



**Universiteit  
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# **The Amazon in Camouflage:**

## **The Effects of Militarised Environmental Governance under Bolsonaro**



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## Abstract

The 2018 presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil presented the biggest shock in civil-military relations since the country's return to democracy. The Brazilian Armed Forces gained significant influence in all layers of governance. In an age of rising awareness on the dangers of climate change, the Amazon rainforest, located primarily in Brazil, became a central concern for the international community as well as the militarised government under Bolsonaro. Combining the environmental threats of climate change with the militarisation of politics, this paper analyses how the militarisation of Brazil's environmental governance has affected environmental protection of the Amazon rainforest. It attempts to understand this green militarisation across different stages: its emergence, its maintenance, and its consequences. The analysis reveals that environmental issues cannot be separated from Brazil's militarisation and Bolsonaro's reactions to global climate action. It finds that green militarisation has contributed to three interconnected processes: a loop of militarisation, the decrease of the Amazon perceived as natural entity, and democratic decay. Each contributing to environmental degradation by harming the Amazon rainforest in the first place, and consequently hindering world-wide climate preservation. In the trend of green militarisation, climate change has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Keywords:** *Green militarisation, Environmental governance, Civil-military relations, Environmental populism*

## List of Abbreviations

COP	Conferences of Parties
GLO	Law and Order Assurance Operation ( <i>Operação de Garantia da Lei e da Ordem</i> )
IBAMA	Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources ( <i>Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Renováveis</i> )
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics ( <i>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</i> )
ICMBio	Chico Mendes Institute of Biodiversity Conservation ( <i>Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade</i> )
INPE	Brazil's National Institute for Space Research ( <i>Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais</i> )
MINUSTAH	United Nation's Stabilisation Mission in Haiti ( <i>Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti</i> )
PT	Brazilian Worker's Party ( <i>Partido dos Trabalhadores</i> )
RWP	Right-wing populism

# 1. Introduction

The 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil presented the biggest shock in civil-military relations since the country's return to democracy (Simon & Winter, 2019). After 30 years of being kept away from politics, the military is back on the top-political stage. Facilitated by Bolsonaro's pro-military view, the turbulent political landscape, and the intense military popularity among the population, the Bolsonaro administration has become significantly militarised across all layers of governance (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021). Simultaneously to the militarisation process in Brazil, the late 2010s marked a time of increasing worldwide awareness of the dangers of climate change. This has elevated the prominence of the world's largest rainforest, located for most part on the Brazilian territory. The Amazon rainforest absorbs millions of tonnes of carbon each year, making it an important carbon sink helping to keep the earth's temperatures low. Deforestation causes stored carbon to be released into the air, heating up the planet and disrupting water systems. Forest conservation of the Amazon, therefore, has a key role in mitigating climate change (Pereira et al., 2020).

By combining the threat of deforestation with the militarisation of politics, this paper specifically analyses the effects of the militarisation of Brazil's environmental governance on the environmental protection of the Amazon rainforest. The Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022) governed the environment based on an anti-climate agenda, placing more emphasis on ensuring the nation's economic prosperity than environmental protection. While the military reinforced Bolsonaro's position on national sovereignty, they were very careful not to deny the existence of climate change. Nevertheless, the Bolsonaro administration has been characterised by the systematic dismantling of policies to protect the environment (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020).

Alongside the militarisation process that had already initiated with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, the urgency of climate change provided legitimacy for the deployment of troops to the Amazon, the replacement of participatory stances with military leadership, and the expanding of budgets. The militarisation of environmental governance, referred to as green militarisation, was characterised by the weaponization of the Amazon rainforest. The Amazon became a weapon for the administration's exploitation campaign, led by understandings of the Amazon as an economic, geographical, and national asset. This contributed to a loop of militarisation, democratic decay, and ultimately environmental degradation due to a disbalance in civil-military relations.

Based on the assumption that Bolsonaro and the military colluded to disarm Brazil's protective environmental frameworks, the objective of this paper is to link the development of civil-military relations in young democracies to the militarisation of environmental governance by exemplifying how green militarisation emerges, how it is sustained, and what the consequences are of this military involvement in environmental governance.

Brazil forms a relevant case study to achieve this objective for multiple reasons. First, Brazil is one of the countries that has only recently transitioned from military rule to democracy, making the democratic government's control over the military extra challenging and dynamic. Second, Brazil harbours more than 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest, the world's largest rainforest and critical in mitigating harmful effects of climate change. Third, the chosen timeframe marks the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, who has been especially notorious for his position on the protection of the Amazon and combatting climate change. Coupled with his outspoken admiration for the military, the rule of the Bolsonaro administration in times of climate change is an interesting case to analyse the development and wider implications of green militarisation.

In doing so, this paper attempts to address what Mason (2018) calls a mechanical puzzle. This translates into the following research question: *How has green militarisation under Bolsonaro affected environmental protection of the Amazon?* By means of a thorough review of existing research on the topic, including academic articles and reports, the question will be answered. To establish a theoretical framework, the selected articles encompass a range of in-dept topical analyses, as well as literature reviews on topics such as civil-military relations, environmental governance, political forest, populism, democracy, and green militarisation. These works serve as a foundation for the theoretical lens through which this analysis is approached. Additionally, case-specific academic articles are selected to provide important insights into the Brazilian political landscape, the ascent of Bolsonaro and the military, the relationship between them, and the environmental policy dismantling under the Bolsonaro administration. Furthermore, several key reports are examined to enrich the empirical understanding of the research topic. These reports include *Climate and Security in Brazil* (Barrett et al., 2020), analyses by non-profit investigative organisation InSight Crime (Jones, 2021) and a report by Global Witness (2020) on the threats against environmental land defenders. They serve to provide additional empirical information on the topic at hand. In order to enrich the contextual background, various news articles are referenced to highlight the debate in the international arena.

By examining how the triangle of military, civil authority and the environment interact and to what results this interaction leads, this paper attempts to contribute to the field of green conflict studies. Where traditional conflict studies tend to focus on simplistic and one-dimensional causal relationships, this paper further gives depth to the civil-military-environment nexus by looking past the isolated ecological character of natural entities. It examines a broader variety of dimensions in which nature shapes and is shaped by civil-military relations power dynamics. Furthermore, the paper attempts to bridge the fields of political ecology and green conflict studies by broadening the understanding of green militarisation to include the impact of inserting approaches that do not intend to protect the natural environment. The way green militarisation is interpreted in this paper, its main purpose concerns the insertion of militaries or military approaches in environmental contexts. In this, it does not matter if the militarised actor's intention is to protect or not to protect since green militarisation considers militarised approaches to the environment counterproductive regardless of the intention.

The culmination of this analysis has yielded the answers to the research and sub-questions, indicating that green militarisation under the Bolsonaro administration contributed to three interconnected processes: a loop of militarisation, the decrease of the Amazon perceived as natural entity, and democratic decay. First, green militarisation has intensified the vicious cycle of military dependency resulting in climate change becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy increasing environmental deterioration. Second, propelled by right-wing populism, the natural dimension of the Amazon becomes less prominent as other dimensions are weaponised to fuel the administration's rhetoric, and consequently, advance their political agenda. Finally, green militarisation accelerated democratic decay which is especially harmful for environmental conservation when due to military involvement in environmental governance. These findings indicate that the Amazon's natural character has become intrinsically linked to populism and civil-military power relations, making it too short-sighted to solely focus on climate change. However, although exacerbated by the three processes, it is climate change that makes the implications of green militarisation an urgent cause to tackle.

To present these findings in a structured manner and understand the military's role in environmental governance and environmental decay, the paper is built-up as follows. The first chapter lies the contextual foundation of the paper, by examining the relationship between Bolsonaro and the Brazilian Armed Forces, both during their ascent and during Bolsonaro's term as Brazil's President. The concept of civil-military relations will be introduced and used to assess how the developments laid the ground for the militarisation

of politics. The second chapter will zoom into one of the political issues of central concern to the Bolsonaro administration: its governance of the environment. By connecting militarisation to environmental governance, the concept of green militarisation in relation to Brazil will be examined. Finally, in the third chapter, the role of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil's militarised environmental governance will be analysed. Propelled by a populist environmental governance the Amazon has come to play a central role under Bolsonaro, fulfilling different roles exceeding its purely passive and natural dimension. This third chapter will examine the different understandings and dimensions of the Amazon and how it has been weaponised to advance the administration's militarised environmental agenda.



## Chapter 2: The Civil-Military Power Balance under Bolsonaro: A Militarised Government

Through the lens of civil-military relations, this chapter seeks to offer insights into the military's increased role in Brazil's recent socio-political landscape under Bolsonaro (2019-2022). By delving into this topic, this chapter seeks to answer the following question: How do civil-military relations shape the return of the military to politics under the Bolsonaro administration? To answer this question, the chapter introduces the concept of civil-military relations. By means of this analytical lens, three interconnected processes in Brazil's recent socio-political landscape will be elaborated upon: the rise of Jair Bolsonaro, the three crises, and the return of the military's prestige.

### 2.1 Balancing Civil-Military Relations Matters

The field of civil-military relations examines how nations attempt to deal with the one organisation capable of overturning that nation's government: the military. It contains a civil component, comprising of the civilian authority and society, and a military component (Pion-Berlin & Dudley, 2020: 15). The military, or more broadly the armed forces<sup>1</sup>, possess unparalleled coercive power to ensure the integrity of the national territory. They "...defend interests and resources; protect the country's citizens and property; and guarantee the sovereignty of the nation"<sup>2</sup> (O Estado-Maior Conjunto das Forças Armadas, n.d.). Every state aims to, on the one hand, utilize the professional power of its military to safeguard essential national security interests, while, on the other hand, taking precautions to prevent the misuse of this power. This involves a constant exchange of negotiations and compromise between those that have been democratically elected and those who have the monopoly on the use of violence (Bruneau, 2006: 3). In order to confront this challenge, it is crucial for governments to be equipped and motivated to effectively lead, while ensuring that the military does not interfere in politics (Pion-Berlin & Dudley, 2020).

As previously hinted to, the field of civil-military relations mostly operates in the realm of democratic governance. Civil-military relations assume that democracies are the optimal form of governance and, for democracies to flourish, it is fundamental that the military remains adequately subordinate to civilian authority (Burk, 2002; Pion-Berlin, 2006; Polga-Hecimovich, 2023). This is important since military values and practice can be conflicting with democratic values<sup>3</sup>. Thus, a "proper" balance must be found between democratic civilian leadership and military effectiveness to ensure successful democratic governance. Essentially, this means that civil-military relations are in balance when the military is subordinate to the civilian authority. However, what is considered proper changes from country to country and from era to era (Burke, 2002: 8).

