

AMAZON BATTLES

Frontiers and deforestation

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The recent election of Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil has brought global attention to the status of the Amazon rainforest and the possibility that environmental protections for that forest may be removed in favour of renewed deforestation and development.

But the political ecology of deforestation and state intervention on the Amazonian frontier has been heavily contested, with the government stimulating and halting development at different times during both the military regime and democratic governance, according to Marianne Schmink at the University of Florida and her colleagues. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders in

2014, the history of the São Félix region shows a contentious site of unofficial road building, heavy deforestation and unregulated slaughterhouses under the aegis of ‘closing’ the frontier and expanding agriculture by federal and state government directive, only for the federal government to ‘swerve’ and enact policies for greening the Amazon in the 2000s. Recent economic and political crises, however, have weakened the government’s ability and desire to continue conserving the forest at the expense of development, with the green trajectory still very uncertain.

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