



# EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE **FIELD GUIDE**

**Brazil**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 “Culture General” provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the major regions of Brazil.

Part 2 “Culture Specific” describes unique cultural features of Brazilian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.



For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at [AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil](mailto:AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil) or visit the AFCLC website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/>.

**Disclaimer:** All text is the property of the AFCLC and may not be modified by a change in title, content, or labeling. It may be reproduced in its current format with the express permission of the AFCLC. All photography is provided as a courtesy of the US government, Wikimedia, and other sources.

[Please scroll over images to view captions.](#)

## PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

### What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture,

and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For

example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

### Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to



focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.



We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better



understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see

chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### **Social Behaviors Across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural

boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

### Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

## 12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people who you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.



### **Cultural Belief System**

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A

community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

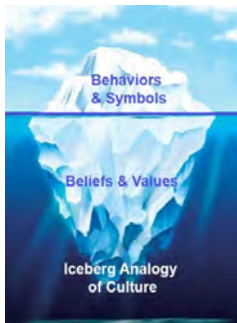
While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right



or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

## Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and



greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through Brazil, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common

across the country, while others vary by region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities and differences.



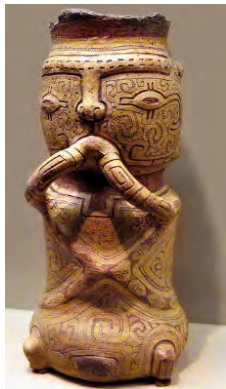


## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

Comprising nearly half of South America, Brazil borders every country on the continent except Chile and Ecuador. The government divides the country into five major regions: North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast, and South. While these regions are divided by common human, physical, cultural, social, and economic aspects, significant diversity also exists within each region.



Rock paintings in the northern State of Pará indicate that humans occupied Brazil at least 12,000 years ago. Indigenous Brazilian communities included hunter gatherers, farmers, and fishers, who spread from the Amazonian lowlands to other areas of present-day Brazil. Estimates suggest that when the Portuguese arrived in 1500, between two-six million indigenous inhabitants speaking

some 1,000 languages lived across the region. The southern Guaraní and Amazonian and coastal Tupi were some of the most influential native Brazilian peoples.

Portugal claimed eastern South America through the Treaty of Tordesillas that partitioned the continent between Portugal and Spain in the late 15th century. Portuguese began to settle the Northeast only in 1531, and Salvador de Bahia became Brazil's colonial capital in 1549. By 1600, only a few thousand European colonists and their descendants, and more than twice as many



enslaved Africans and indigenous people living along the coast, comprised the colony. The French and Dutch controlled portions of the Southeast and Northeast, respectively, though by 1654, Brazilians had expelled their European rivals and begun developing nationalist sentiments.

In the 17th century, **bandeirantes** (flag-carriers), missionaries, and cattle ranchers began to colonize the North and Center-West to capture, kill, or convert native Brazilians, find pasture for cattle, and search for minerals. While Spanish settlers defeated some *bandeirantes* in the South, many reached as far west as present-day Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia, making gains that eventually extended Brazil's borders far into the continent's interior.



Until the 18th century, sugar plantations in the Northeast, worked primarily by enslaved Africans, brought great wealth to a few landholders and the Portuguese Crown. Thereafter, the discovery of large gold deposits and growth of export-oriented coffee farms, mainly worked by enslaved Africans and cheap immigrant labor, shifted economic power to the Southeast and provided the impetus for the capital to move from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro.

Although independence movements had grown and nearly toppled the ruling class by the late 18th century, in 1808, much of the Portuguese royal family and court moved to Rio de Janeiro after France invaded Portugal. In 1822, prince regent Dom Pedro I declared Brazil independent and himself Emperor. In subsequent decades, Brazil endured regional wars and political chaos, though the population and economy grew significantly. In 1888, Brazil became the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, after some 4-5 million enslaved Africans were brought across the Atlantic to help build the nation. In 1889, the military deposed Dom Pedro II and declared Brazil a republic.

By the late 19th century, São Paulo, the hub for booming coffee exports, had become Brazil's commercial center, as European,

Asian, and Middle Eastern immigrants moved to the increasingly urbanized country. A rubber boom in the Amazon fueled internal migration and led to increased development of the interior. While political and economic power had concentrated in the Southeast, Brazilians grew tired of the ruling elite coffee and dairy magnates from that region and ushered in 15 years of populist rule by Rio Grande do Sul Governor Getúlio Vargas, who enacted various reforms to create the **Estado Novo** (New State) dictatorship.

For much of the mid-20th century, central features of Brazilian governments were their flawed democratic institutions and centralized executive power. President Juscelino Kubitschek sought to modernize and industrialize the country, in part by developing the largely rural Central-West and North, and by the construction of a new capital, Brasília, in Goiás, nearly 600 mi northwest of Rio de Janeiro. Despite this progress and growing nationalistic sentiment that permeated much of Brazil, rising



living costs and foreign debt plagued the country.

From 1964-85, a military dictatorship governed Brazil through social and political repression. Despite initial rapid economic growth,

inflation returned, and Brazilians increasingly called for reform. In response, the dictatorship reduced levels of censorship and violence and eventually allowed the return of democracy, which was consolidated with a new Constitution in 1988 and a free and fair presidential election in 1989.

After finally taming inflation in the mid-1990s, Brazil grew rapidly in the 2000s during a global commodities boom. Nevertheless, the 2010s were plagued by massive corruption scandals, the country's worst-ever economic crisis, environmental damage, and other disasters. While Brazil has made significant progress in recent years, by lifting millions out of poverty and becoming an upper-middle income country, society is highly unequal, and power and wealth remain largely concentrated in the Southeast.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social

relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Portuguese conquest and colonial rule considerably changed Brazilian society. The decimation of the indigenous population, massive import of enslaved Africans, and arrival of European immigrants in the 19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup.

Brazilian society is ethnically diverse. While many Brazilians are of mixed heritage, historical immigration patterns and slavery significantly influence the ethnic makeup of each region. Many European immigrants settled in the South and Southeast, while a large portion of enslaved Africans were forced to work on plantations in the Northeast. As a result, as of 2023, about 71% of residents in the South identify as white, compared to 20% in the North and 25% in the Northeast, where most residents identify as mixed. The Central-West is the most racially diverse region, and most indigenous Brazilians live in the North.



Brazilians tend to have a unique perspective on race. At the time of abolition, most Brazilians were mixed or Black. To “whiten” the country in the early-mid 20th century, officials encouraged European immigration, a policy that partly caused the substantial racial differences between major regions. However, because Brazil was a racially mixed society without formal segregation or overtly discriminatory laws, many Brazilians believed the country was a “racial democracy,” where racism was almost nonexistent. Today, race in Brazil tends to be based on self-identification and appearances. Although most Brazilians are mixed, a large share identify as white. Most Brazilians also acknowledge that racial discrimination and inequality are widespread, though these practices are often more subtle than in other countries.

Likewise, significant socioeconomic disparities characterize the regions and many of the areas within them. Brazil is one of the world's most unequal countries. Urban, wealthy, heterosexual

Brazilian men of European ancestry tend to comprise the most privileged social class, regardless of region. Brasília and states in the South and Southeast are much richer and offer their residents more social mobility than states in the North and Northeast. Nevertheless, even relatively affluent cities like São Paulo and Florianópolis contain **favelas** (shanty towns), where



some residents live in makeshift housing and lack access to basic services.

Since consolidating its democracy in the late 1980s, Brazil has become a federal presidential republic, and national politics are

characterized largely by competition between the center-left pro-worker **Partido dos Trabalhadores** (Workers' Party, or PT) and various centrist to far-right parties. State- and local-level politics generally reflect those at the national level, and in recent years, politics have become more polarized. Although the general electorate tends to align to the center-right, the North and Northeast have increasingly voted for the PT, and the right has expanded recently in the South and Southeast.

Brazil maintains positive relations with nearly all countries in the region and further afield. It belongs to the United Nations and many other international and regional organizations through which it pursues a generally independent foreign policy styled by the ideology of the government in power.

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Many of Brazil's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. While little is known of early religions, many attached spiritual meaning to ancestors and nature. Portuguese conquerors introduced Christianity in the early 16th century. As Roman Catholicism

spread, the Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life. Today, the Catholic Church remains an important part of many communities, a significant social services provider, and an influential organization that often wields robust political and social power.



Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion in Brazil, though Protestantism has grown rapidly in recent years. Secularism has grown in Brazil, which is home to fewer members of other Christian groups, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. Some Brazilians are Spiritists, who believe in connections and communications between the natural and spiritual worlds. Many Brazilians' African heritage has resulted in the creation of syncretic (mixed) religions such as Candomblé, Umbanda, and others.

Candomblé is a syncretic religion that developed around Bahia, where Brazilians of African descent mixed veneration of West African deities with that of Roman Catholic saints. Though it has since spread across the country, many Candomblé practitioners still live in the Northeast. Likewise, Umbanda grew from a mix of African, Catholic, Spiritist, indigenous, and other beliefs in the Southeast. Believers, many of whom live in the South and Southeast, worship a supreme being and other deities, and believe in communication with ancestors and the spirit world. Music and dance are important aspects of both religions.

#### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Brazilian society. Brazilians tend to maintain strong connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin

if needed. Residence patterns differ somewhat by region, though multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

Urbanization, which intensified in the 1970s and 80s, has changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in cities, family structures have become more diverse. Over 89% of residents in the Southeast and Central-West live in cities, compared to around 75% in the North and Northeast. Although many upper-income residents in large cities live in big houses or luxurious apartments in high-rise buildings, many cities lack affordable housing. As a result, some residents occupy crowded, sub-standard housing in *favelas* on precarious hills in city centers or on urban peripheries.



While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, both men and women generally choose

their own partners. Although Roman Catholic traditions strongly value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce, rates of divorce have risen in recent years, as women have gained more social and economic independence.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Brazilian culture traditionally privileges men's roles as provider and leader. **Machismo**, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity, while women traditionally occupy subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired equal rights under the law, though social, economic, and political inequalities between the genders remain, especially in rural areas.

Progress towards gender equality has been slow and uneven. While a woman has been elected President, Brazil has one of the world's highest rates of femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender). Women have relatively low rates of participation in local politics, ranging from 14% in the Southeast to about 18% in the South in 2020. National-level congressional participation is similar and among Latin America's lowest rates.

Despite progressive gender equality laws and policies, women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. Many women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, often balancing both domestic duties and employment. Moreover, many women face gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes and are more likely to participate in the informal labor market, limiting their work-related benefits and protections.