The Brazilian case is a schoolbook example demonstrating that civil-military relations are dynamic and susceptible to unforeseen shifts (Pion-Berlin & Dudley, 2020). Table 1 illustrates Brazil's intricate

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<sup>1</sup> 'Armed forces' and 'military' are terms that are often used interchangeably, but there is a subtle distinction between them. Whereas 'armed forces' refers to the collective military organisation and encompass all branches involved in defence, 'military' generally concerns the structure of the institution, including its personnel, equipment, strategies, and operations involved in armed conflict or the defence of a nation. The military instrument responsible for the defence of Brazil is constituted by the Armed Forces, or *Forças Armadas do Brasil*, composed by the Brazilian Navy, Army, and Air Force (O Estado-Maior Conjunto das Forças Armadas, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Own translation of "defender os interesses e os recursos naturais, industriais e tecnológicos brasileiros; proteger os cidadãos e os bens do país; garantir a soberania da nação." (O Estado-Maior Conjunto das Forças Armadas, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> For this paper, democratic values are understood as Burk's (2002: 8) explanation: "... democratic values include the idea that those with authority ought to be elected representatives of the people, and that these representatives ought to exercise ultimate authority over the uniformed military elite."

relationship with democratic governance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked by a series of transitions between democratic and authoritarian regimes instigated by a disbalance in civil-military relations (Daly, 2020: 208-209).

**Table 1.** Brazil’s shifting political landscapes (1889-1985)

Type of governance	Time (Years)	Events
Democracy	1889-1930	Oligarchic government during the First Republic.
Authoritarian Rule	1930-1937	Military Junta in power after revolution. Transition to the Second Republic.
Authoritarian Rule	1937-1945	President Vargas establishes the “New State” and rules as a dictator.
Democracy	1945-1964	Fragile democratic period, Vargas (1951-1954) rules as constitutionally elected president.
Authoritarian Rule	1964-1985	Two decades of direct military rule.

Source: own elaboration based on Daly (2020: 208-209)

As Brazil has experienced multiple times, re-establishing democratic control over the armed forces is especially challenging during democratic transitions. Emerging democracies must not only deal with the risk of military interference in the democratisation process, but also redefine the military’s role within society. This includes re-establishing a balanced division of power between military and civilians, as well as developing institutional frameworks for oversight of the defence establishment to ensure its effective functioning (Pion-Berlin & Dudley, 2020: 3). Bruneau and Goetze (2006: 71) describe that the finishing touch designed to ‘guard the guardians’ in civil-military relations is considered the creation of a Ministry of Defence that aims “to ensure that policy preferences get translated into defence actions” and power relations and hierarchies are redefined (Pion-Berlin & Dudley, 2020: 13).

The shock in civil-military relations that consolidated the return of the Brazilian Armed Forces to politics is characterised by three interconnected processes at play in Brazil’s recent socio-political history: 1) the rise of Jair Bolsonaro, 2) the Brazilian three crises, and 3) the return of the military’s prestige. The diversity of these processes shows that the emphasis on the military’s agency to undermine governments is not the full story. Harig (2021) reveals a gap in the current literature on civil-military relations that scholars have only recently begun to address - but is reality in several Latin American countries. Where the standard for studying increased military power is focused on the military’s initiative, the case at hand shows that the impact of political leaders such as Bolsonaro, and the consequences of a population requesting more military power, is tremendous on civil-military relations. This leads to a militarisation of politics by popular demand, as an increased role for the military becomes a rational choice for decision-makers.

## 2.2 The Rise of Jair Bolsonaro

### 2.2.1 Bolsonaro’s Personal Relationship with the Military

Growing up during the military dictatorship, Bolsonaro’s personal experiences caused him to develop an obsessive interest for the military from a young age<sup>4</sup>. Despite serving in the military for 15 years and becoming an artillery captain, his relationship with the Armed Forces, especially its leadership, has always been complex and multifaceted. From the early 1980s Bolsonaro regularly came into conflict with the

<sup>4</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1970 an impactful shootout took place between guerrillas and police forces near the main square of the small Brazilian town Eldorado Paulista. After the shootout, the military took over the town, searching houses and interviewing locals. Jair Bolsonaro, then a 15-years-old boy, lived close to the main square and was deeply affected by the events that unfolded. He sympathised with wounded policemen and developed an obsessive interest in the military (Lapper, 2021: 20-22).

military leadership because of salary frustrations, even having to serve 15 days in military penitentiary. In 1988 he transferred to the reserve and started a career as politician (Lapper, 2021: 23-24; Simon & Winter, 2019: 12-13).

Despite his disagreements with the leadership, Bolsonaro continuously demonstrated his unwavering support for the Armed Forces. In his political career, he positioned himself as a staunch critic of what he considered the neglect of the military's rank and file within Brazil's democracy. This generated significant support from low-ranking military personnel, police, and firefighters. Additionally, Bolsonaro openly praised the Armed Forces' record during the military regime and advocated for the return of power to the generals. Significantly, during that period, the leadership of the Armed Forces, as well as the generals who had held power during the military regime, openly displayed their disapproval of Bolsonaro (Lapper, 2021; Simon & Winter, 2019).

Bolsonaro became known for his controversial ideas that extended beyond the military. For example, expressions about women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and democracy (Lapper, 2021: 25). Despite these incidents that garnered media attention, he was considered a marginal politician with little influence. This made it particularly astonishing that Bolsonaro defied expectations by rapidly gaining popularity, ultimately emerging as one of Brazil's most favoured politicians (Daly, 2020: 221; Simon & Winter, 2019: 13).

### **2.2.2 The Road to Presidency: The Three Crises**

The unexpected rise of Jair Bolsonaro as a prominent political figure in Brazil began around 2016. Bolsonaro capitalized on three significant crises that were intensifying within Brazilian society: an economic crisis, a political crisis, and a moral crisis.

The economic crisis emerged after 2010 when the Brazilian economy encountered significant challenges (Daly, 2020: 210). The country experienced high inflation rates and rising public debt (Solano, 2020: 211). The economic backdrop coincided with Workers' Party's (PT<sup>5</sup>) President Dilma Rousseff's latter half of her first term. While she was re-elected for a second term by a small margin, public discontent was bigger than ever before clearing grounds for a political crisis (Lapper, 2021).

The political crisis in Brazil was marked by two significant events that occurred simultaneously: the impeachment of President Rousseff and the unfolding of a major anti-corruption investigation known as *Lava Jato* or *Operation Car Wash*. The impeachment process against Rousseff stemmed from allegations of fiscal misconduct, leading to public outrage and widespread protests. The proceedings were highly contentious, with Rousseff's supporters arguing that it amounted to a political coup. At the same time, the *Lava Jato* investigation uncovered a vast web of corruption of unprecedented proportions, implicating high-ranking politicians and influential figures across the political spectrum (Daly, 2020; Lapper, 2021; Solano, 2020). Among them was the PT's former President Lula da Silva. By early, 2018 Lula was still first in the polls in the run for presidency, but when a *Lava Jato*-related sentence put him in jail, Bolsonaro became frontrunner (Simon & Winter, 2019: 14). *Lava Jato*'s revelations caused widespread rejection of the PT further eroding public trust in the political establishment and fuelling demands for greater accountability and transparency (Daly, 2020; Lapper, 2021; Solano, 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> PT refers to the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, which translates to the Workers' Party. It is a left-wing political party in Brazil that emerged as a significant political force advocating for workers' rights, social justice, and economic reforms. It gained prominence under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, commonly known as Lula, who served as Brazil's president from 2003 to 2010 and has resumed office in 2023.

Brazil's political and economic crisis created a sense of disillusionment and frustration among the population, leading to a moral crisis within the country. The deepening economic difficulties, accompanied by widespread corruption scandals and a perceived lack of accountability among political leaders, eroded public trust in the existing democratic institutions. In this context, conservative perspectives that emphasised traditional values, including religion and a strong military, gained traction among segments of the population. This further fueled the idea of a strong military capable to restore law and order, addressing the perceived breakdown of social order and rising crime rates (Solano, 2020: 216-220). The implications of this development for civil-military relations must not be underestimated given that the loss of a government's legitimacy is considered one of the most important incentives for a military to stage a coup or interfere in politics to ease social tensions (Nordlinger, 1977; Pion-Berlin, 2020).

### **2.2.3 Beef, Bible & Bullets – Bolsonaro's Support Base**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2018, Bolsonaro won the presidential elections with 55 per cent of the vote (Daly, 2020: 199). Amid the crises, Bolsonaro was perceived as an outsider capable of confronting a deeply corrupted political framework. His controversial speeches gave him the perception of a sincere and authentic individual, channelling the collective frustration and anger towards the political system (Solano, 2020: 213). He brought together a wide-ranging conservative coalition, uniting individuals who were dissatisfied with Brazil's leftist rule under the PT. To symbolise this support base, Richard Lapper (2021) coined the term "Beef, Bible, and Bullets". Initially used to describe the three conservative congressional lobbies that had a significant influence on Brazilian politics since the restoration of democracy, the term has now evolved into a widely recognised representation of the foundational elements comprising Bolsonaro's support base.

Firstly, "Beef" reflects the beef lobby, also known as *ruralistas*. This lobby represents powerful farmers in Brazil who advocate for greater freedom to cultivate the country's abundant land and water resources to increase food production (Lapper, 2021: 12). The second term, "Bible", represents the Bible lobby which is closely associated with the growing and financially influential evangelical churches (Lapper, 2021: 13). The third term, "Bullet", refers to a group of politicians advocating for expanded gun ownership and a tough approach to crime in Brazil. Over time, it has become closely associated with the interests of the military and Brazil's police forces, particularly officers seeking less constrained methods to combat criminals (Lapper, 2021: 13). This final group resonates well with Bolsonaro, who throughout his career, has expressed support for the military (dictatorship) and restoring order to the state, employing any necessary means to achieve it (Daly, 2020: 221). Despite being dismissed by other politicians and the media as an eccentric and inconsequential figure, his pro-military views resonated with ordinary Brazilians who, overall, held less opposition toward the armed forces than their elected representatives did (Lapper, 2021: 13-14). Right before the 2018 elections, the Armed Forces were even evaluated as the most reliable institution in Brazil by 78 percent of the population (Solano, 2020: 219).

In terms of civil-military relations this public admiration for the military is worrying. When a public wants the military to be more influential, it fosters an environment in which politicians prioritise aligning with public sentiments rather than taking a leadership role. Consequently, a larger portion of resources is allocated to the defence budget to support military personnel, resulting in a depletion of funds for the diplomatic corps and State Department (Brooks, 2016). Ultimately, it is not voters, but the armed forces who decide whether a regime falls (Polga-Hecimovich, 2023: 10).

The period of Bolsonaro's rise to power shows the first symptoms of democratic decay through a disruption in civil-military relations. Besides the political landscape creating an environment for public admiration for the military, the three crises also provided an opportunity to rise for a figure like Bolsonaro, who explicitly

undermines democracy by openly expressing his contempt and advocating for a return of the Armed Forces to power. His controversial speeches and the content of his campaign cleared the way for the military to enter politics and disrupt civil-military relations.

## **2.3 The Changing Image of the Armed Forces in Brazil**

### **2.3.1 The Transition to Democracy**

To explain the rise of the military to politics and how it shaped its relationship with the Bolsonaro administration, it is crucial to understand how the Brazilian Armed Forces positioned themselves after they were removed from power in the mid 1980s. The transition to democracy happened gradually during a process of slow self-dismantling, called *abertura*, that was initiated by the top of military regime in fears of an internal enemy.

