Not the government, but powerful corporations determine climate policy in Brazil

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Amazon River. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Bribing a politician to gain influence or making sure friends end up in powerful positions: Brazilian energy companies use these power

strategies daily. This has a negative effect on Brazil's climate policy, Ph.D. candidate Anaide Ferraço discovered. She will defend her thesis, "Energy Governance in Brazil: Meeting the international agreements on climate change mitigation," on 9 November.

"The problem is that using power strategies runs through the veins of Brazilian society," says Ferraço. "Power strategies are used at every political level—national, state, regional and municipal—to maintain the status quo. And in terms of [energy](#), the status quo remains [fossil energy](#). There are clean energy projects such as wind and solar but the influence oligarchs have over policy means the impact of these projects is much lower than it could and should be."

Belo Monte Dam

A striking example of oligarchic influence on an energy project is the Belo Monte Dam in the Amazon rainforest. Although the first plans for this dam were conceived as early as 1975, it took more than 30 years for an agreement to be reached, partly because of the huge impact the dam would have on the environment, biodiversity and local community. It was concluded that the dam would generate much less energy than originally promised because [climate](#) change has reduced the amount of water that can generate energy. But despite the impacts the dam was built nevertheless and this was partly due to the involvement of oligarchs.

"The dam, which is now complete, is a typical example of political capture," says Ferraço. "Oligarchic companies promised much more than they could deliver, among others in order to gain an influence on other major energy projects in Brazil. The impact of the dam on people in the area was downplayed in the process. The reservoir emits a lot of harmful methane, the area has become more unsafe rather than richer and the living conditions of the indigenous people have worsened because it has

become harder for them to fish in the river."

Short-term solutions

Also of influence on Brazil's climate policy is its political system. As in the Netherlands, politicians have a four-year mandate, and consequently, says Ferraço, mainly focus on short-term solutions. They lean heavily on outdated green policies that don't effect real change. "The government just agreed to a project to drill for oil at the mouth of the Amazon River," says Ferraço. "As it is 500 kilometers from the Amazon, it is supposed to be safe. But it would be much better to invest in solar or wind power. Unfortunately, the companies that do that are very small and don't hold enough sway to get anything done in politics."

Hope for the future

Although Ferraço is not pleased with the government's continued reliance on oil and other fossil fuels such as gas, she is pleased with the current government led by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Under the former president, Jair Bolsonaro, the climate was not a priority and climate change was denied even by several key figures in his government. "Lula da Silva is really different in that regard because he takes climate change seriously and has people in his government who know what they are talking about. But it's not as though he can take immediate action. Many of Bolsonaro's followers are still in Congress and still have a lot of power. So, unfortunately, real changes in Brazilian climate policy will still take a long time."

Provided by Leiden University

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