July 2026

International Strategies of the Global South in Response to New Green Trade Regulations

The Cases of the CBAM and the EUDR

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Green trade regulations

Green transitions

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About the Green transitions project

The Green Transitions project seeks to contribute through information, applied knowledge, methodologies, collaborative networks, and policy recommendations designed to enable the Global South to engage strategically in the global energy transition. Its purpose is clear: to ensure this process does not become a new driver of inequality, but rather a lever for building a fairer, more equitable, and environmentally sustainable model of development.

About the Green trade regulations series

This document is part of the **"Green Trade Regulations"** series, which also includes three additional papers on: the greening of international trade in the Global North and the mapping of the green regulatory regime; the international strategies of the Global South in response to the CBAM and the EUDR; and the trade diversion effects and misaligned incentives associated with unilateral anti-deforestation regulations. Taken together, the series combines empirical infrastructure, regulatory contextualization, international strategic analysis, assessment of trade impacts, and the study of national responses across the Global South, with the aim of building a comprehensive political economy of environmental trade.

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Suggested citation

Zelicovich, J. (2026). International Strategies of the Global South in Response to New Green Trade Regulations: the Cases of the CBAM and the EUDR. Fundar.

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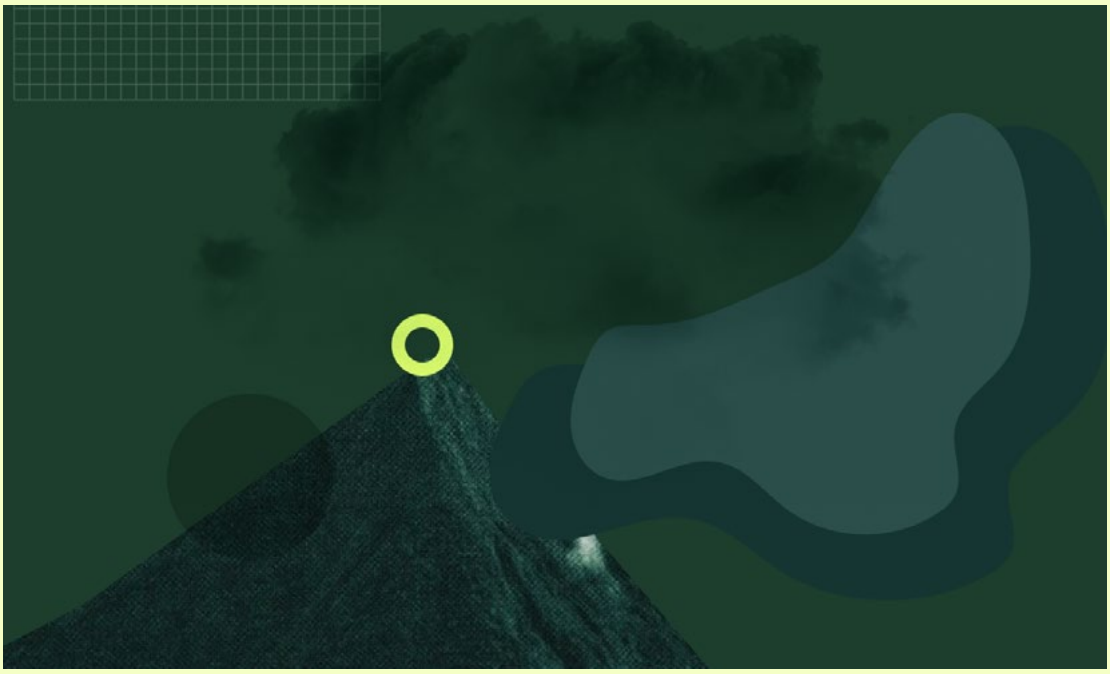
Starting points

Executive Summary

The expansion of unilateral green trade regulations, particularly those promoted by the European Union, is challenging the governance of international trade and placing pressure on governments and producers across the Global South. While environmental trade regulations may support the development of new international insertion strategies, they also generate distributional costs, trade barriers, and productive asymmetries.

In this context, foreign policy emerges — in coordination with domestic policies — as a key tool for expanding room for maneuver: negotiating under better conditions, contesting rules and narratives, gaining access to financing and technology, and sustaining or improving international competitiveness.

This document analyzes how countries in the Global South are responding in the international arena to the advance of the European Union's unilateral green regulations, and which international strategies they are deploying to contest, reform, or adapt to these measures. To this end, we identify, systematize, and analyze the climate diplomacy actions undertaken by thirteen countries between 2019 and 2025, and develop an original database of international response strategies to unilateral green regulations affecting international trade.



Key Messages

1 **Far from being passive actors, countries in the Global South exercise agency:**

In a relatively short period, we identified around one hundred instances in which the countries analyzed used foreign policy to build negotiating leverage, contest narratives on development and sustainability, and gain access to financial and technical resources to reposition themselves within the international economy. The evidence shows that foreign policy is becoming a key component of national strategies in response to the green transition and global reconfiguration.

2 **The predominant position in the international actions of Global South countries is opposition (63% of all actions), with a particular focus on the EUDR.**

However, rather than constituting a homogeneous response, this stance reflects significant pragmatism. We find that opposition has gradually given way to more complex positioning: within the Global South — and even within individual countries — positions of opposition coexist with strategies of reform and adaptation. Countries in the Global South are not opposing decarbonization or anti-deforestation efforts per se; rather, through their international actions, they seek to negotiate new and better terms for articulating the trade–climate nexus.

3 **There is a correspondence between political positions and climate diplomacy instruments.**

Opposition strategies rely primarily on traditional diplomacy and legal signaling in forums such as the World Trade Organization, whereas adaptation strategies prioritize economic diplomacy and bilateral dialogue to secure financing, technical cooperation, or regulatory flexibility. A differentiated diplomatic toolbox tailored to each objective is thus beginning to emerge.

4 **Coordinating actions around converging interests is an important tool for strengthening South–South coalitions.**

