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Who is who? Competing coalitions in climate-AFOLU politics in Argentina

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the main actor coalitions shaping Argentina's climate-AFOLU policy subsystem from 2015 to 2024 using the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). Two key coalitions are identified: a dominant productivist coalition, formed primarily by farmers, agribusiness organizations and supportive state actors, that emphasizes economic expansion, agricultural competitiveness and efficiency in the use of natural resources; and a minority socio-environmental coalition, led by environmental NGOs and diverse social actors, advocating for ecological reforms in AFOLU production systems and restrictions on land-use changes affecting forests, pastures and wetlands. While both coalitions support climate action, they differ in policy goals, reform scope and advocacy capacity. The national environmental authority plays a key brokerage role, pushing other government sectors to increase mitigation ambitions. Policy outcomes have largely reflected the productivist coalition's dominance. However, the incremental approach of the Paris Agreement has created openings to revisit national mitigation goals, pressuring the dominant coalition to address the AFOLU's role in the low-carbon transition. This policy subsystem consolidated during a period of relative receptivity to climate issues among mainstream political actors. The 2023 election of President Javier Milei, however, marks a significant political shift, raising questions about the future direction of climate policy in Argentina.

POLICY INSIGHTS

- The two competing coalitions in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem formally support climate action, but diverge in the policy objectives and in the scope of the transformations needed to achieve decarbonization.
- The productivist coalition dominates AFOLU policy, prioritizing economic growth, competitiveness and resource efficiency.
- The socio-environmental coalition advocates for systemic changes in land use, stricter regulation and absolute emission reductions.
- The national environmental authority acts as a pivotal policy broker.
- Milei's 2023 election represents a radical change in the political landscape within which the climate policy subsystem has consolidated, raising uncertainty for climate policy.

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1. Introduction

Within the framework of the Paris Agreement on climate change, Argentina has committed to contribute to global efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by the second half of the twenty-first century. To this end, the

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country has established greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets for 2030 and announced its goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 (MAyDS, 2020; 2022b).

As in many other Latin American countries, the transition to a low-emission, sustainable economy presents significant challenges for Argentina's agricultural sector. This is due both to its substantial contribution to national GHG emissions and its central role in the country's economy. The AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector accounts for approximately 39% of Argentina's total GHG emissions, primarily from livestock activities and land-use change (deforestation) driven by agricultural expansion (SSAmb, 2024). At the same time, agricultural, livestock and agro-industrial production are vital to the country's economic structure, representing 55% of total exports in 2024¹ and constituting a key source of foreign exchange in a structurally dollar-constrained economy (INDEC, 2024). The sector also plays a significant social and territorial role, generating around 5% of registered employment nationwide² and shaping local economies in several provinces (Mendoza & Corfield, 2024). This dual feature, both as a key source of emissions and a pillar of economic and social development, makes the AFOLU sector a critical arena for the Argentine transition to climate neutrality.

A previous study published in this journal by Gutman et al. (2024) demonstrated the biophysical feasibility of achieving carbon neutrality in the Argentine AFOLU sector by 2050. However, their participatory modelling process also revealed deep divergences and competing priorities among key stakeholders (AVINA et al., 2021). These findings underscore the political complexity of transition processes and the diversity of visions and interests involved.

These political tensions are not unique to Argentina. An incipient but growing body of literature on climate politics in Latin America analyzes the conflicts and tensions between climate mitigation objectives and productivist development models, particularly in commodity-export sectors. In the Brazilian case, several studies show how climate policy outcomes have been shaped by shifting and opposing multi-sector coalitions, resulting in recurrent cycles of ambition and retrenchment in climate governance (Aamodt, 2018; Franchini et al., 2020; Viola & Franchini, 2014). In the case of Colombia, Edwards (2025) documents how different economic and political actors mobilize narratives linking climate action and energy transition to economic risk and development concerns, contributing to delays and contested transition pathways. This article contributes to this literature by exploring the political dynamics of climate mitigation efforts in Argentina's AFOLU sector.

Specifically, the main objective of the article is to examine how the national climate-AFOLU policy subsystem has evolved over time, focusing on the configuration and interaction of key actors within it. The analysis covers the period from 2015, marked by the submission of Argentina's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) at COP21 in Paris, through December 2024, one year into the administration of President Milei. This long-term perspective aligns with recommendations in the advocacy coalition literature to examine policy subsystems over extended periods in order to better capture the dynamics of coalitions and policymaking processes (Nohrstedt et al., 2023; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). In this context, it is worth clarifying that while transitions towards carbon neutrality involve changes across multiple socio-technical dimensions, this article focuses specifically on the policy dimension and its political dynamics.

