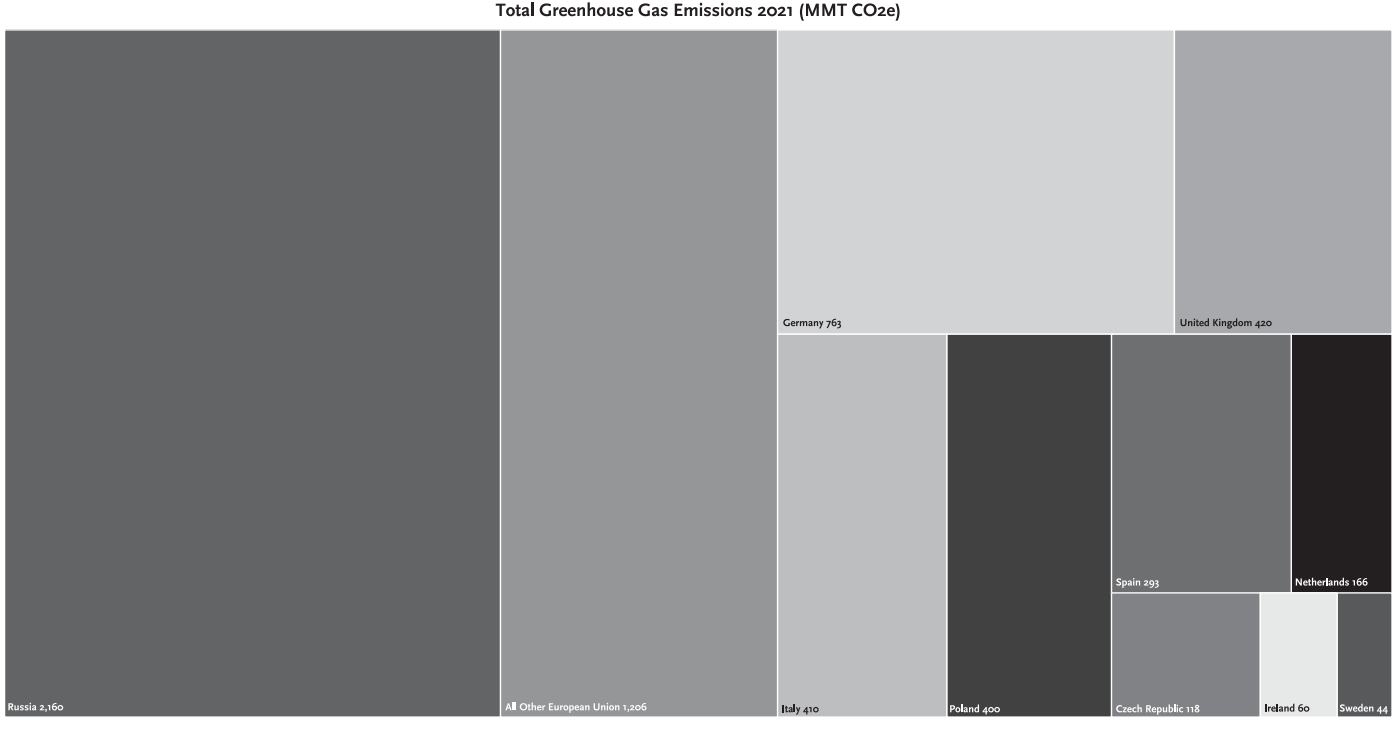

Figure 1.2 The rectangles represent the total quantity of greenhouse gases (GHGs) for each of the eleven European countries studied and for the remaining twenty-seven European Union nations.

Italy, and Poland, with about 400 MMT CO_2e each. Spain, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and Sweden all emit smaller quantities. Thus the overall emissions picture varies widely throughout Europe. In each chapter of this book, we therefore provide a discussion of each country's emissions trends, discuss their overall climate mitigation goals, and assess their success in reaching them.

Given their economic influence and political power, the countries of Europe also exert a major influence in global climate policy negotiations and decision-making. With the rise of the Green Party in Germany and then in other countries, Europe, as both a cultural region and a political bloc, has taken the need to act on climate change more seriously than most other parts of the world. For decades, Europe has seen itself as a leader on climate action, and in the over thirty years of UN negotiations on the issue, the European Union has brought leading pledges and policy ideas to the table.[52] Europe's support of the Kyoto Protocol, the development of the EU-Emissions Trading System, and the 2030 Climate Target Plan[53] are all significant (and flawed) achievements for this diverse region. Coordination and alignment of EU policies has not been easy, however, and early opposition by industry to region-wide climate policies led to targets not being met. Substantial effort has therefore been needed to address a 'credibility gap' between domestic climate policies and international proposals from the region.[54]