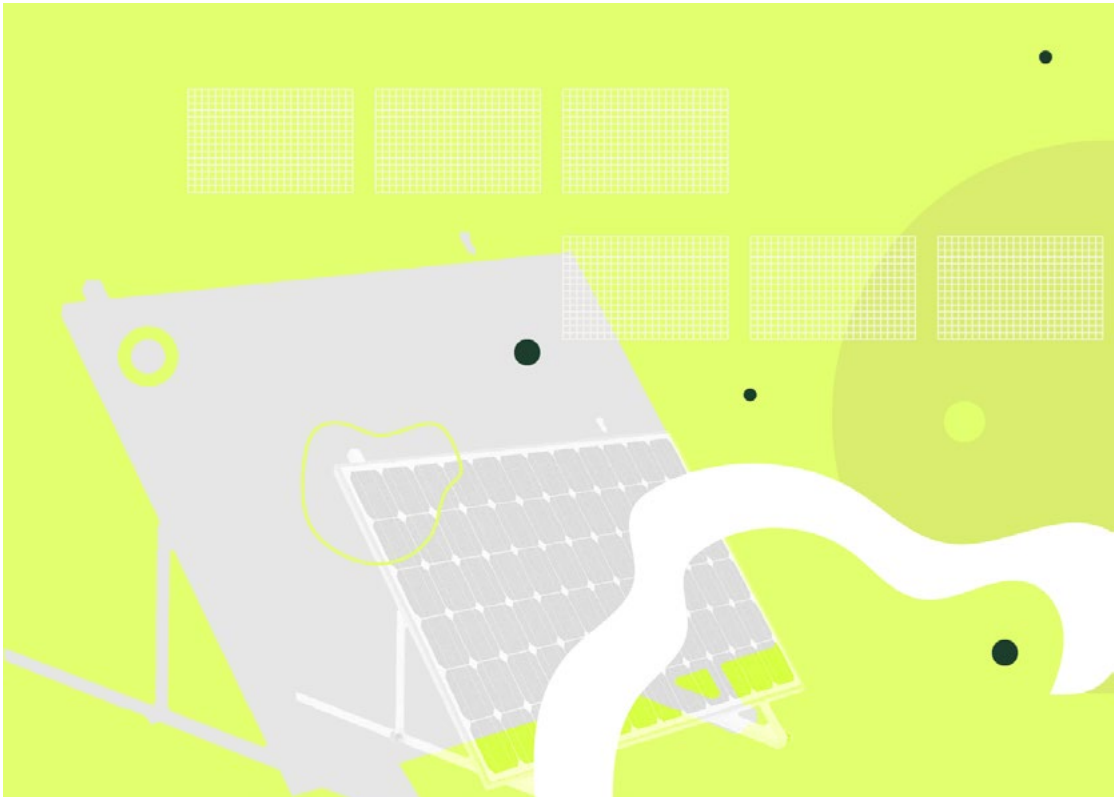
Platforms such as Mercosur, BRICS, the African Union, and ad hoc coalitions help amplify the demands of the Global South and reduce the costs of individual action. These alliances have been particularly effective in advancing reforms in the design and implementation of green regulations during the 2019–2025 period.

5 Contesting narratives around trade, development, and climate is central.

Beyond legal and economic instruments, the construction of legitimacy and alternative interpretive frameworks remains essential. Joint declarations and programmatic documents should continue to be used to challenge unilateral approaches and promote principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, and sustainable development.

6 Climate trade governance remains far from achieving stable consensus.

Instruments such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the European Union Deforestation Regulation face significant legitimacy costs due to their unilateral character, giving rise to a medium-term scenario of normative and political contestation over the terms of decarbonization and forest protection in international trade.



2

The Study

International Strategies of the Global South in Response to New Green Trade Regulations

With the emergence of new regulatory paradigms, the governance of the international trade–climate nexus has become a space of tension and contestation[1]. While the European Union (EU) advances unilateral regulations such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), countries in the Global South[2] must confront new market access and competitiveness conditionalities while simultaneously seeking their own ways of addressing the challenges associated with decarbonization and anti-deforestation in a manner consistent with their development goals and territorial capacities.

Although many of these definitions are linked to domestic productive preferences and capacities, they cannot be understood in isolation from developments in the international arena. The way in which the trade–climate nexus is regulated is shaped by global power asymmetries, which in turn condition development costs and opportunities for other actors. The literature, however, reveals a gap regarding the role of climate diplomacy and international action in this process. While it is widely acknowledged that the development of cooperative, competitive, or conflictive international policies is a determining factor in both the level of ambition and the effectiveness of climate policy implementation — as well as in their distributive effects (Yamin, 2024; Merke, 2025; Buzan, 2025; Rietig, 2025) — few studies have systematically examined the mechanisms through which climate diplomacy actually mediates the trade–climate nexus. Some studies have highlighted the role of coalitions in multilateral forums and the formation of "carbon clubs" (Ramos, 2023), or the use of litigation strategies (Zhang et al., 2024). However, international actions have largely been studied as a consequence of domestic responses (Otto, 2025; Yamin, 2023), without problematizing their role as strategic tools capable of shaping and expanding policy space for those responses, nor analyzing their evolution over time.

This paper seeks to trace and analyze the positions and actions undertaken by countries in the Global South in the international arena in response to the CBAM and the EUDR, and to examine how their international diplomatic strategies have evolved according to

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1 For a detailed discussion of the CBAM and the EUDR as key components of the European Union's green regulatory regime, see the first paper in this series: *The Greening of International Trade in the Global North: Mapping the Green Regulatory Regime and the Cases of the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and Anti-Deforestation Regulation*.

2 The concept of the Global South is presented as a "meta-category" that gives meaning to the actions of these states, even in the absence of explicit coordination among them. By using this term, we seek to acknowledge both the asymmetry in countries' contributions to climate change and the differing levels of vulnerability they face in relation to this phenomenon, while also highlighting the agency of this group of actors in addressing global challenges. We distinguish between a Global North, comprising countries with the material, regulatory, and ideational capacities to shape the rules governing the trade–climate nexus, and a Global South, where such capacities are more limited and countries tend to be rule-takers rather than rule-makers. Within this framework, China occupies a hybrid position with distinctive characteristics: while it self-identifies as part of the Global South, it possesses capacities and pursues practices that more closely resemble those of the Global North.

the type of political response adopted. We aim to identify and classify the different types of international actions employed by Global South countries in response to unilateral environmental regulations, and to explore the relationship between the type of political response and the design of the associated international strategies. In doing so, we seek to contribute to the debate on Global South agency in the governance of the trade–climate nexus and to identify patterns of climate diplomacy that may help expand policy space for these countries.

To this end, we present an original database — the *International Strategy on Green Trade Regulations Database (ISGTR Database)* — which compiles official foreign policy actions and statements from thirteen Global South countries recorded between June 2019 and September 2025, related to regulatory instruments such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

Methodology

The International Strategy on Green Trade Regulations Database records every initiative, intervention, or position adopted by a state or its representatives that involves direct interaction with external actors — including other states, international organizations, regional blocs, or multilateral forums — and seeks to influence the global regulatory, normative, or political environment surrounding unilateral green trade regulations, with particular emphasis on the EUDR and the CBAM.

These actions may take diplomatic, technical, financial, or communicational forms, and occur both within institutionalized settings — such as the World Trade Organization, the European Union, or BRICS — and in ad hoc bilateral or plurilateral instances. Purely domestic measures are therefore excluded, even when they may have international implications, unless they form part of an explicit process of dialogue or negotiation with external actors. The central criterion for inclusion is that the action constitutes an act of external state projection aimed at influencing or responding to international dynamics associated with the CBAM, the EUDR, or other green trade regulations.