Women also face significant challenges regarding healthcare. Maternal mortality rates are relatively high, especially in rural areas. Due to Brazil's strict abortion laws, over a million women have illegal abortions each year, causing some 200,000 hospitalizations due to complications. In addition, violence against women and homosexual people has increased in recent years and spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, public opinion has recently shifted in support of homosexual rights, which has translated into policy. Brazil has passed legislation protecting same-sex marriage and gender transitions.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.



Portuguese is the official language, widely spoken across Brazil. Brazilian Portuguese dialects vary by location. Residents in the North tend to speak a dialect similar to European Portuguese, whereas Spanish influences the prominent dialect in the South. Brazil is home to over 150 indigenous languages, many of which belong to the Tupi and Macro-Jê families, primarily spoken in the North, and to a lesser extent the Central-West and South. Other languages, mainly spoken in the South, Southeast, and border



areas, are Spanish, Italian and German dialects, Japanese, and Arabic. Some Brazilians, primarily in cities, speak English.

Though varying by region and individual, Brazilians are generally

expressive communicators. They tend to complement speech with touch, often using it to convey emotions such as concern or happiness. Brazilians also typically lend significant time and importance to greetings and goodbyes. Nevertheless, social status and regional background often affect communication patterns. Generally, Brazilians from the South and Southeast are less expressive communicators and require more personal space during conversation than those from other regions. Likewise, use of formal terms, conversational etiquette, and eye contact depend on social status, gender, situation, and various other factors.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Educational quality and attainment in Brazil have improved in recent years, though major challenges persist. Private primary

and secondary schools tend to offer better education than free public schools, though many public universities are among the country's best, making admittance extremely competitive. Educational outcomes in the North and Northeast tend to be significantly worse than those in the other regions. Over 30% of young adults in Brasília have post-secondary degrees, compared to less than 10% in much poorer, northern Maranhão State. Likewise, fewer students in the North and Northeast have home Internet access or computers. Further, many rural areas are underserved, as secondary schools and other educational institutions tend to be in larger towns and cities.

Governmental expenditure on education has risen significantly in recent years and since 2015 has been at or above 6% of GDP, one of South America's highest rates. Literacy rates have also improved but are among South America's lowest. Brazil is a regional leader in pre-primary and primary educational enrollment, though international assessments show the country's educational outcomes are among the region's worst. Still, Brazil has robust and relatively well-attended vocational programs. Overall, however, a student's socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of academic success in Brazil.



## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While the pace of life in the South, Southeast, and large cities is somewhat faster than in the other regions, establishing and maintaining relationships often take precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. The workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, though some businesses and shops may close for a mid-day break, extending their hours into the evening.

Businesses in Brazil are typically hierarchical, and some follow traditional, conservative customs, particularly in the Northeast. Although São Paulo is cosmopolitan and home to many global companies, personal connections remain vital to business transactions across Brazil.



While concepts of personal space tend to vary by region, Brazilians generally maintain less personal space than Americans, often sitting or standing

close together in public and private spaces. Compared to Americans, family and friends typically touch more often, as a sign of their close personal relationships. The rhythm of daily life changes during international soccer matches and national holidays, many reflecting Christian or Afro-Brazilian traditions and historical events. Communities throughout Brazil celebrate Carnival, an annual celebration prior to Christian Lent, though Rio de Janeiro and Salvador host the biggest parades.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Most of Brazil's art, architecture, dance, music, and theater reflect its Roman Catholic heritage and European, African, and indigenous influences. While dress varies by region and group, many Brazilians wear warm-weather dress, follow recent US or European fashion trends, and don traditional attire only for holidays, festivals, or ceremonies. Some indigenous Brazilians wear clothing and body paint specific to their community.

Dance and music infuse daily life in Brazil, with hundreds of musical styles that vary by region. Generally, the epicenter of Brazilian music and dance is the Northeast, where notable styles like **forró**, **axé**, and **capoeira** originated. **Samba** developed in Bahia and morphed in Rio de Janeiro. **Sertanejo** (countryside) music began in the rural South, Southeast, and Central-West,

becoming a popular country-style genre throughout Brazil. In the 20th century, ***bossa nova***, ***tropicália***, and Brazilian rock, funk, and hip hop reached global audiences. Regardless of genre, a fusion of African, European, and indigenous instruments and rhythms influence many of Brazil's musical and dance styles.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Brazil, which is home to over 400 league teams.

***Campeonato Brasileiro Série A*** (Brazilian Championship A Series) is the country's most



prominent league, featuring 20 teams, of which Rio de Janeiro's Flamengo is the most popular and successful. Brazil is the world's most successful nation at the FIFA World Cup and has hosted the tournament twice, most recently in 2014. Pelé is the country's most famous, and one of the world's greatest, soccer players. Today, Neymar is one of the world's best. Both from the Southeast, these men played the forward position and are symbolic of Brazil's flashy, aggressive style of play. Other popular sports are volleyball, swimming, cycling, surfing, mixed martial arts like Brazilian ***Jiu-jitsu***, and basketball.

Generally, early Brazilian literature dates to the 18th and 19th centuries and blossomed after independence. Bahia's Jorge Amado is one of Brazil's most prolific writers. As a Modernist, Amado depicted an optimistic Brazil plagued by deep social divisions, and many of his novels describe race relations and syncretic religions in the Northeast. Rio de Janeiro's famous lyricist and novelist, Paulo Coelho, primarily worked in the drama and romance genres. His novel *The Alchemist*, a mystical account of a Spaniard's journey in search of treasure, has sold over 65 million copies in some 80 languages.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence

patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across Brazil based on local products, tastes, and customs, though common staple ingredients are black beans, beef, pork, green leafy vegetables, rice, and root vegetables like cassava. The extent of indigenous, European, African, and Asian influences varies by region. Cuisine in the coastal Northeast reflects African influences, with prominent ingredients like fish, shrimp, palm oil, coconut milk, and peanuts. In the more European South, Southeast, and Central-West, where livestock rearing is widespread, meals tend to highlight meat and dairy products. Many residents of the North make use of river fish and native Amazonian fruits and berries like **açaí** (palm berries) and **camu camu**, a cherry-like fruit grown on small riverside trees.



Health in Brazil has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies.

Nevertheless, health indicators and outcomes vary by

region. Generally, rural residents in the North and Northeast tend to suffer the worst health outcomes, while city dwellers in the South and Southeast have much better access to quality healthcare. Likewise, the North and Northeast have higher hospitalization rates for chronic illnesses than the other major regions.

Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease cause most deaths in Brazil, though communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis B and C remain common, primarily in coastal areas and with men. Brazil experiences more homicides per year than nearly every other country, though per-capita rates are lower than in some other Latin American countries. Further, the mortality rate is far higher among men than women.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to colonization, most inhabitants subsisted on farming, fishing, and localized trade. Under Portuguese colonial control, large estates produced cash crops for export, comprising most of Brazil's economy. In the 18th century, Brazil's center of economic activity shifted from massive sugar plantations in the Northeast to coffee farms in the Southeast, while a rubber boom in the North lasted from around 1880-1910.

Today, Brazil's economy is more diversified. In the North, mining and raw materials extraction prevail, while Manaus is home to growing industrial and technology sectors. Economic activity in the Northeast is based largely around oil production and agriculture. The Central-West is the center of Brazil's livestock sector, though the region is also home to pharmaceuticals and fertilizer production. The Southeast is Brazil's largest, most diversified regional economy. Notable subsectors are finance, oil extraction, agribusiness, tourism, and technology. While the South has large services and industrial sectors like tourism and vehicle production, it also has efficient farms growing crops and rearing livestock.



In recent years, Brazil's economy has been severely impacted by recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic activity shrank from 2014-16 in the country's worst-ever recession in the wake of a massive corruption scandal involving some of Brazil's largest companies. After a meager recovery, Brazil was hard hit by the pandemic, with one of the world's highest mortality rates among confirmed cases, causing a recession again in 2020. Since the economy recovered in 2021, the economic outlook has

improved, though volatile external factors affecting commodity prices, supply chains, inflation, and debt servicing are likely to take part in causing growth to slow in the coming years.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Despite having one of the world's largest economies and populations, Brazil's physical infrastructure lags many other countries. Roads form the primary infrastructure in Brazil, though quality tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Although recently completed subway lines in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte allow increased intra-city passenger transport in the Southeast, Brazil's railway network primarily transports freight. The country has many air, river, and sea ports that facilitate trade and transit across Brazil and to global destinations.

Brazil generates most of its electricity from hydroelectric power, followed by fossil fuels, wind, and biomass. Nevertheless, Brazil



produces, consumes, and exports significant quantities of oil. The country has only one nuclear power plant, in Angra, Rio de Janeiro.

Media independence and press freedom in Brazil have declined in recent years. Media

ownership is concentrated among a few companies, with the largest headquartered in the Southeast. Government coercion, online harassment, and violence against journalists are common. Journalists covering rural corruption and politics are especially vulnerable. Yet, telecommunications infrastructure has improved in recent years, as most Brazilians have access to mobile networks and broadband. As of 2023, about 81% of rural and 94% of urban homes had Internet access, and over 99% of Brazilians owned a mobile phone.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Brazilian society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Brazil.



## PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

### 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

#### Overview

Comprising much of eastern South America, Brazil became a colony in Portugal's global empire in the 16th century. After the Portuguese royal family relocated to Rio de Janeiro in the 19th century, Brazil rapidly developed a robust administrative state led by a liberal monarchy, even after gaining independence in 1822. After becoming a republic in 1889, Brazil leveraged its vast natural resources and large population to become a global economic force. While much of the 20th century was plagued by authoritarianism, Brazil strengthened its democratic institutions since transitioning from military dictatorship in 1985. More recently, the country has become overwhelmed by political polarization and high-level corruption scandals.

#### Early History

Humans first inhabited present-day Brazil at least 12,000 years ago. Due to Brazil's large size and varied geography (see *Political and Social Relations*), the region's indigenous groups held culturally and linguistically diverse traditions. While various groups in the Amazon lowlands relied on agriculture for sustenance, the plains and highlands were home to many semi-nomadic hunter gatherers. From about 400-1400 AD, Marajoara peoples in the Amazon developed intricate pottery and figurines, revealing a society with dedicated artisans and advanced skillsets. Meanwhile, even larger indigenous groups also lived in Brazil. The Tupi inhabited Brazil's coast, along with the Guaraní to the south, and the Xingu in the interior. In total, scholars estimate Brazil's indigenous population had reached between two to six million people by the 15th century.



