



## Beyond climate change denialism. Conceptual challenges in communicating climate action obstruction

*Más allá del negacionismo del cambio climático. Retos conceptuales al comunicar la obstrucción de la acción climática*

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### Abstract

Climate change has been the subject of much research in various fields of the social sciences in recent decades, including that of communication. As a result, much evidence has been accumulated on the complex reality behind political inaction in this regard. However, when it comes to communicating this reality, the media, and part of academia, have tended to simplify this complexity by focusing on the climate countermovement and literal denialism of the phenomenon. This countermovement has been extensively studied in the United States, revealing the existence of a highly influential anthropogenic climate change denialism in that country. However, academic research has also shown that political inaction on the climate cannot be explained by denialism alone; not in the United States, and much less in Europe. In this article, we question the current indiscriminate use of the concept of denialism and suggest the incorporation of a more sophisticated conceptual and analytical framework that provides more nuance and aligns with the evidence emerging from academic research. It is a matter not only of critically communicating the reality of political inaction with regard to

### Resumen

*El cambio climático ha sido objeto de estudio frecuente desde distintos ámbitos de las ciencias sociales en las últimas décadas, también desde la comunicación. Gracias a ello, se ha generado una cada vez más abundante evidencia de la realidad compleja que se esconde tras la inacción política al respecto. Sin embargo, a la hora de comunicar esta realidad, los medios de comunicación, y una parte de la academia, han tendido a simplificar esta complejidad poniendo el foco en el contramovimiento climático y el negacionismo literal del fenómeno. Este contramovimiento ha sido abundantemente estudiado en los Estados Unidos, lo que ha puesto en evidencia la existencia de un negacionismo del cambio climático antropogénico muy influyente en ese país. Pero la investigación académica ha hecho también evidente que la inacción política al respecto del clima no puede explicarse solo con el concepto de negacionismo; ni en los Estados Unidos, ni mucho menos en Europa. En este artículo problematizamos el uso del concepto negacionismo en su uso indiscriminado actual y sugerimos incorporar un marco conceptual y de análisis más sofisticado, que aporte más matices y se alinee con las evidencias de la*

the climate, but also of identifying the entire spectrum of responsibilities, which are not limited to simply denying or not denying climate change.

**Palabras clave:** climate change, denialism, inaction, obstructionism, contrarianism.

*investigación académica. Se trata no solo de comunicar de forma crítica la realidad de la inacción política con respecto al clima sino de hacerlo también identificando todo el espectro real de responsabilidades, que no se reducen a negar o no negar el cambio climático.*

**Keywords:** cambio climático, negacionismo, inacción, obstruccionismo, contrarianismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term *denialism*, a concept with huge ideological baggage, has been incorporated into the everyday vocabulary of the media, social media and public debate. Although the COVID-19 crisis has contributed to this, the term has frequently been applied to other issues over a long period of time, including climate change. When we started the THINKClima research project<sup>1</sup> in 2017, we gave it the title “Climate change, denialism and advocacy communication. Discourse and strategies of think tanks in Europe”. After five years of work, our view of denialism has been transformed: our results indicate that using the term *denialism* to raise opposition to climate change is a mistake that trivializes a very delicate issue, *denialism* itself, and leads to confusion over the real division of responsibilities in the climate crisis.

In this article, we argue that it is necessary to avoid the indiscriminate use of the term *denialism* when communicating about the climate crisis. We base our argument on the fact that the term prevents correct identification of the causes of inaction in the face of the climate crisis due to its reductionist nature. In fact, this label can in itself conceal the real problems that explain climate inaction. The academic field that studies political inaction in relation to global warming has been moving towards the use of other labels that better describe the reality. Thus, academic research has gradually abandoned the term *denialism* as a framework category to describe opposition to climate change, to incorporate other, more precise views that capture the particular features of obstacles to the climate struggle. These new names imply new conceptual frameworks that include, for example, delay, contrarianism or obstructionism.

In this article we question the current indiscriminate use of the concept of *denialism*, and suggest the incorporation of a more sophisticated conceptual and analytical framework that provides more nuance and aligns with the evidence emerging from academic research. It is a matter not only of critically communicating the reality of political inaction with regard to the climate, but also of identifying the entire spectrum of responsibilities, which are not limited to simply denying or not denying climate change.