This first version of the database focuses on the actions undertaken by thirteen Global South countries during the period from July 2019 to September 2025. Case selection followed both theoretical and practical purposive criteria: the objective was to include Global South countries with varying degrees of exposure to the CBAM and the EUDR (see Annex), which had expressed different types of positions regarding these policies, while also ensuring geographic and economic diversity and covering cases not fully addressed in the limited existing literature. The countries included are: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa.

These countries make it possible to capture the diversity of positions within the Global South, reflecting the heterogeneity of the group. The sample includes both emerging Global South powers — such as Brazil, India, and South Africa — and countries with more limited relative power, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ecuador. It also incorporates different patterns of productive and export specialization, along with varying degrees of climate vulnerability, including Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mozambique, Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Malaysia, India, Brazil, and South Africa.

From an institutional perspective, the selected countries belong to a variety of regional frameworks — including Mercosur, Pacific Alliance, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Southern African Development Community, and Economic Community of West African States — and all maintain formal ties with the European Union through association, trade, or cooperation agreements. This enables comparison of how different regional architectures mediate relations with the European Union and shape strategies of negotiation or contestation regarding environmental regulations.

The temporal scope of the database reflects the subject matter under observation. In July 2019, the idea of a carbon border tax was first introduced by the European Economic and Social Committee (Plosceanu, 2019). September 2025 marks the starting point of this research project, when data collection began, with the aim of achieving the highest possible degree of contemporaneity[3].

The data included in the database were obtained through the systematic tracking, compilation, and manual coding of primary and secondary sources related to the foreign policy and economic diplomacy of the selected countries[4]. An interpretive analytical coding approach was applied. For each observed initiative, descriptive metadata on the international action were extracted and four categories were coded.

The first category, *policy_position*, identifies the stance adopted toward the CBAM and the EUDR, with four possible values: competitive adaptation, conditional adaptation, reform, or opposition. The second category, *action_type*, refers to the use of traditional diplomacy, economic diplomacy, international agreements, legal signaling, political dialogue, or public declarations as mechanisms for expressing these international positions. The third category, *action_level*, analyzes the scale or scope of the intervention, distinguishing between unilateral, bilateral, and plurilateral action, while also identifying the partners involved in the initiative. Finally, the category s*trategic_purpose* captures the objective pursued through the action — such as financial cooperation, legal challenge, narrative construction, negotiation, or technical cooperation — based both on

3 It is important to note that the phenomenon under study is highly dynamic. One promising avenue for future research, building on the data collected in the database, is to examine how shifts in global cooperation–competition–conflict dynamics shape the response strategies adopted by countries in the Global South.

4 Primary sources included official documents from the selected countries as well as from international organizations. These encompassed communications issued by different branches of the executive authorities of the selected countries and published on official government websites. They also included records of bilateral meetings and joint committees, ministerial declarations and joint communiqués, and documentation produced by international organizations. As secondary sources, we surveyed news outlets reporting on events, actions, and statements involving the countries included in the sample, in both English and Spanish. In all cases, source triangulation was employed, with news reports cross-checked against the corresponding primary sources to validate their content.

the goals explicitly stated in the discourses accompanying the observed action and on the context in which it was undertaken.

In total, 191 actions were recorded across the 13 countries studied over 69 months of international engagement in response to the CBAM and EUDR unilateral trade regulations. These actions encompass 90 unique international initiatives, many of which were carried out jointly by two or more countries included in the sample[5]. The following section explores the characteristics of these international actions as strategic responses by Global South countries.

Findings

The Global South Intensifies International Activism in Response to the EUDR and the CBAM

International activism by Global South countries in response to green trade regulations has intensified, positioning diplomacy and foreign policy as key tools in debates on sustainability and productive insertion into the global economy. Between 2019 and 2025, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa carried out 191 actions involving economic diplomacy and/or foreign policy in response to unilateral green trade regulations, with notable regional differences. The most active countries were India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Argentina, in contrast to African countries which — with the exception of South Africa — showed more limited engagement in the international arena regarding the CBAM and the EUDR. As shown in Figure 1, 2024 was the year with the highest level of diplomatic activism[6].

Contrary to what has generally been suggested in the existing literature, which has focused primarily on the Global North, it was the EUDR rather than the CBAM that generated the greatest number of reactions among the countries studied, accounting for 50% of all recorded international actions. In 29% of the registered actions, Global South countries mobilized specifically in response to the CBAM, while in 9% they addressed both measures simultaneously. Finally, we identified 24 actions (12% of the total) in which countries referred more broadly to unilateral green trade regulations without explicitly mentioning the EUDR or the CBAM, while still alluding to this type of regulatory practice.

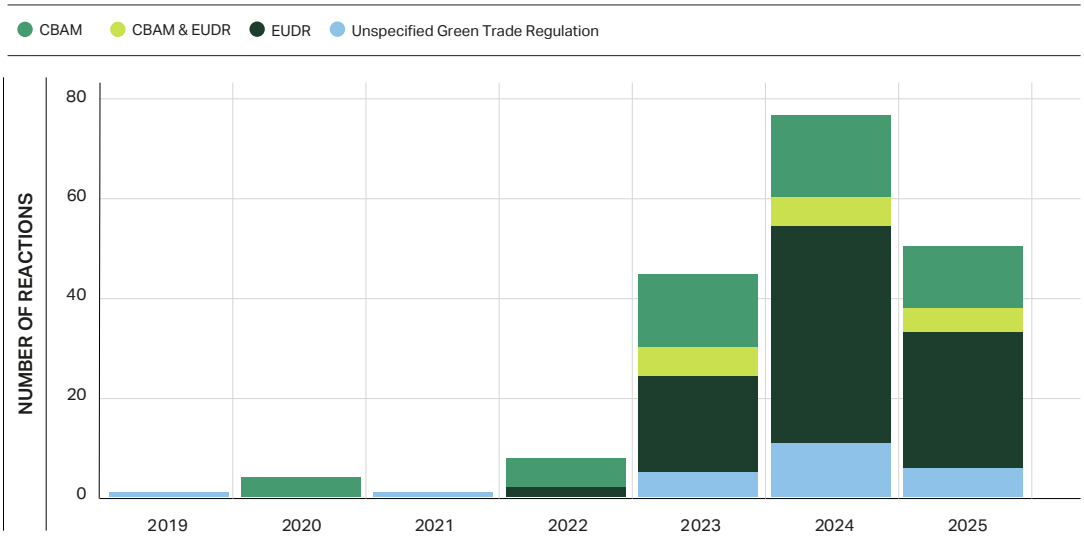
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5 In cases where a diplomatic action involved more than one country from the sample, the action was recorded once for each participating country. Thus, a joint diplomatic action involving countries A and B was entered into the database as two separate observations—one attributed to country A and one to country B—provided that both countries were included in the sample.

