

DEFORESTATION AND POLITICS

The corruption effect

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Credit: Brasil2 / E+ / Getty

Research on deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon abounds but little attention has been paid so far to the role of local politics as a driver of forest loss — an issue that could hinder the success of national government interventions.

Sharon Pailler of Clark University, USA, combined municipal-level deforestation and election data from 2002 to 2012 in the Brazilian Amazon, to compare annual deforestation in municipalities with and without mayoral re-election. She found that, during election periods, deforestation rates in municipalities with re-election were 8–10% higher than in municipalities without re-election, equivalent to 4%

of the total forest loss since the 2004 elections. Corruption and campaign finance were strongly linked to electoral deforestation cycles, whereas changes in agricultural policy implementation and activity were not. This suggests that in weak institutional contexts, manipulation of forest resources during election can exacerbate deforestation, a conclusion likely to explain mismanagement of other natural resources in different regions.

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