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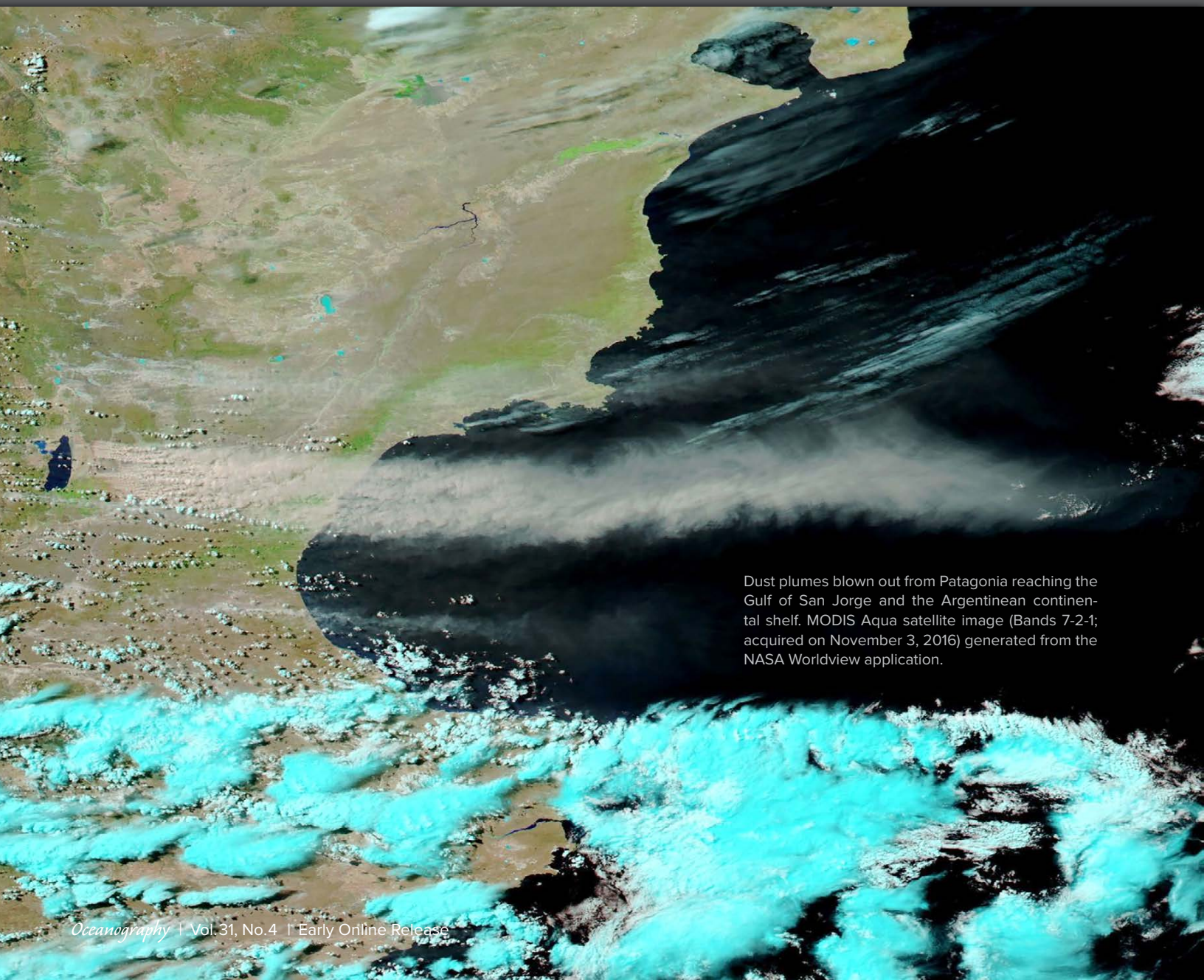
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# QUANTIFYING SOURCES AND TRANSPORT PATHWAYS OF SURFACE SEDIMENTS IN THE GULF OF SAN JORGE, CENTRAL PATAGONIA (ARGENTINA)

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Dust plumes blown out from Patagonia reaching the Gulf of San Jorge and the Argentinean continental shelf. MODIS Aqua satellite image (Bands 7-2-1; acquired on November 3, 2016) generated from the NASA Worldview application.

**ABSTRACT.** The Gulf of San Jorge (GSJ) is a semicircular basin, approximately 160 km long and 250 km wide, located in the central part of Patagonia between 45°S and 47°S, lacking any present-day major perennial tributaries. The grain size and bulk and clay mineralogical compositions as well as major and minor elements of 75 surface sediment samples from the GSJ and the adjacent continental shelf were investigated to define the spatial distribution, transport pathways, and potential sources of terrigenous material. To better constrain the origins of GSJ sediments, analyses were also performed on 14 terrestrial, riverine, and marine samples from potential source areas around the gulf and Patagonia. The mineral assemblage of surface sediments in the gulf, dominated by plagioclase, quartz, and clays, is a function of the primary continental volcanic geology of Patagonia. The significant concentration of volcanoclastic particles indicated by mineralogical signatures and scanning electron microscope images of sediments suggests a substantial contribution from rhyolitic volcanism to the modern sedimentation in the gulf. High amounts of smectite are carried into the GSJ by dust transport, whereas inputs of chlorite and illite seem to be associated with continental shelf current transport from southern Patagonia. Finally, our results suggest that 50% of the surface sediment in the GSJ is derived from external/oceanic inputs, 40% from inner gulf shores (i.e., erosion and runoff), and 10% from dust (i.e., aeolian transport).

## INTRODUCTION

Key oceanographic processes, such as biogeochemical cycles, primary production, and sediment transfer to deeper waters, occur on continental shelves, which lie between terrestrial/coastal and oceanic domains. Because they are partially landlocked and partially open to the ocean, gulfs provide suitable small-scale analogs for the mechanisms occurring on the continental shelf. Furthermore, large coastal embayments such as gulfs are often sensitive marine environments affected by human activities (e.g., fisheries and/or urban development). Located in the central part of the Argentine continental shelf (ACS), the Gulf of San Jorge (hereafter referred to as GSJ; [Figure 1](#)) provides a perfect example of both economical-industrial development and environmental preservation. Indeed, numerous foraging and reproduction areas for marine birds and mammals coexist in the GSJ with commercial shrimp and hake fisheries, as well as terrestrial oil production.

In this strategic environmental and oceanographic context, numerous studies focusing on the grain size and mineralogical and geochemical composition of the detrital sediments over gulfs and continental shelves have been performed to determine their sources and depositional conditions and to identify their transport

pathways as well as regional hydrodynamic patterns (e.g., [Preda and Cox, 2005](#); [Spagnoli et al., 2008](#); [Saukel et al., 2010](#)). A growing number of studies also work with bulk mineralogy, clay mineralogy, and elemental geochemistry to characterize modern sedimentary processes and to determine the provenance of terrigenous sediments (e.g., [Andrews and Vogt, 2014](#); [Gamboa et al., 2017](#)).