## Arrival of the Portuguese

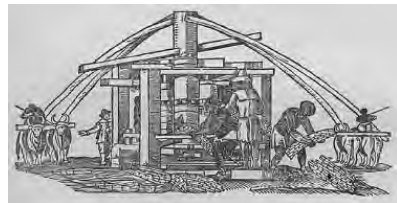
In 1500, the explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral sighted Brazil and claimed the territory for the Portuguese Crown, in accordance with the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas with Spain that had given Portugal control of eastern South America. While the region was rich in **pau-brasil** (brazilwood), which gave the country its name, European explorers did not find precious metals in the region. As such, the Portuguese largely ignored their newly discovered possession, focusing instead on trade in Asia, and wielded only nominal control of Brazil for several decades.

Portuguese colonists eventually arrived in Brazil in 1531, during the reign of Dom (a title originally given to Portuguese royals and aristocrats) João III, who sought to reassert his claim to the region and shift the focus of trade away from Portugal's holdings in Asia. To settle the region, the King distributed parcels of land to Portuguese administrators, who wielded near-total authority in their territories known as captaincies or hereditary lordships. While most of the fiefdoms failed, São Vicente in the Southeast and Pernambuco in the Northeast became wealthy settlements, resulting in the founding of the city of São Paulo and lucrative sugar plantations known for **engenhos de açúcar** (sugar mills)

that fueled a sugar-based colonial economy (see *Economics and Resources*).

### Colonial Brazil

In 1549, Dom João III sent Tomé de



Sousa, a Portuguese nobleman, to serve as governor-general of the colony and centralize royal authority. Sousa founded the city of Salvador da Bahia, which served as Brazil's capital for over 200 years. Likewise, the new governor fortified the colony's coastline and brought over more immigrants from Portugal to populate the region. Among these were Jesuit priests, a Roman Catholic religious order (see *Religion and Spirituality*) focused on education, service, and charitable works. The Jesuits founded prominent religious and educational organizations, establishing **aldeias** (villages) meant to protect indigenous communities from the mistreatment and forced labor they had

endured under Portuguese landowners on sugar and tobacco plantations located primarily in the Northeast.

As the colony grew, the Portuguese instituted a class- and race-based system meant to maintain Portuguese settlers' privileged place in colonial society. At the top of the hierarchy were the European-born **reinois**, who wielded the most economic and political power and had significant social prestige. Next were the **mazombos** (Portuguese people born in the Americas), then the **mamelucos** (people of mixed Portuguese and indigenous descent). Indigenous Brazilians occupied the lowest rung of the early colonial hierarchy. While some rural indigenous groups maintained their autonomy, the Portuguese introduced diseases and enslaved many to work on plantations, which decimated the local populations.

Amidst Jesuit protests of the mistreatment of native Brazilians, many of whom were dying from diseases contracted from the



Europeans, Portuguese traders brought enslaved Africans to work on the sugar plantations in the Northeast. Brazil became the single largest destination for slave ships in the Americas, and Africans soon outnumbered the European colonists. For the next 3 centuries, slave traders brought between 4 and 5 million enslaved Africans to toil in Brazil.

**Brazilian Growth and Expansion:** As relatively few Portuguese inhabited the colony, rival European powers sought to stake a claim to the region. From 1555-67, the French founded a colony in Rio de Janeiro, and Dutch settlers occupied Pernambuco from 1630-54. Nevertheless, a diverse group of Brazilians managed to expel both expeditions without much Portuguese assistance, helping to form a mixed-race national identity in the 17th century that was separate from loyalty to the Portuguese Crown.

Around the same time, Catholic missionaries and **bandeirantes** (flag-carriers) began to expand the colony's territory inland. These groups sought to enslave or convert indigenous groups,

raid **quilombos** (villages of escaped enslaved Africans), and establish plantations or cattle ranches. The Brazilian colonists ventured deep into the continent, extending Brazil's borders to the west. They expanded Portuguese influence far from South America's eastern coastline, reaching already established Spanish colonies in present-day Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru.

In 1690, the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais in the Southeast sparked sustained settlement of the interior and an increase in immigration to Brazil. The newfound wealth led Portugal to move the colony's capital south to Rio de Janeiro. Over the next century, Brazil grew rapidly. Meanwhile, the Portuguese Prime Minister, the Marquis of Pombal, initiated reforms that increased taxes on the colony and grew trade with other European powers, causing the economy to expand as coffee production surged.

However, much of the wealth belonged to *mazombo* landholding and merchant families, contributing to extensive inequality. A lack of opportunities led to early independence movements inspired by the US and French revolutions. Most notably, in 1789, the revolutionary Joaquim José da Silva Xavier (also known as Tiradentes, or tooth-puller, because he worked as a dentist) launched a failed uprising against Portuguese rule. After his execution, Tiradentes became an early national hero.



### From Colony to Kingdom

Political changes in early 19th-century Europe affected Brazil's status as a colony. French Emperor Napoleon I invaded Portugal, forcing the royal family to flee and resettle in Rio

de Janeiro in 1808. The Portuguese court's presence transformed Brazil, allowing for increased trade and the establishment of hospitals, universities (see *Learning and Knowledge*), military academies, and a royal mint, among other institutions. In 1815, the prince-regent (and future Dom João VI) elevated the status of the colony to that of a kingdom, creating the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves.

Even after Napoleon's defeat in Europe, Dom João VI and the rest of the court remained in Brazil for several years, ruling Portugal from its former colony. Nevertheless, after a series of European revolts in 1820 threatened the monarchy, the Portuguese aristocracy convinced the government that Dom João VI needed to return to Portugal to reassert control over the country. Upon the King's departure, he left his eldest son, Dom Pedro, in charge of Brazil as prince-regent.

## Independence

With the King's departure, the **Cortes** (Parliament) of Portugal repealed many of the reforms that had allowed Brazil to grow rapidly over the previous 15 years, increasing tensions between the Portuguese and Brazilians. It became clear that the *Cortes* sought to demote Brazil to a colony, and it soon recalled Dom Pedro to Europe. However, on January 9, 1822, the prince-regent declared his intent to disobey the Portuguese government and stay in Brazil, in a proclamation known as the **Fico** (I stay). On September 7 of the same year, after receiving word that the *Cortes* would not accept Brazilian autonomy, Dom Pedro declared the Kingdom's independence.



## Brazilian Empire

Dom Pedro I proclaimed the Brazilian Empire on October 12, 1822, taking advantage of popular support from the Brazilian landowning classes and loyal troops garrisoned around the country, encountering minimal Portuguese resistance. In 1824, the monarch passed a constitution, which gave the Emperor extensive power over the newly established government led by an indirectly elected Congress comprising a Chamber of Deputies and Senate appointed by the monarch. In 1824, the US was the first country to recognize Brazil, beginning a process that culminated in 1825 with Portugal's recognition of Brazilian independence.

Despite Dom Pedro I's initial popularity, support among his new subjects rapidly diminished. From 1825-28, a disappointing war

with neighboring Argentina over present-day Uruguay led Brazil to lose much of the influence it held over the **Río de la Plata** (River of Silver, or “River Plate”) region to the south. Likewise, several prominent *mazombos* felt that the Emperor remained too concerned with European affairs, ignored domestic policy, and favored Portuguese administrators over Brazilians. Faced with this increasing discontent, Dom Pedro I abdicated the throne in 1831 in favor of his 5-year-old son, Dom Pedro II.

**Dom Pedro II:** The young Emperor inherited an unstable empire, as several of the regents appointed to rule in his name were unable to quell uprisings that had begun during his father's reign and spread across the country. Despite amending the constitution to decentralize power, the regency's efforts to pacify Brazil were unsuccessful. To unify the nation behind a new



Emperor, in 1840, Congress ruled that Dom Pedro II was capable to begin his reign at age 14.

Pedro II's rule brought renewed stability to Brazil, which experienced steady economic growth and a

cultural blossoming under his reign. The Emperor's dedication to freedom of speech, representative government, and robust investment in education strengthened Brazil and led to Pedro II becoming known as **O Magnânimo** (The Magnanimous). Strengthened diplomatic relations with Europe and the US allowed trade to increase, with coffee grown in the Southeast becoming the country's most valuable export (see *Economics and Resources*).

During the second half of the 19th century, Brazil was embroiled in a series of conflicts with its southern neighbors, seeking to increase its influence in South America's Southern Cone region. The deadliest of these conflicts was the 1864-1870 War of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Paraguayan War), whereby Brazil allied with neighboring Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay, decimating the latter's population. While Brazil and its

allies emerged victorious from the conflict, it proved to be Latin America's deadliest-ever war and severely impacted the then-provinces of Mato Grosso and Rio Grande do Sul through the destruction of large slaveholding plantations in the region.

### Transition to a Republic

While Brazil had grown under the guidance of its royal family, Dom Pedro II began to lose the support of key sectors of society after 1870. Wealth inequality remained a persistent problem, as many Brazilians did not benefit from the economic growth the country had experienced. Meanwhile, wealthy landowners grew resentful of the Emperor's declining support for slavery, which culminated in the 1888 **Lei Áurea** (Golden Law) that made Brazil the last nation in the Americas to abolish slavery. Likewise, many young politicians and military officers despaired at the aging Emperor's lack of vitality and pessimism regarding the future of the monarchy after the death of his two sons. On November 15, 1889, military officers staged a coup, forcing the royal family into exile in France.



### The First Republic

General Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca, leader of the coup against the deposed Dom Pedro II, led Brazil's government, beginning a period later known as the First Republic or **República Velha** (Old Republic, 1889-1930). While only ruling for 2 years, Fonseca passed a new constitution that separated church and state (see *Religion and Spirituality*), created a federal system under which the former provinces became states, and introduced democratic institutions to Brazil. His Vice President (VP), who became President in 1891, worked to quell revolts that had erupted across the country and set the stage for an election in 1894 in which Prudente de Morais became Brazil's first democratically elected President.

**Café com leite:** Prudente de Morais' administration ushered in a period of power-sharing between the southeastern states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Known as **café com leite** (coffee



with milk), referring to the former's dairy and latter's coffee industries, this political union ensured that wealthy landowners kept control by alternating the Presidency between the states' outgoing governors via fraudulent elections. These governments bolstered foreign trade and modernized government institutions inherited from the imperial era, fostering a period of relative cultural and academic freedom, despite the limited democracy. In the Republic's first 2 decades, the foreign ministry concluded a series of treaties with several neighboring states, consolidating the country's western limits and solidifying Brazil's borders.

Likewise, Brazil's growing export economy, particularly after a rubber boom had begun in the Amazon (see *Economics and Resources*), attracted immigrants from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, and later, Japan and the Middle East. During the *café com leite* era, Brazil became an increasingly urbanized and wealthy country with a growing middle class.