The study draws on key concepts from the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). Two main reasons support the choice of this approach. First, the ACF focuses on actors within a policy subsystem and how they form coalitions based on shared beliefs about problems and solutions. This actor-centered perspective is especially useful in the domain of climate policy, which is often characterized by contested goals and competing interests (Gabehart et al., 2022). Second, the ACF provides a structured framework to analyze how changes in the broader political and institutional context affect the configuration, beliefs and resources of advocacy coalitions, thereby reshaping the dynamics of a policy subsystem over time. This approach is particularly well suited to the Argentine case, given that the period analyzed (2015–2024) encompasses three different governments with distinct political orientations.

¹https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/cuadros/economia/complexp_est_porcentual_2021_2024.xls

²Secretary of Labor, Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Human Capital: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/trabajoregistrado_2501_estadisticas_0.xlsx

The paper is structured as follows. Section II presents the core analytical elements of the ACF. Section III describes the methodology and data sources used to identify and analyze the advocacy coalitions. Section IV offers a historical overview of climate-AFOLU policymaking in Argentina and analyzes the actors and coalitions that shape and contest the policy subsystem. The final section summarizes the main findings and discusses their implications for climate governance in Argentina.

2. Theoretical framework

The ACF literature (Nohrstedt et al., 2023; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible et al., 2020) identifies four main conceptual elements or attributes to consider when analyzing advocacy coalitions: policy actors, shared policy beliefs, coordination and resources. In the ACF approach, the notion of policy actors encompassed both governmental and non-governmental actors who are involved in and seek to influence the policy process in a particular policy subsystem. These actors can play different roles within the policy subsystem. A basic distinction in the ACF literature is between principal policy actors, those who have a sustained and regular involvement in the subsystem affairs, and auxiliary or peripheral actors, usually characterized by a more irregular or short term involvement. Analyses of coalitions tend to concentrate on the principal members, although auxiliary members can also be of significance, particularly as political resources for a coalition. Furthermore, some actors can play the role of policy brokers, aiming to avoid stalemate within a policy subsystem and reach agreements between opposing coalitions.

The shared belief system is the binding element of the set of actors that forms a coalition. The ACF literature distinguishes different levels of beliefs that follow a hierarchical structure (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible et al., 2020; Weible & Ingold, 2018). This article focuses specifically on the identification and analysis of policy core beliefs, as this set of beliefs allows for the identification of potential allies and opponents and guides the strategic behaviour of a coalition (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). This level comprises, mainly, the beliefs about the general policy goals that should be prioritized in relation to a given issue or problem, the way in which these problems are conceived and the main policy preferences on how to address and solve these problems and achieve the goals (Weible & Ingold, 2018).

While shared beliefs are the core element that binds advocacy coalitions, a key theoretical challenge within the ACF framework is how to account for actors' interests. Scholars working within the ACF tradition (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible et al., 2020) argue that interests can and should be studied through the ACF, provided that researchers do not assume actors are inherently driven by self-interest. As with ideational elements, interests must be examined empirically. One way to do so, as proposed by Weible et al. (2020, p. 1063), is to treat interests as part of the policy core beliefs that guide coalition behaviour. From this perspective, for instance, actors motivated by material gains may align around policy proposals that emphasize economic growth and employment. This article adopts this approach to consider actors' interests and how they are expressed through the belief systems of competing coalitions in Argentina's climate-AFOLU policy domain. In doing so, it also draws from a line of research on environmental politics in Latin America that emphasizes how interests and ideas are deeply intertwined in coalition formation and dynamics (Alcáñiz & Gutiérrez, 2022; Figueroa, 2021).

A third distinguishing element of coalitions, according to the ACF approach, is the coordination among different actors to influence public policy. Coordination activities can take different forms and can be categorized as strong or weak (Weible & Ingold, 2018). The former refers to activities that are agreed upon and recognized by the actors themselves such as the joint formulation of position papers. Weak coordination, on the other hand, refers to actions that, although aimed at achieving a common goal, are not jointly agreed upon. The differences between these forms of action are indicative of the level and density of the collective action developed by the actors in a coalition.

Coalitions also have resources aimed at influencing policy processes. The ACF literature has identified a variety of these types of resources, including legal decision-making power, public opinion support, mobilization capacity, economic resources, information and technical-scientific knowledge and leadership capacity (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible et al., 2020). Although the relevance of the different types of resources is highly contextual and depends on the characteristics of each case, the presence of members of a coalition in the state

structure, with legal authority to make policy decisions, is a critical resource to identify and distinguish dominant coalitions from minority coalitions in a policy subsystem (Sabatier & Weible, 2007).