Thus, in 1985 the Brazilian military left power following a lengthy transition that was primarily orchestrated, albeit not entirely controlled, by the generals. In the first 15 years of democracy, efforts were made to gradually dismantle the authoritarian state. In accordance with literature on civil-military relations, the transition was considered finalised with the creation of the Ministry of Defence in 1999 (Simon & Winter, 2019: 4). In the years that followed, the military was mostly kept away from centres of power (Jenne & Martínez, 2022).

Having left power and becoming obsolete in terms of defence, the government had to find ways to occupy the military and re-establish the balance in civil-military relations. On the other hand, the military also needed to reinvent itself to maintain privileges and power. The solution was to broaden the military's tasks – a process that was not unusual in an era with little direct interstate conflict. At a time where the Brazilian government lacked the means to fight internal criminality, poverty, and social inequalities, the military was deployed where civilian state capacity fell short (Jenne & Martínez, 2022: 58-59). This translated into the military being tasked with providing security for major events such as the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, as well as combating drug cartels in Rio de Janeiro (Simon & Winter, 2019: 10).

The military has largely embraced these responsibilities with little opposition, reflecting its historical sense of being responsible for the protection of the state and maintaining order and stability. Nevertheless, using the military for internal missions challenges civil-military relations as they provide opportunities for military leaders to involve themselves in domestic politics. Among scholars it is widely recognised that internal use of the military negatively affects the quality of democracy. One crucial aspect of this is that operations that involve combat in urban areas might be successful in military terms, but in political terms the operation is failed if the hearts and minds in such areas are not won. Therefore, civilians must maintain control over sensitive operations (Pion-Berlin, 2006: xi). Furthermore, internal missions concern the challenge of determining when the provisional internal deployment should come to an end. As societies begin to view extraordinary measures as normal, the state may neglect the development of alternative capacities, and the military incorporates new operational experiences into its organizational structure and role conception. This leads to a vicious cycle of military dependency, deteriorating the already fragile political controls over the armed forces in a new democracy (Harig et al., 2021; Jenne & Martínez, 2022).

### 2.3.2 The Return of the Military

Partly because of the multidimensionality in the military's tasks, the profile of the Brazilian Armed Forces started to change in the 2000s. Throughout the PT years<sup>6</sup> three significant events played a pivotal role in shaping the Armed Forces, boosting the institution's reputation.

A first decisive event was Brazil's decision to head the United Nation's Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The Haiti mission was unparalleled in terms of scale, and it held large political significance. Brazilian troops constituted the largest contingent within the peacekeeping forces and all force commanders of MINUSTAH from 2004 to 2017 were Brazilian generals (Simon & Winter, 2019: 10). The perceived success of the mission both nationally and internationally resulted in an enhanced reputation for the Brazilian military, bolstered soldier morale, and reignited a sense of purpose within the military (Simon & Winter, 2019: 10).

In terms of civil-military relations, external military missions have usually been portrayed as advantageous for civilian supremacy as they keep the military engaged beyond the borders of a nation-state (Harig et al., 2021: 2). Nevertheless, in recent years this advantageous effect is increasingly disputed. Harig (2023) found that previously existing democratic conditions greatly influence the effects peacekeeping missions have on civil-military relations. It is argued that, if armed forces already perceive involvement in politics as suitable, it is more likely that they use their experiences in peace missions for such purposes. In Brazil, the latter is the case, leading to the militarisation of politics and a deterioration of civil-military relations (Harig, 2023: 13).

Another pivotal moment shaping the Armed Forces surrounded the establishment of a National Truth Commission by President Rousseff in 2011. The Truth Commission attempted to investigate all human rights violations committed by the Brazilian state since 1946, including the periods under military rule. While the efforts of the Truth Commission appeared to confirm the existence of complete civilian control, behind the scenes generals expressed frustration over being stonewalled. The (nonbinding) report following the investigation further fuelled discontent within the Armed Forces towards the PT (Daly, 2020: 224; Simon & Winter, 2019:10-11).

The final event having tremendous impact on the Armed Forces was the Lava Jato investigation. Similar to its impact on Brazilian society and politics, the discovery of the multi-billion-dollar corruption scheme convinced large sections of the military that corruption had irreversibly overtaken the political establishment in Brazil. Lava Jato played a crucial role in solidifying the anti-PT sentiment, becoming a defining factor in the Armed Forces' perspectives on politics (Simon & Winter, 2019: 11).

In addition to its impact on the Armed Forces, the priorly mentioned events caused the decade's long taboo on military involvement in politics to diminish. Since the establishment of the Truth Commission, there has been an increasing occurrence of public displays of military defiance<sup>7</sup>. By doing so, the military extended its political influence and undermined the government's capacity to exercise its political authority (Pion-

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<sup>6</sup> Generally, the PT years are understood as the period extending from Lula's inauguration in January 2003 to the mid-2016 impeachment of Rousseff.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in 2017, General Mourão, who was then occupying one of the top positions in the Army, sparked controversy when he asserted that the high command would not hesitate to consider a 'military intervention' if the political problem persisted. Additionally, the day prior to a pivotal Supreme Court ruling regarding Lula, at-the-time army commander Eduardo Villas Bôas published a tweet that was widely interpreted as a warning that any judicial decision perceived as unfavourable or failing to hold Lula accountable for his crimes could potentially provoke the military (Simon & Winter, 2019: 12)

Berlin & Dudley, 2020). Consequently, this threatens civilian control over the military and democracy (Polga-Hecimovich, 2023: 12).

## **2.4 Bolsonaro & the Military: A Symbiotic Relationship?**

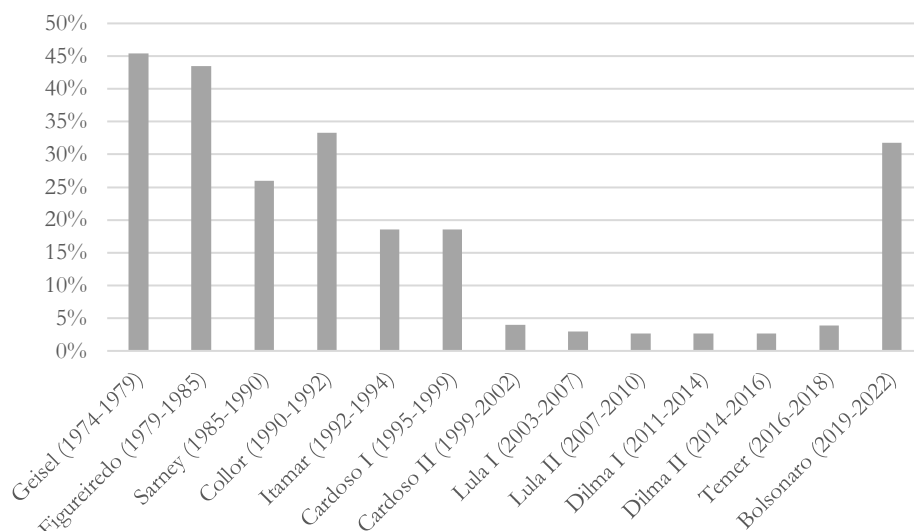
During the period preceding the 2018 elections, a distinctive scenario unfolded characterised by the emergence of two prominent actors gaining significant popularity: Bolsonaro, as a candidate for presidency, and the military, as an institution with regained prestige. This paved the way for a strategic alliance between the two, each capitalising on the distinct advantages offered by the other.

The military expressed strong discontent with the leftist civilian leadership and perceived itself as the only force capable of guiding the country towards progress. An alliance with Bolsonaro could provide the political influence they desired. While several generals were still skeptical about supporting Bolsonaro due to his trade union activities in the 1980s, having the PT as a common enemy convinced that Bolsonaro was their best bet to defeat the left (Lapper, 2021). Bolsonaro, on the other hand, sought to capitalise on the military's reputation, using their support to bolster his own administration. Given his distrust of traditional political parties, Bolsonaro relied on the military to fill crucial bureaucratic positions. True to expectations, upon assuming office, Bolsonaro elevated the military's role, positioning them at the forefront of government and political affairs in Brasília (Simon & Winter, 2019: 14-15).

For large segments of the Armed Forces, Bolsonaro's inauguration symbolised the restoration of the natural order, placing them back in their 'rightful position'. There was a predominant sentiment among army officials that the force had developed to be more democratic, disciplined and connected to the world. Moreover, the military, which has consistently seen itself as the 'enlightened protectors of Brazil's long-term well-being' immune to the corrupt desires of elected officials, now found itself in a position to lead the nation through a protracted political crisis and the most severe recession it has ever experienced. (Simon & Winter, 2019: 15).

The most important indicator for the increased military power under the Bolsonaro administration is illustrated in Graph 1, which demonstrates the percentage of (retired) military officials holding ministerial positions in the different government administrations. It is clearly visible how the trend of keeping the military away from the centres of power in the 2000s has been reversed under Bolsonaro's presidency. The military members under Bolsonaro's governance encompass not just Bolsonaro's running mate, General Mourão, but also more than 6000 retired or active military personnel in lower levels of the administration (Lapper, 2021: 219). At one point during the administration, the military controlled 22 ministries. Notably, military officers held more top positions in the Bolsonaro government than during the military dictatorship (Hunter & Vega, 2021: 337). Given that a force without accountability to voters has such a prominent role in the civilian government stresses the implications of this development for democracy (Bruneau, 2020; Daly, 2020).

**Graph 1. Percentage of Military Ministers in Each Administration**



Source: own representation of Simon & Winter (2019: 4)

Furthermore, under the Bolsonaro administration 80 percent of the defence budget is allocated to personnel. According to Silva & Teixeira (2021) this is a high cost compared to other countries. This large segment destined for military personnel is directly linked to worrying effect of an increase in public admiration for the military that has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. It leads to a depletion of funds for diplomatic and non-military causes and increases military dependency (Brooks, 2016; Dall’Agnol & Dall’Agnol, 2023).

#### **2.4.1 Cracks in the Alliance of Convenience**

Although the Armed Forces and Bolsonaro mutually benefited from each other’s support, the alliance did not result in the perfect ‘happily ever after’ scenario that both had envisioned beforehand. In addition to being constructive, the relationship was also volatile (Simon & Winter, 2019: 23).

First, it must be emphasised that the military as an institution was not in power. As Bolsonaro’s Vice President Mourão stated during the campaign: “It’s not the soldiers (who will govern Brazil), but two Brazilian citizens who were soldiers ... The Armed Forces will continue to fulfill what is established by the Constitution” (Simon & Winter, 2019: 4). Moreover, it is important to note that the military is not a monolithic entity. There were differing viewpoints within the military regarding the future direction of Brazil and how to collaborate with Bolsonaro.

Despite not being in power as institution, the military’s interests were represented by military officials in the government. These officials predominantly formed part of a more pragmatic group of ministers and government officials that aimed for economic recovery and preserving Brazil’s sovereignty in global affairs. Vice President Mourão and Augusto Heleno, a retired four-star general who is considered Bolsonaro’s most trusted advisor and served as the Minister of Institutional Security, are widely regarded as the leaders of this groups of pragmatists.



This pragmatic point of view frequently resulted in clashes with the more radical voices in the administration, including Bolsonaro's sons<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, the military ministers frequently served as a check on the government's more extreme voices, limiting their influence and preventing radical measures from being implemented. This aligns with the longstanding perception of the Brazilian Armed Forces, viewing themselves as a moderating force responsible for preserving stability and continuity in the country (Simon & Winter, 2019).

