

Analysis of Stakeholder Discourses on Petroleum Exploration and Production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin

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Abstract

The exploration and production (E&P) of oil and natural gas in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin, particularly at the Amazon River Mouth, has become a subject of intense national and international debate. This study analyzes public discourses related to those activities within the context of Brazil's environmental commitments under the Paris Agreement. The analysis spans the period from President Lula da Silva's third inauguration, in January 2023, to May 2024, focusing on political and economic approaches. The method involved systematic literature review, discourse analysis, and content analysis, using the Atlas TI software as a content analysis tool to manage, code and categorize textual data. The results show the predominance of the right to development, ecological modernization, and energy clout narratives. The common but differentiated responsibilities narrative is deeply rooted in these dominant narratives and undermines the opposition to oil production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin. The analysis reveals the complexity of the discursive coalitions formed and simultaneously offers insights to help public policymakers balance economic development, energy security, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: oil exploration and production, Brazilian Equatorial Margin, discourse analysis, Paris Agreement, public policies

1. Introduction

The exploration and production (E&P) of oil and natural gas in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin, particularly near the Amazon River Mouth, has become a subject of intense national and international debate. This study analyzes the public discourses surrounding this debate, especially within the context of Brazil's environmental commitments under the Paris Agreement. The analysis covers the period from President Lula da Silva's third inauguration, in January 2023, to May 2024, focusing on political and economic approaches. The energy transition presents challenges and opportunities for Brazil, a major global hydrocarbon producer that pumped 3.12 million barrels per day in average in 2023 (IEA, 2024). Despite its declared commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and to preserving biodiversity, the government has implemented various policies to promote oil exploration near the Amazon River Mouth. That has sparked internal division within the government and strong opposition from environmentalists and from civil society entities that advocate reduced investment in fossil fuels under the argument that increasing oil production is inconsistent with environmental commitments (Bobsin Duarte, 2021).

This paper examines the narratives adopted by different stakeholders in Brazil. These stakeholders include Petrobras, government officials, government entities (such as the Brazilian Institute for the Environment - IBAMA), congresspersons and senators, fossil fuel lobbyists, businesses, non-governmental organizations and academia. The method involved systematic literature review, discourse analysis, and content analysis using the Atlas TI software as a content analysis tool to manage, code and categorize textual data. Discourse analysis was based on the method developed by Hajer and Versteeg (2005) and refined by Amorim (2023).

Recognizing that discourses are social constructs that reflect and shape power relations from a historical, social and cultural perspective, this critical investigation aims to identify the beneficiaries and implications of these narratives. The study seeks to uncover the underlying dynamics that influence Brazil's energy and environmental policies, providing insight into the discursive disputes associated with E&P in the Equatorial Margin, about 500 kilometers from the Amazon River Mouth. The significance of this work lies in its ability to provide a deep understanding of the intersections between development, energy sovereignty, and environmental sustainability, which are central issues for Brazil's energy future, and of Brazil's position in the global geopolitical scenario.

Additionally, by investigating the narratives surrounding oil exploration, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the complex relationships between politics, economics, and the environment, offering support for more balanced and informed public policies and decisions.

2. Method

A triangulation of methods combining literature review, discourse analysis, and content analysis was employed to enhance result validity and reliability. This approach, used by Amorim (2023) in his doctoral dissertation, allows a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of the methods involved and provides a comprehensive analysis of the arguments on the topic. The approach also facilitated the identification of convergences and divergences among the different data sources and theoretical perspectives analyzed.

2.1 Theoretical-Methodological Framework

The systematic literature review focuses on academic publications in discourse methodology and content analysis, international relations, history, sociology, energy and the environment. This review is key to establish a solid theoretical basis and to identify gaps and controversies in the field of study. Scientific papers, books, theses, dissertations, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), videos and official documents from governmental and intergovernmental institutions were examined. The literature review aims to find the theoretical bases of the other two methods and to map the main theories and approaches related to oil and natural gas production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin. Said review also aims to examine the environmental and geopolitical implications of that production considering the historical, social and cultural construction of various Brazilian schools of political thought. That is essential to provide an interpretative basis to apply the other methods. Furthermore, a systematic literature review extracts, interprets and analyzes the relevant data and then describes and summarizes these interpretations, thereby avoiding biases that could occur in a non-systematic review, including in the review and selection of publications and in the critical evaluation of each work analyzed.