We recognize the challenge inherent in our proposal. The term *denialism* is simple and attractive; that is, it allows for eye-catching and reassuring headlines and approaches (the blame lies with the *deniers*). However, crisis communication should not only be critical but also

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honest, avoiding reductionisms (which polarize or conceal some of those responsible, for example) and self-interested interpretations (which, for example, attribute full responsibility to a specific group of actors, as with the conservative right in this case).

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS BEYOND DENIALISM

The term *denialism* has been used as an umbrella concept in communication to refer to a multitude of different positions that are not aligned with the fight against climate change. However, not all stances that are not aligned with the fight against climate change actually fit the definition of *deniers*, a concept with considerable ideological background, as we have said. This is because the origin of the term is, as everyone will be aware, historically associated with the denial of the Jewish Holocaust during Nazi Germany. For this reason, many institutional definitions of the term link it to historical revisionism and international law. In fact, the Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Doubts provides the following definition of denialism: “A hate crime committed by anyone who publicly denies a crime of genocide, harming humanity or against persons and property protected in the event of an armed conflict”. The term therefore deserves a very considered application and various authors have openly questioned its use in the field dealing with the climate change struggle prior to this article (e.g. Jacques, 2012; O’Neill & Boykoff, 2010). However, it has yet to be analysed in any great depth, as we propose to do here.

The indiscriminate use of *denialism* is not just a matter of historical-semantic accuracy, however. Its application generates a division that, as we shall see below, can be seen as fallacious, since there are no two sides in climate inaction (denier and non-denier), but rather a conglomeration of actors, among whom some deny, many more obstruct and a vast majority do not cooperate or boycott climate action unconsciously. In fact, the label *denialism* ends up concealing the responsibility of the non-deniers.

Despite all of the above problems, this is the name that most often appears in the media and in public debate when referring to those who oppose climate action, who are generally referred to as “climate change deniers” (or even “climate deniers”, which would mean denying the climate, obviously something no one does). In light of this and other applications that trivialize the concept, we see how *denialism* is used as a catch-all term that is recklessly applied to dissidents in any complex issue. When it comes to climate change, in Spanish the terms *negacionismo* (the ideology, *denialism*) is also confused with *negación* (the attitude, *denial*) - the latter being a mental state that not only underlies explicit *denialism*, but also includes those who do not deny literal climate change but do deny its implications.

Various researchers have theorized about denial as an attitude. Notably, the sociologist Stanley Cohen (2001) identified three states of common denial among people who experience events that cause suffering: literal, interpretive and implicatory. Cohen’s classification is extremely useful in understanding the phenomenon of climate inaction. Applied here, literal denial implies a refusal to acknowledge the facts or evidence of global warming. Interpretive denial, on the other hand, does not deny the facts that occur, but awards them a different meaning than would be obvious to others - not interpreting current global warming as being caused by humans, for example. And finally, implicatory denial does accept evidence of the

problem being faced, but it denies the “psychological, political or moral implications” that need to be accepted to reduce polluting emissions (Cohen 2001, 8). The first two types, implication and interpretation, can lead to construction of the ideology of climate change denialism, and have been widely studied in the United States regarding opposition to climate action: there are individuals and organizations that effectively deny the evidence of global warming, and others who deny its anthropogenic nature and have incorporated this state of denial into their political ideology. These two states of denial do not always imply denialist stances, however: for example, one can deny the severity of the problem without denying the problem as a whole, or as is often the case, one can deny that it can be solved. To label these last two positions as *denialist*, for example, is both overly-simplistic and confusing. Similarly, in most cases neither does denialism imply the third state of denial, implicatory denial, which is in fact common among individuals and organizations that do acknowledge and care about anthropogenic climate change - but refuse to accept the change of habits that this entails. Therefore, to confuse denial with denialism is a form of reductionism that prevents us from understanding the real complexity behind climate inaction.

Specifically, we argue here that there are three reasons why use of the term *denialism* to refer to those actors who boycott or do not support climate action is not appropriate as an umbrella concept: firstly, because most climate dissidents do not deny climate science, but rather oppose the adoption of climate policies; secondly, because it generates a polarization that poisons the public debate and does not reflect the true composition of the climate countermovement; and, finally, and linked to the above, because the term *denialism* makes those who contribute to climate inaction, but are not actual *deniers*, invisible - and in doing so makes the ideological basis that sustains them invisible as well.