Overall, the military played a crucial role in supporting the government in multiple capacities, including its communication with the press. However, conflicts regarding the influence and appropriate role of the military wing frequently became public and appeared to escalate as the administration progressed. Bolsonaro grew increasingly annoyed by the military positioning itself as Brazil's tutelary institution, imposing its policy agenda and attempts to alter his governing style (Dall'Agnol & Dall'Agnol, 2023: 140). Particularly, he was bothered by public contradictions from the Vice President. In June 2019, Bolsonaro dismissed three senior officials from the military wing within a week, which was interpreted as a deliberate effort to assert his authority over the military. The military, on the other hand, had also concerns for the future of their carefully nurtured image as a morally upright entity. An image that could potentially be significantly tarnished if Bolsonaro failed to adopt a more statesman-like, disciplined, and less divisive approach to governance (Simon & Winter, 2019: 22-23).

## **2.5 The Militarisation of Brazil's Politics**

The wide variety of prompts for the military to increase its power, demonstrates that the return of the military to politics was consolidated through complex dynamics of the military's agency and initiative to interfere in politics, but also certainly due to a pull effect from both the civilian society and Bolsonaro as a political leader. Bolsonaro openly advocated for military power and provided the opportunity for the military to enter the government. Furthermore, the three crises consolidated the anti-PT sentiment both in society and the military, heightening the perceived urgency for the military to 'lead Brazil out of the crises'. Additionally, the crises put all other governance institutions in disgrace, resulting in an exceptional popular trust in the military making it publicly acceptable - and even desired - for the military to return to politics. Finally, the gained prestige and trust for the military was further promoted through its participation in (perceived) successful internal and external mission, preparing them for political tasks.

The significant level of public trust placed in the Armed Forces has granted them a position of influence and a valuable alliance with the Bolsonaro administration. The relationship between Bolsonaro and the military was defined by volatility, with moments of constructive collaboration. The constructive character of the alliance openly led to a militarisation of Brazil's politics, recognisable through the high number of military officials in the government, the consequent greater budgeting for military matters, and the transferring of functions to the military that are traditionally aimed for civilians. This transfer of functions has diminished civilian domination over the military, indicating a distortion of civil-military relations (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021).

The volatility of the alliance is characterised by the military consistently undermining civilian authority whenever there are disagreements. After all, 'democratically controlled militarisation' must not be confused with the idea that elected politicians maintain control throughout the process. In reality, when governments initiate the militarisation of politics, intricate dynamics unfold in which military officers might find

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<sup>8</sup> Bolsonaro's three elder sons, Carlos, Flavio, and Eduardo exerted significant influence in the Bolsonaro administration. Some ministers emerged through their links. Ideologically "they were instinctively distrustful of political pragmatism, authoritarian in their instincts and always looking to promote Bolsonaro through social media". They were also strong advocates for improving ties with the United States and Trump (Lapper, 2021: 217)

momentum to broaden their power at the expense of elected politicians (Harig, 2021: 478). The Brazilian military secured this power through involvement in policy disputes and acts of defiance outside established channels. Hereby, the military challenged the government's authority and expanded its own political influence.

In several instances, this chapter has hinted that the redivision of civil-military power leading to militarisation has also resulted in democratic decay on various fronts. Firstly, the military is a force that is not accountable to voters, diminishing popular power in a democracy (Bruneau, 2020; Daly, 2020). In Brazil, this has given the military greater power to execute their own agenda impacting, for example, the distribution of government budgets to military purposes. Furthermore, the undermining of civilian authority is a clear example of eroding power of the democratically elected President. Where the military is convinced that they have become more democratic, there continues to be a prevalent perception within the military that the government lacks the capacity to maintain social order, perpetuating the belief that there is a power vacuum and justifying their increased involvement (Battaglino, 2021). As a result, the delicate balance of civil-military relations in Brazil has faced challenges, leading to a gradual erosion of democratic values.

## **Chapter 3:**

# **The Militarisation of Environmental Governance**

The previous chapter has traced the changes in civil-military relations in Brazil's political landscape leading up to the militarisation of politics under the Bolsonaro administration. While the correlation between civil-military relations and militarisation is evident in the case of Brazil, the main distortion in the civil-military power balance occurs when the political issues most relevant for the nation are attributed to the military (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021). The governance of the environment is one of the political issues of central concern to the Bolsonaro administration. Therefore, the current chapter will connect militarisation and environmental governance by delving into the concept of green militarisation answering the following question: 'How does green militarisation manifest within Brazil's environmental governance?'

### **3.1 Governing the Environment**

The term 'environmental governance' is closely connected to the notion of democracy as it refers to plural participation in decision-making (De la De la Mora-De la Mora, 2022). Environmental governance concerns how a plurality of actors govern natural resources and environmental problems (Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; Bodin et al., 2020). The acceleratingly visible effects of climate change have given a new dimension to this already broad and deep field, heightening its profile in many countries (De La De La Mora-De La Mora, 2022).

Addressing environmental issues, including climate change, is considered one of the most pressing policy issues of our time, needing significant and costly changes in the behaviour of all actors (Böhmelt, 2021: 98). Therefore, adaptation to climate change is increasingly seen as an effort that exceeds local action. On the one hand, because local action may have implications elsewhere, and on the other hand because a multiplicity of actors, operating across all scales, is required to address the vulnerabilities that climate change exposes to our planet. The assumption that transnational actors can make up for climate deficits has activated international movement towards the achievement of globally agreed climate goals (Chan & Amling, 2019). This global cooperation has led, for instance, to the 2015 Paris Agreement and various climate Conferences of Parties (COPs).

However, the urgency of climate mitigation and adaptation does not mean that all actors exercising environmental governance actively work towards achieving this goal (Ofstehage, Wolford & Borrás, 2022: 678). In acknowledging this diversity of objectives concerning environmental governance, this paper uses Lima & Da Costa's (2022: 510) definition, capturing the essence of the research field: "Environmental governance ... refers to how human activities conserve or impact the environment and the actions taken (or not taken) to govern that relationship".

Given the geographical location of Brazil, harbouring the preponderance of the Amazon rainforest, it is no surprise that the question on how to govern the environment is a huge topic of discussion in the country. The Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, absorbs millions of tonnes of carbon each year, making it an important carbon sink helping to keep the earth's temperatures low. Deforestation causes stored carbon to be released into the air, heating up the planet and disrupting water systems. Forest conservation of the Amazon, therefore, has a key role in mitigating climate change (Pereira et al., 2020).

While this might seem enough reason to combat deforestation in the region, social, economic, and political factors also play a part in shaping environmental governance. Constrains and regulations meant to protect the environment might, for instance, affect the economic situation of individuals and businesses, resulting in outbursts of frustration (e.g. as seen in the Dutch farmer protests commencing in 2019 (NOS, 2022)).

The Bolsonaro administration followed an environmental governance strategy that is based on an anti-climate agenda, placing more emphasis on ensuring the nation's economic prosperity than environmental protection. This opposition to the international climate agreements has become one of the central pillars of the administration (Simon & Winter, 2019: 20).

In short, the Bolsonaro administration has been characterized by a departure from previous environmental norms, with measures that weaken climate policies and directly target environmental defenders (Gagliardi, Oliveira, Magalhães & Falcão, 2021). Deforestation rates in the Amazon have soared, threatening biodiversity and the livelihoods of indigenous communities (Menezes & Barbosa, 2021). Bolsonaro's policies have cut budgets and relaxed controls meant to tackle deforestation, mining, and infrastructure development in the Amazon, intensifying pressure on the region. The consequences of these policies extend beyond Brazil, with global implications for climate regulation and water supply. International attention and calls for accountability have grown, with scrutiny on Bolsonaro's actions and demands for foreign investors to assess the impact of their investments on Amazon deforestation (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020).

### **3.1.1 The Climate Agenda and Populism in Conflict**

In order to fully grasp how the Bolsonaro administration's environmental governance took shape, it needs to be understood that its strategy towards the environment was designed based on right-wing populism (RWP). Populism is a political approach that seeks to gain support of the population by appealing to its interests and concerns. Politicians exercising populism often present themselves as the 'pure people', positioning themselves against the corrupt elites (Lockwood, 2018: 713). When appearing on the right side of the political spectrum, populists have a range of common characteristics. Among them are the strong articulation of nationalism justified in the name of 'the people', demonisation of internal and external enemies, contempt for democratic norms and institutions, and the support for authoritarian leaders who claim to solve popular fears by promising simple and direct action to protect and strengthen the nation. Many of these populists rose to power on the reversing effects of neoliberal globalisation, yet paradoxically, they often deepen neoliberal policies when they are in office (McCarthy, 2019: 302-3).

In addition to these characteristics, patterns have been identified to characterise the ways in which right-wing populists behave towards environmental challenges (Lockwood, 2018, McCarthy, 2019). These patterns, coupled under the concept of *environmental populism*, depart from the idea that RWP creates a natural opposition to the climate agenda due to their frequently emphasised values of social conservatism and nationalism. This opposition is intensified through the fact that the climate agenda is mainly advocated for by globalist elites, directly conflicting with a populist's national interests (McCarthy, 2019). Furthermore, the intricate nature of climate change poses an unwelcome challenge to the populist proposal of a simpler relationship between 'the people' and politics (Lockwood, 2018: 722). McCarthy (2019: 306) argues that even in cases where climate change is consciously denied by the population, the growing awareness of its implications can generate a widespread sense of insecurity and instability, which can manifest in populist and nationalist sentiments. Simultaneously, authoritarian discourses and state-sanctioned violence, employed to maintain the flow of fossil fuels, exacerbate the problem.

In Brazil, opposition to climate change manifests through Bolsonaro's nationalistic discourse that invokes a nostalgic interpretation of Brazil's past and devalues scientific findings on climate change. In doing so, the understanding of environmental protection as a legitimate and necessary solution is weakened among the population. Since the success of political solutions to protect the environment rely on national support, this lack of understanding discourages compliance with mitigating climate change (Gagliardi et al., 2021).

Considering the ascent of Bolsonaro and the controversial rhetoric employed by him and his administration, numerous elements align with the conceptual framework of populism. In the literature, there is little dispute

on whether Bolsonaro can be classified as a populist. Meeting several characteristics such as the ‘us vs them’ divide<sup>9</sup>, the focus on national sovereignty as opposed to global responsibilities, and policies aimed at pleasing the political base, make him a classic right-wing populist (Casarões & Fledes, 2019; Daly, 2020; Lapper, 2021; Pickering, Bäckstrand & Schlossberger 2020). However, Bolsonaro does differ on some aspects with other populists of his time (Lapper, 2021). Daly (2020: 206) suggests that his authoritarian behaviour, in which he vocally expresses his antipathy of democracy, minorities, and strong rule, is not just a symptom of populism, but is part of a male-dominated governance that is deeply rooted in Brazil’s history of slavery and racism.