2.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was based on the method developed by Hajer and Versteeg (2005) and later refined by Amorim (2023). This approach was selected for its ability to reveal the underlying power dynamics within discourses and to identify the discursive coalitions that form around different narratives. According to Amorim (2023), discourse analysis involves interlinked vital concepts, which the author summarized as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Critical Discourse Analysis Concepts according to Amorim (2023)

Concept	Description
Narrative Lines	Discursive constructions employed to simplify a complex reality, operating as a shortcut amid a multitude of conflicting discourses.
Discursive Coalitions	A group of actors who adopt the same narrative lines to achieve their objectives, but who do not necessarily share the same interests and goals.
Discourse Framing	Occurs when a discourse is seen as credible by most people and controls how a particular social unit (company, society, country, etc.) conceptualizes the world.
Discourse Institutionalization	The new discourse is reflected in institutional practices and in concrete public policies.
Discursive Hegemony	When a discourse is both framed and institutionalized.

The narrative lines in the public debate were first identified and systematized using as the primary data source the transcript of the public hearing ‘Intention to pump oil and gas at the Amazon River Mouth,’ conducted by the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee of the Brazilian House of Representatives (2023), as described in detail in the subsequent section. This step involved thoroughly reading the transcript and identifying recurring themes and core arguments.

Discursive coalitions—groups of actors who share and promote certain narratives—were analyzed based on the narratives identified to understand how different actors align or oppose each other around specific issues.

Next, based on the preceding literature review, the discourses were contextualized within their historical, social and cultural production conditions. This step was essential to understand how power relations shape narratives and simultaneously influence them.

Finally, results were interpreted critically to identify the beneficiaries of the different narratives and their implications for Brazil’s energy and environmental policies, especially when one such narrative becomes a framed and institutionalized discourse that can potentially become hegemonic.

Discourse analysis assumes that discursive elements are intrinsically related to the specific historical, social and cultural conditions under which they were produced (Amorim, 2023), so that the contextualization of those conditions is essential to understand how narratives are shaped by power relations and at the same time influence them.

This methodological basis of discourse analysis does not suggest that the environmental crisis is the invention of global warming zealots. The study focuses on how the costs and benefits of environmental planning are distributed among different social groups and how legitimization through ‘technical criteria’ can mask this distribution (Amorim, 2023).

2.3 Categories of Analysis

The categories used in the discourse analysis are presented below, each with its definition and associated key terms. They are the sovereigntist discourse, subdivided into four themes (nationalism, energy security, energy clout and climate denialism), and the developmentalist discourse, also subdivided into four themes (right to development, common but differentiated responsibilities, ecological modernization, and energy transition).

2.3.1 Sovereigntist Discourse

One of the most deeply rooted discourses in the Brazilian environmental debate, especially concerning the Amazon region, is that Brazil’s territory and natural resources must be protected from “foreign greed.” This discourse is based on the perception of a constant external threat, framed as “us versus them” with narratives that historically adapt to various circumstances and governments (Amorim, 2023). In this analysis, the sovereigntist discourse is expressed along three main conceptual lines: nationalism, energy security, and energy clout.

2.3.2 Nationalism

The acceptance of the nationalist discourse by the Brazilian public contributes to create a political identity that allows different governments to focus on the Amazon region primarily through the lens of geopolitical interests and national security, as advocated by the National Security Doctrine (Domingos Neto, 2022). Some critics argue that this view relegates the region’s social and environmental problems to the background. The nationalist discourse offers a partial and biased view of the country as a whole and of the Amazon region in particular that obfuscates the constant presence of international interests in the region often associated with the Brazilian state (Penido, Barbosa, & Kalil, 2022).

Another critical aspect, deeply seated in the Brazilian mind, is the slogan “The oil is ours,” which refers to a nationalist movement from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s seeking to keep Brazil’s oil resources under Brazilian control and which culminated in the creation of Petrobras in 1953 (De Abreu Penna, 2003).

In his book “Oil and Nationalism,” Gabriel Cohn (2021) analyzes the complex and contradictory relationship between oil and nationalism in Brazil’s economic development process. He mentions, for example, renowned Brazilian writer Monteiro Lobato’s strong criticism of the then current government’s oil policy, which Lobato thought to be excessively aligned with the interests of large international business groups to the detriment of the national interest. This criticism is consistent with Cohn’s analysis of the ambivalence of the relationship between oil and nationalism in Brazil.

2.3.3 Energy Security

The First Oil Shock, in 1973, put energy security on the agenda and propelled ethanol production to reduce Brazil’s oil imports. In 1975, the Federal Government created the Proálcool program to encourage the production of sugarcane and the construction of refineries to produce anhydrous ethanol, which was initially added to gasoline to be fed into unmodified engines. Hydrated ethanol (pure ethanol) also was extensively used, particularly for ethanol-only vehicles. The distinction between anhydrous ethanol (used as a gasoline additive) and hydrated ethanol (used in ethanol-only or flex-fuel vehicles) is crucial to understand Brazil’s energy landscape. Rico et al. (2002) have researched this differentiation in production and application and provided critical insights into Brazil’s ethanol strategy. The Second Oil Shock, in 1979, intensified the use of hydrated ethanol and gave long life to the mandatory mixture with gasoline (Amorim, 2023).