On the Argentinean continental shelf and margin, the physical and chemical properties of surface and subsurface sediments have been characterized via bulk and clay mineralogy and elemental and isotopic geochemistry (e.g., [Petschick et al., 1996](#); [de Mahiques et al., 2008](#)). All these results contributed to investigations of the composition and provenance of terrigenous inputs. Additionally, the chemical signatures of rivers, aeolian dust, and topsoil samples have been analyzed to estimate the potential riverborne and windborne inputs to the Patagonian littoral ([Gaiero et al., 2004, 2007](#)). However, most of the coastal studies, as well as the sampling campaigns, have been conducted in the northern region of the ACS and especially in the Río de La Plata estuary at ~35°S (e.g., [Nagai et al., 2014](#)). This focus leads to a disproportionate amount of information available for the north compared to the other coastal and inner

shelf areas of Argentina.

In this study, we present the first multiproxy analysis based on grain-size distribution, bulk and clay mineralogy, and elemental geochemistry (major and trace elements) of surface sediments from the GSJ. The main objectives of this study were to (1) characterize the spatial distribution of the surface sediments, and (2) define the different sources and transport processes of detrital sediment in the GSJ. Samples from potential source areas (such as beaches, tablelands, dry-bed lakes, river mouths, and oceanic environments) were also analyzed to document the relative differences between the sediment composition in the potential source areas and sediment samples from the GSJ.

## STUDY AREA

### Physical Setting

The Patagonian continental shelf represents the southern part of the ACS and is delimited by the Patagonian coast from Cape Horn (55°S) nearly to the Colorado River (39°S). The hydrodynamics of the region consists of a northward (NNE) flow of sub-Antarctic cold water (i.e., Patagonian Current; [Figure 1a](#)) conveyed onto the shelf through the Cape Horn Current and the Malvinas Current along the continental slope ([Palma et al., 2008](#), and references therein).

The Atlantic coast of Patagonia is therefore characterized by a dry climate (from 200 mm yr<sup>-1</sup> to 400 mm yr<sup>-1</sup> rainfall; [Coronato et al., 2008](#)). The strongest winds are concentrated between 49°S and 53°S in the heart of the southern westerly winds belt ([Kilian and Lamy, 2012](#)). The surface hydrology consists of eight main watercourses, mostly perennial, draining toward the east from Andean headwaters to the Atlantic. Except for the Negro River in the north and the Santa Cruz River in the south, the other major watercourses have relatively limited discharge ([Figure 1a](#); [Kokot, 2004](#)).

The GSJ is a semicircular basin, approximately 160 km long and 250 km wide, located in the central part of Patagonia between 45°S (Cape Dos Bahías) and

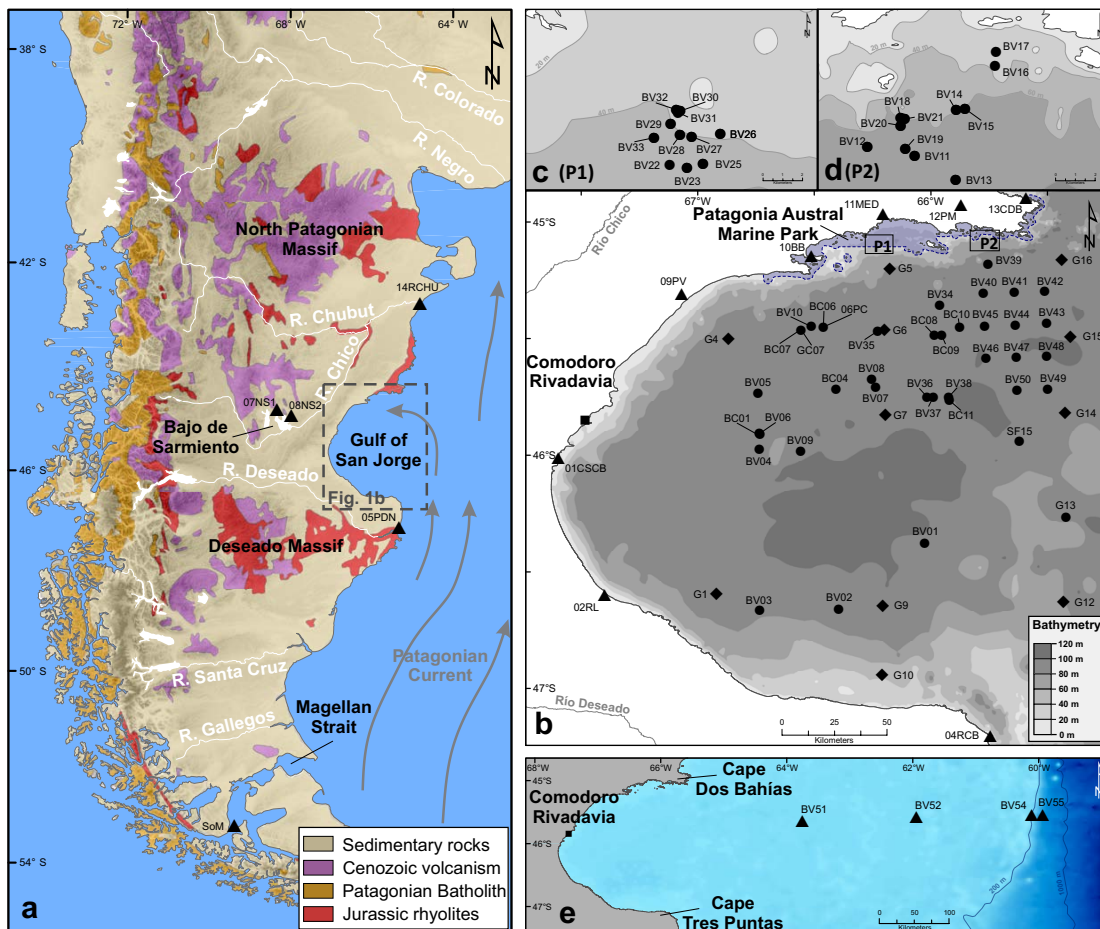
47°S (Cape Tres Puntas; Figure 1b,e), an encroachment of the South Atlantic Ocean in the heart of southern South America. The bathymetry of the basin rapidly decreases to reach the 90 m isobath, which defines a large flat central region that covers most of the surface of the gulf and corresponds to the Patagonian outer shelf (Violante et al., 2014). The hydrodynamic and water mass origins in the gulf are related to the northward circulation on the shelf (Figure 1a; Palma et al., 2008), but the GSJ is also located at the limit of the influence of the Magellan Strait discharge flowing along the coast and entering the gulf in the southeastern sector at Cape Tres Puntas (Fernández et al., 2005).

From geological and geographical points of view, most of the GSJ forms the eastern part of the hydrocarbon-producing San Jorge Gulf Basin that is surrounded by the North Patagonian Massif to the north, the Deseado Massif

to the south, and the Andes to the west (Sylwan, 2001). The presence of these two massifs is expressed in the GSJ area by Jurassic silicic volcanic rock outcrops, predominantly rhyolitic, from the Chon Aike province (Figure 1a; Pankhurst et al., 1998). The main outcrop of silicic rocks, dominated by rhyolites and ignimbrites, is located in the northeastern part of the gulf close to Cape Dos Bahías and covers the entire sector of the Patagonia Austral Marine Park (hereafter referred to as marine park; Figure 1a,b; Pankhurst et al., 1998). The tablelands of the San Jorge Gulf Basin are mainly overlain by Eocene-Miocene sedimentary rocks of the Sarmiento and Patagonia Formations (Cuitiño et al., 2015), as well as Quaternary fluvio-glacial deposits (e.g., “Rodados Patagónicos”; Martínez and Kutschker, 2011). The tablelands reach the coast as cliffs or beach-ridge systems, and are generally composed of gravel and/or sand (Isla et al., 2002).