By the 1920s, the newly formed urban middle class had become dissatisfied with wealthy landowners' control of government. In 1922, members of the military and civilians challenged the results of the presidential elections, and amidst allegations of fraud, launched a coup. While the coup ultimately failed, it

sparked a wave of armed revolts across the country, which the ruling elites were unable to quell.



### Getúlio Vargas's New State

After 8 years of sporadic violence throughout the country, the 1930 presidential election provided a break in the traditional power-sharing agreement that had governed Brazil since its transition from monarchy. The 1929 stock market crash and subsequent Great Depression (see *Economics and Resources*)

caused the price of coffee to plummet and weakened the Brazilian economy, eroding support for the government. The popular Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas, ran for the Presidency as a reform candidate, ultimately losing the

election amid widespread claims of fraud. While initially accepting the results, Vargas and his allies orchestrated a successful coup.

In office, Vargas centralized power in the role of the President, reduced regional autonomy, and passed a new constitution in 1934 that codified women's right to vote (see *Sex and Gender*). After a series of failed uprisings against him, Vargas seized near-total control of the country and eroded democratic institutions through the passage of another constitution in 1937. The new government, while totalitarian, implemented legislation that helped working-class Brazilians, promoted the advantages of a multi-racial Brazil, increased domestic manufacturing (see *Economics and Resources*), and passed labor protections, earning the President the title, "father of the poor." This new political system, termed the **Estado Novo** (New State), developed a cult of personality around Vargas, influenced by the fascist governments that were in power in Portugal and Italy.

At the 1939 outbreak of World War II (WWII), which was fought between the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others) and Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan), Brazil supported the US as an act of Pan-American solidarity, despite close ties with Italy and Germany. The renewed trade and military exchange between the two countries helped Brazil's economy recover from the Depression, modernize the military, and bolster Vargas's political position. Regardless, the military became concerned that Vargas had too much power after the 1945 end of WWII and forced him to resign.



### Return to Democracy

The military scheduled elections for late 1945, which Vargas's hand-picked successor won. In 1946, Congress passed a new constitution that returned more autonomy to the states and separated the three branches of government (see *Political and Social Relations*), seeking to prevent the rise of another

strongman. Nevertheless, Vargas, who had served as a senator after the military removed him from the Presidency, handily won the democratic presidential election in 1950.

Vargas's second administration was less successful, as the new constitution constrained the President, who lacked significant congressional support. The economy began to suffer from high foreign debt and inflation, damaging the reputations of many members of government. In 1954, a series of corruption scandals, including the murder of an Air Force officer, engulfed Vargas. In the face of government investigations and crumbling popular support, Vargas committed suicide that August.

In 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek, an ally of Vargas, was elected President. While the working class largely supported him, the military and powerful business interests distrusted Kubitschek. To gain support, the new President began work on several largescale infrastructure projects, such as dams and highways, seizing on growing enthusiasm for Brazil's role as a major global economy. To signal Brazil's modernity and consolidate control over its vast territory, in 1960, Kubitschek founded Brasília in the Central-West to serve as the country's new modernist capital. While the nationalist infrastructure projects helped develop the country, the largescale public spending increased foreign debt

and inflation, weakening the economy.



In 1961, Vargas's former Minister of Labor and protégé, João Goulart (also known as Jango), became President after Jânio Quadros, who had won the 1960 election, suddenly

resigned without much reason. Like his mentor, Goulart was popular with the working class and had the support of labor unions and left-wing political movements. His political orientation put him at odds with the military, middle class, and the Catholic Church, all of which feared he was too close to communist governments abroad. Goulart secured the passage of measures that prevented foreign capital flight and supported a controversial land reform bill in Congress. However, faced with

the prospect of largescale wealth redistribution and strained diplomatic relations with anti-communist Western nations, the military ousted Goulart in a 1964 coup.

### Military Dictatorship

Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco took control of Brazil after Goulart's removal. While many in the middle class expected the Armed Forces to purge leftists from the government and then schedule elections, the



military instead saw its role as a guiding force for the development of Brazilian society and solidified its political control of the country. Castelo Branco introduced sweeping changes to the political system, eliminating direct elections and ruling largely through a series of emergency decrees. By 1967, Castelo Branco had consolidated the military dictatorship. The military amended the constitution to centralize power, kept tight control of the only opposition party it permitted to register, and filled national and state legislatures with supportive politicians. General Artur da Costa e Silva succeeded Castelo Branco, governing from 1967-69.

After Costa e Silva fell ill, General Emílio Garrastazu Médici took office via a highly controlled congressional vote. The new executive was repressive, violently suppressing anti-dictatorship activists and leftist guerilla groups that had emerged across the country. This crackdown, termed ***Operação Bandeirante*** (Operation Flag-Carrier), violently persecuted leftists through intimidation and torture. Scholars estimate that security forces tortured up to 20,000 people and killed some 500 prisoners. The Médici regime also restricted the media, with censorship laws banning anything that it deemed pro-left or subversive.

During the first decade of the military dictatorship, the increasingly wealthy upper and middle classes generally were willing to look past the lack of democracy in exchange for political stability and economic growth. However, after several years of

rapid economic growth (see *Economics and Resources*), a group of oil-producing countries enacted an oil embargo in 1973. The Brazilian economy, at that time highly dependent on imported oil, began to waver, which cost the government the support of many upper- and middle-class Brazilians.

### Slow Transition to Democracy

Having suffered a partial defeat in the 1974 legislative elections, the government began an **abertura** (opening) by reducing media censorship and allowing some centrist voices back into politics. After frequent protests from union leaders, student groups, and white-collar professionals, the government realized it could no longer maintain complete control. Beginning in 1977, Médici's successor, General Ernesto Geisel, announced various democratizing measures, such as a controversial 1979 amnesty law that allowed some political dissidents to return to public life in exchange for pardoning military officers for human rights

crimes. Lastly, the government authorized more political parties, even those overtly critical of the military, to participate in society.



The regime lost important gubernatorial elections in 1982 and faced major protests

led by the **Partido dos Trabalhadores** (Workers' Party, or PT, see *Political and Social Relations*), a political group that had emerged from a coalition of labor unions, Afro-Brazilian and homosexual, activists, progressive Catholic Church members, and working-class Brazilians. Faced with rising unpopularity, Congress elected Tancredo Neves, a Senator and leader of a coalition of opposition parties, as President in 1985. However, Neves died before taking office, leaving his VP, José Sarney, who was less charismatic and closer to the military, to lead the country's transition to democracy. In 1988, Sarney's government passed a constitution that reestablished Brazil as a democracy and restored direct elections, set for late 1989 (see *Political and Social Relations*), beginning a period that became known as the **Nova República** (New Republic).

## Democratic Consolidation Under the New Republic

In 1990, Fernando Collor de Mello took office with support from Sarney after Brazil's first democratic elections since the dictatorship, despite some allegations of electoral manipulation. However, after claims of corruption engulfed his administration, Collor de Mello resigned, and VP Itamar Franco took office. While Franco could not control the political unrest and economic instability that had engulfed Brazil (see *Economics and Resources*), his government oversaw a series of constitutional changes aimed at making the country more democratic.

Franco's Minister of Finance, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, won the 1994 presidential election after he introduced popular measures to lower inflation. Cardoso moved to modernize Brazil, controlling previously rampant inflation and privatizing a series of state-owned companies. Amidst his popularity, Congress passed a law allowing reelection, which the President easily won in 1998. Cardoso's second term was also successful. He further strengthened the economy, by stabilizing the currency and attracting foreign investment, and limited the military's residual influence in government.

## PT Rule

In the 2002 presidential election, labor union leader, PT member, and anti-dictatorship activist, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula), won the Presidency. The first leftist



leader of the country since Jango, Lula took advantage of a commodities boom to fund popular welfare policies aimed at lifting Brazil's poorest citizens out of poverty. He also became an important figure in regional affairs, as he oriented Brazil's foreign policy to align with left-wing governments in power throughout Latin America. Lula won a second term in 2006 and remained popular, largely thanks to a growing economy and redistributive social policies that earned him many working-class Brazilians' support.

Lula's Chief of Staff, Dilma Rousseff, a former leftist guerilla, won Brazil's 2010 presidential election. Dilma, the country's first

woman President (see *Sex and Gender*), encountered a more difficult political environment than her predecessor. The end of the commodities boom and years of high public spending led to economic difficulties. Despite the continuation of pro-worker policies, many Brazilians, especially those in the upper- and middle-classes, grew dissatisfied with stagnating living standards. By 2014, fears of political instability, high household debt, and reduced foreign investment had caused Brazil to enter a severe recession (see *Economics and Resources*), shaking confidence in the government. Although Rousseff narrowly won reelection in 2014, a high-level corruption investigation led by the judiciary the following year implicated many high-ranking PT members.



Termed ***Operação Lava Jato*** (Operation Car Wash), the broad-ranging anticorruption probe alleged that many members of government had been benefitting from bribes and kickbacks paid by

the state-owned petroleum firm, Petrobras, as well as several of its suppliers, notably the construction firm Odebrecht. The case resulted in the conviction of Lula and severely damaged Rousseff's popularity. Faced with persistent claims of government impropriety and a deepening recession, Rousseff's approval rate dropped to 14%. While the President was acquitted of any wrongdoing in the *Lava Jato* case, Congress impeached her for breaking budget laws in a questionable legislative procedure in 2016.

### **Brazil's Rightward Turn**

After Congress convicted Rousseff and removed her from office, her more conservative VP, Michel Temer, took office and completed the remainder of the presidential term. Soon after becoming President, Temer cut much of the social spending the PT had implemented in a policy of strict government austerity meant to improve the dire economic conditions. Despite his party dissolving its coalition with the PT over corruption claims, Temer and many supporters were embroiled in related scandals.

In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, a former Army Captain, member of Congress, and vocal proponent for Rousseff's impeachment, was elected President. Bolsonaro, a right-wing populist, ran on a pro-business, socially conservative platform with the support of many wealthy, middle-class, and Evangelical Brazilians (see *Religion and Spirituality*). During his term, human rights groups criticized Bolsonaro for glorifying the 1964 military coup, reversing many of the PT's efforts to reduce deforestation in the Amazon (see *Political and Social Relations*), and condemning homosexual Brazilians (see *Sex and Gender*). Regardless, he implemented some essential financial reforms and remained popular among many for his nationalist rhetoric and closeness to then-US President Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, in a turn for the *Lava Jato* investigation, in 2019, the Supreme Federal Court ruled Lula's incarceration while under appeal was unlawful, and he was released from prison. Then, in 2021, investigators found that the case's primary judge, Sérgio Moro, had been collaborating with prosecutors for political purposes. As a result, the Court invalidated Lula's conviction and restored his political rights, allowing him to run for office.