Coalitions emerge and operate in policy subsystems. For the ACF approach, this is the primary unit of analysis. A policy subsystem refers to a policy domain or area that includes the various policy actors involved in the policy processes related to a substantive issue and bounded by a geographic or jurisdictional area (Nohrstedt et al., 2023). As mentioned in the introduction, this study focuses on the Argentine climate AFOLU policy subsystem at the national level.

The notion of the policy subsystem, as an analytical tool, also allows to distinguish this substantive policy area from the broader political and institutional context, which are part of the external parameters under which a policy subsystem operates (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Events and changes in the broader political context or in other relevant external parameters, can affect and modify policy beliefs and resources of the coalitions that interact and dispute a given policy subsystem (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). This is particularly relevant for our study, given that the period analyzed 2015–2024 occurred mostly under the terms of three different governments in Argentina (Macri 2015–2019, Fernandez 2019–2023, Milei 2023–December 2024). In this context, we apply these insights from the ACF literature to explore whether and how changes in the national political landscape have affected policy coalitions and the dynamics of the AFOLU policy subsystem in Argentina during the period analyzed.

3. Methods and sources of information

The analysis was developed in three main steps. First, we identified the main stakeholders that participate in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem. Second, we analyzed their core policy beliefs and their levels of coordination. Finally, we identified and analyzed the policy coalitions involved in the subsystem.

The process of stakeholder's identification and policy beliefs analysis was mainly based on an extensive documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources. This includes the annual reports of the activities of the Expanded National Cabinet on Climate Change between 2015–2024, minutes and documents related to the External Advisory Council of the National Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan, official documents and reports elaborated by the Argentine government on climate change policy. Furthermore, we analyzed technical reports and position papers produced by the different non-governmental actors identified, including information available on their websites, statements by leaders and institutional spokespersons. In addition, we analyzed media coverage of AFOLU and climate change issues in Argentina, as well as scientific and grey publications addressing stakeholders' involvement in AFOLU policy and politics in Argentina.

Furthermore, between December 2024 and February 2025, we carried out seven semi-structured interviews with key informants actively involved in the climate AFOLU policy subsystem throughout the period analyzed (see the Appendix). Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling based on their sustained involvement and recognized roles within the policy subsystem. The interviews were particularly useful to complement and triangulate observation-data resulting from the documentary analysis as well as to gain deeper insights about policy processes and political context.

Once the stakeholders were mapped, we proceeded to identify coalitions of actors that shared a set of core policy beliefs. Based on the categories of policy core beliefs identified in the ACF literature (Weible & Ingold, 2018), we analyzed actors' perspectives on three key dimensions: the conceptualization of the problem, the overall policy goals and the scope of the reforms pursued (Table 1). The analysis of stakeholder perspectives

Table 1. Policy core beliefs dimensions.

Main dimensions	Descriptions
Conceptualization of the problem	Causes of climate change and Argentina's level of responsibility
General priority policy goals	Overall policy goals that should guide transition in the AFOLU sector
Scope policy reforms / solutions	Scope of the reforms needed in the AFOLU sector to contribute to Argentina's transition to carbon neutrality

in relation to these dimensions, and the subsequent identification of coalitions, was carried out qualitatively through a coding process applied to documentary sources and semi-structured interviews.

4. Analysis

4.1. Brief historical development of the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem in Argentina

In 1994, Argentina ratified the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The development of the climate policy subsystem during the period from 1994 to 2015 can be characterized by the emergence of an incipient institutional framework and the building of bureaucratic capacity at the national level. These changes were driven mainly by developments in the international climate regime (e.g. the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol) and the need to comply with international reporting and information requirements (e.g. national communications). However, during this period, there was no significant advancement in domestic climate mitigation policies, nor were specific GHG emission reduction goals established (Viola et al., 2013). A notable policy development in this timeframe was the enactment of Law 26.331 in 2007, aimed at the protection of native forests. While this law had important implications for the AFOLU sector due to its contribution to reducing deforestation, its formulation and adoption were not driven by climate change mitigation concerns (Gutiérrez, 2017).

In 2015, Argentina signed the Paris Agreement. As part of the lead-up to COP21, Argentina submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), in which it made an unconditional commitment to reduce its emissions by 15% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels and a conditional reduction target of 30% contingent upon international support and financing. The INDC did not commit to an absolute reduction in GHG emissions, but rather to limiting the increase in emissions by 2030 relative to a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario (FVS and FARN, 2016). Nevertheless, observers highlighted the relevance of the INDC as it established a national GHG emissions target for the first time (Villalonga, 2021). Among the measures for the AFOLU sector, the INDC highlighted the role of Law 26.331 on reducing deforestation and measures to increase productivity.