## Sedimentation

The main suppliers of terrigenous materials to the Patagonian littoral are coastal erosion, rivers, and aeolian transport, as well as transportation and redistribution of sediments from the shelf by the prevailing northward-flowing Patagonian Current. Indeed, according to Pierce and Siegel (1979) and Gaiero et al. (2003), the estimated contributions of coastal erosion, dust transport, and rivers to the terrigenous sedimentary supply transferred offshore are, respectively, 56%, 41%, and 3% (Violante et al., 2014). The weak proportion of sedimentary inputs to the continental shelf by the Patagonian rivers is explained by their present low flows and the low particulate loads in their downstream sectors (Gaiero et al., 2003; Kokot, 2004). The large aeolian contribution results from a combination of strong westerly winds over the regional geomorphology and the arid climate, which stimulates the resuspension and



**FIGURE 1.** Maps of the study area with sample locations. The dots indicate surface sediment samples in the Gulf of San Jorge (GSJ), the diamonds denote sites with surface sediment samples as well as water column filters, and the triangles illustrate samples from potential source areas. (a) Map of Patagonia showing the main hydrodynamic circulation on the Patagonian continental shelf (gray arrows; Palma et al., 2008), simplified surface geology, and main geographic features mentioned in the text. (b–d) Bathymetric maps of the Gulf of San Jorge and marine park areas. (e) Bathymetric map of the GSJ with adjacent continental margin.

transport of surficial terrestrial sediments from Patagonian tablelands to the shelf (Crespi-Abril et al., 2018).

The GSJ does not have any present-day major and perennial tributaries likely to strongly affect the sedimentation. Furthermore, the gulf is located in the heart of several hundred kilometers of littoral without major rivers, except for the relatively low flow of the Deseado River ( $5 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$ ; Kokot, 2004), which reaches the ocean a few dozen kilometers south of the GSJ (Figure 1a). However, there are aeolian inputs to the Gulf area (Isla et al., 2002; Crespi-Abril et al., 2016), as the basin is located on the outskirts of major dust sources (Prospero et al., 2002).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Seventy-five marine surface samples were collected in the GSJ, as well as on the continental shelf. The sampling was performed using a Van Veen grab sampler (65 samples), a box corer (8 samples), a gravity corer (1 sample), and a piston corer (1 sample) wherein the uppermost 1 cm of sediment was recovered to collect only the sediment-water interface (Figures 1b–e). These core-top sediments were found to represent modern

time or at least the last decade/century when the topmost centimeters were missing. All marine samples were recovered on board R/V *Coriolis II* from January 29 to March 4, 2014 (Leg 1: MARES and Leg 2: MARGES), as part of the PROMESSE (PROgrama Multidisciplinario para el Estudio del ecosistema y la geología marina del golfo San Jorge y las costas de las provincias de Chubut y Santa Cruz) project. Bulk and clay mineralogy and elemental geochemistry were analyzed for all samples, whereas grain size analysis was performed on only 57 samples due to the low quantity of sediments available for the Leg 1 stations. The 63–300  $\mu\text{m}$  and <63  $\mu\text{m}$  sediment fractions of three selected samples (BV01, BV06, and BC11) were also examined using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) to determine the abundance and the geochemical character of volcanoclastic particles (e.g., glass shards) in the marine sediments. In addition, 13 terrestrial and riverine samples as well as a marine surface sediment sample (0–2 cm sediment depth) from the Magellan Strait were analyzed for their mineralogical and elemental geochemistry signatures (see details in the supporting information; Figure 1a,b).

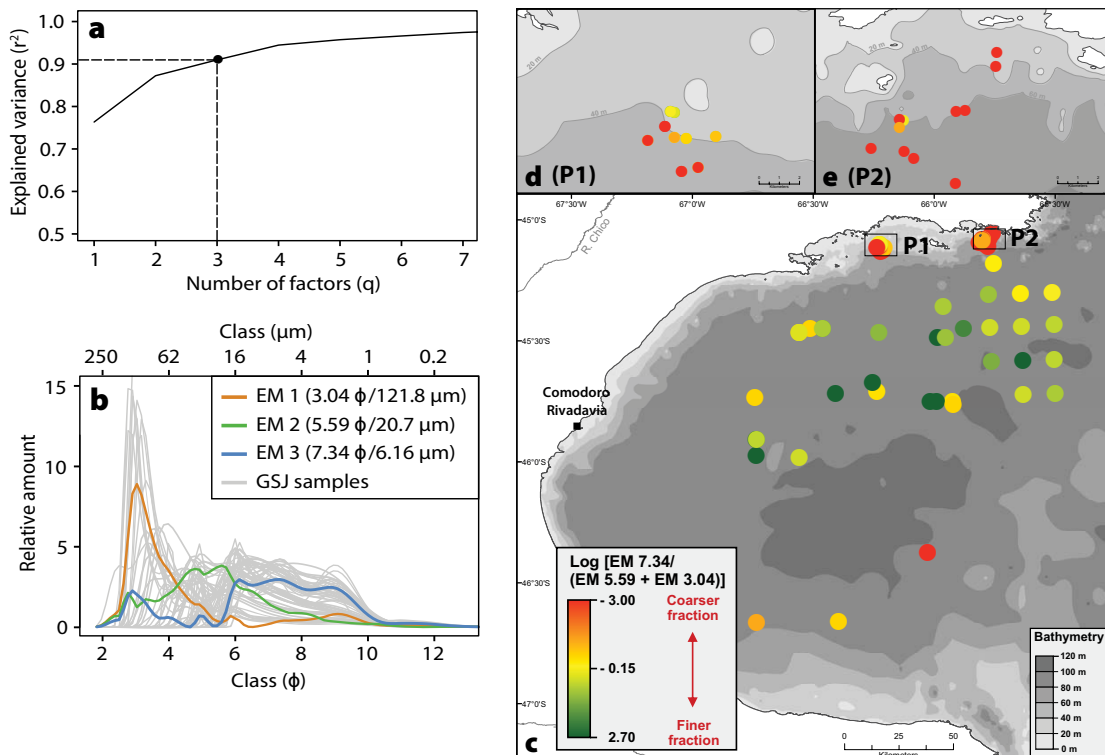
To document the chemical composition and geochemical classification of suspended sediments in the water column, 22 seawater samples from 11 stations were recovered in the GSJ during the MARES cruise (Figure 1b). For each station, seawater samples were collected using Niskin bottles fixed on a CTD rosette both at the sea surface (2 m depth) and close to the seafloor. Between 0.5 L and 1.5 L of seawater, depending on particle load, was filtered onto glass-fiber GF/F filters. The filters were stored frozen at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$  until they could be analyzed.

The source samples and detailed methodology used for the analyses of grain size, SEM, bulk and clay mineralogy, and elemental geochemistry, as well as the statistical approach are presented in the online supplementary material.