## **2.1. Obstructionism (denialist or not) is the dominant reality**

In both the United States and Europe, it is clear that the types of arguments put forward by individuals and groups who disagree with climate activism are much broader than that implied by the term *denialist*. Although denialists doubtless exist - those who deny the existence of or scientific consensus on anthropogenic global warming - they do not represent all opposing positions. An analysis of the ideology used in both the United States and Europe shows that strictly denialist arguments are not predominant in climate action contrarian narratives (Almiron *et al.*, 2020; Coan *et al.*, 2021). Historically, since the advent of climate dissent, the most widely used arguments have been those related to political solutions and the attempt to discredit climate activists.

In fact, historical data show that the vast majority of climate dissidents do not deny global warming, but are essentially opposed to policies that seek to address the problem. The reasons given for this opposition are mainly a lack of effectiveness or even priority - because there are other more pressing issues or because policies cannot fix the problem, or even make it worse, as well as harming the economy. Obviously, the underlying cause of this opposition is simply trying to keep up with business as usual, so that everything stays the same in those businesses that have a greater impact on the environment.

In general terms, what research has revealed is that there are some deniers of the anthropogenic climate crisis, but, above all and eminently, there is political obstructionism.

This is why researchers in the English-speaking world have been so prolific in their use of labels, which includes referring to denial, often translated as denialism - and the *denial machine*, or the set of actors seeking to question consensus and attacking climate science (Dunlap and McCright, 2011) - but also, for example:

- *sceptics*, those who doubt climate science but actually represent pseudoscientific positions (e.g. Dunlap, 2013; Lahsen, 2013)
- *countermovement*, a term that defines those actors who work in the same direction, but not necessarily in coordination, to undermine climate science and policy (e.g. Dunlap & McCright, 2015; McKie, 2017)
- *contrarians*, used to define those who oppose climate action (e.g. Boykoff, 2016; McCright, 2007)
- *delayers*, whose discourses question measures to curb climate change and promote inaction (Lamb *et al.*, 2020), and, more recently
- *obstructionism*, a term that describes those who in some way boycott or obstruct political action to reduce emissions and pollution in general (e.g. CSSN, 2021; McKie, 2021).

Each of the above labels has different nuances, but in our opinion it is the last, obstructionism, that incorporates a position shared by most of these actors. Obstructionists are united by the fact that they perceive any alteration to the status quo that is contrary to their interests as a threat. Links between the conservative right, libertarianism and neoliberalism and the climate countermovement in the United States and Europe (Brulle, 2014; Jacques *et al.*, 2008; Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; McCright & Dunlap, 2010, 2011) prove this: it is not denialism that unites those who oppose climate action, but rather the defence of financial, oligarchic and patriarchal capitalism. It is true that some of the above are deniers, but many others are sceptics or simply stand against it, while virtually all are advocates of the economic status quo and obstruct climate policies.

Thus, the academic study of dissent in relation to climate change has ceased to focus on negationism to concentrate on obstructionism. Obstructionism is both a narrative and a strategy. In both cases, the goal is the same: to delay policies that seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or general pollution by seeing them as a threat to business. The Climate Social Science Network defines the following three actions as obstructionist (CSSN, 2021):

- 1) Maintaining or transforming the public agenda so that the desired framing is accepted as common sense in that particular area, and ensuring that public opinion does not support climate action.
- 2) Shaping the media agenda to promote particular perspectives that cast doubt on actions that address climate change.
- 3) Influencing the political process to select policies that do not support climate action.

This strategy includes delaying arguments such as the following: it is not possible to mitigate climate change and we must give up trying; responsibility lies with others, they are the ones who have to act first; it is not necessary to apply profound changes to combat climate change; or the necessary changes and measures bring with them many disadvantages (Lamb *et al.*,



2020). This type of argument, which is much more pragmatic and less hostile to scientific evidence, is more widespread than would appear in the business and economic spheres, and exerts great influence in the political sphere - a good example of this is how the rhetoric of adapting to climate scenarios that are considered inevitable has already replaced the fight to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in contexts such as climate summits organized by the United Nations.

In the business sphere, climate action obstructionism is carried out much more forcefully in the background, through corporations that have incorporated the rhetoric of climate activism in their public discourse but in practice - in the corridors of power - lobby against pro-environmental policies. This dynamic logically requires a large dose of public relations to ensure no evident contradiction between public discourse and actions taken in the background. This has come to be called *greenwashing* - that is, the use of green marketing strategies to give a positive and environmentalist image that hides malpractice with respect to environmental problems (de Freitas Netto *et al.*, 2020). Some industries stand out among the most obstructionist, but not denialist, corporate actors, mainly in the energy, transport and agricultural-food sectors, whose lobbies have been dedicated to delaying climate action as far as possible.