In December 2015, after 12 consecutive years of centre-left Peronist governments, Mauricio Macri leading a more pro-market coalition government took office. In 2016 Argentina ratified the Paris Agreement and submitted its first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to replace the INDC at COP 22 in Marrakech. The review of the INDC was conducted within the framework of the National Climate Change Cabinet (GNCC) created in July 2016 by decree 891/2016. The GNCC was formally under the Chief of Cabinet and its technical coordination was handled by the national environment authority.³ The first NDC increased the conditional and unconditional GHG reduction targets to 18% and 37%, respectively, by 2030 (República Argentina, 2016).

Once the First Contribution was submitted, the National Climate Change Cabinet started a process of elaboration of sectoral climate change action plans, addressing the energy, transport, agriculture, industry, health, infrastructure and territory and forestry sectors. Unlike the other sectoral plans that submitted emission reduction targets, the Agriculture plan did not present unconditional reduction targets, but only an 'additional' target to that of the NDC subject to external financing (GNCC, 2019). Furthermore, it did not include specific measures regarding livestock despite the fact that this subsector is a large emitter within the Argentine AFOLU sector.

In November 2019, The Argentine congress approved the Framework Law on Climate Change 27520. The new law institutionalized the National Cabinet on Climate Change as the highest body responsible for the development of the national climate policy. However, unlike the climate framework laws of other countries in the region (Brazil or Mexico), the Argentine climate law did not establish GHG emission targets or quantifiable objectives of any kind (Villares, 2020).

On 10 December 2019, a Peronist coalition returned to the presidency under the leadership of Alberto Fernández. The first year of the new administration was marked by the drafting of the second NDC, which was submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat by the end of 2020 and updated in October 2021. The updated Second NDC set the goal of a 26% GHG emissions reduction compared to the first NDC (MAyDS, 2020; República

³The legal status and the name of the national department responsible for environmental and climate issues have varied over the period analyzed. To maintain consistency throughout the paper, we have adopted the term national environmental authority.

Argentina, 2021). This 2030 target implies the establishment of a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions stabilization objective over a decade, given that it was relatively close to the 2018 and 2020 emission levels (Villalonga, 2021). According to Aneise (2024, p. 52), the increased ambition of the 2020–2021 NDC was partly possible because economic growth projections were considerably higher when the 2030 target was established in the 2016 NDC. The downturn of the Argentine economic activity during the following years led to a moderation of these expectations, making it feasible to set a higher emissions reduction target for 2030 with a similar mitigation effort.

During the years 2021 and 2022, the environmental authority and the National Climate Change Cabinet's work was focused on developing the National Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan (PNAyMCC) and the Long-Term Low Emission Resilient Development Strategy (LTS) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Both documents were planned to be presented at COP 26 in Glasgow by the end of 2022. Nevertheless, tensions between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministries of Energy and Agriculture became evident in the run-up to COP 26. This opened up a further process of negotiation among the various actors involved. The PNAyMCC and the LTS were finally presented at COP 27, arguably with a less stringent scope.

The PNAyMCC, like the 2017–2019 national sectoral action plans, did not establish sectoral emissions targets for 2030, which would determine how much effort each sector needs to make to achieve the NDC target (Aneise & Möhle, 2024). Meanwhile, the LTS establishes a commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, although there is little indication of how the AFOLU sector would contribute to this goal (MAyDS, 2022b, p. 7).

At the end of 2023 there was a new change of government. In December 2023, Javier Milei, a self-confessed denier of anthropogenic climate change, took office. The new president promptly modified the Law of Ministries and downgraded the environmental area to the rank of sub-secretary. In November 2024, during COP 29 in Baku, Argentina withdrew its delegation from the meeting. In various statements, President Milei has strongly criticized the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

4.2. Identification and analysis of the advocacy coalitions

Based on the analysis, we identified two main competing coalitions in the Argentine climate change-AFOLU policy subsystem over the period analyzed. A dominant coalition, which we refer to as the productivist coalition adopting the terminology used by Gutiérrez (2017), and a minority coalition, which we call the socio-environmental coalition. These coalitions mainly differ in terms of the policy objectives that should guide the transition process and the scope of the reforms needed in the AFOLU sector to contribute achieving carbon neutrality at a national level.