6 A comparable level of activity is projected for 2025, with 52 actions having been recorded as of September.

FIGURE 1

International Activism in Response to the CBAM and the EUDR, June 2019–September 2025



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Climate Diplomacy Reflects a Pragmatic Approach: Opposition as the Predominant Position, with Adaptation as a Complement

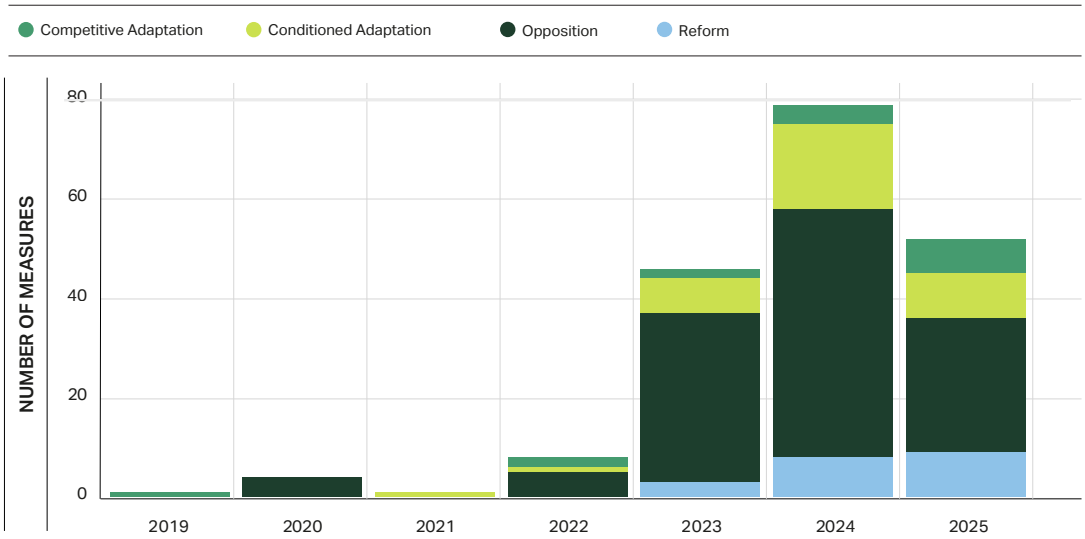
These actions expressed different political positions, combining opposition, reform, conditional adaptation, and competitive adaptation in response to the CBAM and the EUDR. Opposition refers to the explicit rejection of these measures, both in terms of their substantive content and their unilateral, non-cooperative mode of implementation, as expressed by national authorities in different forums. Reform involves proposals by the countries analyzed to modify the scope, design, or implementation mechanisms of the European measures. Conditional adaptation encompasses positions that accept the general principles of the CBAM and/or the EUDR, but condition their implementation on obtaining technical assistance, financing, flexibility, or some form of support to facilitate compliance. Finally, competitive adaptation refers to countries that support these initiatives and seek to use them to improve their international insertion and competitiveness through early adoption or by implementing standards that exceed those of their competitors.

The predominant position adopted by Global South countries in the international arena — and the one that motivated the largest number of foreign policy and economic diplomacy initiatives — has been opposition, accounting for 63% of the observed actions. This is followed by international actions advocating reform, which represented 10.4% of the total. These initiatives suggest an intention to project an autonomous voice in shaping the rules governing trade and environmental governance, challenging not the goal

of climate sustainability itself, but rather the unilateral and discriminatory character of the European measures. Meanwhile, 26% of the recorded actions correspond to adaptation strategies, either aimed at securing some form of flexibility or facilitation (conditional adaptation), or at taking advantage of this new regulatory framework in international trade (competitive adaptation). Initially, Colombia and Morocco were the first countries to use international actions to advance these positions, but adaptation-oriented actions gradually increased, reaching 31% of all initiatives by 2025 (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Evolution of Policy Positions toward the CBAM and the EUDR, by Year



Source: Authors' elaboration.

A particularly noteworthy finding is that countries have simultaneously maintained different positions in the international arena, suggesting pragmatic rather than principled approaches, as shown in Figure 3. Similar findings appear in other empirical studies, such as those by Otto (2024) and Pauw (2022). Within this pragmatic orientation, several patterns emerge over time. For example, conditional adaptation and competitive adaptation strategies — with the exception of the Moroccan case — gained strength in 2024 and 2025. However, in very few countries did this imply abandoning positions of reform or opposition; rather, most maintained a degree of strategic pragmatism. South Africa, Colombia, Malaysia, and Côte d'Ivoire exhibited the most significant transformations in their positioning within the international arena.

Overall, opposition to the CBAM and the EUDR tended to be combined with more constructive positions. In the cases of Argentina and India, for example, positions gradually incorporated greater emphasis on reform and some degree of adaptation, although opposition continued to predominate. In Colombia, the shift was more pronounced: by 2025, 43% of its international interventions supported the adoption of the new green trade regulations. South Africa represents the most extreme case: between 2022 and

2024, its international positioning centered on opposition to the CBAM and the EUDR, accompanied by intense activism in the international arena. However, by 2025, while maintaining a high level of diplomatic engagement, 83% of its interventions had shifted toward reforming the CBAM and the EUDR or toward conditional adoption.

FIGURE 3

Evolution of Policy Positions by Country and Year



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Diplomatic Instruments Reflect Differentiated Strategies and a Specific Toolbox for Each Contex

To sustain these positions, Global South countries deployed a broad range of actions combining traditional diplomacy, economic diplomacy, the signing of international agreements, legal signaling, political dialogue, and public declarations. Traditional diplomacy encompasses actions undertaken in international organizations and forums to express national positions through conventional channels of external diplomacy. This includes the submission of notes or official documents, bilateral or multilateral meetings, and participation in international forums. Economic diplomacy, by contrast, focuses on actions related to the negotiation of subsidies, credit lines, and investment plans associated with the CBAM and the EUDR regulations. High-level political dialogue constitutes a more specific subset within the broader spectrum of diplomatic actions, centered on structured channels of political conversation and negotiation among heads of state or ministers, primarily in bilateral settings.