The authoritarian behaviour that Daly refers to points towards another form of populism that characterises Brazil’s environmental governance: the hybrid form of *authoritarian populism*. As this form typically rises from urban-rural disparities, authoritarian populism has a particular impact on rural communities. In this political perspective the “... leader or party seeks unchecked political power through emotional appeals to the defence of ‘the people’, land, and territory against an external enemy” (Ofstehage et al., 2022: 672). This discourse picks up on long-held fears, anger, and prejudice (Ofstehage et al., 2022). Ofstehage et al. (2022) suggest that leaders who blend characteristics of authoritarian and populist governance attempt to control environmental resources to consolidate and maintain their political and economic power. This leads to a hierarchical approach to resource extraction, portrayed as necessary to defend national sovereignty.

To understand the rural-urban disparity in the case of Brazil, it must be noted that it is not just indigenous people that are living in the Amazon<sup>10</sup>. Small-scale farmers (the Beef-component of Bolsonaro’s support base) operate there too. It is this group that was increasingly experiencing the burdens of mechanised resource extraction and globalisation of the commodity markets, declining their prosperity. The Bolsonaro administration eases life for them by removing restrictions meant to protect the environment and by withdrawing from constraining international agreements (Lapper, 2021). It hereby employs the populist extractive strategy to accumulate job creation, economic development and gain political legitimacy (Ofstehage et al., 2022: 672).

Menezes and Barbosa (2021: 230) assert that the attacks of the Bolsonaro administration on climate change are not merely rhetorical, but “... a political tactic to legitimise Bolsonaro’s authoritarian environmental governance in the promotion of ‘total extractivism’ while maintaining a populist appeal”. By maintaining this populist appeal, the government pleases its support base and consolidates popular legitimacy. Combatting climate change is not perceived as a crucial interest for these support bases, resulting that under Bolsonaro Brazil’s environmental governance employed a strategy of dismantling policies protecting the environment.

### **3.1.2 Dismantling Brazil’s Environmental Protection Policies**

While the 2020 Brazilian National Security Policy acknowledges that climate change may have severe “‘social, economic, and political’ consequences requiring ‘prompt response from the State.’”, the implications have not been translated to protective policies regarding the environment (Barret, Rezzonico, Pinney & Femia, 2020: 28). Advancing Brazil’s national development was perceived incompatible with protecting the environment. Therefore, despite the acknowledgement in the National Security Policy, the

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<sup>9</sup> For Bolsonaro, ‘us’ refers to the Brazilian people, but more specifically his support base. ‘Them’ refers both to an external and internal enemy. Internally the enemy is framed as a ‘communist threat’ often implying indigenous peoples, non-state actors advocating for social rights and environmental activists that are blamed for Brazil’s problems. Externally, the international community is blamed for imposing climate measures and infringing Brazil’s sovereignty.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, the Amazon is home to more than 28 million inhabitants (WRI & The New Climate Academy, 2023: 7).

Bolsonaro administration initiated a process in which existing policies on environmental protection were dismantled<sup>11</sup>.

Brazil increasingly disengaged itself from the international sustainability agenda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' influential climate division was abolished, the country's hosting of the COP 25 in 2019 was cancelled, and the submission of additional voluntary national reviews on the SDGs was suspended (Lima & Da Costa, 2021: 512). The government also initiated a strong centralisation of policymaking and implementation to prevent the 'communist danger' in the Amazon from misusing public funds (Milhorance, 2022: 763). With the centralisation of environmental governance, governance was intentionally designed so that the exclusive authority lied with the Bolsonaro administration. In doing so, the administration could guarantee an improvement of conditions for private actors who support the government (Menezes & Barbosa, 2021: 243).

Concurrently with the process of centralisation, most of the country's participatory stances were extinguished (Milhorance, 2022: 760). These included monitoring and consultative councils that had already been trimmed under Bolsonaro's predecessor Michel Temer<sup>12</sup>, but were further reduced under Bolsonaro. By April 2019, most councils that had not been established by law but by ministerial decree had been dissolved, whereas many remaining others were weakened (Lima & Da Costa, 2022: 512). Following an outburst of public discontent, some councils were recreated, but with less participatory elements (Milhorance, 2022: 760).

Furthermore, the notion of environmental governance being a multi-actor issue is significantly decreased under the Bolsonaro administration. Next to participatory stances, civil society members have also been excluded from advisory councils. The argument supporting this decision was, once again, the "communist ideological danger arising from the growing role of civil society in public management" (Milhorance, 2022: 760). All policies endorsed the contempt for democracy which is common among authoritarian populists.

Unsurprisingly, all these measures went hand in hand with severe budget cuts for the remaining environmental protection agencies. Pereira et al. (2020: 2) found that, in its first year, "the government cut 95 percent of the National Policy on Climate Change budget, 26 percent of the Federal Conservation Management and Implementation Program budget, 24 percent of IBAMA's Inspection and Control Program budget, and 20 percent of Environmental Inspection Prevention, and Control of Forest Fires Program of the ICMBio budget". These budget cuts, for instance, caused agents on the ground to no longer be able to pay for lodging to tackle deforestation or buy fuel for their monitoring vehicles (Milhorance, 2022: 759).

Consequently, the relaxed controls on deforestation gave rise to criminal networks responsible for "...reinforcing the economic interests of agribusiness, illegal mining and logging sectors, providing all the logistic chain that interconnects such illegal activities and the global market" (De Souza et al., 2021: 5). These so-called environmental militias have been supported by both the president's populist discourse and the dismantling of environmental policies.

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<sup>11</sup> Before the 2018 elections Brazil held a frontrunner position on protecting the environment through research and governance. Under the Lula administration (2003-2010), Brazil even came remarkably close to achieving all its deforestation goals nearly a decade ahead of schedule (Barrett et al., 2020; Gagliardi et al., 2021). Of course, it must be noted that these were different times in which Brazil was experiencing large economic growth.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Temer was President of Brazil from August 2016 to December 2018. Before, he acted as Vice-President under Dilma Rousseff's administration, but stepped in as acting president when she was impeached.

### 3.2 Green Militarisation

In a time when environmental concerns play an increasingly large role within the global political economy, actors have intensified the role of the military to protect the environment (Büscher & Fletcher, 2018). This trend, known as green militarisation, is defined by Simlai (2015: 39) as “a process by which *military approaches and values* are increasingly embedded in conservation practise”. The emphasis in this definition highlights that for green militarisation to occur it is not a prerequisite that actual military personnel are deployed in the pursuit of conservation efforts. The inclusion of military approach and values, including training, technologies, and partnerships is enough (Massé, Lunstrum & Holterman, 2017: 5). This way the process of green militarisation captures a broad range of actors from the environmental militias in the Amazon to armed rangers protecting wildlife in reserves in Kenya (WWF, 2015).

In existing literature, the term is mostly used in contexts where the military or the incorporation of military tactics are employed to *protect* the environment. However, this paper holds that green militarisation is also valuable to analyse militarisation processes in environmental governance that do not aim to safeguard the environment from decay. Despite not being beneficial for the environment, these militarised actors still operate in the realm of environmental governance and conservation. Moreover, the field of green militarisation is critical about the increased militarisation of the environment, regardless of the actor’s intentions. Therefore, a broader definition is required for green militarisation, including the ways in which militarisation impacts the environment. This leads to the following definition: green militarisation is a process by which military approaches, values, or personnel, are increasingly embedded in conserving or impacting the environment, regardless of its intentions<sup>13</sup>.

Critical scholars studying the increasingly central role of military approaches in environmental and conservation concerns argue that militarisation is not “... an appropriate, proportionate and necessary response to an urgent situation” (Duffy et al., 2019: 67). The main argument for this reasoning is that green militarisation leads to poor conservation outcomes on the long run (Duffy et al., 2019). Moreover, the military’s approach to climate change is based on a narrow notion of security, and therefore, not capable to address fundamental social structures that are intrinsically linked to environmental degradation. In the rare cases that military personnel are well-trained and well-equipped for the task, it is unlikely that local communities will support conservation efforts if they have to deal with violent military approaches (Simlai, 2015: 43). Consequently, institutional causes for environmental degradation are obscured while scarcity of natural resources and degradation are normalised (Gilbert, 2012: 5).

### 3.3 Green Militarisation in Practice

Green militarisation under the Bolsonaro administration is intrinsically intertwined with the militarisation of politics and expresses itself most notably in three areas: 1) in the administration, 2) in environmental institutions, and 3) the deployment of troops in the Amazon.

Before delving into these areas, the distinction between the military and the Bolsonaro administration in terms of environmental governance must be clarified. Even though their lines of interest overlap and are intertwined, they are not always uniform. Already in 1966, the military regime launched ‘Operation Amazon’ which was an attempt to modernise and integrate the region. This was based on the assumptions that nature should be conquered by mankind and that exploiting natural resources would make the region economically profitable. Promoting settlement in the area by expanding agriculture and establishing tax-free zones to attract investments was considered necessary to exert control over the territory (Silva-Muller & Sposito,

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<sup>13</sup> As it is considered that literature on green militarisation and environmental governance are complementary, the newly formed definition is essentially a combination between Simlai’s (2015: 39) definition of green militarisation and Lima & Da Costa’s (2022: 510) definition of environmental governance.

2023: 10). Controlling the remote territory in order to ensure its sovereignty and exploit its natural resources for economic gains has always been top priority and is what still drives military thinking in Brazil today (Marin, 2022; Simon & Winter, 2019).

While the military reinforced Bolsonaro's position on national sovereignty, they acted as a moderating power on other issues. This might sound counterintuitive given the explicit anti-environmental campaign, but it must be emphasised that the military – unlike Bolsonaro - was very careful not to deny climate change. Instead, its rhetoric was balanced with the recognition that “Brazil must protect the environment out of its own self-interest” (Simon & Winter, 2019: 21). However, ‘protect’ in this sense does not mean protection from environmental decay, but rather, protection from ‘international greed’ for the region’s rich natural resources. As a result, it was the military that fabricated the internal enemy represented by agents of international powers, meaning environmental and indigenous activists and organisation. Since their silencing was needed to protect the Amazon, participatory mechanisms including civil society needed to be removed from governance (Valle & Garzón, 2023). This paved the way for the hierarchical approach to resource extraction which characterises authoritarian populism (Ofstehage et al., 2022).

### **3.3.1 The Militarisation of the Administration**

The militarisation in Brazil occurred on all areas of governance. However, given the significance of environmental governance in the administration and its intersection with both economic, agricultural, and security issues, the impact of the militarisation was especially large on environmental governance. Military approaches were embedded into environmental governance, as the military were the primary orchestrator of the policies themselves. For instance, Environment Minister Ricardo Salles relied on the military to staff his ministry with officials that were aligned to his sovereign view (Simon & Winter, 2019). Furthermore, Chapter 2 has given a clear account of the significant military presence all over the Bolsonaro administration. The result flowing from this is that they have a strong presence, and thus, influence on policy and decision-making. Consequently, this power imbalance leads to democratic decay and – given their disregard of environmental conservation - contributes to environmental decay.

