

AMAZON FIRES

WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH US?

An explainer

Solidarity!

We stand in solidarity with the indigenous people of the Amazon and echo [their call](#): “We all breathe this one air, we all drink the same water. We live on this one planet. We need to protect the Earth. If we don't, the big winds will come and destroy the forest. Then you will feel the fear that we feel.”

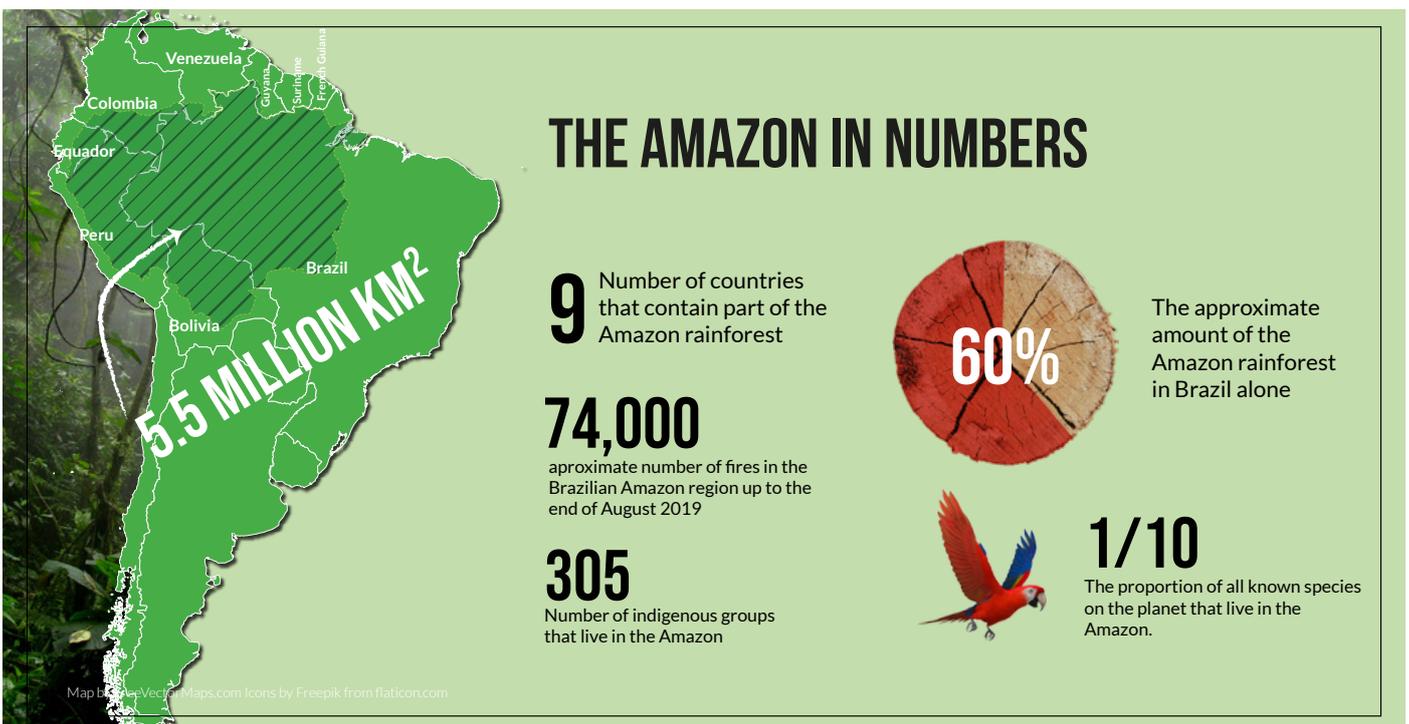
Background

The Amazon - the largest and most biodiverse tract of tropical rainforest in the world - has been under threat for quite some time. It absorbs about 15% of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and is essential to the stability of the global climate, as well as achieving the Paris Agreement targets. The Amazon straddles nine countries in Latin America but the vast majority, 60%, lies in Brazil.