Another critical perspective on energy security was the historic electricity rationing of the early 2000s. Hydropower has for decades been the primary source of electricity in Brazil and currently accounts for 58.9% of Total Electricity Supply by Source (EPE, 2024b). The debate about electricity production, which is very sensitive to rainfall given Brazil’s heavy reliance on hydropower, intensified at the time. The importance of and advocacy for expanding dispatchable thermal power grew significantly, as seen in “The Origins of the Brazilian Energy Crisis” (Tolmasquim, 2000).

Furthermore, Petrobras was considered to have actively helped resolve the energy crisis. According to Tolmasquim (2000), “Today, the solution will come through Petrobras, which will bear the exchange rate risk through a mechanism similar to that used for petroleum products.”

The crisis turned energy security into a central pillar in the governance of Brazil’s energy sector. This is explicit in the book “New Model of the Brazilian Electric Sector,” in which Tolmasquim (2015) highlights the importance of ensuring new governance and the resilience of the national power system and reflects on Brazil’s overall energy strategy. Tolmasquim therein examines in depth the strategies and policies used to build a new governance model that could ensure a continuous and reliable supply of power and fuels.

2.3.4 Energy Clout

In the mid-2000s, the “Brazil as an energy superpower” narrative emerged based on the diversity of sources in Brazil’s energy mix. The promotion of biofuels has significantly impacted Brazil’s emission profile, particularly in the transportation sector. At the same time, the expansion of modern renewable sources like wind and solar has played a key role in reducing the country’s dependence on hydropower (Amorim, 2023). In 2023, sugar cane products represented almost 16.8% of total energy supply (EPE, 2024b).

Over the past 15 years, Brazil has stood out on the world stage for the rapid expansion of wind and solar power generation. Wind power, particularly in Northeast Brazil, has seen impressive growth driven by incentive policies and by private investment. In 2023, installed wind power capacity exceeded 28 GW, positioning Brazil as a leading global wind power producer (EPE, 2024a).

Solar power has also grown exponentially. Brazil’s installed photovoltaic solar power capacity exceeded 37 GW in 2023, with a significant increase in distributed generation, where consumers produce their own power from solar systems installed in homes, businesses and industries (EPE, 2024a).

Similarly, the enthusiasm with the Pre-Salt oil discovery in 2006 marked a turning point for Brazil’s oil industry. Located in ultradeep ocean waters, these deposits represent one of the most significant oil discoveries in the world in recent decades. The Pre-Salt gave Brazil a new perspective on economic growth and on energy self-sufficiency. According to Sauer (2016), the Pre-Salt discovery may turn Brazil into a major oil producer and exporter. The country is betting on harnessing the oil windfall to fund the public investments necessary to bridge the wide social gap that mars Brazilian society.

2.3.5 Climate Denialism

The term “*Climate Denialism*” is used negatively to energize the narrative that a foreign threat looms over the Amazon region. This concept is presented as an expression of globalism, as climate zealotry fostered by institutions such as the UN and its entities, the European Union and international NGOs (Sagres, 2022).

As Amorim (2023) noted in his dissertation, the report “Nation Project – Brazil in 2035,” published in 2022 and developed by the Sagres, General Villas Bôas, and Federalist institutes (all associated with the Armed Forces), mentions “globalism” and “climatism” in its scenario for 2035:

In Brazil today, it is obvious that certain national entities are joining forces with the globalist movement, including through the support of significant international actors, aiming to interfere in the decisions of government authorities and lawmakers, especially on issues intended to give benefits to certain minorities to the detriment of the majority of the population, to influence our economic development using environmental agendas to obfuscate their interests, and not for the necessary preservation of nature, and to provoke crises that sap the pursuit of national development (Amorim, 2023, p. 12).

In his dissertation, Ferreira (2023) notes that the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bolsonaro Administration, Ernesto Araújo, defined “environmentalism” or “climatism” as using the climate issue for economic control purposes (Araújo, 2020, p. 699) to suppress the conventional political-democratic debate (Araújo, 2019, p. 401). In a lecture given at the Heritage Foundation in September 2019, Ernesto Araújo posited, based on conspiracy theories, that specific “promoters” supposedly distort climate change data to convince the population that dramatic action is needed to protect the environment. According to Araújo, the true intention of these promoters is to implement socialism, although they avoid using this term because of its unpopularity. They allegedly manipulate the perception of a climate emergency to justify adopting authoritarian measures (Araújo, 2019, p. 401).