### **The Return of Lula**

After the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*), various public health officials claimed Bolsonaro's government had mismanaged its pandemic response. Bolsonaro repeatedly stated his mistrust in vaccination against COVID-19 and did not implement the preventative measures that other countries in the region had enacted. Likewise, pro-democracy groups condemned Bolsonaro's efforts to undermine public trust in Brazil's electronic voting system, which intensified after Lula announced his candidacy for the 2022 presidential election. This speculation continued during the campaign, which culminated in a narrow victory for Lula in a runoff election in late 2022. After days of protests, Bolsonaro accepted the results of the election, allowing the transition of power to proceed.





In early 2023, Lula became President and sought to use his third term to strengthen many of the popular welfare policies he had championed during his first two terms, some of which had been underfunded during subsequent administrations. Likewise, he pledged to reduce poverty and deforestation, increase citizen security (see *Political and Social Relations*), and strengthen the public healthcare system (see *Sustenance and Health*). However, days after Lula's inauguration, Bolsonaro supporters stormed the Congress and other buildings in Brasília, causing dozens of injuries among the police and protesters. While investigations into the insurrection are ongoing, the event highlights Brazilian society's increasing polarization.

### Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Some Brazilian myths helped define a sense of national identity as the country's diverse ethnic

groups merged and developed folklore that incorporated various indigenous, European, and African traditions.



**Saci-Pererê:** The myth of Saci-Pererê (or Saci) comes from southern Brazil, where colonists and enslaved Africans adapted a Tupi folk figure and created a myth that spread across the country. Saci is commonly depicted as an Afro-Brazilian boy missing a leg as the result of a *capoeira* (folk dance, see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) accident, wearing a red cap, and smoking a long

tobacco pipe. He is an agent of mischief, known to misplace household items, distract cooks so that their food burns, and release livestock from their pens at night. While often blamed for minor inconveniences and tricks, Saci is also known as a healer and protector of the forest and the medicinal herbs that grow in it. In recent times, Brazilians have invoked him as a hero in the preservation of minority traditions and fight against deforestation in the Amazon.

## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name

Federative Republic of Brazil (Brazil)

**República Federativa do Brasil** (Portuguese)

### Political Borders

Venezuela: 1,328 mi

Guyana: 813 mi

Suriname: 320 mi

French Guiana: 403 mi

Uruguay: 652 mi

Argentina: 785 mi

Paraguay: 852 mi

Bolivia: 2,115 mi

Peru: 1,652 mi

Colombia: 1,112 mi

Coastline: 4,655 mi

### Capital

Brasília

### Demographics

Brazil's population of about 220 million is growing at an annual rate of 0.61%. Some 88% of the population lives in urban areas, with about 22.6 million people residing in Brazil's and the



Western Hemisphere's most populous city, São Paulo. Generally, the population concentrates along coastal areas in the Northeast and Southeast.



### Flag

Adopted in 1889 and last modified in 1992, Brazil's flag has a green

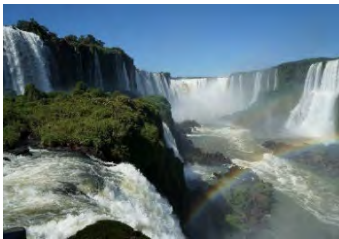
the motto **ordem e progresso** (order and progress). Inspired by the banner of the former Empire of Brazil (see *History and Myth*), today, the flag's green background represents the country's forests, yellow its mineral wealth, and the blue globe and stars depict the sky over Rio de Janeiro the morning Brazil became a republic in 1889 (see *History and Myth*).

## Geography

Comprising about 48% of South America, Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country. It borders Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana to the north; the Atlantic Ocean to the north, east, and south; Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay to the southwest; Bolivia and Peru to the west; and Colombia to the northwest. Off the northeastern coast lie the Fernando de Noronha Islands and Rocas Atoll, the South Atlantic's only atoll (a ring-shaped island at least partly made of coral). Spanning four time zones (see *Time and Space*), Brazil's total land area is 3,287,957 sq mi, larger than the continental US.

Brazil is geographically diverse. In the North, tropical forests, waterfalls, and mountains comprise the Guiana Highlands, which merge into the Amazon lowlands that contain the Amazon basin, home to the world's largest rainforest. To the south, the Brazilian Highlands occupy more than half of Brazil's landscape and feature steep cliffs, rolling hills, and plateaus. The Pantanal, a tropical wetland and flooded grassland area in the Central-West, extends to the Gran Chaco plain in Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Coastal lowlands comprise a narrow area in the North, Northeast, and Southeast, which contains lagoons, sandy beaches, swamps, and coral reefs.

Brazil's highest point is Neblina Peak (9,888 ft) on the northern border with Venezuela. Iguaçu Falls, on the southwestern border with Argentina and Paraguay, is one of the seven natural wonders of the world and comprises 275 cascades, making it the world's largest broken waterfall. The



Amazon River (4,250 mi) is Brazil's longest and the world's second-longest river, originating in the Andes in Peru but primarily running through Brazil. Likewise, Brazil is home to most

of the Amazon Rainforest, which is shared with eight other countries, covers some 1.2 billion acres, and contains about 10% of the world's known species.



### Climate

Due to its vast size and diverse terrain, weather varies by region. Much of Brazil's climate is tropical,

with high temperatures and humidity, except for drier interior areas in the Northeast and the cooler South.

While forested and coastal regions in the North are humid and hot throughout the year, the South's climate varies more widely. In the winter, the southern region is cooler, with some areas in the high plains experiencing occasional snow. In São Paulo, the average lows and highs are 55° F in July and 83° F in February.

### Natural Hazards

Brazil is vulnerable to droughts, wildfires, extreme heat, and floods, and landslides in the Southeast. During rainy months, November-March in the South and April-July in the Northeast, heavy rains sometimes cause flash floods and landslides, which often result in displacement and death. In February 2022, at least 700 people were displaced and 117 died due to torrential rain in Petrópolis, a mountainous city in Rio de Janeiro State.

### Environmental Issues

Human practices and related climate change have degraded Brazil's natural environment, resulting in significant damage to land, sea, and wetlands; air and water pollution in large cities; severe oil spills; and water pollution caused by improper mining activities. Deforestation, the illegal wildlife trade, and poaching endanger plant and animal species and destroy their habitat in Brazil's Amazon basin and the Cerrado – forest and savanna in the Brazilian Highlands. Largescale soy farming, cattle ranching, and poultry and pork production (see *Economics and*

*Resources*) contribute to endangering various ecosystems and deforestation. In 2022, after pressure from the US and European Union (EU), Brazil pledged to end illegal deforestation by 2028.

## Government

Brazil is a federal republic that divides into 26 **estados** (states) and the **Distrito Federal** (Federal District) of Brasília, each led by a **governador** (governor). The states subdivide into over 5,000 **municípios** (municipalities) led by **prefeitos** (mayors) and **vereadores** (councilpersons). Municipal government officials and councilpersons are elected every 4 years by absolute majority and proportional majority votes, respectively.

The current Constitution, adopted in 1988 following the military dictatorship (see *History and Myth*) and last amended in 2022, includes citizen rights, condemns torture, and guarantees local self-governance. Like in the US, each state establishes its own Constitution in accordance with the national Constitution, granting local governments significant legislative and governing power separate from the federal government.

## Executive Branch

The current President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, took office in 2023, after having served two terms from 2003-10 (see *History and Myth*). The President is head-of-state and government and serves as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The President is also responsible for appointing cabinet ministers, federal judges, and other heads of ministerial-level departments.



The President and Vice President (VP) are elected directly by an absolute majority vote for 4-year terms, with multiple, but only two consecutive terms allowed. If a candidate does not receive a majority in the initial round of voting, a run-off is held. Inaugurated in 2023, VP Geraldo Alckmin's formal role is to succeed the President in case of death, incapacity, resignation, or other reasons to leave office.

## Legislative Branch

Located in Brasília, the two-chamber ***Congresso Nacional*** (National Congress) consists of an 81-seat ***Senado Federal*** (Federal Senate) and a 513-seat ***Câmara dos Deputados*** (Chamber of Deputies). Senators, who comprise three representatives from each state and the Federal District, are directly elected to 8-year terms, with either one-third (27) or two-thirds (54) of seats up for election every 4 years. Deputies are elected in multi-seat constituencies to 4-year terms and apportioned according to population. However, no state can have more than 70 or fewer than 8 deputies, effectively causing underrepresentation in the heavily populated state of São Paulo.



The *Congresso Nacional* controls most legislative powers, such as lawmaking and approving treaties and declarations of war.

Congress may overrule a President's veto of a bill by absolute majority vote within 30 days of the veto.

## Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Supremo Tribunal Federal*** (Supreme Federal Court), ***Superior Tribunal de Justiça*** (Superior Court of Justice), Regional Federal Courts, Electoral Courts, Labor Courts, and Military Courts.

As the highest court, the Supreme Federal Court provides rulings on constitutional cases and hears those involving high-ranking political figures, such as the President, VP, diplomats, and government ministers. The Superior Court of Justice is the highest appellate court and hears cases involving state and Federal District governors. The Supreme Federal Court's 11 ***Ministros*** (Ministers) and Superior Court of Justice's 33 judges are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate to serve until the mandatory retirement age of 75.

## Political Climate

During its transition from military dictatorship, Brazil legalized political parties in 1985. Today, Brazil's politics are polarized and fragmented, partly due to its vast number of political parties and

coalition system. Politicians often switch parties, even after elections. For example, former President Jair Bolsonaro changed political parties some nine times in 30 years. Brazil has universal suffrage with compulsory voting for literate people aged 18-70 and voluntary voting for illiterate people and those ages 16-17 and over 70. The law prohibits active-duty military personnel from voting.

In the 2022 election, Lula won just below 51% in the second round of voting, making it the tightest presidential election in Brazil's recent democratic history, and further contributing to polarization. The dominant



political parties were Lula's center-left **Partido dos Trabalhadores** (Workers' Party, see *History and Myth*) and President Bolsonaro's conservative center-right **Partido Liberal** (Liberal Party). Although President Lula's coalition lacks a majority in Congress, he has sought to work with more centrist parties, such as the **Movimento Democrático Brasileiro** (Brazilian Democratic Movement) and **Partido Social Democrático** (Social Democratic Party), to govern the country.