The productivist coalition comprised a diverse array of actors who considered the promotion of the growth and competitiveness of the Argentine agricultural, livestock and forestry sectors as main policy goals. From this perspective, while it is acknowledged that climate change is a phenomenon primarily caused by anthropogenic activity, it is stressed that Argentina – and particularly the Argentine AFOLU sector – is not a main contributor to the problem globally. Furthermore, it is contended that Argentine productive systems in the AFOLU sector are already low carbon and have a large capacity for carbon capture. Regarding the scope of reforms needed in the AFOLU sector for the transition to carbon neutrality, this group of actors emphasize the need to increase productivity and efficiency in the use of environmental resources and services, as well as to harness and expand the carbon sink potential of the Argentine AFOLU sector.

This coalition comprises a broad range of different business actors from the agricultural and livestock industry.⁴ The main Argentine farmers' and agribusiness associations are central members of this coalition, although with varying levels of participation. It is important to note that some of these actors were early participants in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem, while others incorporated over time.

Similarly, business actors from the forestry sector are also part of the productivist coalition. They perceive the climate change agenda and carbon neutrality goals as an opportunity to expand the forestry sector based on the carbon sink services that planted forests provide (Mesa de Competitividad Foresto Industrial, 2018). In fact,

⁴Annex II provides a table describing all relevant policy actors identified in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem. See supplemental material available at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.30694889>.

actors from the forestry sector are strong promoters of the development of carbon markets in Argentina, especially in the AFOLU sector (Mesa Argentina de Carbono, 2023).

The productivist coalition also comprised key governmental actors, in particular the national Ministry of Agriculture.⁵ The Agricultural Ministry is a central actor in the climate-AFOLU national policy subsystem, with legal authority to define climate relevant policies and measures in the agricultural, livestock and forestry sector (planted forests) at the national level. Throughout the period analyzed and despite of the nuances of each government, the national Ministry of Agriculture was a clear and central member of this dominant coalition, promoting the growth and competitiveness of the productive activities of the AFOLU sector as its main policy goals in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem (Bilbao, 2021; Gutman, 2024).

The ministers of agriculture of the provincial governments (or similar offices within the provincial governments) can also be included in this coalition. Although these actors have a more marginal role in the national climate-AFOLU policy subsystem, they play – jointly with provincial environmental authorities – a central role in the provincial climate policy subsystems, especially in relation to the implementation of the native forest protection law and the expansion of the agricultural frontier. This is particularly relevant in provinces that constitute the Chaco forest region (e.g. Chaco, Santiago del Estero, Salta and others), where deforestation significantly contributes to the national GEI emissions from the AFOLU sector (Fernández Milmanda & Garay, 2019). A main shared concern of the provincial authorities has been the vindication of provincial policy making powers over natural resources and environmental issues in relation to federal government regulation (Gutiérrez, 2017; Langbehn, 2017).

The productivist coalition also includes actors from the scientific and academic community. Particularly important has been the work of Viglizzo and colleagues (Viglizzo et al., 2019, 2020), as well as the CONICET network on food security (IPCVA, 2021). This body of research argues that Argentine livestock, given its production systems, fix more carbon in soils than they emit through the livestock cycle. Viglizzo et al.'s work, in particular, has had a significant impact on the climate policy debate regarding the role of livestock in Argentina. It has been widely cited and used by the Ministry of Agriculture and other actors within the dominant coalition to substantiate their policy positions on this issue (Bilbao, 2021; Gutman, 2024).

The Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers and agribusiness associations can be considered as principal members of the productivist coalition. They share a common set of core policy beliefs and have shown varying patterns of coordination over time in order to affect the climate-AFOLU agenda setting and policy making process. The so called public-private declarations issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and the main Argentine farmers and agribusiness associations prior to COP 26, COP 27 and COP 28, expressing the sector's main concerns and positions on the climate change agenda, are clear indicators of shared core policy beliefs and highlights of their coordination actions (MAGyP, 2021; SAGyP, 2022, 2023).

We consider this set of actors to be the dominant coalition in the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem because of the scope and diversity of its resources and capabilities to influence the policy processes compared to other actors of the subsystem. These political leverage and capacities are deeply intertwined with the structural and historical socio-economic significance of the agricultural and livestock sector in Argentina (Hora, 2012; Mendoza & Corfield, 2024), especially its role in generating export earnings and territorial development, as outlined in the introduction.