2.4 Developmentalist Discourse

The developmentalist discourse has spread globally since the second half of the 20th century. It proposes that all nations follow a single model to overcome backwardness and to achieve the standard life of Global North countries. However, more than seventy years after these guidelines were implemented in many parts of the world, it is evident

that only a few nations have achieved the desired development level (Amorim, 2023).

Lencioni (1992) argues that the transformation of the developmentalist discourse, focusing on technical progress for capitalist reproduction, no longer legitimizes development. The theoretical foundations of new developmentalism lie in Keynesian macroeconomics and in the economic theory of development, based on classical economic theory. New developmentalism firmly advocates fiscal prudence not for orthodoxy's sake but from the perception that a strong and capable state needs healthy finances, low debt and a long time horizon. A heavily indebted state, especially with foreign creditors, is vulnerable to capital flight and to disastrous economic policies, as has occurred in Brazil (Bresser-Pereira, 2007).

This paper focuses less on the development discourse from the perspective of economic theory and more on the interpretations that materialize economic policy narratives, with emphasis on social and environmental aspects. Four narratives stemming from the developmentalist discourse were identified: the right to development, common but differentiated responsibilities, ecological modernization, and a new concept: just energy transition.

2.4.1 Right to Development

The right to development concept sustains a crucial narrative in international relations and global economic growth. This coalition, which encompasses various actors such as state bureaucrats, trade unions, academia, economists, politicians and businesspeople, operates on the premise that all countries, particularly those in the Global South, have the inalienable right to use their natural resources to achieve economic development and, by extension, to improve the social well-being of their populations (Amorim, 2023).

In his book "Right to Development," Robério Nunes Dos Anjos Filho (2017) explains the difficulty in defining "development" due to its interdisciplinary nature encompassing economic, legal, political, sociological and cultural aspects. The evolution of the term has given it a strong polysemous character. Despite the challenges, the study of development remains a robust field of work that produces vast academic literature in numerous languages. In this article, we associate it with economic growth.

2.4.2 Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

The narrative line of "common but differentiated responsibilities" holds that because developed countries have industrialized early at the expense of developing countries, the former should lead the fight against climate change by assuming greater responsibility for mitigation efforts. While they recognize that all nations must contribute to curb emissions, developing countries argue that Global North countries should act first, make more ambitious commitments and provide financial and technological support to Global South countries.

The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" is key to the international climate change regime and has been a central pillar of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since its inception. This principle, associated with climate justice, allocates responsibility based on each state's emissions level, development, technological, social and economic capabilities. The UNFCCC and the principle of intergenerational equity stipulate that parties should protect the climate system for present and future generations according to their capabilities. This principle has been incorporated into and explicitly mentioned in subsequent protocols and programs such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement (Balduino, 2020).

2.4.3 Ecological Modernization

The signatory countries of the Paris Agreement, created in 2015 as a key result of COP21, in Paris, and ratified in 2016, acknowledged the urgent and potentially irreversible threat climate change poses to humankind and to the planet and agreed to take joint action to swiftly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement left signatory countries free to set their own climate commitments and included mechanisms to regularly review their compliance (Falkner, 2016).

The Theory of Ecological Modernization (TEM) posits that economic growth can be harmonized with the goals of the Paris Agreement. It rejects radical proposals for economic reorganization in favor of a gradual transition to a "green economy." According to Olivieri (2010), TEM emphasizes the growing importance of economic and market dynamics for ecological reform and the role innovators, entrepreneurs and other economic agents can play as social catalysts for that reform by interacting with state agencies and environmental movements in complex ways.

However, as Lane (2014b) points out, the concept of sustainability, including ecological modernization, must go beyond the mere maintenance of current economic growth models. It should prioritize the preservation of ecological capital and should focus on avoiding irreversible damage to the global environment rather than on relying solely on technological innovations and economic adjustments. This perspective underscores the

importance of ensuring ecological sustainability in the pursuit of economic objectives.

TEM challenges the simplistic view of the 1970s by contending that economic development and environmental quality are interdependent and not necessarily incompatible. It suggests that the institutions and mechanisms of a modern market economy can be reformed based on ecologically rational criteria—a process that is already under way. TEM also advocates internalizing “economic externalities” into production and consumption processes to promote the “economization” of ecology. TEM further articulates environmental standards in economic processes involving insurers, credit institutions, industrial consumers, certification organizations, and industry associations.