One case that has been widely studied in the US is that of the company Exxon, whose public relations strategy has aimed to spread climate change denialist ideas through think tanks and pressure groups (Oreskes & Conway, 2018) and media campaigns (Supran & Oreskes, 2017). In fact, an analysis of this company's communication reveals that its objective has been to reduce the severity of the climate emergency and blame consumers in order to hide the company's own responsibility in this regard (Supran & Oreskes, 2021). Similar dynamics have occurred in contexts such as Spain, where energy companies that are among those that emit the most greenhouse gases sponsored COP25 Madrid-Chile and various press articles to give themselves a green image during the summit (Moreno & Ruiz-Alba, 2021).

Such strategies are not limited to the energy sector. For example, in the case of the meat lobby in the European Union, it is possible to identify a strategy that replicates the tactics of classic climate obstructionism: disseminate information that casts doubt on the existing consensus regarding the polluting nature of meat production and convince politicians that technology (not a change in diet) is the solution (Almiron, 2020). The meat lobby also forms part of discursive coalitions against the adoption of climate policies (Almiron & Moreno, 2021); that is, groups that, though not necessarily coordinated, promote a certain narrative, as is the case with other sectors within the climate counter-movement. Specifically, one of the strategies with which the meat lobby has managed to delay political decisions regarding emissions from the animal-based agricultural and food industry has been to refocus the discussion on aspects that indefinitely delay decisions - discussing and re-discussing how emissions should be measured, for example. With actions of this type, this lobby, together with the energy and transport lobbies and others, have systematically obstructed climate political action, delaying any relevant change. In public, all of these industries display environmental concern and awareness (*greenwashing*), while at the same time spending huge amounts of money and efforts lobbying to hinder effective climate policies, which are seen as a threat to their businesses. It is this reality, this obstructionism, rather than the influence of the deniers who radically reject anthropogenic climate change, that has prevented effective progress in

environmental policy in Europe, despite it being one of the regions on the planet whose inhabitants are most aware of the issue, according to the Eurobarometer (European Parliament, 2017).

## **2.2. The “denier vs. non-denier” polarization is reductionist (and misleading)**

In the United States, the debate on climate change has been tremendously polarized since its inception (Rekker, 2021). This American polarization has often been interpreted from the outside as reductionist, as if it meant that half of the population are deniers while the other half are not, and thus would be exonerated of all blame in climate inaction. Such a polarization does not exist in Europe, where the vast majority of the population aligns with the scientific consensus on the climate and yet where the environmental policies necessary to reduce polluting emissions are not being implemented either.

Given this context, the use of the term *denier* is not simply an inaccurate generalization applied to the climate countermovement, but also an overly-simplistic rhetorical strategy that feeds this false polarization of the climate debate by distinguishing between bad (deniers) and good (non-deniers). This allows for the former to be criminalized and the latter exonerated, when in reality the latter group has as many or more obstructionists (even if they are not deniers of the scientific bases of climate change).

American researchers have long known this, warning that dissent against the climate struggle is made up of a much broader group of actors than the orbit of think tanks financed by the oil industry (e.g. CSSN, 2021; Dunlap & McCright, 2015). In addition to these, the countermovement in the United States also includes corporations and trade associations, coalitions and interest groups, public relations agencies, false flag activist groups, philanthropists and conservative foundations, some scientists, media, conservative politicians and bloggers. In Europe, we have also been able to verify that obstructionist think tanks are not alone: they are at least connected with the neoliberal movement (e.g. Almiron *et al.*, 2020), the US countermovement (e.g. Huth & Peters, 2020) and campaigns such as Brexit (Farand *et al.*, 2019), in addition to also having journalists and bloggers associated with them. In this regard, a study we carried out on a hundred of the most important think tanks in Europe of all ideologies has shown that, with very few exceptions, these organizations in Europe have paid minimal, purely anecdotal, attention to the important question of the animal-based diet and its impact on greenhouse effect emissions (Almiron *et al.*, 2021). All of which proves that there are many more involved in employing some degree of delaying tactics or non-collaborationism than what we have come to call deniers and associate with the ideological right.