This advocacy capacity of the productivist coalition is reflected in several key policy outcomes across the period. For instance, during the Macri administration (2015-2019), the targets of the sectoral climate action plans were expressed in terms of 'net emissions avoided' without specifying the contribution of each sector to the 2030 projected emissions goal. According to Aneise (2024, p. 55), this framing resulted from pressure from the agricultural sector to avoid reducing its share of emissions by 2030. Similarly, during the Fernandez administration (2019-2023), the government did not submit the LTS adopting the carbon neutrality goal for 2050 at the COP 26 as planned. This was partly due to resistance from the AFOLU-dominant coalition regarding commitments related to the livestock sector, as well as to opposition from the secretary of energy (Aneise, 2024;

⁵The legal status and name of the national department responsible for agriculture and livestock issues have varied over the period analyzed. To maintain consistency throughout this paper, we have adopted the term "Ministry of Agriculture".

Gutman, 2024). The LTS was finally submitted in November 2023; however, it did not specify interim targets or roadmaps to achieve carbon neutrality.

In opposition to the productivist coalition, we identify a minority coalition, which we have termed the socio-environmental coalition. This coalition consists of a diverse and heterogeneous set of actors who emphasize ensuring the environmental and social sustainability of the AFOLU sector as their main policy goal. For this set of actors, climate change is conceived as a phenomenon clearly linked to unsustainable human production and consumption patterns. From this view, Argentina must take decisive action to address and contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gases, while recognizing Argentina's differentiated responsibilities as a developing country and the need for international financing and support. Regarding the scope of the reforms required to move towards carbon neutrality, this group of actors consider, with varying nuances, the need for structural reforms in the production systems of the AFOLU sector, incorporating agro-ecological criteria and limiting land use changes that affect native forests, pastures and wetlands.

This coalition encompasses a broad range of non-governmental organizations (NGOS) working on environmental and nature protection issues. Some of the most well known and most professionalized Argentine environmental NGOs are key members of this coalition and they have been involved in the Climate policy subsystem even prior to the Paris Agreement. After the signing of the Paris Agreement, there was a significant increase in the number and diversity of NGOs participating and following the climate agenda in Argentina (GNCC, 2016; GNCC, 2017; interview Konstantinidis, E.); in this context, particularly relevant was the emergence of climate youth organizations which became extremely active and involved in the climate policy process (Bilbao 2021; Villares, 2020).

Various other actors from different social collectives and social movements can also be considered part of this coalition. This is the case of the agroecological movement, and the peasant and family farming sector as well as actors from indigenous communities. These actors have generally been more active in the policy debate on climate adaptation and focus their activity on specific themes regarding AFOLU (MAyDS, 2022a). Similarly, the anti-speciesist movement, which includes animal rights organizations and various actors promoting veganism, can be included in this coalition, focusing on the livestock sector contribution to GHG emissions and in promoting dietary changes (Maceira et al., 2023).

Various actors from the scientific community can also be placed within this minority coalition. In addition to the general relevance of climate scientists in climate policy debates, different research groups and networks are producing policy-relevant research on various aspects of the interface between AFOLU and climate change in Argentina. However, their level of involvement in the policy subsystem dynamics and coordination with other coalition actors varies.

In contrast to the productivist coalition, the socio-environmental coalition is a much heterogeneous and looser coalition. It covers a broad range of different social actors and networks, whose level of involvement in the policy subsystems vary significantly. The long established environmental NGOs as well as many of the actors related to the so-called climate youth movement regularly participated in the dynamics of the policy subsystem. For these actors, climate policy issues are part of their main concerns and areas of work and can be considered as the principal coalition members. Meanwhile, many of the other actors within this coalition are not regularly involved in the policy subsystem; their attention to and involvement in the subsystem affairs fluctuate significantly. Furthermore, the level of coordination among the coalition members also varies in frequency and intensity. Although some of the actors show certain regular patterns of interaction, coordination dynamics tend to be more contingent and triggered by specific events such as the NGOs declarations regarding the Government's recent decision to withdraw the national delegation from COP 29 in Baku (ACDH et al., 2024). We therefore consider this coalition as a minority coalition because its resources and advocacy capabilities are clearly limited compared to the productivist coalition, an assessment also shared by previous analysis (Bilbao, 2021). The lack of strong governmental actors within this coalition further illustrates these limitations, a pattern consistent with the view that successful environmental protection policy change in Latin America largely depends on collaboration and coalitions forged between state and societal actors (Alcáñiz & Gutiérrez, 2022, p. 6).

Although the predominant pattern of relations between these two coalitions is adversarial, there are some collaborative initiatives involving members of both coalitions. One example is the Alianza para la Acción Climática Argentina (AACA), a multisectoral alliance aimed at mobilizing and scaling up climate action to help achieve

the Paris Agreement's goals, which includes some well-known environmental NGOs (e.g. FVS) as well as more technically oriented farmers' associations (e.g. AACREA). One of AACREA's key contributions is providing a platform for policy dialogue and coordination among more moderate members of both coalitions (AACREA, 2024; Periago et al., 2021). However, its influence on the broader dynamics of the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem appears to be limited.