2.4.4 Just Energy Transition

The global energy mix has changed significantly in recent years, shifting towards cleaner and renewable energy sources in a process known as energy transition. A just energy transition aims to ensure that this shift from fossil fuels to renewable and sustainable energy sources is carried out equitably. This concept involves mitigating the negative impacts of the transition on workers, communities and economies that traditionally depend on fossil fuels while maximizing the social and economic benefits of new energy technologies (De Oliveira Nascimento, 2023).

As Leão et al. (2021) stated, achieving a fair energy transition demands collaborative efforts from national governments and significant investments from leading energy entities, including major government or non-government oil companies. Governments need to manage geopolitical factors, energy diversification, and economic development. At the same time, financial considerations are the primary driver of oil companies' interactions with governments and of their ability to align actions across the energy sector.

In response to these pressures, oil companies develop strategies to either invest in renewable energies or to delay their adoption in defense of oil's dominance. These companies seek to maintain their long-term significance within the energy industry by participating in the energy transition while at the same time supporting the oil and gas sector to buttress their global influence. This “energy dilemma” reflects not only the increasing certainty of the key role that renewable energies will play in the future but also the ongoing uncertainty about the future of oil. As Lane (2014a) notes, reconciling economic growth with environmental sustainability is expected to be one of the most critical challenges of the 21st century, especially as the limitations imposed by climate change make reducing carbon emissions paramount.

2.5 Integration of Categories in the Analysis

The discourse analysis mapped the various narrative lines from the transcript of the Public Hearing held on May 31, 2023 by the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee of the Brazilian House of Representatives regarding oil and natural gas production near the Amazon River Mouth. Discursive coalitions were identified and analyzed to show how they influence power relations in the debate over oil production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin. These narratives' historical, social and cultural context gave more profound insights on the discursive dynamics and on their impact on Brazil's energy and environmental policies.

2.6 Content Analysis

This research used content analysis to examine the discourses from the same Brazilian House of Representatives public hearing mentioned in the preceding section. This method was chosen for its ability to systematically interpret textual data in order to identify patterns, themes and underlying meanings in the participants' discourses.

The analysis proceeded in three phases: initial coding, code refinement, and interpretative analysis. The Atlas TI software was used for data management and coding.

2.6.1 Initial Coding

Initially, thematic categories and subcategories were created based on the literature review and on the study's objectives. The categories were divided into two main groups: Sovereigntist and Developmentalist, as described below:

2.6.1.1 Sovereigntist Discourse

- Nationalism: energy sovereignty; control of natural resources; energy independence; national energy policy; “The Oil is Ours”; protection against foreign greed; and nationalist movement.
- Energy Security: supply security; energy risk management; “Proálcool”; reduced dependence on imported oil.
- Climate Denialism: globalism; climate zealotry; foreign threat; “climatism”; international NGOs; global institutions; foreign greed for the Amazon region.
- Energy Superpower: energy self-sufficiency; oil reserves; wealth; Pre-Salt; equatorial margin; diversity of energy sources; energy clout.

2.6.1.2 Developmentalist Discourse

- Right to Development: economic development; economic growth; job creation; income and investment.
- Common but Differentiated Responsibilities: developed countries; industrialized countries; Europe; 100 billion dollars; historical responsibility; underdeveloped countries; United States.
- Ecological Modernization: renewable energies; ecological transition; environmental sustainability; biodiversity protection; green economy; environmental responsibility; environmental preservation; Blue Amazon.
- Just Energy Transition: just and fair energy transition.

2.6.2 Code Refinement

In the next step, key terms and ideas were refined to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the analysis. For this, we used Atlas TI's search and automatic coding functionality, which efficiently searches for term variations. For example, to capture different forms of the expression "energy transition," terms such as "just transition" and "transition" were included in search parameters.

2.6.2.1 Analysis and Interpretation

The final phase involved analyzing and interpreting the data coded. The occurrences were examined to identify discourse patterns and trends and to find dominant narratives and contrasting positions among the different actors. This analysis revealed discursive coalitions and the underlying power dynamics in the debates over oil and gas production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin.

2.6.2.2 Atlas TI Coding Procedure

The following coding steps were followed in Atlas TI:

- Code Creation: As described above, specific codes were created for each category and subcategory.
- Term Search in the Transcript: Atlas TI software was used to find all occurrences of related terms in the hearing transcript examined.
- Automatic Coding: The occurrences found were automatically coded and the appropriate codes were applied.
- Use of Search Operators: Operators such as the asterisk (*) were used to capture term variations.
- Review and Refinement: The segments coded were manually reviewed and adjusted to ensure accuracy.

The procedure above made a detailed and structured content analysis possible and provided a deep understanding of the narratives and power relations in the context of oil and gas production at the Amazon River Mouth.