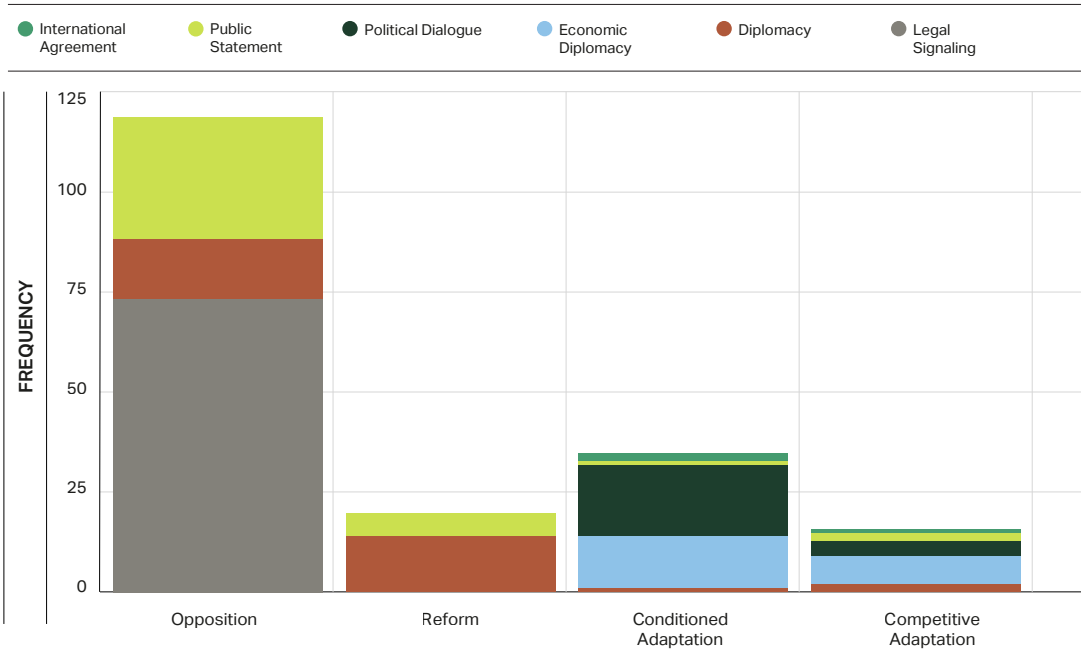
Another type of strategy involves the formalization of international agreements and/or treaties. These are actions between one country and one or more partner countries that reflect a strong reliance on international law as a mechanism for channeling international cooperation. Legal signaling, in turn, refers to actions used to indicate the likelihood of initiating or advancing a legal dispute within institutional mechanisms focused on dispute settlement, whether through political negotiation, international tribunals, or arbitration mechanisms. These actions consist of claims raised by countries within the framework of the World Trade Organization Council for Trade in Goods regarding the trade policies of WTO members. Although these are diplomatic rather than judicial instances, the fact that the discussions are grounded in the WTO legal corpus and take place within institutionalized mechanisms makes these actions substantially different from other forms of diplomacy. For this reason, we opted for the distinct coding category of "legal signaling."

Finally, we consider public declarations: speeches and public statements delivered by representatives of the selected countries before international audiences. This includes ministerial statements at the WTO, speeches issued by the foreign ministries of the countries studied, as well as declarations by regional organizations or coalitions, such as those issued by the Southern Agricultural Council.

We find that the actions deployed display a clear specificity according to the political positioning adopted by countries, and that multiple types of actions may be used to express the same position (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

International Actions According to the Political Position Adopted



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Opposition strategies relied primarily on traditional diplomacy, public declarations, and legal signaling. In particular, WTO committees and the expression of "trade concerns" within these forums were among the most frequently used tools for channeling disputes over the governance of the trade–climate nexus in the international arena. These institutionalized settings have facilitated recurring meetings and enabled even countries with more limited relative power vis-à-vis the European Union to project their voice. Indonesia, India, Brazil, and Argentina stand out as recurrent drivers of legal signaling actions as their main international mechanism for expressing opposition to the CBAM and the EUDR. South Africa, by contrast, relied more heavily on public declarations. Malaysia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Chile, when expressing opposition to the CBAM and the EUDR, did so primarily through traditional diplomacy and public declarations, without resorting to the formal mechanisms provided by WTO forums.

Reform-oriented positions, meanwhile, were advanced mainly through traditional diplomacy and public declarations. In the case of South Africa, actions prioritized traditional diplomatic engagement. Other countries combined diplomatic actions in international forums with public statements aimed at constructing alternative narratives in response to green trade regulations.

Positions oriented toward competitive adaptation and conditional adaptation were primarily channeled through economic diplomacy and references to high-level political dialogue. Morocco stands out as a particularly relevant case within this group. The country is considered a leader in climate adaptation and energy transition, predating the European Green Deal (Arkeh & Khalil, 2025; El Hafdaoui et al., 2024). Consistent with this

trajectory, Morocco has used a wide range of instruments to reaffirm its international position, including public declarations, political dialogue, and even international agreements. In all cases except Ecuador, competitive adaptation strategies were sustained through political dialogue, with the European Union serving as the primary interlocutor.

A similar pattern emerges among countries promoting conditional adaptation, which relied mainly on economic diplomacy aimed at securing financing, as well as on high-level political dialogue. Global South countries use these actions to improve the conditions under which they access and implement the CBAM and the EUDR. Examples include financial cooperation agreements under EUROCLIMA+; negotiations תרגסמב the Mercosur–European Union trade agreement; investment agreements under the Global Gateway; and high-level consultation mechanisms.

Each political positioning therefore translates into a differentiated repertoire of actions. This suggests that contestation over the governance of the trade–environment nexus — and, in particular, responses to the CBAM and the EUDR — is structured not only around the substantive positions advanced through international activism, but also around the strategic selection of the available institutional and diplomatic channels.

Strategic Objectives Focus on Expanding Negotiating Capacity, Shaping Narratives, and Securing Access to Financing

The strategic objectives underlying these actions are both explicit and implicit, and can be inferred through an interpretive analysis of official discourse, considered within its communicational, historical, and political context. When mobilizing in the international arena in response to the CBAM and the EUDR, Global South countries pursue objectives ranging from financial and technical cooperation to the strengthening of bargaining power in international negotiations, the construction of narratives, and legal contestation.

Our analysis shows that, first and foremost, Global South countries seek to negotiate new and more favorable terms for articulating the relationship between trade and climate change. In this regard, it is noteworthy that legal signaling actions only rarely aimed at directly challenging the legal foundations of the measures themselves; rather, their use was predominantly instrumental. These actions function as a means for Global South countries to improve their leverage and build bargaining power vis-à-vis European regulations, using forums such as the World Trade Organization as platforms for strengthening their negotiating position.

The strengthening of negotiating capacity is also evident in public declarations, traditional diplomacy, and international agreements. The joint mission undertaken by Indonesia and Malaysia to Brussels in March 2023 illustrates this dynamic. Both countries coordinated a joint engagement with the European Union, enabling them to increase their leverage in Brussels. These meetings resulted in an agreement to establish a Joint Task Force composed of government representatives and relevant stakeholders from both countries, including commodity associations, smallholder farmers, workers' associations, and civil society organizations, among others. The initiative aimed to strengthen

dialogue on supply chain traceability and transparency, while also creating a structured mechanism for political dialogue.

