

An area of the Amazon spanning 118 million hectares, equivalent to the combined territory of three countries, is becoming a "no man's land," fueling land grabbing, deforestation, irregular land registration certificates, and agrarian conflicts

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December 16, 2025



8 min read

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Published 16/12/2025 às 13:14

An area equivalent to the size of Spain, France, and Portugal combined encompasses undesignated forests, weak land registries, and illegal occupations, exposing flaws in land control, advancing deforestation, and persistent violence in the Amazonian countryside.

118 million hectares of undesignated public lands in the Legal Amazon are equivalent to the combined area of Spain, France, and Portugal, involving irregular (Rural Environmental Registry), 56,5 million hectares of undesignated forests, and a direct impact on deforestation, land grabbing, and agrarian conflicts.

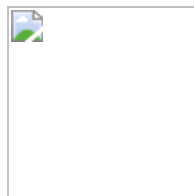
The Legal Amazon region encompasses 118 million hectares of federal and state public lands without a defined purpose, spread across several states, affected by land grabbing, cadastral fraud, and violence in rural areas. This problem exposes structural flaws in land control and threatens forests, traditional communities, and environmental policies.

The total area corresponds to the sum of the territories of Spain, France, and Portugal, according to estimates consolidated by experts who have been monitoring land issues for more than a decade.

These are lands belonging to the Union and the states that may be occupied irregularly, but function as if they had no owners, due to the absence of integrated cadastral control.

The lack of a unified system makes it impossible to know who controls each portion of the territory, creating loopholes for illegal appropriation and further deforestation.

Paulo Moutinho, scientist and co-founder of IPAM – the Amazon Environmental Research Institute, states that this represents public assets being lost to land grabbing.



According to Moutinho, many of these areas have come to be perceived as no man's land, a condition that encourages persistent illegal occupations.

A survey by the Escolhas Institute details the scale of the problem by mapping federal and state public lands that still lack formal allocation.

The study indicates a total of 118 million hectares, comprising 60,9 million hectares of public land and 57,1 million hectares classified as vacant land.

Within this total, 56,4 million hectares already have some type of occupation, while 59,4 million hectares have no consolidated occupation.

A significant portion of these areas corresponds to Undesignated Public Forests, known by the acronym FPND, recognized as public forest assets.

FPNDs are registered in the CNFP – National Registry of Public Forests, but do not yet have a formal definition of use.

Once designated, they can become conservation units, forest concessions, or territories designated for traditional communities.

The most recent update from the CNFP, published in 2024 by the SFB – Brazilian Forest Service, records 56,5 million hectares of forests without designated use in the Legal Amazon.

This significant volume increases the risk of illegal occupations, predatory logging, and social conflicts in remote areas.

How the (Rural Environmental Registry) came to enable land tenure fraud in public areas.

One of the main drivers of irregular land occupation is the CAR – Rural Environmental Registry, created by the Forest Code Law of 2012.

The CAR (Rural Environmental Registry) is self-declaratory and mandatory for rural properties, with the original function of mapping permanent preservation areas and legal reserves.

In practice, it came to be used as informal proof of ownership, including in public areas without a designated purpose.

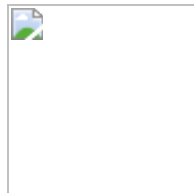
Because it does not require prior proof, the registry has been used to legitimize large-scale land fraud.

Moutinho estimates that around 30 million hectares of undesignated public forests are covered by CARs (Rural Environmental Registry) with evidence of irregularities.

He reports cases in Amazonas with 20 to 30 overlapping CAR (Rural Environmental Registry) registrations in the same area, highlighting the system's fragility.

This scenario is directly reflected in the pattern of deforestation observed on public lands without designated use.

According to Moutinho, about 65% of all deforestation in these forests occurs within CARs (Rural Environmental Registry) considered fraudulent.



After the extraction of the most commercially valuable timber, land use changes rapidly in most cases.

Approximately 70% of the exploited areas are converted into pasture, while about 25% end up being abandoned later.

Livestock farming plays a central role in this process, with the figure of the so-called "caretaker ox," used to give the appearance of productive use.

In this context, the herd serves to consolidate illegal occupation, not for a legitimate economic activity.

In many cases, cattle are slaughtered by meatpacking plants without proper licenses, fueling clandestine production chains.

For years, the financial system has indirectly contributed to this dynamic, according to Moutinho's assessment.

Official banks accepted the CAR (Rural Environmental Registry) as proof of land ownership, allowing for financing that ultimately enabled deforestation.

Investigations by Repórter Brasil have indicated the involvement of Banco do Brasil, Caixa Econômica Federal, and BNDES in this scheme.

According to investigations, the funds reached producers who had been fined by Ibama (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), farms that had been seized, and irregular slaughterhouses.

The Federal Police estimated that the cost to deforest one hectare ranged between R\$ 1,5 and R\$ 3.