Indeed, although world-leading, even Europe's efforts on climate have been inadequate, uneven, and halting. In a 2014 article on EU climate policy, Jakob Skovgaard described a 'recurring pattern' by which proposals to increase the ambition of Europe-wide climate goals are 'quickly rejected, mainly by a coalition led by Poland and including Italy and some new Member States (Hungary and Romania among others) . . . a large group of actors either did not have a clear position for or against the step-up or oscillated between them'.[55] In a 2020 article, media scholar Juho Vesa and colleagues discussed how industrial lobbies work behind the scenes, outside of the media spotlight, to influence European climate policy by emphasizing the need for economic competitiveness.[56] Thus, some steps toward stronger EU climate policy have been rolled back and others threatened by economic crises, war, global competition, and authoritarianism. Pushback is growing as the region shifts from setting bold targets to implementing them.[57]

It is therefore an urgent task to explore the larger questions raised by the continuing difficulty of advancing ambitious climate policy and action in Europe. Three decades of halting progress suggest that a new understanding of the obstacles to climate action is needed. Who are the actors

and organizations obstructing climate action in Europe? What are their strategies, and how are they evolving? This volume seeks to advance our understanding of climate obstruction in the region as a whole and to learn from the significant variations in such efforts across the continent.

ELEVEN NATIONAL CASES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Because the literature on climate obstruction efforts in Europe is scattered and sporadic, it was not apparent that there was a substantial enough body of research on which this book could be based. Therefore its development followed a unique approach. Working with the All Europe Academies of Science (ALLEA), the Climate Social Science Network (CSSN) solicited proposals for chapters on multiple geographic regions in Europe, hoping that the scholars in each country would be aware of sufficient material from which they could develop a review. From this solicitation, we received eighteen responses; twelve were selected for inclusion. While many of the major national actors are included here, regrettably, the editorial team was unable to develop analyses of climate obstruction in France, Greece, Norway, Portugal, or the other European nations. This gap indicates a need for further support to develop sufficient academic research to enable analyses commensurate with the twelve that appear in this book.

Additionally, by design, the analyses emphasize national-level politics. As such, they do not focus on the larger dynamics at play, such as the roles of multinational corporations, international agreements, or think tanks across international boundaries. They also do not focus on cities or other subnational regions. Some of these broader topical issues are taken up in the forthcoming *First Global Assessment of Climate Obstruction*, now under development. Each chapter of this European volume is intended as a stand-alone case study, as well as part of a larger unit. However, where appropriate, the authors discuss the broader dynamics in their individual chapters.

This volume thus represents the current state of social scientific knowledge on climate obstruction efforts. Given the above limitations, the chapters offer a relatively comprehensive and in-depth presentation of climate obstruction efforts across a wide range of countries in the four European regions and introduce the key actors in climate change mitigation in Europe. No overriding theoretical framework was promulgated to guide development of the manuscript: each team of scholars was left to its own creativity on how to approach their topic. The only guidance provided was to ask each team to provide four specific analyses related to climate

obstruction in their specific geography: (1) a historical narrative on climate obstruction in the area, (2) a description and analysis of the major actors and type of institutions involved, (3) a discussion of the strategies and tactics they utilize, and (4) a description of the discursive framings they employ. While this approach yielded a variety of theoretical approaches to their topics, we hope it will stimulate further research and collaborative efforts that might ultimately refine a framework that can encompass the wide range of climate obstruction efforts described in this book. By assembling them in one volume, we hope to demonstrate the relevance of such analyses for expanding our understanding of climate change obstruction, especially its inherent links to social structure and societal dynamics.

The first three chapters focus on the British Isles. Chapter 2 focuses on climate obstruction in the United Kingdom. Through a historical account of the development of climate policy in the UK, the essay shows how incumbent interests utilize their structural, institutional, and discursive power to shape climate policy and obstruct ambitious climate action. This use of incumbent power has locked in future carbon emissions and will further restrain climate action. Chapter 3 provides a focused examination of climate obstruction related to gas and oil in Scotland. Rich with these fossil deposits in the North Sea, Scotland has been the site of an intense struggle over the development of these resources. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of this political struggle and how this effort has been centred on the protection of oil and gas jobs over mitigation of future climate change. Chapter 4 focuses on Ireland and the transformation of a primarily agricultural economy. Despite having a small fossil fuel-based economy, Ireland has a strong cultural tradition based on farming and the burning of high-carbon-emitting peat for home heating in rural areas. This analysis shows how the major agricultural interests act to obstruct climate regulations that might affect them.