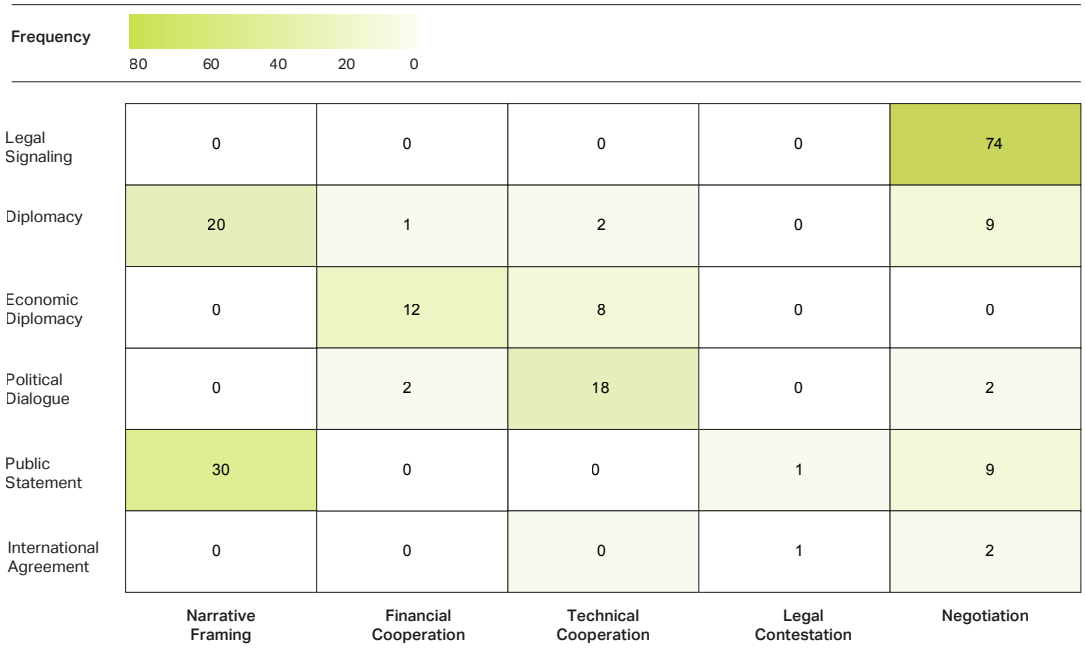
Second, Global South countries sought to shape narratives surrounding the relationship between trade, development, and environmental commitments, contesting dominant meanings and sources of legitimacy. Diplomatic actions and public declarations were the most recurrent instruments used for this purpose. A particularly notable example is the communication submitted by the African Group in July 2023, titled *"Principles Guiding the Development and Implementation of Trade-Related Environmental Measures."* The document acknowledges environmental concerns associated with trade, while emphasizing the importance of granting flexibilities to developing members and least developed countries, and rejecting unilateral measures such as the EUDR and the CBAM.

By contrast, when the objective is technical and financial cooperation, economic diplomacy and high-level political dialogue become the predominant tools. It is noteworthy that 11 of the 13 countries included in the study resorted to actions aimed at securing technical cooperation during the period analyzed, alongside other forms of international engagement.

Figure 5 identifies these intersections and the specific uses of international actions according to the strategic objectives pursued. Figure 6, meanwhile, presents a country-level breakdown of initiatives according to their strategic purpose.

FIGURE 5:

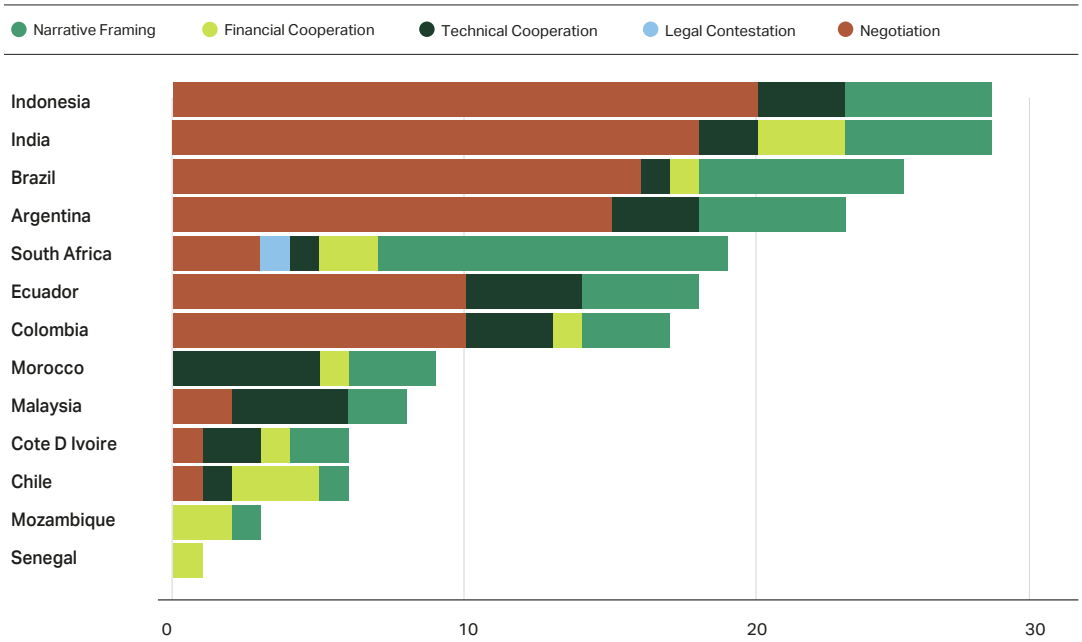
Distribution Matrix of Observations According to Strategic Objectives and Types of International Action



Source: Authors' elaboration.

FIGURE 6

Distribution of International Initiatives by Country According to Strategic Objectives



Source: Authors' elaboration.

The analysis reveals a clear and consistent pattern of correspondence between the types of international actions deployed and the strategic objectives pursued by Global South countries in response to the CBAM and the EUDR. Rather than constituting an ad hoc repertoire of interventions, the observed actions follow a logic of strategic coherence: specific diplomatic, legal, or economic instruments are activated systematically in pursuit of particular objectives, such as strengthening bargaining power, securing technical and financial cooperation, or contesting narratives regarding the trade–climate nexus. This correlation reinforces the interpretation that international activism in response to unilateral green regulations is structured around patterns of strategic rationality, in which the selection of foreign policy tools is closely aligned with the objectives being pursued.

Differentiated Interaction Patterns Emerge: Bilateralism for Adaptation and Plurilateralism for Resistance

We identify two clearly differentiated patterns in the way the observed actions are deployed. Diplomatic initiatives associated with opposition and reform tend to be pursued through unilateral and plurilateral channels, whereas actions promoting conditional adaptation and/or competitive adaptation are primarily carried out at the bilateral level. This helps explain why international relations surrounding the trade–climate nexus are characterized by a polyphony of voices operating across multiple levels.

At the bilateral level, the European Union is the primary counterpart to these efforts. Through such engagements, countries seek to negotiate the terms governing the relationship between trade and climate change, while also securing technical cooperation and financing for decarbonization and/or anti-deforestation policies. In some cases, bilateral initiatives are also used as negotiation tools. One example is Indonesia's effort to be classified as a "standard-risk" country under the EUDR within the broader context of the Indonesia–EU trade agreement negotiations. Complementing the role played by Brussels, Germany, Netherlands, and France also emerge as important providers of bilateral technical and financial cooperation within conditional adaptation strategies. We also identify initiatives in which the World Bank appears as a counterpart in financial cooperation efforts.