These funds were provided by third parties, including international resources, according to investigations by the Federal Police.

In recent years, however, there has been a change in the profile of those who finance the devastation, according to Moutinho.

The funding is believed to have migrated to organized crime, with resources originating from gold mining, drug trafficking, and arms dealing.

The combination of undesignated public lands, weak land registries, and insufficient oversight facilitates this criminal activity.

Land tenure chaos exposes overlaps and structural flaws in the State.

Girolamo Treccani, a lawyer and professor at UFPA – the Federal University of Pará, defines the scenario as land chaos.

He also serves as legal counsel for the CPT – Pastoral Land Commission, which monitors conflicts in rural areas.

Treccani points out that decisions by the TCU – the Federal Court of Accounts – indicated a lack of knowledge on the part of the government itself regarding its lands.

In 2023, land governance was classified by the TCU (Brazilian Federal Court of Accounts) as one of the most critical points of the Brazilian State.

According to Treccani, there is currently no system capable of offering complete control over the national land tenure situation.

The country coexists with parallel databases that do not communicate with each other, operated by different agencies.

These include Incra, SIGEF – Land Management System and CAR itself, as well as state registries.

In addition, there are property registrations, which are also not fully integrated into the federal land databases.

This fragmentation generates severe distortions, such as municipalities where the sum of the registered areas exceeds the actual territory.

In Amazonas, Treccani reports cases where there is more paperwork than land, due to multiple registrations of the same property.

To address part of the problem, initiatives such as SINTER – the National System for Territorial Information Management – have emerged.

SINTER was regulated in 2016 and amended in 2022, with the aim of integrating land and data.

In 2025, the CNJ – National Council of Justice approved Provision 195, requiring a geospatial database managed by the ONR.

Despite this, implementation is slow and incomplete, according to Treccani, especially in states within the Legal Amazon region.

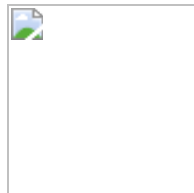
He states that at least 30% of registry offices in Pará have not yet joined the ONR system.

Without full compliance, it is not possible to cross-reference land registry entries with areas declared in SIGEF or .

Treccani points out that land insecurity stems from a lack of systematization and integration of information.

Since September 2025, it has been mandatory to present a CAR (Rural Environmental Registry) to register a property in the Land Registry.

However, the CAR (Rural Environmental Registry) does not need to be validated, allowing the use of registrations with indications of irregularity.



The history of land grabbing shapes Brazilian territorial occupation.

Raoni Rajão, a professor at UFMG – the Federal University of Minas Gerais – points to deep historical roots of the problem.

He headed the Department of Deforestation and Burning Control Policies at the Ministry of the Environment until 2024.

Rajão claims that Brazil was born from a large-scale land grabbing operation, historically based on the principle of occupation.

During the colonial period, those who occupied the land held power, not those who possessed formal documentation.

The Land Law of 1850 attempted to organize access to land by requiring the purchase and sale of public areas.

Law enforcement was limited, leaving loopholes for irregular appropriations over time.

In the 20th century, colonization policies increased the lack of control over land ownership, according to Rajão.

He cites the westward expansion during the Getúlio Vargas administration and the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway.

During the military dictatorship, programs linked land ownership to deforestation, such as land concessions along the BR 230 highway.

Legislation regarding the maximum size of private properties has also varied over the decades.

At certain times, land titles exceeding 10 hectares required authorization from the Senate.

After 1964, the limit was reduced to 3 hectares and then to 2,5 hectares after 1988.

Even so, records persist of private properties with much larger areas, inherited from old lawsuits.

According to Treccani, many land titles could only be verified by digitizing historical land records.

He advocates for the digitization of land grant documents and titles issued by state and federal governments.

Violence increases while lands remain without a defined purpose.

Land tenure uncertainty is cited as a central cause of the increase in agrarian conflicts in the Legal Amazon.

Annual reports from the CPT show that the region concentrates the majority of conflicts in the countryside.

Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, and traditional communities are among the main recent victims.

Threats, evictions, and murders frequently occur in public areas without formal designation.

Moutinho states that as land grabbing advances, so do the fires, devastation, and social conflict.

Rajão agrees that, without regulation and clear allocation of land use, the Amazon remains vulnerable to these cycles.

Treccani emphasizes that the solution depends on political decisions and the effective integration of systems.

The technical chamber for land allocation, recently recreated, resumed discussions concerning tens of millions of hectares.

Created during Dilma's government, abolished during Bolsonaro's government, and reinstated during Lula's administration, this body has yet to produce a few decisions.

Treccani advocates for greater participation of states and civil society in the decision-making process.

He highlights the constitutional principle that all power emanates from the people as a basis for transparency.

Public land, according to him, does not belong to governments, but to the Brazilian population, whose protection continues to lag behind.

With information from ICL News.