## RESULTS

### Grain-Size Distribution

In the GSJ, the analyzed sediments are mostly fine to very fine silts, as well as very fine sands with a mean grain size ( $\Phi$  scale) ranging from 8.01 (very fine silt) to 3.73 (very fine sand; Figure 2b, Figure S1a, and Table S1). Coarser sediments are dominant for the northern



**FIGURE 2.** End-member modeling analysis (EMMA) performed on the detrital fraction of the grain-size distribution in the GSJ. (a) The grain-size distribution of the first three end members accounts for more than 91% of the variance. (b) Three representative unmixed grain-size distributions produced from EMMA based on the grain-size distributions of the GSJ samples (gray lines). (c–e)  $\text{Log}[\text{EM}3/(\text{EM}2+\text{EM}1)]$  end-member ratios in the GSJ and marine park areas, respectively.

coastal sample patches (marine park area; Figure S1b,c), especially close to the Cape Dos Bahías area (P2; Figure S1c). Fine silts prevail in the north-central area of the GSJ, with a finer fraction in the inner part of the gulf (Figure S1a). The mean sediment grain size measured in the GSJ for this study coincides with results obtained by Fernández et al. (2003). Furthermore, end-member modeling analysis (EMMA) provides a model with three end members (EM) that explain 91% of the variance in the grain size data set (Figure 2a). Based on the grain size distributions of the three end members (Figure 2b), EM1 represents a well-sorted distribution associated with the very fine sand fraction (mean  $\sim 3.04 \Phi$ ), EM2 shows a well-sorted distribution associated with the coarse and medium silt fractions (mean  $\sim 5.29 \Phi$ ), and EM3 represents a well-sorted distribution with main peaks corresponding to the finer grain fractions (i.e., fine silt to clay; mean  $\sim 7.34 \Phi$ ). EM1 and EM2 characterize all the samples from the park area

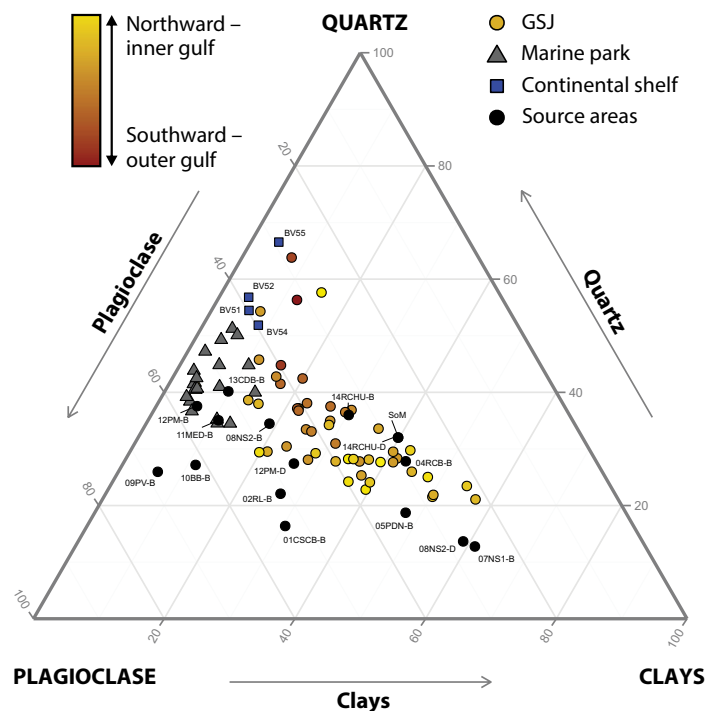
(P1 and P2), as well as the three samples from the southern part of the gulf, and EM3 represents most of the samples from the north-central area (Table S1). Maps of the  $\log[EM3/(EM2+EM1)]$  end-member ratios are used to illustrate the spatial variations of the relative proportion between very fine silt and coarse silt to identify the mechanism of transport/sources of particles in the GSJ (Figure 2c–e).

### Bulk Mineralogy

The most abundant minerals in the GSJ bulk sediments, identified according to the quantitative X-ray diffraction (qXRD) method developed by Eberl (2003), are quartz (14%–51%), plagioclase (15%–49%), clays (2%–41%), amorphous silica (4.5%–35.5%), and K-feldspar (2%–12%). The bulk mineralogical compositions of sediments also indicate smaller proportions of pyroxene (<2.7%), amphibole (<1.5%), and Fe-oxides (<0.9%; Table S2). Amorphous silica can mostly be identified as volcanic

rhyolitic tephra based on the Icelandic tephra sample (Hekla-4), which is used as a mineral standard in RockJock v11 (Andrews et al., 2013). Indeed, in the XRD scans centered between  $19^\circ$  and  $31^\circ$  two-theta, the samples containing higher proportions of amorphous silica (>10%; e.g., BV01; Figure S3a) present patterns similar to the standard of rhyolitic tephra (Hekla-4). Furthermore, SEM imaging of the sediments in the 63–300  $\mu\text{m}$  fraction from the BV01, BV06, and BC11 sites attests to the appreciable amounts of volcanoclastic particles, which are mainly represented by highly vesicular glass shards and slightly vesicular glass shards with blocky to curvilinear shapes (Figure S3b,c). SEM images also show the near absence of diatom frustules, considered to be the other potential source of amorphous silica. The geochemical data in  $\text{K}_2\text{O}-\text{SiO}_2$  of glass shards in the surface sediments confirm the rhyolitic composition of volcanoclastic particles in surface sediments (Figure S3d). The bulk mineralogy is presented in a ternary diagram showing the three most abundant minerals (quartz, plagioclase, and clays) in the GSJ samples (Figure 3). The ternary diagram also includes results from bulk mineralogy analyses of marine and terrestrial sediments from the Patagonian continental shelf, Strait of Magellan, and San Jorge Gulf Basin, all representing potential source areas of sedimentary inputs to the GSJ (Figure 3). The ternary diagram reveals that the clay content differs significantly between sediments from marine park areas and those from most of the other parts of the gulf. Indeed, the sites in the marine park areas are characterized by lower concentrations of clays (2%–10.5%) with homogeneous values of quartz and plagioclase (26%–42% and 34%–49%, respectively) in contrast to the clay contents in the other parts of the GSJ, which are higher (6%–41%), with scattered values of quartz and plagioclase (14.5%–51% and 16.5%–37%, respectively).

To visualize the main tendencies of mineralogical enrichment in the gulf, spatial distributions of mineralogical