At the plurilateral level, 139 initiatives were recorded, the majority consisting of institutionalized actions such as the submission of WTO "trade concerns," through which Global South countries forge alliances in response to European regulatory power, whether to negotiate reforms or to directly oppose the EUDR and the CBAM. In terms of frequency, these are followed by plurilateral traditional diplomacy initiatives and public declarations.

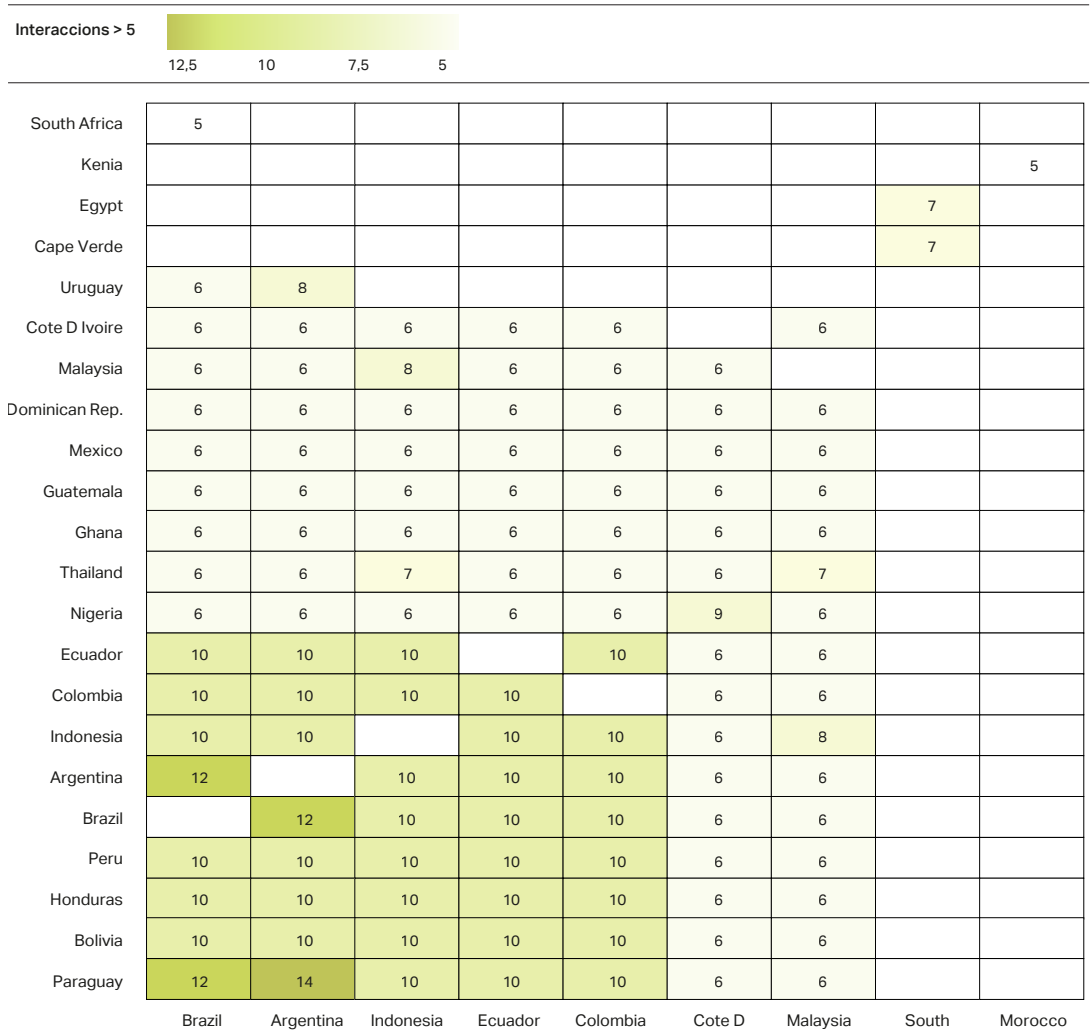
Regional and coalition-based platforms emerge as clear coordinators of these actions. First, BRICS stands out, particularly through intensified coordination between India and South Africa within multilateral forums. Likewise, Mercosur and the African Union have served as platforms for joint action. Diplomatic initiatives, however, were not confined to regional boundaries. Cross-regional actions also emerged, such as the diplomatic note presented in September 2023 by Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Indonesia. On that occasion, 17 developing countries submitted a joint letter to the European Union requesting the postponement of the EUDR's entry into force and calling on Brussels to align its rules with multilateral practices.

The analysis of alliances reveals a dense South American core structured primarily around Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. This cluster is particularly dense in plurilateral diplomatic actions (Figure 7). By contrast, when focusing specifically on legal signaling actions, the central hub shifts toward the Indo-Asian bloc (Figure 8).

Links between Argentina and Brazil are especially intense and symmetrical, while Paraguay displays even higher levels of interaction with both countries. Peru and Ecuador also join this cluster, showing strong interactions with Argentina and Brazil, although in a less balanced manner. Taken together, this pattern points to a regional space structured around Mercosur and its immediate periphery, in which Paraguay emerges as an unexpectedly strong hub, possibly explained by the high level of political or documentary activity identified in the exchanges analyzed.

FIGURE 7:

Alliance Matrix in Plurilateral Diplomatic Actions in Response to the CBAM and the EUDR