During recent decades, Brazilians have gathered sporadically in large demonstrations to protest the country's economic issues, police brutality (see "Human Rights" below), and corruption. While Brazil's criminal code prohibits bribery of public and foreign officials, corruption is persistent. In 2021 corruption perceptions ranking, Brazil tied with neighboring Argentina at 96 of 180 countries and ranked far below Uruguay and Chile. From 2014-21, a criminal investigation known as **Operação Lava Jato** (Operation Car Wash) focused on money laundering, bribery, and bid-rigging involving construction company Obredecht, state-owned oil company Petrobras, and politicians. Initially led by judge Sérgio Moro, the investigation resulted in many high-level corruption cases and the imprisonment of then-former President Lula from 2018-19 (see *History and Myth*). Operation Car Wash sparked both demonstrations against Moro for convicting Lula and protestors backing Moro's investigation.

In 2020, President Bolsonaro and his family faced various corruption investigations, and his son, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, was charged with diverting public resources. In 2021, protesters criticized President Bolsonaro for mishandling the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*). He has faced investigation for corruption and interfering

with federal police appointments for personal gain.

During the latest series of demonstrations, beginning in October 2022, after Lula won the runoff election, truck drivers blocked over



1,000 roads and highways in support of President Bolsonaro, who had consistently made unproven claims of electoral fraud in the final years of his term (see *History and Myth*). The demonstrations culminated in early 2023, when Bolsonaro supporters led an insurrection in Brasília, violently storming government buildings and unsuccessfully demanding that the military intervene to remove Lula from office.

### Defense

As South America's largest military, the **Forças Armadas Brasileiras** (Brazilian Armed Forces) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air



branches, with a joint strength of 374,500 active-duty troops and 124,600 reserve personnel. Military operations focus on maintaining domestic stability and territorial integrity; ties with Chile and Colombia in joint military training; and military cooperation with France, Sweden, and the US.

Upon turning 18, all Brazilian men must register for compulsory military service, though clergymen are exempt. The government



then gives men the **Certificado de Alistamento** (Military Draft Certificate), which is required to obtain a passport. Although mandatory service is 10-12 months, conscription is often waived.

**Army:** As the largest branch, the Army consists of 222,000 active-duty troops organized into 27 headquarters with a special forces brigade; a special forces convoy; over 150 maneuver regiments, battalions, brigades, convoys, and squadrons (including reconnaissance, armored, mechanized, light, air maneuver, and others); 53 combat support battalions, convoys, groups, and a battery; 11 combat service support battalions; a helicopter brigade; and an air defense brigade.

**Navy:** Composed of 85,000 active-duty personnel, the Navy is organized into 9 districts (Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Natal, Belém, Rio Grande, Ladário, Brasília, São Paulo, and Manaus), and a special forces group. Naval Aviation consists of 2,100 personnel with a ground attack, an anti-surface warfare, an anti-submarine warfare, a training, and 6 transport helicopter squadrons. The Marines, comprising 16,000 active-duty troops,



consists of a special forces battalion; 15 amphibious maneuver groups, battalions, and a division; a combat support battalion; and a combat service support battalion.

**Air Force:** Composed of 67,500 active-duty troops, the Air Force comprises the following squadrons: 5 transport helicopter squadrons; 2 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) unmanned aerial vehicles; 4 training; 15 transport; a tanker/transport; a search and rescue; an airborne early warning and control; 2 ISR; 3 maritime patrols; 4 ground attack/ISR; 3 fighter/ground attack; and 2 fighter squadrons.

**National Public Security Forces:** The **Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública** (National Public Security Force) is a service of the Ministry of Justice and comprises 395,000 Military Police from various states, headquartered in Brasília.

# BRAZIL RANK INSIGNIA

## Air Force



**General of the  
Air Force**  
*Marechal-Do-Ar*



**General**  
*Tenente-Brigadeiro*



**Lieutenant  
General**  
*Major-Brigadeiro*



**Major General**  
*brigadeiro*



**Colonel**  
*Coronel*



**Lieutenant  
Colonel**  
*Tenente Coronel*



**Major**  
*Major*



**Captain**  
*Capitão*



**1st Lieutenant**  
*1º Tenente*



**2nd Lieutenant**  
*2º Tenente*



**Officer  
Candidate**  
*Aspirante*



**Warrant Officer**  
*Suboficial*



**Cadet 3rd Year**  
*Cadete 3º*



**Cadet 2nd Year**  
*Cadete 2º*



**Cadet 1st Year**  
*Cadete 1º*



**1st Sergeant**  
*1º Sargento*



**2nd Sergeant**  
*2º Sargento*



**3rd Sergeant**  
*3º Sargento*



**Airman**  
*Cabo*



**Airman 1st Class**  
*Soldado 1ª Classe*



**Airman 2nd Class**  
*Soldado 2ª Classe*



**Senior Technician**  
*Taleiro - Mor*



**1st Class Technician**  
*Taleiro De 1ª Classe*



**2nd Class Technician**  
*Taleiro De 2ª Classe*

## Security Issues

**Narcotics Trafficking:** Brazil is a major exporter of illegal cocaine (a drug refined from the coca plant used for medicinal and other purposes). Neighboring Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are the world's largest producers of cocaine, much of which is trafficked to Brazil for domestic use or export, mainly to Europe,



Asia, and Africa. In 2024, the Brazilian Federal police seized over 74 tons of powder cocaine an increase of over two tons from 2023.

The two largest organized crime groups in Brazil, **Comando Vermelho** (Red

Command) and **Primeiro Comando da Capital** (First Capital Command, or PCC), control most of Brazil's drug trade. In addition to narcotics trafficking, the groups are involved in extortion, money laundering, murder-for-hire, and debt collection, all of which contribute to Brazil's high violence and incarceration rates (see *Sustenance and Health*). As of 2024, Brazil had over 909,000 prisoners, the world's third-largest prison population, over 28% of whom were incarcerated for drug trafficking.

In 2019, the city of Rio de Janeiro issued a controversial decree for the involuntary hospitalization of drug users, addicts, and the homeless to prevent drug abuse. The government continues to adopt tactics to combat drug trafficking and money laundering. In 2022, a police raid targeting leaders of *Comando Vermelho* in a Rio de Janeiro **favela** (shanty town – see *Family and Kinship*) killed 21 people. As of 2022, Brazil's government is cooperating with the United Nations (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime to develop its first National Plan on Drug Policy to integrate policies and efforts to combat drug trafficking.

**Social Unrest and Human Rights:** In recent years, Brazil has been rocked by sporadic and sometimes violent demonstrations, with protestors demanding a reduction in wealth inequality, political corruption, and food and fuel shortages, as well as

protection for indigenous and homosexual rights, and police reforms, among other appeals.

Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, 16 activists across a range of topics from environmental to homosexual rights were murdered in 2020. Further, investigative journalists, who cover corruption or critique the government, often face threats, harassment, or violence (see *Technology and Material*). During the COVID-19 pandemic, then-President Bolsonaro spread misinformation about safety measures and vaccines, and over 700,000 residents died from the disease.

Abuse of power also extends to the police. In 2020, police killed over 6,400 people, significantly higher than the US (1,133). Police often claim deaths are a result of self-defense and that they routinely face violent gangs, though police brutality and use of lethal force mainly occur in poor neighborhoods. Like in the US, police brutality disproportionately affects Black men (see “Ethnic Groups” below). Between 2010-20, about 75% of police brutality victims were Black.

### Foreign Relations

Brazil is a member of international economic and peace organizations like the UN, World Health Organization,



World Trade Organization, Group of 20 (G20, comprising 20 of the world's largest economies), and Group of 15 (a forum for developing countries). As of 2021, Brazil participated in 50 UN peacekeeping operations. Brazil is also a member of regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States (OAS). In 2022, Brazil suspended its participation in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, claiming its failure to protect democracy.

Although Brazil has historically maintained close economic and political ties with its neighbors, its foreign relations tend to shift with each government. Brazil has a largely independent, non-aligned foreign policy. In recent years, it has shared close ties with the US, while cultivating relations with Russia and China.

## Regional Relations

Historically, Brazil has disputed territory with various neighboring countries, such as Chile, Bolivia, and French Guiana. Today, Brazil and Uruguay still dispute over **Ilha Brasileira** (Brazilian Island) and the land of **Rincão de Artigas** (Corner of Artigas).

Bolivia and Brazil both claim the riverine island **Ilha de Guajará-Mirim** (or **Isla Suárez** in Spanish).



As the largest countries in the region, Brazil and Argentina are the dominant members of the Southern Common Market, known by its Spanish-language abbreviation Mercosur (or Mercosul in Brazil), an economic and political bloc. Founded in 1991, Mercosur also includes Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela (suspended in 2016), as well as various other

associate members. As of 2021, members' combined GDP was about \$2.2 trillion, making Mercosur one of the world's largest economic blocs. Nevertheless, Mercosur has become weaker in recent years, largely due to protectionism, a stalled trade deal with the EU, internal squabbling, and Uruguay pursuing relatively independent trade and economic policies.

Mercosur and the Pacific Alliance – a generally more free-trade-oriented economic bloc comprising Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru – held their first summit in 2018 to commit to future integration and reaffirm cooperation in trade, tourism, and migration. However, relations between the blocs are often strained over trade, policy, and diplomatic disputes. Moreover, while former President Bolsonaro encouraged pursuing free trade agreements with countries like Canada and South Korea, in 2020, Argentina announced that it will not participate in future trade deals with Mercosur.

**Relations with Venezuela:** Brazil is part of the Lima Group – a coalition of countries in the Western Hemisphere seeking to address the human rights crisis in Venezuela that has caused millions of Venezuelans to flee their country. In 2019, Brazil recognized widespread violations of human rights in Venezuela,

making it easier for Venezuelans to obtain asylum there. As of 2024, over 511, Venezuelans had migrated to Brazil, and many are underemployed and have less access to education and social programs than their Brazilian counterparts. After Brazil ceased diplomatic relations with Venezuela in 2020 under Bolsonaro, Lula's government restored ties, and Lula met Venezuelan counterpart, President Nicolás Maduro, in 2023.

**Relations with Russia:** Brazil and Russia established diplomatic relations in 1828. Both countries participate in the G20. In 2004, President Vladimir Putin was the first Russian head-of-state to visit Brazil. Since 2006, Brazil has been a key participant in the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) group of emerging economies focused on increasing mutual development and investment. Russia invests in Brazil's infrastructure, oil and gas, and electronics sectors (see *Economics and Resources*). Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, Brazil has sought to play a relatively neutral role, meeting with both governments to help end the conflict.

**Relations with China:** Brazil and China established diplomatic relations in 1974 and continue to cultivate trade ties, notably in the G20 and BRICS. Although Brazil is not part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy, China is Brazil's top trading partner, and in 2023, bilateral trade reached \$157 billion (see *Economics and Resources*). Despite US objections, Brazil has granted Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, contracts to help develop its 5G mobile network (see *Technology and Material*).