Bolsonaro has capitalised on the military's support allowing them to augment their political power and privilege. In exchange, the military reiterated the populist narrative to a large extent reinforcing the populist anti-environmental policies (Hunter & Vega, 2021). Populist alliances with the military are a frequent sight in countries where signs of democratic decay are surfacing. On the one hand, populist can seek protection in the military. On the other hand, military officers are offered a part in implementing political decisions over other democratically elected politicians (Hunter & Vega, 2021). In Brazil, the militarisation is justified by the military's image as moderating power and protector of national sovereignty (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021: 84). Alongside Bolsonaro's populism, another important factor how this militarisation could be consolidated is due to the military's position in society as the country's most trusted institution (Solano, 2020: 219). This good reputation reinforced the military's belief that it could lead the country better from within the government (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021: 84).

### **3.3.2 The Military over Plural Participation**

The 2019 Amazon fires, and its consequent outburst of international pressure, reignited concerns over Brazil's territorial sovereignty. This accelerated the transfer of responsibilities on environmental governance to the military, an institution historically in favour of exploiting the Amazon's natural resources (Pereira & Terrenas, 2022: 65).

One of the strategies of Bolsonaro's environmental governance was the extinguishment of participatory councils. The councils that were not completely abolished severely changed in structure and the leadership



was replaced by military officers. This was especially impactful for government institutions set up to combat climate change. Limiting the participatory element significantly reduced resistance in implementing environmentally unfriendly policies. For example, the Amazon Council was recreated by Bolsonaro after popular pressure and set up to ‘regulate’ all actions in the area including combatting deforestation and forest fires. Civil society, indigenous, and environmental agencies were excluded while the council composed of 19 military officers (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020: 259).

While extinguishing participatory mechanisms and replacing them with, nonelected, military personnel is in itself an attack against democracy, Floyd’s (2008; 54) argument goes one step further. She states that

“... institutions that provide safety from environmental degradation (for example, the Environmental Protection Agency) and the institutions that provide safety from violence (the military) are fundamentally incompatible. The way they work and the means they employ are in direct opposition to each other: the military operates secretly, whereas the work of environmental protection agencies is open and deliberately accessible as they actively seek to inform and educate the public. (Floyd, 2008: 54)

The secrecy involved in military operations contrast with transparency and inclusivity that are often named key objectives of climate governance (Jayaram & Brisbois, 2021: 2). The lack of military transparency is exemplified by General Mourão claiming that deforestation rates had decreased practically total. To the contrary, Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE) showed a sharp increase in deforestation (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020: 259). This divergence highlights how the accessibility of environmental protection agencies is incompatible and disruptive of the military’s concealment meant to advance the populist agenda. In this line of thinking, it is not surprising that the Bolsonaro administration needed to constrain these environmental protection agencies. The argument that military involvement in environmental institutions is fundamentally not constructive, therefore, points at the exact reason why military involvement was necessary. Environmental protection was never priority. Simultaneously, the argument affirms that green militarisation does not result in environmental protection. Ferrante and Fearnside (2020: 258) argue that “...the militarisation of Brazil’s environmental protection has served as a smokescreen to weaken environmental protections”, thereby putting indigenous people at risk and violating their rights.

### **3.3.3 The Militarisation of Conservation**

Perhaps the clearest example of green militarisation is how the military as an institution has been deployed to the Amazon to ‘reduce deforestation’ – with actual soldiers on the ground. International press agency *Presenza* (Marin, 2022) reports that, under the Bolsonaro administration, the military has been deployed to the Amazon under three ‘Law and Order Assurance Operations’ (GLOs): *Operation Verde Brasil* (August-October 2019), *Operation Verde Brasil 2* (May 2020-April 2021), and *Operation Samaúma* (June-August 2021). These operations provided the military with the powers to monitor and combat forest fires and take ‘preventive and repressive actions against environmental crimes’. The first mission was (reluctantly) established after the administration’s downplaying of the severity of Amazon fires in 2019 led to significant international critique (Jones, 2021).

Although, formally, these missions were framed as the protection of the Amazon from deforestation, the absence of any reference to the protection of the environment in these GLOs questions to which extent these missions were committed to combatting climate change. While references to *Verde* (Portuguese for

‘green’) and *Samaúma*<sup>14</sup> are indicators holding up this environmental frame. The explicit anti-climate campaign suggest that it is more likely that these operations emerged to silence international critique (and possible sanctions<sup>15</sup>) and to maintain popular support since there was no denying the Amazon Fires given the immense media coverage and black clouds darkening the city of São Paulo (Lapper, 2021).

In line with literature on green militarisation, Jones (2021) states that the lengthy deployments have not made a measurable difference to combatting deforestation. Marin (2022) augments this by stating that “the military intervention has only led to tragedies in the region, directly or indirectly”. The deployment of soldiers to the Amazon has hindered operations by better-trained environmental agencies. Soldiers lacked specialised training, identifiable enemies and tended to neglect targeting heads of illegal logging and mining networks (De Souza et al., 2021; Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020; Jones, 2021). Moreover, journalist Marta Soloman argued that Operation Verde Brasil 2 facilitated a “military build-up with money from the Amazon” (Marin, 2022). The mission’s operating expenses included renovating the barracks and secret expenses in the contracts with private companies. In addition, investment in GLO military mission grew by 178 percent, while the Ministry of the Environment’s spending on the preservation of the forest fell. In 2021, 37 percent of the budget to combat deforestation was attributed to military actions (Marin, 2022). As it becomes a source of ‘green’ initiatives increased military spending is legitimised to the public (Gilbert, 2012: 10)

This budgetary transfer exemplifies cautions made by conservationists against replacing civil personnel with military officials. If environmental issues are being tackled through the military, less money is available for innovation in other sectors and underlying factors continue to be left unaddressed (Duffy et al., 2019; Gilbert, 2012; Jayaram & Brisbois, 2021).

Regardless of the administration’s true intention, the green militarisation process of the Amazon has not protected the Amazon rainforest. Valle and Garzón (2023: 151) argue that, with this military take-over of environmental governance, organised crime has taken root in the Amazon making deforestation a lucrative business. The Brazilian government’s approach to combating deforestation is contradictory and counterproductive. On the one hand, civil enforcement action is militarised, while on the other hand, they actively dismantle existing punitive laws and create new laws encouraging illegal actors that cause the damage to the forest. This combination of worsening the problem while hindering the solution has led to a substantial increase in deforestation rates (Barrett et al., 2020: 28). The outcomes of Brazil’s green militarisation followed the playbook of how to not protect the environment, exactly as the populist rhetoric indicated.

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<sup>14</sup> Samaúma is a tree native to the Amazon reaching up to 50 meters in diameter and 70 meters in height. The giant tree is historically used as a point of reference for fisherman and holds high spiritual significance to indigenous populations (The Majestic Samaúma, n.d.).

<sup>15</sup> The inaction of the Bolsonaro administration to combat the forest fires caused widespread international critique. Finland, which was holding the EU presidency at that moment, called upon the European Union to boycott the import of Brazilian Beef (Lapper, 2021: 184).

## Chapter 4: The Weaponization of the Amazon under Bolsonaro

The previous chapter has shown how Bolsonaro's environmental governance was militarised and how this green militarisation manifested in practice. Propelled by a populist environmental governance the Amazon has come to play a central role under Bolsonaro, fulfilling different roles exceeding its purely passive and natural dimension. The current chapter dives deeper into the relationship between militarised environmental governance and the Amazon rainforest. On the one hand, it attempts to demonstrate how the Amazon has influenced environmental governance, and on the other hand, it analyses how the Amazon has been weaponised to reinforce the administration's policy agenda. To answer this chapter's sub-question 'How is the Amazon weaponised in Bolsonaro's environmental governance?', the different understandings and dimensions of the Amazon will be examined, as will its implications for the Amazon's environmental protection.

### 4.1 The Amazon as a Political Playing Field

When thinking about the Amazon rainforest, it is often characterised by its abundant biodiversity. The rainforest is home to 14 percent of the world's birds of which many are not found anywhere else. Moreover, the forest is characterised by its ecological properties such as being an important regulator of weather patterns, responsible for the continent's water supply and function as an enormous carbon storage (Jones, 2022). Therefore, the natural dimension of the Amazon emphasises its forestry characteristics; an area covered with trees, with wildlife populating the area. Map 1 shows how the Amazon rainforest, understood as its natural dimension, stretches across the upper half of the South American continent.

**Map 1.** The Natural Amazon: The Ecological Region surpassing National Borders.



Source: Wikipedia (n.d.-a)

The natural dimension of the Amazon is often stressed by scientists and environmentalists expressing their worries on the developments of climate change and by the international community in urging that joint action is needed globally. After all, it is often shown that neglecting the protection of this natural dimension, by enabling tropical deforestation, is a major cause for climate change (De Oliveira et al., 2023: 5).

However, the Bolsonaro administration's environmental governance exemplifies that there are other ways to think about forests. Forests can be instrumentalised to serve the political agenda, surpassing their

exclusively natural character. A common populist characteristic, and arguably inherent part of environmental governance, is the conflation of nature and nation, which McCarthy (2019: 306) describes as “the multiple ways in which physical and biological environments and resources become politically understood as inextricably linked to national identities, fortunes, and prospects”. In other words, nature is being instrumentalised and claimed for national development. In alignment with this reasoning, Vandergeest and Peluso (2015) have coined the term *political forest*. The term specifically focusses on forests and describes a process in which forests become political-ecological entities (Devine & Baca, 2020: 911). Political forests actively shape and are shaped by politics (Vandergeest & Peluso, 2015: 173). World-wide many, if not most, forest have lost their exclusively natural character, because they have been “designated, legislated, demarcated, mapped and managed by state forestry institutions ...” (Vandergeest & Peluso, 2015: 162).

Emphasising the socio-political dimensions of a forest, the notion of political forest is helpful in capturing why governments would sometimes make decisions that go against the perceived interests of the forest as a natural entity, such as promoting deforestation. When approaching environmental governance from a political forestry lens, it becomes evident that these governments place more emphasis on forest dimensions outside of its natural property. Rather, they consider the forest as a national territory that provides access to resources that serve the market economy (Devine & Baca, 2020).

The Brazilian Amazon is a clear example of a forest that has become politicised. It is no longer ‘just’ an area of land covered with trees, instead the Amazon has become a political playing field of “... everyday relations of power, claims to territory, and access to resources” (Devine & Baca, 2020: 912). It has multiple functions and dimensions that strongly influence and are influenced by the militarised administration’s populist environmental governance. Alongside the natural dimension that is often emphasised in pro-environmental governance, in Bolsonaro’s environmental governance three key dimensions have been identified: an economic, a geographical, and a nationalist dimension.

#### **4.1.1 The Economic Amazon: Propelling Prosperity**

Under the Bolsonaro administration, the most prominent function of the Amazon is the access it provides to natural resources such as timber, gold, and land that can be used for agriculture. Consequently, these resources are being extracted for economic gains. The driving forces behind the quest for economic gains in the Amazon are symbolised by two factions in the government, influencing the administration’s position on climate change.

The first is the agribusiness community, or *ruralistas* as described in Chapter 2. The influence of this faction is dangerous since the ruralistas are the main greenhouse gas producing sector in Brazil, responsible for most deforestation (Pereira et al., 2020). Where multinationals and larger companies tend to appreciate the need for environmental regulations due to the demands of western markets, small-scale farmers desire to be free of constraining environmental controls and be able to cultivate land where and when they see fit (Lapper, 2021: 12; Simon & Winter, 2019: 20). The second faction are the anti-globalists symbolising a nationalist sentiment. As they see climate change as a problem imposed by, in particular, left-wing Western European states, they advocate for protecting and advancing Brazil’s own economy, instead of following orders from the international community (Simon & Winter, 2019: 21).