3. Results

3.1 Dominant Narratives

The content and discourse analysis revealed several dominant narratives among the actors involved in the debate over oil and natural gas exploration and production in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin, focusing on the Amazon River Mouth. These narratives were grouped into two discourse categories, each with four subcategories, along the narrative lines described in Subsections 2.3 and 2.4. The categories and analyses present in each discourse (whether sovereigntist or developmentalist) are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

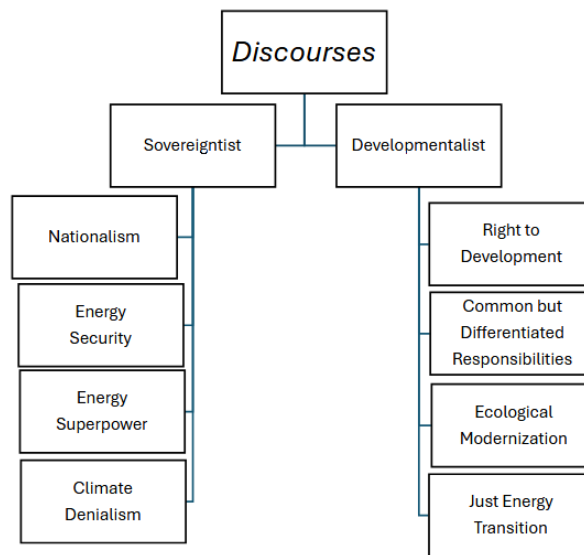


Figure 1. Narrative line flowchart

Source: Prepared by the Authors.

The content analysis conducted using Atlas TI reveals the predominance of certain narratives in the debate over oil and gas production at the Amazon River Mouth. The figure below shows the number of occurrences found for each narrative. The number of references within each category helps us understand the priorities chosen to support arguments for or against oil and gas production.

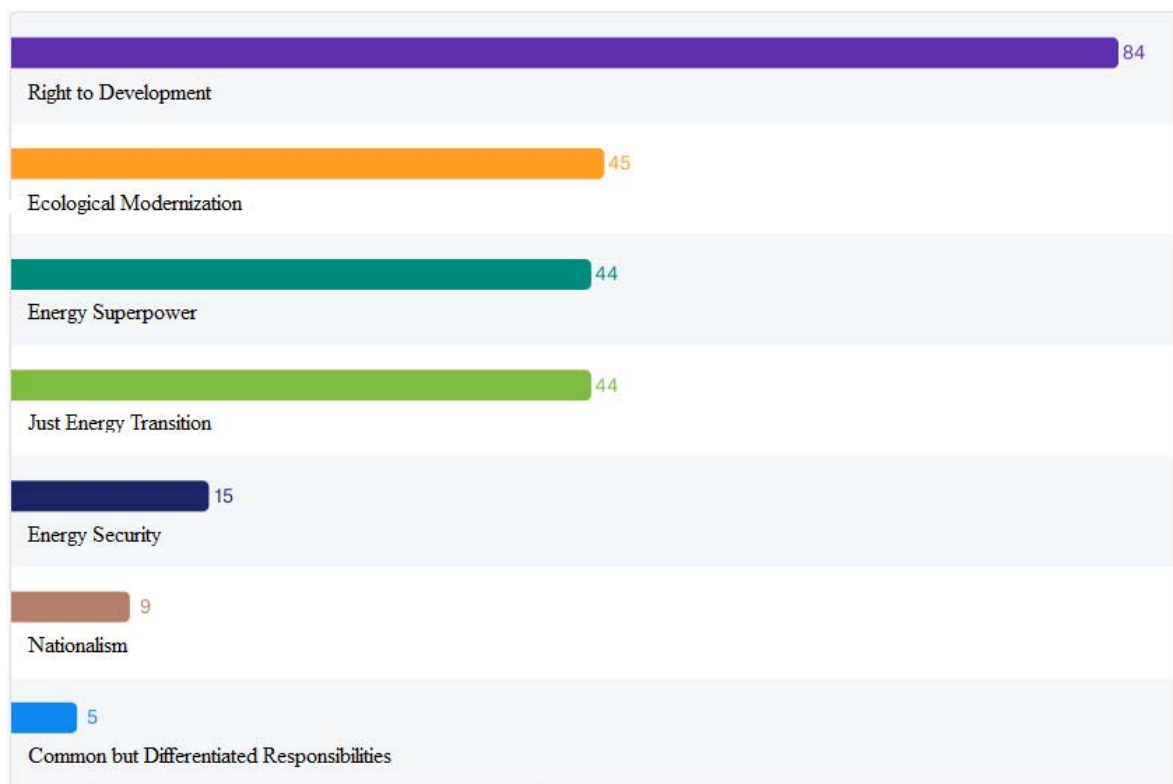


Figure 2. Number of quotes found for each narrative

Source: Prepared by the Authors.

