

[Decarbonization in the view of Brazilian Parliament: Impact on Public Perception and Consequences for Energy Transition Projects]

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Overview

The aim of this study is to assess how the idea of decarbonisation and the energy transition by the oil and gas industry has been approached by the Brazilian Congress. To do this, we will analyze the shorthand notes from the General Assembly and Senate over the last five years. Our hypothesis is that the way congressmen perceive and communicate the issue of decarbonisation plays a fundamental role in the alternatives proposed for emissions reduction and energy transition in the country. Additionally, their views as opinion leaders have a significant influence on public perception towards or against alternatives and players. Therefore, we aim to map the discourses about decarbonisation and energy transition in the Brazilian Congress, especially concerning the oil and gas industry.

Methods

Our methodological framework consists of (i) a Content Analysis of the collected shorthand notes, supported by the Atlas.ti software, and (ii) a Discourse Analysis of the main subjects brought out when the terms 'decarbonization' and 'energy transition' appear. Finally, we will propose a framework of the main discourses/narratives identified in the Brazilian Congress.

Results

So far, we have identified eight discourses. Inspired by the typology created by Dryzek (1997) in his book "The Politics of the Earth", we have called them (i) Environmentalist, (ii) Social environmentalist, (iii) Developmentalist, (iv) Individualist, (v) Negationist, (vi) Promethean, (vii) Liberal, and (viii) Geopolitical.

The idea of the Environmentalist discourse is that continued economic and population growth will eventually reach the natural limits of the earth. It therefore calls for immediate and significant changes in production and consumption patterns and a reorientation of planning beyond perpetual economic growth. The Socio-environmentalist discourse is based on the importance of preserving natural ecosystems and, above all, the traditional way of life of the people who inhabit these places (indigenous peoples, rubber tappers, small farmers, etc.). This discourse opposes the idea that fenced-off and uninhabited conservation units, or large areas of forests kept intact only to generate carbon credits, would be the ideal solution to reduce deforestation and thus mitigate emissions. Despite some similarities with the Environmentalism discourse, Socio-environmentalists believe that Environmentalism downplays the importance of social equality for environmental preservation.

The Developmentalist discourse is based on the conception that Brazil, as well as other countries in the Global South, has the right to achieve the same levels of social well-being as developed countries. Denying middle or low-income countries their right to economic growth would be unjust. On the other hand, the Liberal discourse argues that market mechanisms (emission taxes, carbon markets, green funds) are the fundamental drivers for the decarbonization of the economy. This discourse often gives less importance to actions called "command and control" (prohibitions and sanctions) and opposes a strong state presence in the regulation of economic activity.

The 'Promethean' discourse draws on the myth of Prometheus to symbolize a belief in the limitless potential of technology to solve humanity's challenges. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity, thus enabling progress and advancement (Dryzek, 1997). Similarly, the Promethean discourse posits that technological innovation will enable humanity to overcome almost any obstacle, including the problem of climate change.

The Geopolitical discourse tends to emphasize the importance of energy security for the sovereignty and economic growth of the country. This discourse is based on the imminent threat of a fuel supply crisis in the future, serving to justify investment in large projects for the generation of fossil and non-fossil energy, often delaying the implementation of more sustainable alternatives. On the other hand, the Individualist discourse argues for individual solutions, such as conscious consumption, to fight climate change. Finally, the Negationist discourse ignores environmental problems or simply argues that there is nothing mankind can do to address them.

Conclusions

Our initial conclusion is that the way in which the issue of decarbonization is communicated by the country's key policymakers is crucial to society's understanding of the problem and, therefore, plays a crucial role in the selection of mitigation projects. Since each discourse envisions different solutions, we believe there is a strong correlation between how congressmen perceive and portray certain mitigation alternatives and the passing of legislation on the matter.

References

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