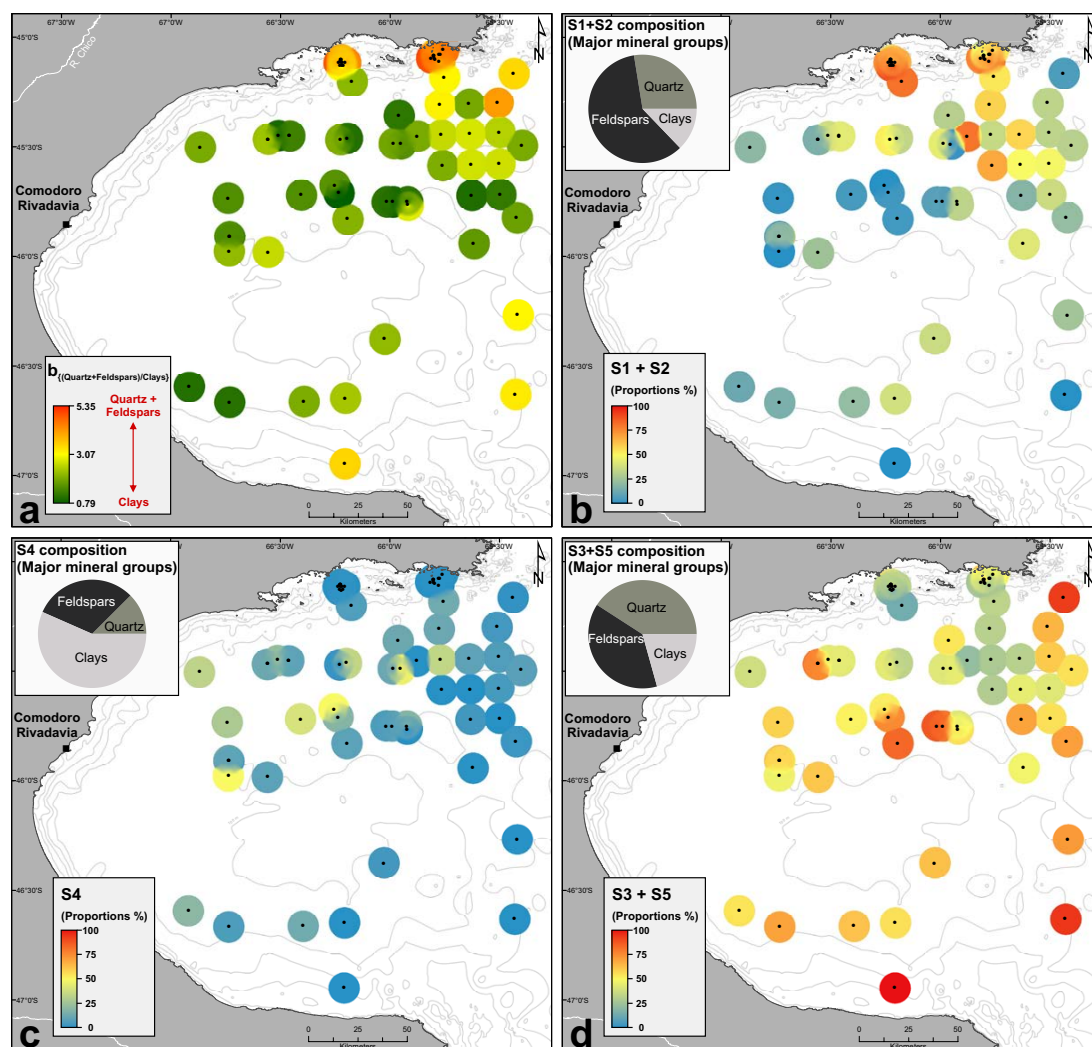
**FIGURE 3.** Quartz-plagioclase-clays ternary plot illustrating the relative compositions of the main minerals. The samples are illustrated according to their locations in the Gulf of San Jorge; the northward-inner gulf to southward-outer gulf tendency is calculated from absolute latitude and longitude coordinates (excluding the park sites).

balances for major mineral groups (i.e.,  $b_{\{(Quartz+Feldspars)/Clays\}}$ ) were conducted (Figure 4a; see statistical details in the online supporting information). The results indicate higher values associated with quartz and feldspar enrichments versus clay enrichment for the marine park areas. The lower values are related to most of the other parts of the GSJ, with the exception of intermediate values for samples located in the northern and southern outer parts of the Gulf (Figure 4a).

To confirm the five-source composition, SedUnMix was run with the five sources against the source area samples previously used to define the source compositions (see details in supplementary material; Table S5). The results indicate a high proportion of sources S1, S2, S4, and S5 to the sediment composition of their respective source samples

(from 65% to 100%; Table S4). The contribution of source S3 to its representative source samples is weaker (from 7% to 47%; Table S4), and proportions are mainly shared with source S5. Spatial distributions for the proportions of inner gulf coastal inputs (S1 + S2), dust transport (S4) and external/oceanic contributions (S3 + S5) to sediment mineralogical composition are presented respectively in Figure 4b–d. Sources S1 and S2 are abundant in the sediment assemblage of the coastal park areas and the northeast-central part of the GSJ (>40% with mean value ~70% close to the park). The proportions of sources S1 and S2 in sample composition are comparatively low for the other sectors of the GSJ (<30%; Figure 4b). The results from Figure 4c indicate that a low to intermediate fraction of the sediment assemblage

is associated with source S4 (<50%), with distribution limited to approximately ten samples in the northwestern and central parts of the GSJ. Nevertheless, this study focuses on the aeolian transport of silt and clay fraction particles using the <63  $\mu\text{m}$  fraction of 08NS2 and the fine dry-bedload sediment from 07NS1 as source samples to generate a dust-related source (S4) in SedUnMix. Thus, we consider only the intermediate- to long-distance aeolian transport. This bias could have led to underestimating the wind-blown “coarse” dust, which is known to be deposited in the region as shown by the creation and displacement of dune fields south of Comodoro Rivadavia (Montes et al., 2015). S3 and S5 combined represent the source with the highest contribution to the sediment composition of the Gulf, excluding the



**FIGURE 4.** (a) Spatial distribution of the elemental balance for major mineral groups (i.e.,  $b_{\{(Quartz+Feldspars)/Clays\}}$ ). (b–d) Maps showing relative proportions of inner gulf coastal inputs (S1 + S2; b), dust transport (S4; c) and external/oceanic contributions (S3 + S5; d) to sediment mineralogical composition. The proportions in major mineral groups (quartz, feldspars, and clays) of proposed sources (S1 + S2, S4, and S3 + S5) are presented in pie charts.

coastal park areas, especially in the central sector (from 47% to 86%), in the southwest part (from 50% to 100%), and in the oceanic perimeter of the GSJ (from 56% to 100%; Figure 4d).