The second set of chapters focuses on Northern Europe. It starts with Chapter 5, an analysis of climate obstruction in Sweden. This analysis centres on the Swedish notion of the 'middle way' when developing policy approaches to climate change. This way reflects a centrist approach to moderate and incremental policy adjustments to reduce Sweden's GHG emissions. To oppose these policies, the opposition to climate action utilizes indirect tactics involving delaying climate solutions and displacing impacts to other locations, such as by utilizing carbon offsets. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how climate obstruction is changing as politics have shifted to the right in Sweden. Chapter 6, on Germany, focuses on the strong neoliberal opposition to climate action there and how this opposition is realized through the use of think tanks and campaign

organizations to shape public opinion against renewable energy. German climate opposition does not frequently engage in outright climate denial. Rather, the campaigns focus on delaying mechanisms such as advocating for carbon offsets, less ambitious vehicle emissions standards, and the use of natural gas as a 'transition fuel' on the path to a hydrogen economy. Chapter 7, on the Netherlands documents a history there of early ambition on climate change and the subsequent mobilization of strategic sceptics on the science, lobbying by the nation's largest corporations and trade groups, and a cultural offensive to keep fossil fuels as inevitable and positive contributors to solving the problem. Central to the story are the close ties between the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the fossil fuel industry, through lobbying and the revolving door. That ministry, in turn, undermined every effort to put in place ambitious climate policy in the Netherlands.

The third section of the book focuses on three former Soviet republics: Poland, Russia, and the Czech Republic. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, all three of these nations experienced a dramatic drop in their GHG emissions after the collapse of their economies. Accordingly, there has been very little external pressure to reduce GHG emissions in these countries because the UNFCCC baseline year by which national reductions would be measured was set at 1990. In all three countries, state ownership of the energy industries and state investment led to a continuation of fossil fuels as the basis for these nations' economies. Chapter 8, on Poland, shows the central role that the coal industry plays in the Polish economy and how a coalition of government institutions, agencies, state-owned energy companies, and utilities works to perpetuate fossil fuel use. Similarly, Chapter 9 shows the centrality of fossil fuel use in the economy of Russia, where national defence and government stability ensure a taken-for-granted economic structure in which there are no significant ongoing efforts to meaningfully mitigate GHG emissions. Finally, Chapter 10's analysis of the Czech Republic shows how low 'issue saliency' and lack of pressure on politicians to reduce carbon emissions leads to a lack of meaningful climate policy in this country. Thus, all three former Soviet republic countries are burdened by a political system firmly linked to an economy based in fossil fuels, and little action on climate change is taking place because national priorities are focused elsewhere.

The final section of the book focuses on two southern European countries (Italy and Spain) and the European Union. Italy is the focus of Chapter 11, which shows the enduring opposition to climate change in that country is based in a strong climate countermovement. This effort,

which is linked to conservative think tanks in the United States, appears to engage in very similar tactics to oppose climate action. This effort is backed by Italian oil and gas companies, their lobby groups, and corporate and institutional allies. Chapter 12, on Spain, shows that the legacy of Spanish authoritarian government has obstructed action on climate change and allowed vested interests to maintain the status quo in energy policy, which favours large corporations and fossil fuel use. Additionally, its strong agricultural industry limits action to address carbon emissions from cattle production. Chapter 13 concludes with an analysis of obstruction at the level of the European Union. The chapter provides a historical perspective on the development of climate policy in the European Union and the conflict between its core mandate to develop an integrated European economy and a secondary effort to reduce its overall carbon emissions. The opposition to ambitious climate action at the EU level is not based on climate denial. Rather, it consists of lobbying efforts to reduce the ambition of climate policy initiatives and make them more market friendly. The chapter presents an empirical analysis to show how fossil fuel interests exercise a significant advantage in lobbying capacity and how this resource advantage leads to a systematic weakening of EU climate policy.

LOOKING AHEAD

However belatedly, the social sciences are finally turning more intently to examine human-caused climate change, a welcome trend critical for both the development of a series of other subspecialties in our fields—and the very survival of our species. In this first-of-its-kind volume, multidisciplinary social science teams seek to understand the ways in which the primary drivers of global climate change are social-structural and sociocultural phenomena. These eleven national case studies and the review of climate obstruction at the level of the European Union therefore represent a major leap forward in our understanding of climate obstruction efforts in the region, provide a good sense of what social science can contribute to this enterprise, and underscore the urgency of incorporating social-science perspectives into future research, action, and policy on climate change. Finally, a concluding chapter distills the book's main findings into a series of ten lessons to suggest new avenues for policy and action. We look forward to a new era of useful research on climate obstruction across Europe.

NOTES

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