Another aspect on which it is worth reflecting in relation to the over-simplification created by use of the *denier* concept is the heterogeneity of non-deniers. Among non-deniers we find not only organizations that do not doubt the existence of climate change but that, out of economic interest, act to obstruct climate action. Progressive organizations and citizens themselves are also found in this group. The former, for example, even include environmental organizations, which have not incorporated aspects such as denunciation of the animal-based diet in their climate fight until relatively recently, and even then not unanimously (Kramcsak Muñoz, 2021). With regard to citizens, although Europeans are mostly aware of the environmental problem, this does not mean that they assume and accept the required changes in habits.

Among the changes in habits with the greatest mitigation potential are giving up private cars, rejecting air travel, consuming only renewable energy in the home and adopting a vegan diet (Ivanova *et al.*, 2020). Denying the impact of these measures for cultural and ideological reasons is consistent with the implicatory denial as described by Stanley Cohen (2013). Generally speaking, European citizens are aware of the climate problem, they do not deny it (European Parliament, 2017), but they do deny its implications, or the changes in behaviour necessary to be consistent with the climate crisis situation. This denial seeks to sustain privileges that science has shown as environmentally unsustainable but that citizens justify based on arguments commonly anchored in tradition, culture or ideology. The sociologist Kari Marie Norgaard (2011) attributed such attitudes to the need to maintain a certain “ontological stability” (p. 26), that is, continuity with the lifestyle and the certainty of a stable future. Thus, paradoxically, a large part of the citizenry would also be taking refuge in a narrative of climate action obstructionism and delay despite their climate awareness.

### **2.3. Criticism of denialism makes the anthropocentric-patriarchal-industrial status quo of obstructionism invisible**

The concept of *denialism* used as an ideological umbrella for climate inaction is not only a reductionist imprecision, it is also a way of making the set of anthropocentric-patriarchal and industrialist ideas and values that underlie climate inaction invisible (whether denialist or non-denialist).

We have seen that the economic interests of the industries involved play an important role in obstructing climate action, as well as ideologies that defend the free market and materialist positions. This dynamic is supported by an anthropocentric, industrial and patriarchal worldview, a set of interconnected beliefs that define Western society’s culture and worldview.

We live in times of uncertainty marked by unsustainability; in other words, the way in which society works must change or it will collapse (Garcés, 2017; Taibo, 2011). The anthropocentric notion of progress that guides humanity has traditionally been centred on accumulating wealth through the exploitation of finite natural resources and non-human animals (Best, 2014; Hribal, 2014). The accumulation processes that take place in the economic system use patriarchy to perpetuate themselves (Mies, 2018). There is evidence that links this notion of progress to a certain type of masculinity called “industrial” (Hultman & Pulé, 2018), and that it may be representative of the hegemonic Western patriarchy. This masculinity emanates from social norms regarding what it means to be a man, and is deeply linked to ideals of industrial growth, extractive industries, and practices dependent on fossil fuels (Hultman & Pulé, 2018). Different investigations have indicated that Western conservative white men, exponents of “industrial” masculinity, are the most likely to oppose climate action or deny climate change (Anshelm and Hultman 2014; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Krange *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, the literature has shown that one pillar of this hegemonic masculinity is the annihilation of other animals (Adams, 2010). Various studies have shown that men are more likely to justify animal-based diets than women, due to a deep identification between masculinity and meat (eg, Love & Sulikowski, 2018; Rothgerber, 2013). Even in the field of mobility, there is evidence that links this masculinity to the culture of cars, with automobiles being objects associated with power



and virility (Duerringer, 2015; Walker *et al.*, 2000). Thus, curbing global warming is contentious as it attacks such fundamental pillars for masculinities in crisis as meat, cars and economic growth based on the status quo. Climate policies aimed at promoting degrowth and regulating unsustainable mobility or the consumption of products of animal origin collide with these patriarchal ideals, which are vulnerable to an attack on elements of their identity.

To address the climate problem - which is essentially one more deriving from the problem of overpopulation, overexploitation and humanity's poisoning of the environment - it is necessary to move towards other ways of seeing the world that are more ethical, egalitarian and sustainable; that is, to promote those visions of systemic change that really respond to the situation of emergency in which we find ourselves (Fernández-Reyes, 2013). Sara Ahmed (2019) stated that "to point to the emptying of the world by overdevelopment is to be a killjoy, getting in the way of a future enjoyment" (p. 357). Thus, the transformative movements based on degrowth, antispeciesism or feminist ethics of care, among other aspects, do not address only the climate problem, but a whole culture and an ideological system that sustains the unsustainable Western way of life. Proposals aimed at promoting the cultural change required by the climate crisis arise from different currents of thought and consist of adopting a vision that is anti-anthropocentric (Almiron & Tafalla, 2019; Best, 2014), ecofeminist (Gaard, 2015; Herrero, 2013), intersectional (Hathaway, 2020; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014) and based on degrowth (Keyßer & Lenzen, 2021; Taibo, 2011) when it comes to the climate crisis.