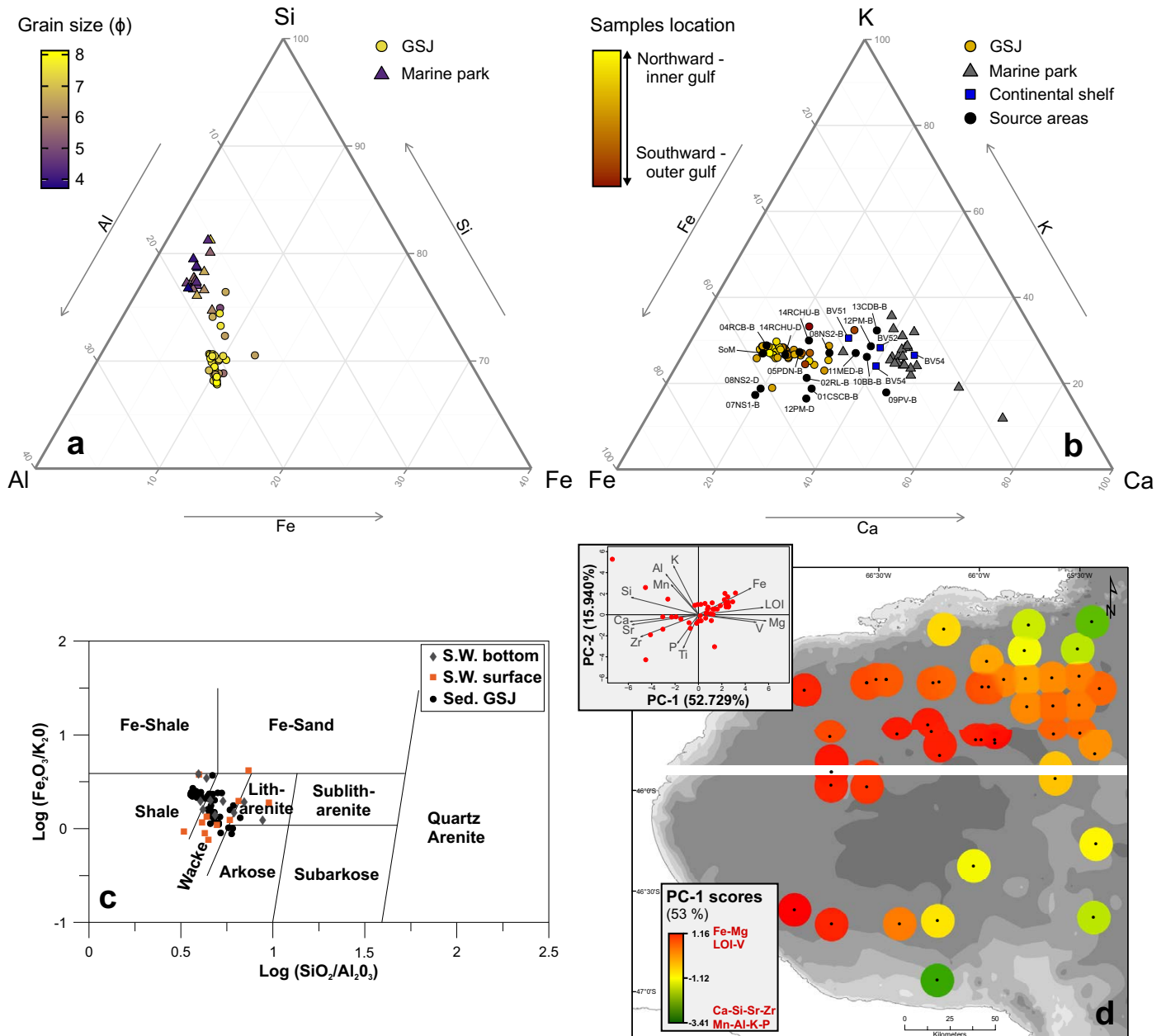
### Elemental Geochemistry

The major element composition of bulk sediments from the GSJ is characterized by very high proportions of SiO<sub>2</sub>, high

contents of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, and lower concentrations of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, CaO, K<sub>2</sub>O, MgO, TiO<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>, and MnO (Table S3). Sr, Zr, and V dominate the minor and trace elements. The sediment samples are plotted in the log(SiO<sub>2</sub>/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) versus log(Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/K<sub>2</sub>O) classification diagram (Herron, 1988) coupled with the results of the water sample filters (surface and bottom) to compare the geochemical classification and

mineralogical maturity between sediment from the seafloor and the water column (Figure 5c). The seafloor sediments and suspended sediment in the water column are geochemically classified as shale and wacke with no major distinction concerning the dispersion in the diagram of the seabed and suspended sediment samples.

The ternary diagrams Al-Si-Fe and



**FIGURE 5.** (a) Si-Al-Fe abundances of marine park areas and other GSJ samples associated with mean grain size ( $\phi$ ). (b) K-Fe-Ca distribution of marine park areas and other GSJ samples, plotted together with potential source area samples, as well as surface sediment samples from the Patagonian continental shelf (Table S3). The samples are illustrated according to their location in the gulf; northward-inner gulf to southward-outer gulf tendency calculated from absolute latitude and longitude coordinates (excluding the park sites). (c) Herron (1988) geochemical classification diagram for surface sediment and water column samples of the GSJ. (d) Biplot of the PC-1 versus PC-2 generated from the log-centered transformation of major, minor, and trace elements of GSJ samples, presented with map of PC-1 scores.



Fe-K-Ca (Figure 5a,b; see details in the online supporting information) highlight the clear distinction between coastal park areas and central GSJ samples with higher relative proportions of Si (>74%; Figure 5a) and Ca (>38%; Figure 5b) in the park. The enrichment in Si seems positively correlated with coarser sediments (Figure 5a).

We illustrate the scores from the first two principal components of the log-centered geochemical data (excluding the geochemically distinctive areas of the coastal park) as they account for more than 69% of the total variance (Figure 5d). PC-1 scores account for 53% of the total variance and appear to be positively correlated with Fe-Mg-V-LOI and negatively correlated with Ca-Si-Sr-Zr-Mn-Al-K-P. The spatial distribution of PC-1 elemental geochemical scores indicates that high values dominate the central and southwest parts of the gulf and are associated with enrichment in Fe, Mn, and V in these areas (Figure 5d). These results expose a noticeable tendency similar to that of the bulk mineralogy distribution in the GSJ with higher enrichments in clays in the central and southwest parts of the GSJ (Figure 5a). Limited sectors in

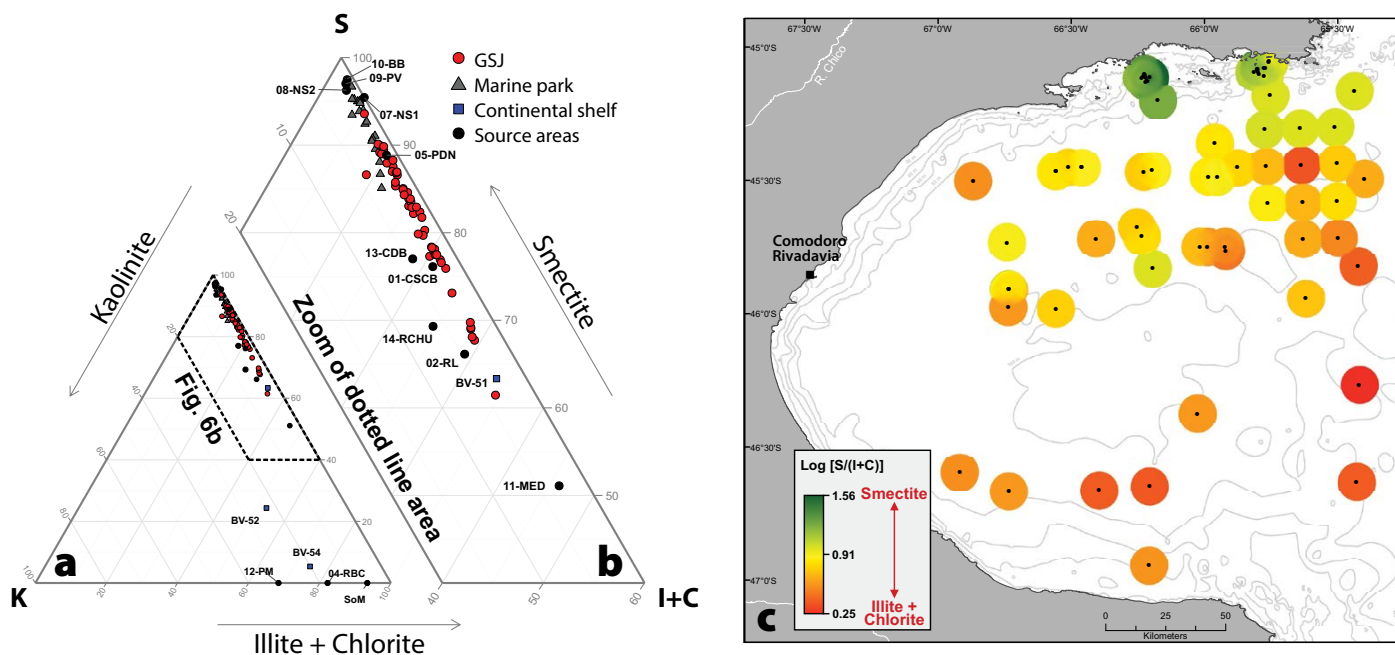
the northeast and southeast parts of the GSJ, close to Capes Dos Bahias and Tres Puntas, present intermediate to low PC-1 scores (Figure 5d).