Since 1978 [over 750,000 square kilometres of the Amazon rainforest](#) has been destroyed, mostly due to the expansion of the cattle industry, followed by mining and large-scale agriculture. This depressing trend began to reverse during President Lula's presidency of Brazil when [the rate of deforestation](#) reduced by half, the best improvement of any country, thanks to more vigorous monitoring and strict enforcement.

In 2012 President Dilma Rousseff, Lula's successor, clashed head-on with Brazil's powerful farm lobby over the revision of the forest code, the law that dictates the minimum percentage and type of woodland that farmers, timber companies and others must leave intact on their properties. Despite not commanding a majority in Congress, Rousseff [vetoed](#) parts of the bill attempting to loosen forest protection.

The right-wing coup against Dilma Rousseff's presidency sealed the ongoing crisis in the Amazon, culminating with the rise to power of Brazil's far right President, Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018.



What our MEPs says



Helmut Scholz

(Die Linke, Germany)

"I question the sincerity of Bolsonaro's commitments to environmental protection and respect for human rights. If the EU Commission is serious about breaches to the obligations on trade and sustainable development within the EU-Mercosur agreement, they will have to suspend the agreement on day one of it entering into force."

The 2019 Amazon fires

There has been an [83% increase](#) in forest fires since early 2019, according to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE). More than 74,000 fires were detected between January and August - the highest number since 2010.

Wildfires can start accidentally from the "queimada" - controlled fires started by farmers during the dry season to clear land for agriculture. After suspending the practice temporarily following international outcry, Bolsonaro has now announced [its expansion](#) to other states.

Besides appointing a foreign minister who believes that climate change is part of a "[Marxist plot](#)" and picking the head of the farming lobby for the post of agriculture minister, Brazil's Bolsonaro has made no secret of his intent to "open-up" the Amazon for development.

One of the far right President's first policy goals was [to roll back on the constitutional protections](#) of the lands of Brazil's indigenous communities - the first line of protection of the Amazon. He also made clear from his first day in office that there would be [little to no enforcement](#) against loggers and livestock farmers flouting environmental protection laws.

Already, government and big business [lining up](#) to take over indigenous land by force to exploit vast mineral deposits. Illegal mining in the Amazon has been described as an "[epidemic](#)".

Rewarding big business and the far right

Agriculture represents 22 percent of Brazil's gross domestic product. The country is the world's [top exporter](#) of beef and a major producer of soy, corn, sugar, coffee, oranges and cotton. Illegal land clearance has enabled cattle ranchers and producers of soy, the top export crop, to expand into the Amazon basin.

The EU is one of the main importers of Brazil's minerals, feed and meat which, along biofuels, feed the deforestation of the Amazon. Faced with public outcry, EU leaders were quick to denounce Bolsonaro's negligent approach to the forest fires. Finland even urged the EU [to ban Brazilian beef imports](#) as a form of pressure. Germany halted payments to the Amazon fund.

Despite these token gestures, the EU has signed the biggest free trade agreement of its kind with Mercosur countries, which includes Brazil. The agreement will give Brazilian agro-industrialists, many of them with a foothold in Bolsonaro's far right government, [tariff free access to Europe's markets](#).

The free trade agreement, if ratified by EU countries, will have a [devastating impact](#) on the Amazon, its indigenous population and fuel the land and resource grab.

The view of the Left

The deforestation of the Amazon is catastrophic to humankind and is yet another example of the havoc capitalism and industrial agriculture are causing to our planet.

The EU-Mercosur agreement will be sent to the European Parliament for approval. This agreement will only benefit the elites, embolden the far right and be devastating to local communities. We oppose the ratification of the agreement and stand for fair trade, sustainable development and a sustainable food system. We want the EU to end imports of goods that encourage deforestation (like soy, meat, timber and biofuels).

The Left, progressive agenda that put people and planet first is the only viable alternative to the reckless centrist and right wing agenda that supports the neoliberal status quo of the elites and that is leading the Amazon, and this planet, to a dead end.



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