Finally, we must consider the role of the national environmental authority, which is a key actor in the Argentine climate policy subsystem. Based on its institutional mandates and organizational culture, it can be argued that – until the Milei's administration – the national environmental authority was closer to the core policy beliefs of the socio-environmental coalition, especially regarding the conceptualization of the climate problem (the anthropogenic causes of climate change and Argentina's level of responsibility in addressing this global problem) and the overall goals that should guide the transition process in the AFOLU sector. However, our analysis suggests that between 2015 and 2023, the national environmental authority functioned as an isolated policy actor, playing more of a brokerage role within the climate policy subsystem, rather than as a clear member of one of the opposing coalitions.

According to the ACF literature, the role of brokers is to search for stability in the policy subsystem, mediate between the different coalitions in order to make compromise solutions feasible and avoid stalemate (Weible et al., 2019; Weible & Ingold, 2018). However, as our case shows, policy brokers are not necessarily always impartial mediators; they also possess their own policy perspectives and preferences which influence their role as brokers and can impact the policy process (Smith, 2000).

In the case of the national environmental authority, its brokerage role is heavily motivated and shaped by the institutional context. On the one hand, the environmental authority is in charge of implementing the mandates established by the National Climate Law as well as elaborating the national contributions (NDCs) and the different reports (BURs, GHG national inventories, etc.) to be submitted to the international climate regime. Furthermore, the environmental authority plays a critical role coordinating the National Climate Cabinet. On the other hand, with the exception of native forest, the environmental authority does not have legal competences over the policy fields where most GHG emissions occur and in which mitigation measures must be taken (e.g. agriculture and livestock, energy, transport). Other ministries or secretaries of the national government have legal competences over these policy fields. In the case of the AFOLU sector, as mentioned above, it mainly falls under the authority of the ministry of agriculture. In short, the national environmental authority is the central focal point for the national climate policy, however it does not have legal authority to develop or implement climate mitigation policies in most of the critical policy fields. This institutional setting helps explain the reasons and motivations for the environmental authority to play this brokerage role, while urging the other key areas of government to internalize the climate agenda and raise their level of climate mitigation ambition.

The national environmental authority performed this combined climate policy advocate-broker role during the Macri and Fernandez administrations, with different nuances depending on the period. Under the Macri's government, the authority focused on building the institutional framework for national climate policy, involving the different areas of government and leading an inward-looking process of climate institutional building, that culminated in the approval of the climate change framework law. Under the Fernández's government, the environmental authority focused on implementing the climate law and increasing policy commitments, including the announcement of the 2050 carbon neutrality goal. However, the tensions within the climate policy subsystem became more explicit. In the case of the AFOLU sector, resistance from the Ministry of Agriculture and others actors of the dominant productivist coalition to measures affecting agricultural and especially livestock production forced the environmental authority to review its strategy and accentuate its role as broker to achieve the adoption of the LTS and the PNAyMCC.

However, this policy advocacy and brokering role of the national environmental authority changed fundamentally with the start of the Milei government in December 2023. The new government adopts an increasingly adversarial strategy on climate change (Ryan, 2025). This means that the government openly and explicitly opposes the advancement of climate policies, especially on climate mitigation issues. This position is based on the denial of the anthropogenic causes of the phenomenon of climate change. Furthermore, it is framed in a narrative that incorporates libertarian and nationalist ideological elements and conceives the Paris

Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda as global attempts to limit individual freedom and national sovereignty. This discursive pattern corresponds closely to what Van Rensburg (2015) conceptualizes as evidence – and process-based climate skepticisms, in which actors reject the scientific and political consensus on anthropogenic climate change rather than merely seeking to delay or dilute policy responses.

This adversarial strategy is expressed in different ways. From a generalized dismantling of the state's capacity to formulate and monitor environmental and climate policies (e.g. de-hierarchization of the national environmental authority, weakening of its operational capacities: budget cuts, loss of human resources, etc.) to the withdrawal of the Argentinean delegation from COP 29 in Baku and the announcements of a possible withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. In this new political context, the national environmental authority ceases to play this combined brokerage/advocate role of the climate policy subsystem, and instead becomes part of the Milei government's increasingly adversarial strategy towards the climate agenda.