### Clay Mineralogy

The clay mineral assemblage of sediment in the gulf is highly dominated by smectite with a contribution of more than 75% for at least 85% of the samples. In contrast, chlorite, illite, and kaolinite contents are rather low with average contributions close to 8%, 6.5%, and 1.5%, respectively (Table S2). The relative abundances of kaolinite, smectite, and coupled illite plus chlorite (I+C) of the GSJ samples, as well as marine and terrestrial samples associated with potential source areas for sedimentary inputs in the GSJ, are plotted in a ternary diagram (Figure 6a,b). The results confirm the high proportions of smectite in GSJ sediment, especially in the coastal park areas (Figure 6b). The spatial distribution of the  $\log[\text{smectite}/(\text{illite}+\text{chlorite})]$  ratios shows that the higher values occur in the southern part and on the oceanic perimeter of the gulf, excluding the northeast sector, suggesting enrichment in I+C in these regions (Figure 6c).

### SEDIMENT DISTRIBUTION, POTENTIAL SOURCE AREAS, AND TRANSPORT PATHWAYS

In the GSJ, grain size analysis and distribution are used to highlight two clearly distinct sedimentary environments. The dominance of coarser sediments (i.e., very fine sand) in the northern part of the gulf in the coastal marine park areas reflects moderate- to high-energy environments (erosive environments; Fernández et al., 2003). These sediments are mainly associated with EM1, especially the sediments close to Cape Dos Bahías, and to a lesser extent with EM2. Due to the absence of riverine inputs in the GSJ, we suggest that the well-sorted fine sand EM1 can be associated with sediments derived from local erosion (i.e., beach and cliff erosion; Isla et al., 2002), and the well-sorted coarse to medium silt EM2 with wind-blown “coarse” dust from nearby sources such as dune fields on the outskirts of the GSJ (Montes et al., 2015). The second distinct sedimentary environment is observed in the central part of the gulf with fine to very fine silts corresponding to a depositional environment with low energy (Fernández et al., 2003). The sediments in this area are almost exclusively



**FIGURE 6.** (a–b) Ternary diagram of smectite (S), kaolinite (K), and illite + chlorite (I+C) relative concentration in samples from marine park areas, other GSJ samples, continental shelf, and potential source areas. (c) Spatial distribution of  $\log[S/(I+C)]$ .

associated with EM3, which is characterized by a large dominant mode extending from medium silt to clay that could reflect a depositional environment associated with sediments transported over significant distances (e.g., currents and aeolian transport).

The bulk mineralogy, rather homogeneous and dominated by plagioclase, quartz, and clay minerals, is in accordance with the topsoil and riverine mineralogy from eastern Patagonia previously published in Gaiero et al. (2004). The high proportions of plagioclase and quartz reflect the dominant volcanic signature of Patagonia, mainly driven by the southern volcanic zone of the Andean Cordillera but also, to a lesser extent, by volcanic rocks erupted since the Jurassic. Indeed, numerous studies have highlighted the major influence of Andean volcanism on the mineralogical, chemical, and isotopic signatures of beach, riverine, and marine samples from western (Bertrand et al., 2012), as well as eastern Patagonia (Potter, 1994; Gaiero et al., 2007). The prevalence of clays in the riverine samples (Chubut and Deseado), as well as in samples from the area known as “Bajo de Sarmiento,” suggests that riverine and aeolian transports have an impact on the inputs of clays in the GSJ. According to Gaiero et al. (2004), the suspended loads of the Chubut and Deseado Rivers, likely to be partially transported to the gulf, present the highest proportions of clay minerals in comparison to other Patagonian riverine and topsoil samples. Furthermore, the potential of wind to transport clays from dust source areas such as Bajo de Sarmiento (Prospero et al., 2002; Montes et al., 2017) is reinforced by the nature of the soil covering the Gulf of San Jorge Basin. Indeed, the soil is mainly composed of yermosols that are often characterized by a developed argillic (clay) B horizon that is easily eroded by wind (Gut, 2008). In the GSJ, the sediments enriched in clay minerals are located in the deep and central areas that are associated with weaker hydrodynamic conditions and identified

as depositional environments (Fernández et al., 2003). In addition, the appreciable amounts of volcanoclastic particles, identified as rhyolitic tephra (Figure S2) in the bulk mineralogical composition and observed as glass shards in SEM images of the surface sediments (Figure S3b,c), also support the aeolian and riverine transport contribution, as opposed to coastal erosion, which carries modern and past (i.e., remobilization of terrestrial tephra deposits) volcanogenic particles into the GSJ. Furthermore, the geochemical composition of glass shards suggests a dominance of rhyolitic volcanoclastic material (Figure S3d); however, the sources of recent rhyolitic products are rare in the volcanic zone close to the GSJ (i.e., Southern Volcanic Zone of the Andes), except for the Chaitén volcano in Chile (López-Escobar et al., 1993). Thus, we hypothesize that the ash plumes generated by the explosive rhyolite eruptions of Chaitén volcano and the remobilization of associated tephra deposits represent the most conclusive source of modern tephra in the GSJ.

The well-defined correlation between the grain-size distribution and the bulk mineralogy, where the coarser grains are associated with clay-poor and plagioclase/quartz-rich samples (Figures 2 and 4a), highlights the presumptive impact of the grain size on the sediment mineral composition. Therefore, the bulk mineral composition of sediments in the GSJ is primarily controlled by the dominant and homogeneous continental volcanic signature in Patagonia, but it is also influenced by the grain-size distribution.

Our analysis of clay-mineral assemblages in the GSJ, highly dominated by smectite, is relatively consistent with the results reported both on the nearshore areas of Patagonia (Pierce and Siegel, 1979) and on the continent (i.e., riverine and topsoil material; Gaiero et al., 2004). This high smectite content is related to the combination of two factors: (1) potential high inputs of smectite from adjacent eastern and southern Patagonian sources (Petschick et al., 1996; Diekmann et al.,

2000), and (2) rapid gravitational settling on coastal areas of smectite compared to other clay minerals (Pierce and Siegel, 1979). Indeed, the well-crystallized smectite observed in the gulf (Table S2) is mostly connected to the physical weathering of Si-poor rocks, such as the basaltic and basalt-andesitic formations dominating the Cenozoic volcanism in the central part of Patagonia (Petschick et al., 1996; Corbella and Lara, 2008). Moreover, the smectite transported onto the Patagonian Shelf seems to be derived at selected locations from large morainic and glacio-fluvial Quaternary deposits (Marinoni et al., 1997). It should be noted that in the vicinity of the Gulf of San Jorge Basin, sedimentary and pyroclastic rocks represent potential sources of smectite (e.g., Las Flores Formation [Raigemborn et al., 2009]; Bajo Grande Formation [Dominguez et al., 2008]). Furthermore, because of the high proportions of smectite from the Bajo de Sarmiento (07NS1 and 08NS2) and the Deseado River (05PDN) samples, as well as its scattered proportions in the GSJ shore samples, the clay-mineral assemblages of riverine and terrestrial samples point to riverine and aeolian transport as the main suppliers of smectite to the gulf (Figure 6a,b).

