THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Climate change mitigation: The politics of extraction for a just energy transition project

Project Summary: International efforts to tackle climate change are leading to a global surge in demand for 'critical metals' - so named for their strategic material value in the low-carbon energy sector writ large, and especially for batteries in electric vehicles and electricity storage. Primary among these critical metals is lithium, for which global demand is projected to grow fivefold by 2025. Feeding this demand is a global network of mining and extractive processes whose most destructive (and least documented) effects are happening at the far ends of the value chain -- i.e., extraction and disposal. The research seeks to understand the consolidation and contestation of lithium mining in five of the world's principal lithium-bearing countries: Australia, Canada and the "lithium triangle" of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

Through comparative research across these regions and socio-technical landscapes, the research will pursue two inter-related empirical questions and objectives.

1. How are states governing this process?

A principal aim here is to document the institutional arrangements that have been put in place for regulating access, exploration, extraction, and accumulation within the lithium sector. This will entail investigating the material and political conditions under which extraction processes and impacts have been governed and regulated in Australia, Canada, Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

2. What accounts for political variation?

A principal aim here is to explain how and why countries with comparable material conditions vary in terms of global integration and capital accumulation. A working hypothesis is that the integration and regulation of domestic and international capital will vary with the degree to which political interest groups and coalitions are able to organize and influence executive, legislative and judicial decisions within the sector.