5. Conclusions

This paper has analyzed the main coalitions of actors involved in Argentina's climate-AFOLU policy subsystem between 2015 and 2024, drawing on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The analysis identified the consolidation of two competing coalitions. The dominant productivist coalition, composed mainly of farmers and agribusiness associations and aligned state actors, prioritizes economic growth, competitiveness and resource efficiency as central pillars of climate action. The minority socio-environmental coalition led by environmental NGOs and encompassing a diverse array of social actors, advocates for systemic changes in land use, stricter regulation and absolute emission reductions. While both coalitions formally support climate action, they diverge significantly in the policy objectives that should guide the transition process and in the nature and scope of the transformations needed in the AFOLU sector. Our analysis reinforces a general finding in the ACF literature – namely, that studies tend to identify two main coalitions competing within climate policy subsystems, which form around shared policy beliefs and remain stable over time, though additional coalitions may sometimes emerge (Gabehart et al., 2022).

Our research also highlights the asymmetry in resources and advocacy capabilities between these coalitions. The productivist coalition exhibits stronger internal coordination and institutional access, while the socio-environmental coalition operates more reactively and with limited coordination. These asymmetries help explain why the climate-AFOLU policy subsystem in Argentina has largely reflected the perspectives of the productivist coalition. The absence of sectoral mitigation targets for agriculture and the lack of effective policies to curb livestock emissions exemplify this dominance. Yet, our analysis also shows that incremental mechanisms introduced through the Paris Agreement, combined with the brokerage role of the national environmental authority, created opportunities to revise and raise national mitigation goals, compelling the dominant coalition to address how the AFOLU sector could contribute to the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The consolidation of the climate policy subsystem in Argentina occurred in a political context in which mainstream political actors were relatively open to addressing the climate change agenda. Both the Macri (2015–2019) and Fernández (2019–2023) administrations adopted what can be characterized as an accommodation strategy towards climate change (Carter, 2013), incorporating the issue into their policy narratives and taking incremental steps to build a climate institutional and policy framework, but without fundamentally realigning development priorities (Ryan, 2017).

The coming to power of the Milei government in December 2023 represents a radical change in the political landscape within which the climate policy subsystem had consolidated. The administration's explicit rejection of climate action and its radical anti-regulatory stance have already altered the structure of opportunities and resources within the subsystem. The weakening of the national environmental authority reduces its brokerage capacity and risks pushing the national climate policy subsystem into a state of stagnation. Furthermore, it may provoke realignments within the dominant coalition. Actors within the productivist coalition now operate in a political context that actively delegitimizes climate concerns and government regulation, creating both conditions and opportunities for coalition shifts. This may lead to changes in the core policy beliefs of the dominant coalition, including the radicalization of some actors and the adoption of more openly climate-obstructionist strategies and narratives (Lamb et al., 2020).

This analysis of the Argentine case also offers relevant insights for the broader study of climate policy sub-systems, particularly in Latin America. First, it shows how asymmetric distribution of resources and political influence among coalitions can shape climate governance in commodity-dependent economies. The dominance of the productivist coalition, based on the structural advantages embedded in the prevailing agricultural sociotechnical system, limits the possibilities of more climate-transformative socio-ecological alternatives. Second, the role of the national environmental authority illustrates how brokerage and strategic action can generate incremental policy advances even within politically constrained contexts. This is an insight particularly relevant for middle-income democracies navigating development – climate tensions, as those in Latin America. Finally, Argentina’s climate policy reversal after 2023 highlights the contingent and politically sensitive nature of policy subsystems during moments of macro-political change. This raises important questions for future research on how pro-climate actors and coalitions can adapt their beliefs, narratives and strategies to sustain climate agendas in politically adverse environments.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: DR; LAL. Data curation: DR; LAL. Investigation: DR; LAL. Methodology: DR; LAL. Resources: DR; LAL. Supervision: DR. Writing – original draft: DR; LAL. Writing – review & editing: DR; LAL.

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Data availability statement

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Appendix. List of interviewees.

Soledad Aguilar, former National Climate Change Director 2016-2019. Buenos Aires, December 13, 2024.

Martín Fraguío, former Executive Director of Asociación Maíz y Sorgo Argentino (MAIZAR). Buenos Aires, December 16, 2024.

Florencia Mitchell, former National Climate Change Director 2019-2023, and Emanuel Ayala, PNAyCC drafting coordinator. Buenos Aires, December 17, 2024.

Nazareno Martín, former National Climate Change Director 2007-2014. Buenos Aires, February 18, 2025.

Claudia Peirano, Executive Director of Asociación Forestal Argentina (AFoA). Buenos Aires, February 20, 2025.

Enrique Martúa Konstantinidis, climate activist, former member of Latin American Climate Action Network (CANLA) and Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN). Buenos Aires, February 26, 2025.