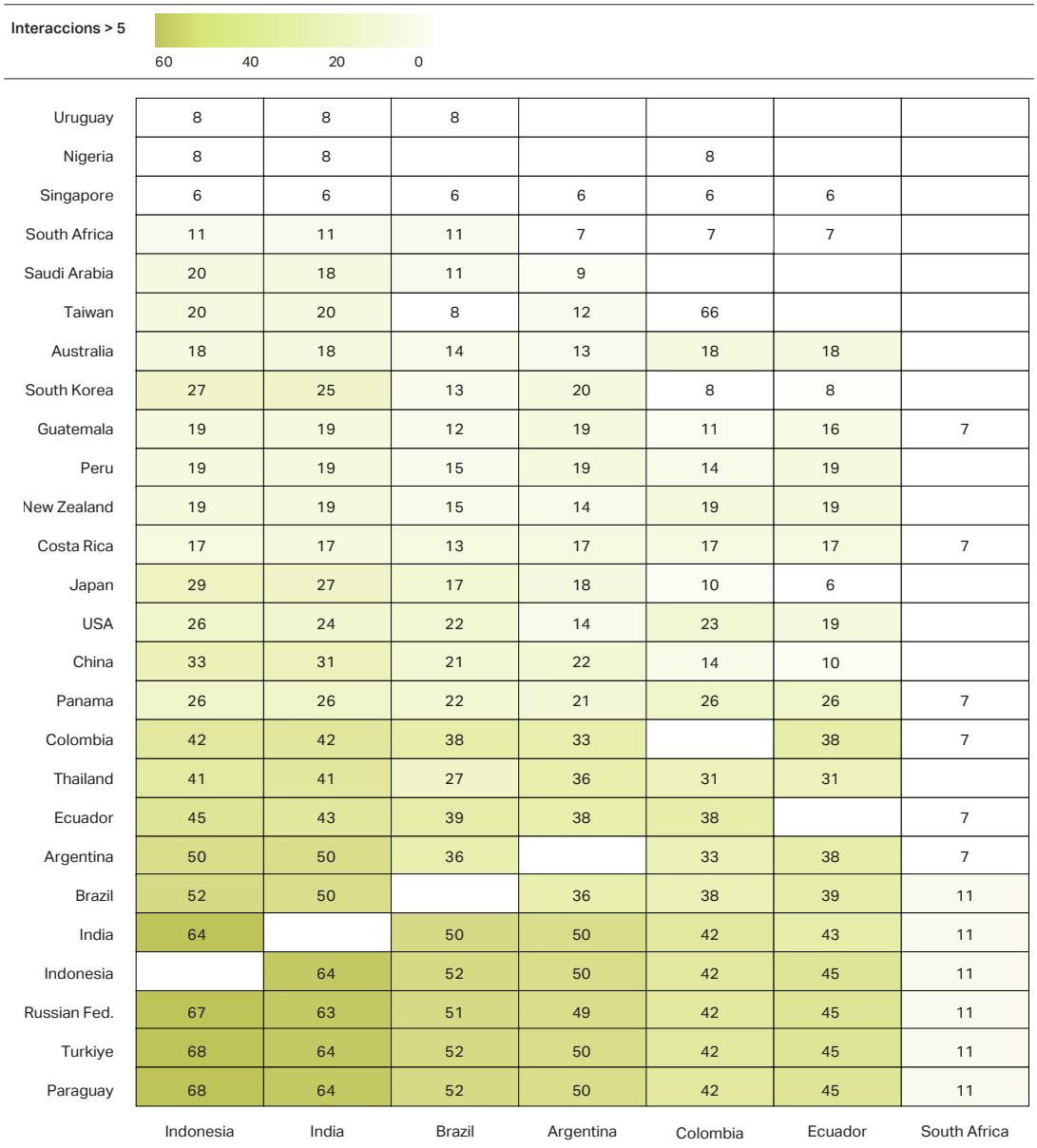


Source: Authors' elaboration.

A second alliance cluster emerges within the Indo-Asian bloc, composed of India, Indonesia, and Japan, with a particular focus on legal signaling actions (Figure 8). India and Indonesia maintain a particularly intense and reciprocal relationship, while Japan joins the cluster with significant, though more moderate, levels of interaction with both countries. India also maintains high levels of interaction with Brazil, reinforcing the connection between this Asian bloc and South America. This pattern suggests coordination sustained through multilateral platforms (such as the Group of Twenty), trade agendas, South–South cooperation initiatives, and shared integration into Asian value chains. As shown in Figure 8, this cluster is more concentrated around legal signaling actions, reflecting a strategy somewhat differentiated from the Latin American core, which is more focused on diplomatic negotiation..

FIGURE 8:

Matrix of Recurring Plurilateral Alliances in Legal Signaling Actions in Response to the CBAM and the EUDR



	Indonesia	India	Brazil	Argentina	Colombia	Ecuador	South Africa
Uruguay	8	8	8				
Nigeria	8	8			8		
Singapore	6	6	6	6	6	6	
South Africa	11	11	11	7	7	7	
Saudi Arabia	20	18	11	9			
Taiwan	20	20	8	12	66		
Australia	18	18	14	13	18	18	
South Korea	27	25	13	20	8	8	
Guatemala	19	19	12	19	11	16	7
Peru	19	19	15	19	14	19	
New Zealand	19	19	15	14	19	19	
Costa Rica	17	17	13	17	17	17	7
Japan	29	27	17	18	10	6	
USA	26	24	22	14	23	19	
China	33	31	21	22	14	10	
Panama	26	26	22	21	26	26	7
Colombia	42	42	38	33		38	7
Thailand	41	41	27	36	31	31	
Ecuador	45	43	39	38	38		7
Argentina	50	50	36		33	38	7
Brazil	52	50		36	38	39	11
India	64		50	50	42	43	11
Indonesia		64	52	50	42	45	11
Russian Fed.	67	63	51	49	42	45	11
Turkiye	68	64	52	50	42	45	11
Paraguay	68	64	52	50	42	45	11

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Finally, the overall structure of the matrix reveals strong contrasts. On the one hand, Brazil and Indonesia emerge as the two major hubs of the system, while two interconnected sub-systems can be identified: South America (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Ecuador, and Colombia) and Asia (India, Indonesia, and Japan). On the other hand, several countries appear clearly marginalized. Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and, to a lesser extent, Côte d'Ivoire display almost no significant ties, functioning as a diplomatic periphery within the analyzed group. At the opposite extreme, Chile appears as an outlier:

its very low density of bilateral interactions suggests a strategy that, at least within this corpus, prioritizes multilateral frameworks or specific agreements over the construction of a broad bilateral network.

Conclusion

The analysis confirms that the Global South exercises agency, that foreign policy can become an important tool within national strategies addressing the green transition, and that, from a global perspective, European regulations remain far from achieving broad consensus.

The evidence gathered points to a series of strategic lessons for the design of public policies and international insertion strategies in Global South countries within a context in which the governance of the trade–climate nexus has become a space of political and normative contestation.

First, there is a need to integrate foreign policy into the design of responses to unilateral green trade regulations. Strategies addressing the CBAM and the EUDR should be conceived in a coordinated manner across trade, industrial, climate, and foreign policy, rather than being treated solely as domestic responses. Economic and environmental diplomacy have proven to be useful tools both for opposing unilateral green trade regulations and for advancing adaptation strategies.

Second, it appears essential to make strategic use of the available instruments in order to maximize the opportunities offered by the international environment. Legal signaling and the submission of trade concerns in forums such as the World Trade Organization have proven to be accessible tools for building bargaining power and making distributive costs visible, even under conditions of power asymmetry. By contrast, high-level political dialogue and bilateral economic diplomacy with the European Union and its member states are key mechanisms for securing financing, technical cooperation, and differentiated implementation arrangements. There is no universally optimal strategy; effectiveness depends on the combination of political positioning, the instrument employed, and the level at which action is pursued.

In particular, regarding the strategies available to Global South countries, South–South and regional coalitions have proven especially effective in advancing reforms to green regulations. Coordinating actions around converging interests is therefore a highly relevant tool. Platforms such as Mercosur, BRICS, the African Union, and ad hoc coalitions have enabled Global South countries to amplify their demands while reducing the costs of individual action.

Finally, the findings highlight that, beyond legal and economic instruments, the construction of legitimacy and alternative interpretive frameworks is central. Joint declarations

and programmatic documents should continue to be used to contest dominant narratives surrounding trade, development, and climate: challenging unilateral approaches while promoting principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, and sustainable development.

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