Right to Development (84 occurrences)

The “Right to Development” narrative is dominant, reflecting actors’ strong emphasis on using Brazil’s natural resources to promote economic growth and social well-being.

Discourse Example: “Billions of dollars will create 445,000 jobs in this industry. This is what Brazil needs. We must combat poverty, which is often a source of environmental problems.” (IBP)

Ecological Modernization (45 occurrences)

Advocates the alignment of economic growth with environmental sustainability through the green transition.

Discourse Example: “The Climate Observatory argues that Brazil has the potential to become carbon negative by 2045. A movement composed of 95 organizations believes that Brazil is poised to become the first carbon-negative major global economy.” (Climate Observatory)

Energy Superpower (44 occurrences)

Emphasizes the diversity of energy sources and Brazil’s importance as a global energy player.

Discourse Example: “Today, we need this oil from the continental margin to ensure energy security; otherwise, the country risks again becoming a net oil importer in a time of extreme geopolitical uncertainty.” (Petrobras)

Just Energy Transition (44 occurrences)

Emphasizes the need to ensure an equitable energy transition that minimizes the negative impacts on workers and communities that depend on fossil fuels.

Discourse Example: “Ensuring that this use is compatible with our current needs and future generations. The commitment signed in the Paris Agreement, therefore, implies working towards an energy transition and finding other sustainable energy production alternatives.” (IBAMA)

Energy Security (15 occurrences)

Addresses the need to ensure a continuous and reliable energy supply and to reduce dependence on imports.

Discourse Example: “Today, we need this oil from the continental margin to ensure energy security; otherwise, the country risks again becoming a net oil importer in a time of extreme geopolitical uncertainty.” (Petrobras)

Nationalism (9 occurrences)

Emphasizes the protection of Brazil’s natural resources against foreign greed and the promotion of energy sovereignty.

Discourse Example: “The experiences in Guyana and Suriname, where more than 20 oil companies operate along the Equatorial Margin and in the Amazon region, illustrate the importance of those areas for national sovereignty. This underscores the need to develop a new national and regional development paradigm in which Brazil’s federal and state governments use their institutions and instruments—along which Petrobras takes pride of place—to play a key role in the coordination of actors and investments.” (MME)

Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (5 occurrences)

This narrative, used both for and against oil production, argues that developed countries should lead the effort to curb emissions and should support developing countries, recognizing the need to balance economic development and climate commitments.

Discourse Example: “The dollars from industrialized or developed countries, i.e., those that emit the most greenhouse gases, have not arrived and if they do arrive, state governments cannot receive them without federal approval. Even more accessible loans such as those provided by The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and KfW, require federal approval. The state of Pará is currently seeking a loan from The World Bank” (State of Pará).

3.2 Discursive Coalitions

The analysis found two main coalitions with some significant narrative overlaps that reflect the complexity of the positions held by different actors.

Table 2. Discursive coalitions

Coalition	Composition	Predominant Narratives	Main Arguments
Pro-Production	Government and businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to Development; • Energy Superpower; • Energy Security; • Nationalism; • Common but Differentiated Responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National energy security; • Job creation; • Strengthen the economy; • Increase tax revenues; • Production as a sovereign and strategic right
Environmentalists	NGOs, civil society, part of the academic community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Commitments; • Ecological Modernization; • Just Energy Transition • Common but Differentiated Responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incompatibility with climate commitments; • Preservation of ecosystems; • Promotion of renewable energies; • Advocacy for a just energy transition

Source: Prepared by the Authors.

Although less frequent than other narratives (with only five direct occurrences), the “common but differentiated responsibilities” narrative is deeply embedded in other dominant narratives such as “Right to Development,” “Just Energy Transition” and seemingly in “Ecological Modernization.” This underlying integration makes this narrative a central and cross-cutting argument that reinforces Brazil’s legitimate use of its natural resources in support of its economic development while seeking to balance global environmental commitments and climate justice.

The “Climate Denialism” narrative did not appear in the debate, specifically during the public hearing analyzed in this study. Although this concept is often discussed in other contexts, especially those involving actors aligned with the so-called far-right, it was not mentioned in the speeches analyzed in this study.

4. Discussion

The exploration and production of oil and natural gas in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin is a complex issue involving a range of interests and perspectives. The different narratives and discursive coalitions described in this study not only reflect the tensions and opportunities within the debate over economic development, energy sovereignty, and environmental sustainability, but also provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. This understanding is essential for formulating balanced public policies that address Brazil’s economic, energy and environmental needs and that promote sustainable and equitable development.