Reducing the climate debate to "deniers vs. non-deniers" is not only reductionist and polarizing, it is also a way of making this ideological substrate that underlies the climate inaction of so many non-deniers of climate change invisible. A polarization that ultimately hides the role of the anthropocentric, patriarchal capitalist system based on an idea of progress centred around unlimited industrial-technological growth. More precisely, it makes the values that have led us to the current situation, and that are not only the patrimony of a "conservative denialist right", invisible.

### 3. COMMUNICATING COMPLEXITY

The task of communicating complexity is both difficult (requiring the management of many variables) and thankless (it does not lead to headlines or simple communicative actions, which are the ones that have the most impact and are therefore the most desired). For George Lakoff (2010, 2014), the difficulty of communicating complexity lies in the fact that humans think in frames, that is, particular explanations about a matter based on a specific approach to that reality. But complex issues resist being tackled with single approaches, especially when they have systemic causes, as is usually the case.

Communicating the complexity of climate inaction does not escape this logic, which is also complicated by the public relations strategies of the climate counter-movement (Almiron & Xifra, 2020) and other structural conditioning factors that act on journalistic work (Mancinas-Chávez, 2013; Moreno-Cabezudo, 2018). However, when trying to escape simplification, care must be taken not to make the matter more complex. Some of the solutions suggested by Lakoff (2014), for example, to address the complexity of climate change - using networks of interconnected causes, feedback loops or probabilistic calculations - can make things more

complicated than clearer, which paralyses action and adds fuel to the argument to give up (if it is too complex, one tends to think there is nothing one can do).

We cannot offer specific recommendations for the best execution of this task here. There are no magic formulas (see Boykoff, 2019, for example). But we can establish some general recommendations on the question of terminology to communicate the causes of climate inaction. If our aim is to implement ethical, egalitarian and sustainable communication in this regard, we suggest the following three reflections:

First of all, it is important to remember that the current episode of anthropogenic climate change is nothing more than the consequence of our environmental impact. An environmental impact that causes enormous suffering to many humans and non-humans, those social strata that pollute the least, the most impoverished, generally being the most affected, while all non-humans are innocent of such pollution and still suffer from it equally. This reminder is relevant because, from an ethical and pragmatic perspective, we do not need to recognize climate change to accept that polluting is wrong, with or without global warming. As this ethical stance is brought into communicative focus, the need to promote effective action and stop delaying action becomes immediately apparent. As Fernández-Reyes (2014) stated, we must stop focusing communication on what is “said” and focus it on “what is done” and “what is happening”. And therefore, precisely the opposite of the strategies employed by the most polluting industries, which are exquisitely pro-environment in public and intensely politically obstructive in practice. Consensus on how much is polluted, how to measure emissions, who pollutes the most, how to measure the impacts of pollution, etc. - which are part of the central procrastination strategy adopted by the major obstructionist industries - is a public relations action masquerading as climate action. The communication of climate inaction should be very aware of not conveying as discursive action what is in fact only delaying action.

Secondly, the “denier vs. non-denier” framework must be abandoned as a global concept for explaining political inaction. The denial of anthropogenic climate change exists, in a notable way, in the United States, but this is not a position that represents all actors causing climate inaction, nor is it the majority stance in the arguments used. Centring climate inaction on denialism is reductionist and over-simplistic, and contributes to reinforcing a false reality that contrasts good and bad actors. Climate inaction in Europe is mainly driven by non-denier climate science actors.

Finally, in this article we have put forward the main concepts that inform different nuances of the causes behind climate inaction. In doing so, we have placed special emphasis on obstructionism, which reflects not “what they say” but “what they do” and “what is happening” when it comes to the vast majority of actors who, regardless of their ideas, are effectively dedicated to influencing the public agenda, the political process and public opinion so that the necessary actions are not carried out and the citizens support the status quo, or at least accept it and continue voting for those same political parties that allow themselves to be influenced. Terms such as *obstructionism*, *delay*, *opposition* or *contrarianism* not only better reflect the real complexity of the climate problem, but also cease to divert attention towards some external enemy.

## NOTES

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