The pressure from these factions to cut back environmental protection policies contributed to a stance on climate change where the administration focussed on the reinforcement of an ultra-liberal approach with a strong nationalist element (Milhorance, 2022: 763). The administration considered the economic development of the Amazon as Brazil’s sovereign right in which “national development in technology,

infrastructure, and trade is the priority goal” (Casarões & Fledes, 2019). In this approach, the private sector was considered the motor of economic growth (Pokorny, Pacheco, De Jong & Entenmann, 2021: 2008).

Within the Bolsonaro administration’s environmental governance, the economic dimension of the Amazon has become a weapon in the fight for economic growth, at the expense of its natural dimension. As is typical for an authoritarian populist government, environmental resources are being controlled to consolidate and maintain economic and political power (Ofstehage et al., 2022). The Bolsonaro administration’s populist behaviour has exacerbated the perceived divergence between environmental protection and economic growth. The dismantling of environmental protection policies to advance this economic growth and please its support base have had far-reaching effects in terms of the preservation of the Amazon, as well as the world-wide level of carbon emissions.

#### 4.1.2 The Geographical Amazon: *Ruralistas* vs the Communist Enemy

The geographical location of the Amazon has had great implications for how the region was weaponised to advance the administration’s political agenda. As can be observed in Map 2, most municipalities in the Amazon region<sup>16</sup> are relatively distant from the nearest relevant urban centres (IBGE, 2017). This remote location, far from Brazil’s biggest cities have made it a challenge to effectively control the Amazonian territory since the founding of the state.

**Map 2.** Urban-Rural Disparities in Brazil: Adjacent and Remote Municipalities in Comparison to the National Average.



Source: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) (2017) <sup>17</sup>.

The former military regime’s Operation Amazon marked the beginning of economic development in the Amazon and brought to the region the farmers that would grow out to Bolsonaro’s support base. However,

<sup>16</sup> The Amazon region consists of the following states: Amazônia, Acre, Rondônia, Roraima, Pará, Maranhão, Amapá, Tocantins, and Mato Grosso (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), 2014).

<sup>17</sup> The index has been translated by the author of this paper. The original index reads “Capital Federal; Capitais Estaduais; Índice de Localização; Adjacente; Remoto”.

most of Brazil's indigenous population had also been living there for centuries, largely in harmony with the forest. Moreover, with the Amazon slowly turning into a hotspot for environmental crimes, it also became the area of operation for environmental activist (Lapper, 2021).

The fact that a large portion of the Amazon is legally protected by indigenous territories and protected areas causes tension in the region (Silva-Muller & Sposito, 2023: 1-2). The Bolsonaro administration capitalised on these tensions by reinforcing the populist 'us vs them' divide. The illegal occupation of protected areas and indigenous lands was endorsed rhetorically to discourage 'unproductive use' and promote economic development. According to the administration, indigenous populations living in the Amazon would need to integrate into the project of economic development according to the administration (Milhorance, 2022: 763).

In the administration's rhetoric, indigenous and environmental activism are lumped together with a so-called 'communist danger' with which is referred to non-state actors advocating for basic social rights and environmental protection. These actors were criminalised and accused of legally profiting from public funds (Milhorance, 2022: 763). For the activists, the rhetoric had immediate consequences. The Global Witness Report of 2020 notes that indigenous communities are increasingly caught in conflict with agricultural businesses, as desertification and climate change diminish the access to land that can be cultivated. Additionally, the report states that Brazil ranks third in the number of killings of environmental defenders with 33 deaths in 2019 in the Amazon region alone. In 2020, 90 percent of all killings in Brazil happened in the Amazon. Furthermore, deforestation in indigenous lands increased by 157 percent under the Bolsonaro government (Valle & Garzón, 2023: 152).

Blaming Brazil's problems on a certain group of people, drawing away attention from the "deserving but neglected people", is a classic populist strategy convenient for maintaining public support (Lockwood, 2018: 714). As it becomes synonymous with both the rural support base and harbouring prosperity's enemy, the Amazon's geographical dimension becomes a powerful tool in emphasising the 'us versus them' divide encapsulating the political dynamics and social divisions in the region. Instead of a natural being, the Amazon is instrumentalised as a geographical location harbouring support and adversary and providing access to natural resources.

#### **4.1.3 The National Amazon: "The Amazon is ours"<sup>18</sup>**

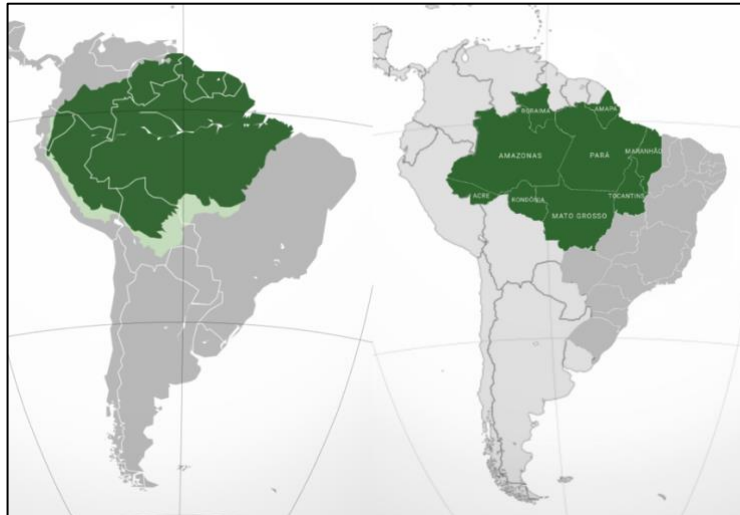
The final dimension in which the Amazon is weaponised is by appropriating it as Brazil's national property (Devine & Baca, 2020). It is the literal result of McCarthy's conflation of nature and nation. The 'Brazilian National Amazon' is frequently referred to as the *Legal Amazon*<sup>19</sup>. Map 3 emphasises how the Amazon's natural dimension has been converted to a national property by comparing the natural borders demarcating the rainforest and the state borders of the Amazon region in Brazil.

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<sup>18</sup> During an interview with foreign journalists Bolsonaro famously stated: "We understand the importance of the Amazon for the world – but **the Amazon is ours**. There will not be any more of that sort of policy that we saw in the past that was terrible for everyone..." (In Phillips, 2019). A statement that is exemplary for the Bolsonaro administration's nationalist, anti-globalist, and neoliberal approach to environmental governance.

<sup>19</sup> "The use of the adjective "Legal" is due to the necessity of distinguishing the division defined by the Law and the Amazon division defined by the biome and the river basin, as well the International Amazon." (IBGE, 2014)

**Map 3.** The Natural (left) vs the Legal Amazon (right).



Source: Own comparison of Wikipedia (n.d.-a & n.d.-b)

The question on who is allowed to claim the (natural) Amazon rainforest has been a topic of dispute ever since Brazil's independence. Several countries<sup>20</sup> had imperial ambitions in the region, causing sovereignty in the Amazon to become one of the main concerns of the military regime (Silva-Muller & Sposito, 2023: 8). While it is no longer a topic of discussion that Brazil accounts for the preponderance of the rainforest, international behaviour towards the Amazon still is interpreted by many in the Bolsonaro administration as a threat to the country's sovereignty. By lifting climate mitigation to a global level, in a way the Amazon transforms from Brazil's national territory into an area open for global interference justified by the worldwide consequences were the forest not protected. The international interference is concretely felt in the form of international regulations to combat climate change as well as non-state organisations operating in the rainforest.

Especially the anti-globalist faction in the government considers the international pressure for stricter environmental laws as an infringement of Brazil's sovereignty and, therefore, resist international regulations while promoting Brazil's economic growth (Simon & Winter, 2019: 21). Consequently, Bolsonaro attempts to reinforce the conservative alliance by a nationalist discourse and anti-corruption rhetoric" (Milhorange, 2022: 763).

In practice, all dimensions elaborated upon above are closely intertwined and utilised to strengthen the administration's environmental governance. Each dimension shows that the Brazilian Amazon is a clear example of a forest that has become politicised. It is no longer 'just' an area of land covered with trees, instead the Amazon has become a political playing field of "... everyday relations of power, claims to territory, and access to resources" (Devine & Baca, 2020: 912). Instead of seeing the Amazon as a natural entity, the forest is consistently claimed a national property and used to invigorate a nationalist rhetoric. The Amazon has become a weapon for the administration's exploitation campaign. The rainforest is instrumentalised for the purpose of maintaining popular support, the economy, and a narrative of sovereignty, at the expense of the preservation of the Amazon's natural dimension as well as the indigenous peoples largely living in accordance with natural preservation efforts.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, France, Britain, the United States, Belgium, Bolivia, and Peru (Silva-Muller & Sposito, 2023: 8). Nowadays, the Amazon rainforest stretches over nine countries. Brazil accounts for approximately 60% of the total rainforest, while the remaining portion is distributed among eight other countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, and French Guiana.

## **4.2 The Shared Battle of the Environment and Democracy**

Brazil's environmental governance has been severely impacted by green militarisation under Bolsonaro. Furthermore, the redefined civil-military power balance has resulted in the erosion of democratic principles. This raises questions on how the two are connected. Therefore, this section will first elaborate on the effects of militarising environmental governance on the Brazil's democracy. Secondly, it will be assessed what the consequent democratic decay means for environmental protection.

### **4.2.1 Democratic Decay**

Valle and Garzón (2023: 151) state that “the destinies of the Amazon rainforest and of democracy in Brazil are umbilically intertwined”. They argue that the fight against environmental crime and democracy are the same because the agents of chaos are the same. Indeed, this paper has demonstrated that the Bolsonaro administration dismantled environmental protection laws, reducing impunity, and encouraging deforestation. Furthermore, the administration openly defied democracy; Bolsonaro by his expressions and enabling the military to enter politics, the military by enhancing their influence and reiterating the populist narrative. The question to be asked now is how the militarisation of environmental governance, specifically, affected Brazil's democracy.

Through the militarisation of politics, the military gained significant influence over environmental governance. In effect, civil servants were replaced by military officials in both the administration and in (formerly) participatory institutions. This is detrimental for democracy for several reasons. Similar to Bolsonaro, the military entered politics with a contempt for democratically elected politicians, thinking they are better fit to rule Brazil (Gouvêa & Branco, 2021). Even though the military enjoyed public trust as an institution, the military is not accountable to voters, meaning that the militarisation of environmental governance diminishes popular power (Bruneau, 2006; Daly, 2020). Additionally, the growing numbers in military personnel and increased budget attributed to military affairs, resulted in a loop of militarisation further eroding popular power. Moreover, the military served as a smokescreen for Amazon destruction and restriction of rights for indigenous (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2020: 258).