The content analysis shows the predominance of the *right to development* narrative, which supports using Brazil’s natural resources to foster economic growth and social well-being. This discourse is reinforced by the *common but differentiated responsibilities* narrative, which, although less frequent, permeates discussions about Brazil’s right to use its natural resources according to its development needs. This principle is also invoked in the debate on *just energy transition*, which calls for an approach that minimizes the negative economic impacts of the energy transition on communities that depend on fossil fuels. However, the concept of *just energy transition* has also been used by proponents of oil exploration, which some critics interpret as a strategy to delay a more ambitious phase-out of fossil fuels.

Part of the discourse around *ecological modernization*, which emphasizes the alignment of economic growth with environmental sustainability, also intersects with the *common but differentiated responsibilities* principle, which argues that the green transition should consider each country’s specific capabilities and conditions. This integration creates a “gray area” that undermines the opposition to oil production and relativizes the positions of opposing actors. This intersection raises a key geopolitical question: Why should developing countries like Brazil pump less oil if oil-rich developed countries have not made explicit commitments to reduce their output or to phase-out fossil fuels? This issue creates tensions in the debate over the expansion of oil production in Brazil.

The analysis found different coalitions with distinct interests in the debate over oil exploration in the Equatorial Margin. The pro-production coalition, including government entities, businesses, and part of academia, relies on narratives of energy sovereignty, economic development, and energy clout, along with the *common but differentiated responsibilities* principle, to support oil production. This coalition argues that production is essential to ensure energy security and independence, and to promote economic growth. On the other hand, the environmental coalition, including NGOs, civil society, and another segment of academia, emphasizes climate commitments, ecological modernization, and just energy transition, focusing on the risks the “business as usual”

scenario poses to the environment and to ecosystem preservation.

The debate also reflects the division within the government, which adds another layer of complexity to the decision-making process. While some voices express environmental concerns, the overall trend suggests the government favors oil production in alignment with the pro-production coalition.

The *climate denialism* narrative did not appear in the debates analyzed, particularly in the public hearing that is the focus of this study. Although this concept is discussed in other contexts, mainly by actors aligned with the far-right, it was not mentioned in the speeches observed in this case.

The frequently-invoked *right to development* is one of the most sensitive points in the debate over oil production. This highlights the need for studies that comprehensively assess the oil's economic, social and environmental impacts, as well as the potential benefits of the "no production" scenario, such as the preservation of ecosystems and of their services. Accurately pricing these externalities—both positive and negative—is essential for a balanced analysis of each option. The lack of a clear assessment of these factors contributes to the ongoing polarization of the debate. Studies that precisely quantify the impacts and trade-offs of the "production" and "no production" scenarios could provide more robust support for informed and evidence-based public policies

5. Conclusion

The analysis of stakeholder discourses surrounding oil and gas exploration in the Brazilian Equatorial Margin showed how deeply complex this debate is. Critical narratives like the right to development and to ecological modernization dominate the discussion, reflecting the tension between Brazil's growth aspirations and environmental commitments. Integrating the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities into these narratives adds to this tension between global climate goals and national development priorities.

Coalitions were found to appear around major narratives: one coalition supports oil production, driven by energy security and economic development concerns, and another advocates environmental preservation and shifting away from fossil fuels. These coalitions underscore the complexity of the decision-making process, with both sides invoking the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities* to bolster their cases. Some believe that the pro-oil coalition uses the *just energy transition* narrative to delay more aggressive climate commitments. The division within the Brazilian government, where some voices push for environmental considerations while others lean toward oil production, adds an additional layer of complexity to the mix.

One notable gap in the discourse is the absence of any robust analysis on the costs and benefits of the "no production" scenario, particularly the value of preserving ecosystems. While the potential economic gains from oil production are frequently cited, there is a clear need for more comprehensive studies that quantify the trade-offs the "production" and "no production" scenarios involve. Those studies will provide valuable insight to policymakers by giving them a clearer picture of the long-term impacts of their choices.

This study focused solely on describing the narratives and discursive coalitions identified through the approach selected. It did not aim to assess the technical validity of the arguments or to determine who is right or who is wrong. The analysis acknowledges that discourses are social constructs that reflect and shape power relations within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts. This study sought to illuminate the discursive disputes surrounding oil and gas exploration and production in the Equatorial Margin, particularly near the Amazon River Mouth. Although not a decision-making tool, this research sheds light on the ideological undercurrents and political influences embedded in the technocratic discourse and offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics that influence Brazil's energy and environmental policies.

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