**Relations with the US:** The US was the first country to recognize Brazil's independence from Portugal in 1822 (see *History and Myth*). Relations have been strained at times, like in 2003, when Brazil criticized the US-led coalition invasion of Iraq, and in 2020, when the US condemned increased deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon.



President Bolsonaro's 2018 election resulted in closer bilateral relations with President Trump's administration. Later, President Trump announced his support to designate Brazil as a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally. The Presidents also signed a limited trade deal and the Technology Safeguards Agreement and agreed to enable US companies to conduct commercial space launches from Brazilian territory. Brazil also agreed to exempt US citizens from tourist visa requirements.

Other areas of bilateral collaboration are an accord between the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Brazil's Space Agency to develop satellites, an agreement on livestock safety and inspections, and collaboration to combat organized crime. In 2021, the US government announced sanctions that target persons connected to illicit drug trafficking in Brazil, noting the PCC for its criminal activities. In 2023, Presidents Lula and Biden met in Washington, DC, where they agreed to strengthen democracy and human rights, as well as address climate change and sustainable development issues. However, as part of Brazil's independent foreign policy, Lula does not always share US goals, and at times aligns more with China and Russia than the US.

## Ethnic Groups

According to Brazil's 2022 census, about 44% of Brazilians are of European descent, 45% **pardo** ("brown," or of mixed heritage), 10% **preto** (Black), and <1% Asian. Near 1% of



Brazilians identify as indigenous.

As of 2025, Brazil also has large German, Italian, and Japanese communities. About 2 million Japanese live in Brazil, making it the

largest Japanese community outside of Japan. Bolivians, Venezuelans, Paraguayans, Haitians, Jews (see *Religion and Spirituality*), Arabs, and other immigrants also live in Brazil.

During the colonial era (see *History and Myth*), most European immigrants were Portuguese. After independence, European settlers were mainly Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, and German.

Between 1950-54, about 150,000 Portuguese, 59,800 Italians, and 53,300 Spanish immigrated to Brazil. More recently, Brazil's Jewish population of about 110,000, largely based in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belém, Manaus, and Porto Alegre, has declined, primarily due to economic and political crises and growing antisemitism (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Brazil is home to hundreds of indigenous groups, which mostly concentrate in the North and Central-West, with some groups residing in São Paulo, Maranhão, and other areas across the country (see "Social Relations" below). Some 46,000 Ticuna, a group in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, mostly reside in the northwestern Amazon region. Other indigenous communities are Guaraní Kaiowá (43,401), Kaingang (37,470), Makuxí (28,912), among others. Today, around 77 indigenous Brazilian groups have had no contact with people outside their own communities, making Brazil's indigenous among the world's largest number of peoples living in isolation.

The ancestors of Brazilians of African descent – *pretos*, or Afro-Brazilians – were enslaved by Europeans and first brought to Brazil in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*). During the next few centuries, slave traders brought between 4-5 million enslaved Africans to Brazil, which in 1888 became the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery (see *History and Myth*). Afro-Brazilians live throughout the country, though many concentrate in cities and the Northeast.

## Social Relations

Like in its neighboring Spanish colonies, early Brazil had a strict hierarchal class- and race-based system that continues to influence society. Today, Brazilian society divides along rural-urban, rich-poor, and ethnic group lines. Indigenous and Afro-Brazilians are more likely to be poor, have less access to quality education, and face more social stigmatization than Europeans and their descendants, who control much of the country.





Social, economic, and political crises in the 21st century, notably the 2014-16 economic recession (see *History and Myth* and *Economics and Resources*), contribute to Brazil's fragmented society. Brazilian society divides into a small upper class and large middle and lower classes. Upper-class Brazilians tend to live in urban areas and control much of the country's wealth, despite representing only about 6% of society. Primarily descendants of European immigrants, the upper class mainly consists of wealthy business owners and professionals.

The middle and lower classes, each accounting for about 47% of residents, comprise most of society. Members of the middle class often have incomes above the poverty line but are vulnerable to economic instability and have minimal social mobility. The middle class primarily constitutes waged workers, such as teachers and nurses, and their children tend to have less access to private education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). The lower class typically includes informal and rural workers and the unemployed. Often living in suburbs or *favelas* in major cities, they usually have access to lower-quality education and healthcare.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened poverty across Brazil (see *Economics and Resources*).



Indigenous Brazilians, many of whom live in rural communities, often have less access to social services and quality education. In recent years, private and state

interests in development and infrastructure projects have undermined these communities' rights to their traditional lands. Since the 1980s, illegal gold mining in the northern Yanomami Indigenous Territory has damaged the environment and caused an increase in violence, particularly sexual abuse of women by illegal miners. In 2021, miners fired at police and Yanomami people, resulting in two children drowning after having escaped the shooting. During his tenure, President Bolsonaro promoted encroachment on indigenous lands for economic development.

### 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

#### Overview

According to a 2023 survey, Brazil is 53% Roman Catholic, 26% evangelical Christian, 16% atheist or non-religious (including agnostics), and 2% practice Afro-Brazilian religions. The remaining 3% of residents adhere to other religions, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or syncretic (mixed) religions.

The constitution protects religious freedom and mandates church-state separation. While religious persecution is illegal and Brazilians are generally tolerant of religious differences, hate crimes against religious groups sometimes occur. In recent years, observers have noted acts of government- and citizen-perpetrated religious prejudice and related intolerance.

#### Early Religion

Before the arrival of European conquerors (see *History and Myth*), Brazil's indigenous people led rich spiritual lives as indicated by archeological evidence of early ceremonial tools. By around 400 AD, the Marajoara peoples in the Amazon (see *History and Myth*) built ceremonial mounds to worship ancestors and female spirits. They also buried their deceased men with ornate ceramics.

From about 800-1600 AD, the Xingu peoples, a community of about 15 tribes in central Brazil, held ceremonies to honor the Xingu River. The Xingu believed that native plants were manifestations of deities, and that the sun and moon created the river. Additionally, the Xingu used ayahuasca, a psychedelic brew made from native plants that causes hallucinations, to engage in spiritual ceremonies. Other groups, like the Tupi and Guaraní, held similar beliefs for years after the arrival of the Portuguese.



## Arrival of Christianity

Colonizing Brazil in the 16th century, the Portuguese believed in a holy duty to convert indigenous Brazilians to Roman Catholicism, which gave them an ideological justification for their



conquests. In 1549, the Jesuits, a Catholic order, arrived alongside Tomé de Sousa, the first governor-general of Brazil (see *History and Myth*). In later centuries, the Jesuits and other Catholic orders spread their versions of

Catholicism to indigenous Brazilians and enslaved Africans.

## Catholicism During the Colonial Period

With approval from Portugal's King Dom João III, the Jesuits subjugated indigenous communities through forced recruitment and conversion in Jesuit-controlled **aldeias** (villages, see *History and Myth*). The Jesuits also created a standard form of Tupi, a prevalent indigenous language (see *Language and Communication*), to aid in religious conversion. As Roman Catholicism spread across Brazil, religious leaders in Europe appointed an Archbishop to Rio de Janeiro in 1575.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Brazil's government and Catholic orders disputed over colonial earnings and influence. The pope (leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) granted Jesuits a special status, exempting the order from paying taxes. However, local landowners and government officials perceived Jesuits as monopolizing labor resources without paying their fair share, causing resentment and the Jesuits' expulsion from the Portuguese Empire in 1759. In 1782, Portugal's Prime Minister, the Marquis of Pombal, expelled other Roman Catholic orders.

## Catholicism in an Independent Brazil

Having proclaimed independence from Portugal in 1822 (see *History and Myth*), the Brazilian Empire's 1824 constitution made Catholicism the official religion, though it also protected non-Catholics by allowing religious freedom. Still, the Catholic Church paid taxes to keep certain privileges, like jurisdiction over

education, marriage, and funerals. In the 1870s, Catholic Church-government conflict arose from the **questão religiosa** (religious question), a dispute about Brazilian bishops' loyalty to the pope over the Brazilian state. When Brazil imprisoned bishops, who did not express primary loyalty to the state, public support for the bishops were a factor in a violent event known as the **Quebra-Quilos** ("break the kilos") revolt. This name represents protest of a mandated metric system implementation. In an illustration of the Church's societal influence, Emperor Dom Pedro II granted full amnesty to the bishops after the revolt.

Dom Pedro II's friction with the Church was one of many factors that led to Brazil's 1889 transition to democracy (see *History and Myth*). Brazil's provisional government redefined its relationship with the Church, codifying the separation of church and state, and revoking subsidies for religious groups. The government also adopted nine new holidays to commemorate secular events and passed a civil marriage law, among other policies. Although not in favor of the changes, many Catholics supported the church-state separation, which reaffirmed the clergy's loyalty to the pope and separation from the government.

### Catholicism in the 20th Century

In the 20th century, Brazil was a destination for Catholics escaping European conflict. Catholics further cemented their presence in Brazil with the construction of Christ the Redeemer, a mountaintop statue overlooking Rio de Janeiro, in 1931. In 1955, construction began on the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady Aparecida, Brazil's principal patroness. As the world's second-largest church building by interior area, the Basilica has become a Catholic pilgrimage site.



After the success of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, with its Marxist and atheist message, Catholic leaders worried that communism could limit their authority across Latin America. Although upper

and lower clergy shared this worry, they often adopted different measures to help stop communism's spread. While the upper clergy sought to educate government officials' children to fortify their high-level state influence, many lower clergy worked with marginalized people to reassert the role of Catholicism in their daily lives. Likewise, many upper clergy members endorsed the 1964 military coup, which sought to end any leftist or communist threat in Brazil (see *History and Myth*). Conversely, the lower clergy protested the military dictatorship's human rights abuses, believing they would inspire pro-communist sentiment.

**Catholicism During the Military Dictatorship:** From 1964-85, the dictatorship imprisoned and killed anti-regime lower clergy, some of whom assisted guerrillas who fought against the government. In response to the resultant priest shortage, some marginalized Catholics formed **Comunidades Eclesiais de Base** (basic ecclesial communities, or CEBs), which held private masses guided by a single clergy member. The CEBs practiced liberation theology, a Catholic movement that emphasizes freedom from social, political, and economic oppression. CEB social causes, such as sanitation campaigns, often found their way into the national discourse, challenging the dictatorship.

As lower clergy fought for political change, the conservative upper clergy sought to expel lower clergy from the Church if they

disagreed with the Church-regime alliance. While the number of CEBs declined in the late 1980s after the country's democratic transition (see *History and Myth*), their influence remains and has made Brazil's Catholic Church one of Latin America's most progressive.



