

Brazil and Latin America: A brief guide and the condition of children

Brazil and Latin America – Basic facts

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Scotland, September 2019.

1. Brazil: brief history

- Brazil was “discovered” by Europeans in 1500. Despite competition from the Dutch and French, the Portuguese gain control and formally claim ownership of the territory in 1654.
- In 1808, the Portuguese royal family, fleeing Napoleon, sail to Brazil under the protection of the British Navy and establish a joint Portuguese/Brazilian empire. In 1822, the Emperor, Dom Pedro I declares independence from Portugal.
- Slavery abolished in 1888, and in 1889 the Republic declared (with strong oligarchical component) and Dom Pedro II sent back to Portugal where he had never lived.
- After a history of oligarchical democracy, the military established a dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.
- Democracy restored post 1985 with a new constitution in 1988.
- 2002, the Workers Party Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva becomes president and inaugurates a progressive regime taking the first steps towards reducing income inequality.
- Lula succeeded by his handpicked candidate Dilma Rouseff who is impeached in 2016 for a non-impeachable offense.
- 2018 Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right loner in Brazilian politics is elected president partly because of the massive corruption scandals that affected all parties and institutes an anti-human rights, anti-education, anti-democracy program.

2. Brief facts: demographics

- Population: 208 million. The vast majority of people live along or relatively near, the Atlantic coast in the east; the population core is in the southeast, anchored by the cities of São Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro. 86.6% of the population is urban.
- 47.7% white, 43.1% mixed race, 7.6% black, 1.1% Asian, 0.4% indigenous.
- Religions: 64.6% Roman Catholic, 22.2% Protestant which includes 8.5% Adventist, 2% Assembly of God, 2.2% Spiritist). The indigenous population of about 300,000 marks a decline from the estimate of between 3 million and six million population at the European arrival.
- Massive decline in fertility from 6.2 births per woman of child bearing age in 1940, to 1.73 in 2016 which is below replacement rate.

- During the African North American slave trade period, two-thirds of all slaves who arrived in the Americas went to South America, the majority to Brazil.

3. Basic facts: economics

- Well-funded public pensions have nearly wiped out poverty among the elderly, and Bolsa Familia and other social and cash transfer programs have lifted tens of millions out of poverty. But these and other programs are now under attack from Bolsonaro's administration. More than half of Brazil's population is considered middle class, but poverty and income inequality levels remain high.
- The number of Brazilians living in extreme poverty -- calculated at less than \$1.90 per day -- rose from 13.5 million in 2016 to 15.2 million in 2017, representing 7.7 percent of the population.
- 18 million boys and girls (0-18) - 34.3 percent of the total - face financial poverty and are forced to live on less than a monthly \$88.75 per capita in urban areas, and \$69 in rural areas.

4. Basic facts: health and education

- Maternal mortality rate: 44 deaths per 100,000 live births.
- Infant mortality rate: Though much improved it is still 16.9 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- Very high rates of bacterial diarrhea and hepatitis (A), dengue fever and malaria. The Rio favelas have some of the highest rates of leprosy in the world.
- OECD ranks Brazil as the 65th worst country for education out of 75 evaluated.
- Until very recently students attended school for half a day to free up space for other students. This is slowly changing.

5. Basic facts: violence

- Murder rate in Brazil 30.8 per 100,000 compared to 5 per 100,000 in the U.S. and 25 per 100,000 in Mexico.
- Majority of victims are young, black, male and poor living in gang infested communities.
- Major reason for this level of violence is that Brazil borders the three largest cocaine producing countries in the world, Columbia, Peru and Bolivia and is the route for those drugs heading to Europe and Asia.
- From January through November, 2018, there were 1,444 persons killed by police in Rio de Janeiro with the Governor, a Bolsonaro supporter, saying the police should shoot to kill even if no one was at risk.
- Police are incompetent, corrupt and violent.

6. Points of light

- Brazil suffered inflation rates of 1,000 percent in the early 1990s. Those rates have never returned and is currently at 3.4%.
- The country has vast natural resources and agricultural land. New oil and natural gas resources off the coast of Rio (pre-sal) the second largest proven reserves in South America.
- The Constitution and such statutes as the Statute on the Child and the Adolescent have important human rights protections even if many of these are ignored in practice.
- Opposition to the current government is growing and there have been overthrows of some of his executive orders in Congress.
- The massive national and international protests against fires in the Amazon appear to have forced the government to send troops into 7 states to control the fires and stop more burning.
- If Brazil achieves a more humane and progressive government in 2020, there are strong examples from the Lula and Dilma governments of policies to increase human rights and reduce inequality. In the Bolsonaro election it was apparent that if the Workers Party had supported the center-left candidate as its candidate rather than pushing its own, that candidate would have won the election.

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