Inherently, the military has a non-democratic structure. It is unique from other climate actors due to their hierarchical nature with a capacity to exercise force (Jayaram & Brisbois, 2021: 1). This questions whether they are capable of upholding democratic values - assuming that this is what they attempt to do. The premise underlying civil-military relations is that they are not. Simply because military values and democratic values - such as coercion versus diplomatic reasoning, secrecy versus transparency, and the military's history with restrictions and violations of human rights - are deemed incompatible (Burk, 2002: 8; Floyd, 2008).

Lastly, as the influence of the military in environmental governance deepens, the plurality of decision-making is increasingly restricted. This means losing an intrinsic characteristic of both environmental governance and democracy. This development further diminishes the capacity for popular oversight, but also undermines checks and balances traditionally placed upon the administration. Causing the loop of militarisation to contribute to a loop of democratic decay.

### **4.2.2 Environmental Decay**

This increasingly visible decay of democracy, combined with the rise of populist anti-environmentalism and the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions, raises questions to whether contemporary democracies can safeguard the environment (McCarthy, 2019).

On the one hand, democracies are proven to perform better in terms of environmental protection as they are characterised by greater civil liberties, allowing citizens to be more informed about environmental



problems and government policies (Böhmelt, 2021: 100). Due to public participation, democracies have an incentive to invest in 'environmental quality' and therefore, they tend to adopt stricter environmental policies and cooperate in international treaties (Povitkina, 2018: 411). On the other hand, democratic leaders are often focussed on short-term gains as these provide visible outcomes for their electorate and can consolidate electoral victory. Additionally, economic interests tend to steer politicians away from implementing environmental reductions policies (Povitkina, 2018: 412). More fundamentally, democracies are critiqued for not providing representation of non-human interests at stake in environmental governance (Eckersley, 2021; Pickering et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, green democrats do believe that eventually democracies are the best hope to combat climate change. Despite democracy's pitfalls it still outperforms non-democratic regimes and one-party states. However, for a democracy to be successful at safeguarding the environment, it will need to be ecologically informed with a transparent and public exchange of reason to help weed out uninformed and self-centred arguments in favour of public goods such as environmental protection (Eckersley, 2021: 115).

While the green democrat's trust in safeguarding the environment does give hope for a future in which democracies and environmental protection are constructive, it does not undo the harm done by the Bolsonaro administration. In four years' time, the administration has made steps in restricting all elements that allow democracies to perform better on environmental protection. Simultaneously, the administration's environmental governance is focussed on all democratic pitfalls that hinder environmental performance. The focus on short-term interest of economic gains and nationalism under the Bolsonaro administration, give yet another reason to increase militarisation as military are a great partner in achieving results quickly. In the trend of green militarisation, climate change becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The strive for economic growth and national sovereignty have led to a loop of militarisation and environmental degradation that are the principle causes for climate change (Dunlap & Fairhead, 2014: 955).

### **4.3 The Consequences for the Amazon and the World**

Given the deliberate neglect of tackling climate change, it is not a surprise that deforestation rates have soared under the rule of the Bolsonaro administration. Loggers immediately responded to the removal of legal constraints and rhetoric signals of support by expanding their operations (Simon & Winter, 2019: 21). In June 2019 deforestation grew by 88 percent, compared to 15 percent a year earlier, and in the first six months of 2022, an area equivalent to five times the size of New York City had been cleared (Chow, 2022). The main driver of this deforestation is beef production, followed by soy and animal feed (Ferris, 2022). Hence, it is safe to state that rather than ending deforestation, Bolsonaro has encouraged individuals to participate in deforestation, both legally and illegally.

As is common all over the world, climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations (WRI Brasil & The New Climate Academy, 2023). In Brazil, these populations face a dual impact as indigenous are directly and indirectly hit by the government's policies. Despite bearing the highest costs, indigenous or locals do not benefit from the governmental focus on economic growth as opposed to climate mitigation. In general, the primary beneficiaries of Bolsonaro's approach to environmental governance are big business owners and western consumers, who reap the advantages of cheaper imports (Ferris, 2022).

Understanding the multiple ways in which the Amazon is weaponised to advance the Bolsonaro administration's political agenda is crucial as its effects also stretch beyond a singular domain. The impact goes beyond loss of forest, but also affects people and animals living inside the forest. Moreover, the weaponization of the Amazon sustains Bolsonaro's populist narrative emphasising economic growth and sovereignty. This way, the Amazon serves to please the support base and, in some sense, is deployed to

self-destruct its natural dimension. More broadly, the weaponization of the Amazon affects Brazil's entire state-structure as democracy slowly deteriorates.

Furthermore, the populist approach that underlies this specific case is of even greater importance considering it concerns the world's largest rainforest in a time of great climate uncertainty. The latest IPCC (2023) report highlighted "... the losses and damages we are already experiencing [due to climate change] and will continue into the future" and stressed that "Taking the right action now could result in the transformational change essential for a sustainable, equitable world". The urgency that is expressed by the IPCC report, illustrates that the environmental and social cost of Bolsonaro's policymaking affect the entire planet. A study by Gatti et al. (2021) demonstrated that some parts of the Amazon rainforest, that have been subject to deforestation for 40 years, now emit more CO<sub>2</sub> than they absorb. Given these developments scientists are warning that the record of deforestation set under Bolsonaro pushes the rainforest nearer and nearer towards the tipping point, which equals irreversible consequences for the entire planet (Chow, 2022).

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has attempted to make sense of green militarisation across different stages: its emergence, its maintenance, and its consequences. By exemplifying this, the connections between civil-military relations in emerging democracies and the militarisation of environmental governance have been revealed.

Through the case of Bolsonaro's Brazil, the lens of civil-military relations has been used to understand the emergence of green militarisation. A three-fold of factors was identified as critical developments for the military's return to the top-political stage: 1) the rise of Jair Bolsonaro, 2) the economic, political, and moral crises defining the political landscape, and 3) the return of the military's prestige within society and the institution. These factors created the momentum necessary for the military to re-enter politics in numbers unseen even during the latest military rule. It laid the ground for a constructive but volatile alliance between the military and Bolsonaro in the government, clearing the path for the military to fulfil its perceived mission to lead Brazil out of the crises.

Based on the assumption that Bolsonaro and the military colluded to disarm Brazil's protective environmental frameworks, this paper found that reality is more complex. The policy dismantling under Bolsonaro was not driven by an intrinsic contempt for environmental conservation. Rather, it is the complex dynamic of historical roles, a volatile political landscape, and the influence of a worldwide surge of populism and global environmentalism, that cause its priority to lie elsewhere.

By applying both theory on populism and political forestry, the paper demonstrated the ways in which green militarisation was sustained by utilising the Amazon as a weapon to advance its political agenda. In this case economic growth and sovereignty was prioritised, generated by the phenomenon that the Amazon had become intrinsically linked to populism and civil-military power relations. This demonstrates that the way in which civilian authority and military roles are fulfilled, highly influences its implications for the environment. On the other hand, Vandergeest and Peluso's (2015) concept of political forest has indicated that this influence works vice versa. The Amazon is not a passive actor, instead the environment shapes and is shaped by politics, resulting in a dynamic interaction possibly triggering green militarisation. In the case of Brazil, it has been revealed how a populist civilian authority was drawn to a military that desired to lead the country by means of instrumentalising an environment of great ecological, economical, and political value. A recipe for green militarisation.

The analysis of the militarisation of Brazil's environmental governance has led to the conclusion that the Amazon's environmental protection has immensely suffered under the Bolsonaro government. This analysis has revealed that environmental issues cannot be separated from Brazil's militarisation and Bolsonaro's reactions to global climate action. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the Amazon is not merely a victim of environmental governance. The Amazon rainforest has many different dimensions and understandings and is intrinsically connected to the militarisation of politics - under Bolsonaro reinforced by a process of green militarisation.

Green militarisation has had a detrimental effect on the biological Amazon and its protection. The green militarised approach to environmental governance was counterproductive and the combination of worsening the problem while hindering the solution has led to a substantial increase in deforestation rates (Barrett et al., 2020: 28). This paper has found that green militarisation has contributed to three interconnected processes: a loop of militarisation, the decrease of the Amazon perceived as natural entity, and democratic decay. First, green militarisation has intensified the vicious cycle of military dependency resulting in climate change becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy increasing environmental deterioration.

Second, propelled by right-wing populism, the natural dimension of the Amazon becomes less prominent as other dimensions are weaponised to fuel the administration's rhetoric, and consequently, advance their political agenda. Finally, green militarisation accelerated democratic decay which is especially harmful for environmental conservation when due to military involvement in environmental governance. Although the consequences are varied and extensive, each process contributes to environmental degradation by harming the Amazon rainforest in the first place and consequently hindering world-wide climate preservation. In the trend of green militarisation, climate change has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The strive for economic growth and national sovereignty have led to a loop of militarisation and environmental degradation that are the principle causes for climate change.

Even though this paper is focussed on the case of Brazil, the analysis and conclusions serve as an example for understanding how the interplay of populism and civil-military power struggles can mount to green militarisation in an era where climate change is high on the political agenda. This paper contributes to the field of green conflict studies by examining how environmental challenges impact and are impacted by the national military. In an attempt to go beyond simplistic and one-dimensional causal relationships that are prevalent in traditional conflict studies, this paper has demonstrated the multidimensionality and active role of the Amazon rainforest in propelling the dismantling of environmental protection and greater military involvement. In this effort, the environment has been analysed beyond its natural character including a broad variety of dimensions such as the economic, geographical, and sovereign space. Moreover, green militarisation is shown to have a variety of implications when coupled with populism and civil-military power struggles. While the outplay of these implications is unique for Brazil, the areas through which they emerged can be generalised to understand other young democracies with a strong military and populist regime. The loop of militarisation, the democratic decay, and the devaluation of the natural entities are outcomes of green militarisation driven by the dynamic interactions of the civil-military-environment nexus.

This paper has bridged the fields of political ecology and green conflict studies by broadening the understanding of green militarisation to include the impact of approaches that do not intend to protect the natural environment. By introducing the concept of green militarisation, political ecologists have done valuable research on the insertion of military approaches in conservation. However, by confining it to militarised conservation, the findings have only a limited purpose. The way green militarisation is interpreted in this paper, its main purpose concerns the insertion of militaries or military approaches in environmental contexts. In this, it does not matter if the militarised actor's intention is to protect or not to protect since green militarisation considers militarised approaches to the environment counterproductive regardless of the intention. Moreover, even if not aimed to protect the environment, militarised action is still often framed that way. By broadening the concept to the militarisation of environmental governance, the concept gets lifted into green conflict studies surrounding the question of how environmental issues and challenges impact or are impacted by violent conflict and inequalities. This elevation still does justice to political ecology as militarised conservation can be part of militarised environmental governance. This highlights the paper's relevance as the concept of green militarisation can now be used for insights to a large variety of militarised environmental issues.

While the consequences of green militarisation for the Amazon are grave and impact the entire state-structure, one cannot make predictions for how this develops in the future. All processes are interconnected and can change with the slightest altering in the civil-military-environment nexus. At the time of writing, elections have taken place in Brazil and civilian authority has been transferred to the elected President Lula da Silva. The Bolsonaro administration is no more, and the new President seems more appreciative of the Amazon's natural dimension. It remains to be seen what Lula's interaction with the military means for green militarisation in Brazil that was so strongly consolidated under the Bolsonaro administration.

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