The contrast between low to moderate proportions of illite and chlorite in the GSJ and higher contents in the shelf samples shows the influence of continental shelf inputs for these clay minerals in the gulf. The illite and chlorite are derived from Patagonian batholiths and low-grade metamorphic rocks located in Antarctica as well as in Patagonia (Petschick et al., 1996; Diekmann et al., 2000). The chlorite and illite are both transported from southern South America and the Drake Passage along the Argentinean continental shelf (Petschick et al., 1996). Once sediments settle on the shelf, the northward circulation controls their redistribution and transport (Palma et al., 2008). The inputs of illite and chlorite to the GSJ by the Patagonian Current flowing northward through the continental shelf from southern South America

are also supported by I+C enrichment in the eastern and southern parts of the gulf (Figure 6c).

In addition, the concentration of kaolinite in the gulf is very low despite the numerous outcrops of rhyolites and ignimbrites in eastern Patagonia, known as potential sources of residual kaolin deposits (Dominguez et al., 2008), and despite the significant amount of kaolinite in the Las Flores Formation, which overlies tablelands in some sectors of the San Jorge Gulf Basin (Raigemborn et al., 2009). This near absence of kaolinite may be due to dilution with much higher contents of smectite, illite, and chlorite.

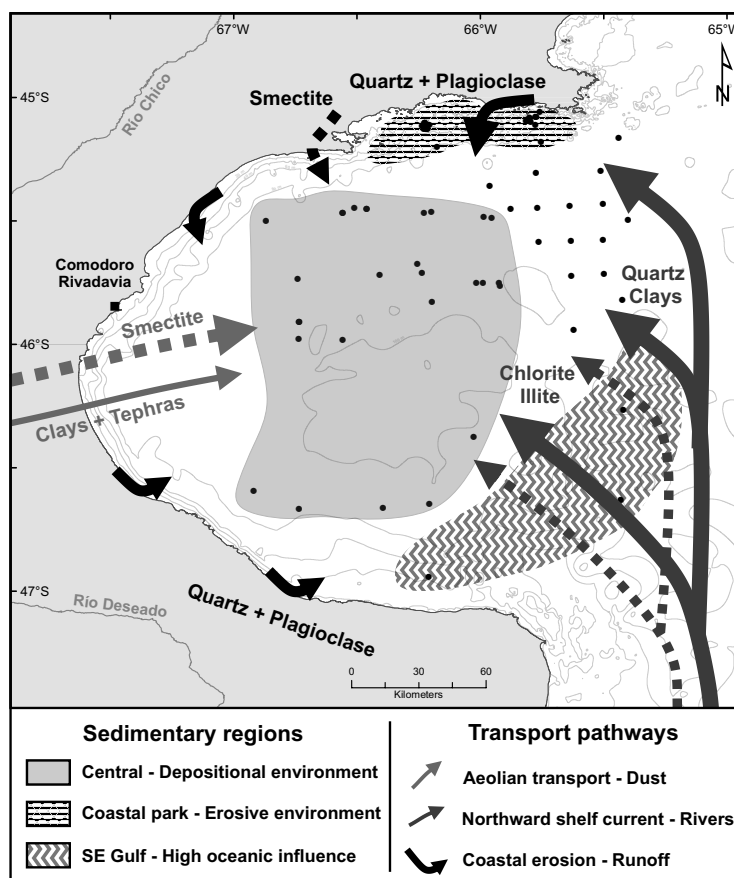
The major and minor element composition of surface sediments seems well correlated to the mineralogical properties in the GSJ. The PC-1 scores derived from elemental geochemistry signatures show patterns of distribution similar to those found in the elemental balance of major mineral groups in the gulf. The large positive PC-1 scores are associated with Fe, Mg, and V in areas enriched in clays, and conversely, negative PC-1 scores are associated with Ca, Si, Sr, Zr, Mn, Al, K, and P in areas enriched in quartz and feldspar (Figures 5d and 4a). Furthermore, numerous major elements reveal good correlations with various minerals identified in the gulf. For example, the major components Si, Fe, and Ca are linked to the presence of quartz ( $r^2 = 0.61$ ; Figure S4a), the sum of Fe-bearing minerals (notably, pyrite, magnetite, hematite, goethite, and maghemite) and clays ( $r^2 = 0.66$ ; Figure S4d), and plagioclase ( $r^2 = 0.77$ , Figure S4b), respectively. The relationship between mineralogy and major element composition supports and strengthens the use of quantitative X-ray diffraction to determine the mineralogy of sediment samples, as well as the use of SedUnMix to estimate the proportions of potential sources for the composition of surface sediments in the GSJ. In addition, the absence of clear differences in the geochemical classification between particles from suspended sediments from the water column and surface sediments

from the same site reveals that most of the material carried toward the surface water of the gulf settle on the bottom of the GSJ (Figure 5c).


## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of grain size, bulk and clay mineralogy, and the geochemistry of surficial sediments from the GSJ was used to highlight the nature and spatial variability of surface sediments. The results reveal and allow quantification of numerous factors, such as continental volcanism, local coastal inputs (i.e., erosion and runoff), dust and aeolian transport, hydrodynamic conditions, and the northward-flowing Patagonian Current, that impact sedimentation in the GSJ. Based on our interpretation, coupled with nonlinear mixing models (SedUnMix) of

bulk mineralogy, we suggest that the origin of sediments in the GSJ is 50% from external/oceanic inputs, 40% from the inner gulf shores, and 10% from dust (i.e., aeolian transport). In the central part of the GSJ, a region associated with a lower-energy depositional environment enriched in clays (Figure 7), the contributions of external/oceanic and dust inputs increase to 60% and 15%, respectively, whereas inner gulf shore inputs decrease to 25%. The marine park area in the northeastern part of the GSJ constitutes an erosive environment linked to high proportions of quartz, plagioclase, and smectite (Figure 7), with a large contribution from the inner gulf shores (70%) to sediment composition. Furthermore, the southeastern part of the gulf can also be considered a distinct sedimentary



**FIGURE 7.** Schematic map of the main sedimentary regions and transport pathways identified in the Gulf of San Jorge area. The sedimentary regions were determined according to the authors' interpretations and previous results from Fernández et al. (2003). The bulk terrigenous inputs are illustrated with filled arrows, and the terrigenous clay inputs are depicted with dotted arrows. Note that the spatial distribution of the samples does not follow a regular and homogeneous pattern, leading to potentially underrepresented areas.

region enriched in quartz, illite, and chlorite minerals and highly influenced by external/oceanic inputs related to the northward-flowing continental shelf current (85%; Figure 7). Finally, in the absence of current major fluvial inputs, these results highlight the combined contributions of various sediment sources and transport mechanisms that must be taken into account when investigating recent and past sediment distributions and their interactions with biogeochemical processes in the GSJ. It is necessary to keep in mind that fluvial inputs were significant (Kokot, 2004) during past glaciations and deglaciations following sea level changes and glacial meltwater pulses, thus adding other possible sediment sources to the sedimentary budget during these periods. 

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Supplementary materials are available online at <https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2018.401>.

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