### **Syncretic Religions**

Between 1531-1888, the Portuguese enslaved some 4-5 million Africans to work on Brazilian plantations (see *History and Myth*). These enslaved Africans, from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, brought

diverse religious traditions to the country that merged with

Catholicism to create new beliefs, including Afro-Brazilian religions and Spiritism, collectively known as syncretic religions. To prevent slaveholders from destroying or corrupting their traditions, enslaved persons renamed some of their deities to correspond with Roman Catholic saints, elevating the figures most relevant to their circumstances. In turn, many 18th-century Brazilians understood traditional African and Roman Catholic figures to have parallel identities. Further, unlike many Christian colonizers in other parts of the Americas, who prohibited such practices, many Brazilian Catholics saw syncretic religions as a step towards converting enslaved peoples to Catholicism.

In the early 19th century, official support of syncretic religions diminished after the Haitian Revolution, as leaders feared similar slave revolts in Brazil. The government suppressed syncretism and banned ceremonial activities. While Brazil's



1891 constitution recodified freedom of religion, many Brazilians persecuted non-Christians. Persecution became less common in the 1930s, due in part to the **Estado Novo** (New State) that highlighted the benefits of a multi-racial Brazil (see *History and Myth* and *Political and Social Relations*).

In the 20th century, Macumba, an umbrella term for Brazilian syncretic religions, the largest of which are Candomblé and Umbanda, grew in popularity. In the 1940s, amendments to Brazil's penal code further protected freedom of worship and syncretic religions. Moreover, the Afro-Brazilian population grew throughout the century, bringing these beliefs to more Europeanized parts of Brazil, such as São Paulo, where adherents founded 1,500 syncretic temples between 1980-90.

Candomblé largely draws on African traditions. Adherents worship many **orixás** (deities or spirits) but bond to a single **orixá** during an intricate initiation ceremony. Umbanda, a faith that developed in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s, includes African,

Catholic, Spiritist, Hindu, Buddhist, and other traditions. Adherents believe in connections between humans and the spirit world, and depending on the community, they emphasize beliefs like reincarnation or racial democracy.



### Religion Today

Since 1990, many Catholic Brazilians have become Protestants. Despite some variation among sects, Brazilian Protestantism tends to emphasize

personal salvation, morality, and has a traditionally less complex relationship with the government, appealing to many people. In recent years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has opened hundreds of schools across Brazil, attracting many middle-class Brazilians. Evangelicals' organizations and hierarchies are more decentralized than Catholics' and face less bureaucracy when opening new churches, resulting in a massive growth in adherents and political influence. Some studies suggest that the number of Evangelicals will match Catholics in Brazil by 2032.

Nevertheless, Catholicism still influences norms and institutions in Brazil. Although the Church does not retain a privileged status in government (see *Political and Social Relations*), many holidays, like the Feast of Our Lady Aparecida, are Catholic (see *Time and Space*), and Catholic images are present on government buildings. Brazil's Ministry of Education considers religious education integral to the national curriculum, and while lessons are required to be non-denominational, they often invoke Catholic traditions (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

**Catholicism:** While Brazil is home to about 123 million Roman Catholics, more than in any other country, membership as a proportion of the population declined from 65-53% between 2010-23. Catholicism is the predominant religion in every state, though the percentage of Catholics varies. For example, 88% of Piauí residents are Catholic, compared to 47% in Roraima.

Brazil's Catholics have unique celebrations and traditions. Brazil hosts the **Caminho da Fé** (Walk of Faith), a 310-mi pilgrimage route, one of the world's longest, through São Paulo and Minas

Gerais states. The journey ends at the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady Aparecida in Aparecida, São Paulo. Catholics also observe World Youth Day, a celebration of young Catholics also referred to as “Catholic Woodstock.” Rio de Janeiro hosted the 2013 World Youth Day, which attracted over three million people.

**Other Christian Churches:** While Protestant missions have been present in Brazil since the 16th century, few made significant inroads until the early 19th century. In recent years, Protestant groups, such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals, have experienced a surge in membership. Many recent converts are former Catholics from poor urban and suburban areas.



Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are increasingly involved in government (see of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2021, an evangelical pastor joined the Supreme Federal Court. The evangelical community has also become an increasingly important voting bloc and was key to former President Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory in 2018 (see *History and Myth*). Other Christian groups in Brazil are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Orthodox Christians, and others.

**Syncretic Religions:** While few Brazilians practice syncretism as their primary religion, many incorporate syncretic beliefs into their spiritual lives and follow multiple faiths. Historically grouped together, Candomblé and Umbanda are the largest syncretic religions. Many adherents are among the urban poor, although membership is more diverse in southern Brazil, where some members are in the middle and upper classes.

**Other Religions:** Non-Christian religious minorities, many of whom descend from Chinese and Japanese immigrants (see *Political and Social Relations*), primarily live in major cities. Numbering 250,000, Brazil has Latin America's largest Buddhist population. Although Brazil has the world's tenth largest Jewish population, antisemitism has risen in recent years, and many Jews have emigrated to Israel to escape discrimination and economic and political instability.



## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Overview

The family is the center of Brazilian life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Brazilian families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Marrying and starting a family remain a priority for most young adults.

### Residence

Beginning in the 19th century, Brazil began to urbanize. As of 2023, some 88% of Brazilians live in cities. Middle- and upper-class homes typically have electricity, running water, and heated water in bathrooms and kitchens. Home heating is rare in much of the country, primarily due to its warm climate (see *Political and Social Relations*) and high electricity costs. Although electricity and indoor plumbing are widely available, many residents in lower-income or rural areas lack safe access to drinking water and sewage systems.



**Rural:** Rural residents typically construct houses to withstand extreme weather. Materials vary by region, with most houses built from wood, plaster, bricks, and/or metal. Many rural families live in spacious homes with a yard. Some residents along the Amazon River build floating houses on wooden rafts, while some homes in the South and Southeast are influenced by German immigration (see *Political and Social Relations*), featuring patterned timber with stones or clay.

**Urban:** Middle- and upper-class urban families tend to reside in apartments and houses similar to townhouses in the US. Some upper-class families live in luxury apartments with amenities, such as pools and gyms. Homes often are made of concrete and brick with tiled roofs and floors made of wood, tile, or cement. Some upper-class houses, often located in gated communities, use more expensive materials, such as granite, marble, or wood.

By contrast, many lower-class families live in makeshift housing. Migration from rural regions to São Paulo and other large cities resulted in the development of **favelas** (shanty towns), where residents build homes from available materials, such as wood, cinder blocks, sheet metal, and brick. Some residents in the



*favelas* lack basic services like indoor plumbing and running water.

### Family Structure

In Brazilian families, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head-of-household, while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and

childcare, though many women also work outside the home (see *Sex and Gender*). In some urban families, men and women share domestic tasks and support the household financially. Many children live at home well into adulthood. While most newly married couples prefer to move into their own homes, a lack of financial resources compels many to remain with their families until they can afford their own house or apartment. Brazilians highly respect their elders, and children often care for their parents as they age.

### Children

While Brazilian families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents' involvement in their children's lives often varies by social class and ability or desire to employ domestic help. While many middle- and upper-class families have maids or nannies, lower-class women typically assume childcare responsibilities themselves or have assistance from older children or relatives. Parents often exhibit warmth and affection rather than authority with their children.

**Birth:** About a month before the baby is born, close family and friends typically hold a party similar to a baby shower in the US, whereby attendees bring gifts for the mother and baby. After a birth, family members and friends typically visit the mother and present her flowers and gifts. Many families celebrate the child's first birthday with a large party.

**Names:** Historically, many Brazilian Catholics (see *Religion and Spirituality*) named their children after Catholic saints, and some still do. Today, many parents name their newborns after themselves, a relative, or a family friend.

### Rites of Passage

Many Brazilians, including those who practice Candomblé (see *Religion and Spirituality*), observe the Roman Catholic rite of passage of baptizing their children within a few months of birth. To mark the



transition to adulthood, some 15-year-old girls from upper-class families have a **feira de debutante** (debutant party). Festivities typically include a large formal dinner and party with friends and family, as well as a father-daughter dance. In the Amazon, most boys from the Sateré-Mawé indigenous group (see *Political and Social Relations*) perform a ritual to mark adulthood known as **Waumat**. During the ritual, boys must demonstrate their fortitude by sticking their hands into a glove filled with **formigas tucandeira** (bullet ants), experiencing severe pain that often causes them to get sick and vomit.

**Dating and Courtship:** Brazilians typically begin dating in their mid-teens, often meeting at school, dance clubs, or in their neighborhood. Traditionally, most Brazilians aimed to marry and start a family in their early-to-mid-20s. Today, Brazilians who attend university often postpone marriage until their mid-to-late-20s, preferring to first graduate and establish stable careers. Many young adults date for 1-3 years before getting engaged.

**Weddings:** Friends and family typically hold a bridal shower for the bride before her wedding. Brazilian weddings generally comprise two events: a civil ceremony performed at a government office to receive a marriage certificate and exchange rings and a religious one at a church. After the ceremonies, Brazilians typically hold an extravagant wedding party. The reception usually includes plentiful food (see *Sustenance and Health*), sweets, music, dancing, and drinks,

especially **caipirinhas**, the national cocktail with lime, sugar, and **cachaça** (distilled sugarcane liquor, similar to rum – see p. 3 of *Sustenance and Health*). The party usually continues into the early morning, with breakfast served the following day.

## Divorce

Legalized in 1977, divorce was traditionally highly stigmatized. Today, uncontested divorce is relatively simple, and couples can get divorced within 4-8 weeks of announcing intent. A couple without children may get divorced by a notary rather than a judge, substantially cutting cost and time. As of 2024, about 1.4 of 1,000 marriages in Brazil ended in divorce, a lower than the US (around 2.4 divorces per 1,000 marriages in the same year).



## Death

After death, Brazilians typically hold a vigil (or wake) at a **velório** (similar to a funeral facility). During this period, friends and relatives visit to pay respects to the family and grieve. Rather than focus on celebrating the deceased, a common practice in Brazil is to

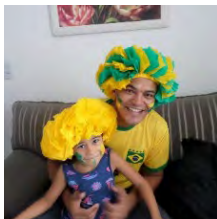
kiss and hug the deceased and cry. Since the funeral and burial occur within 48 hours of the death, some funeral services include live video streaming for those unable to attend. Food and beverages are relatively rare at funerals, which typically have a religious service with prayers and hymns. Today, burials are more common than cremation, and family members are typically buried in the same cemetery.

Funeral rituals vary by region, and many indigenous groups have unique traditions. Among the Xingu (see *History and Myth*), the community performs a funeral ritual called **Kuarup** when a chief dies on Xingu land in the Amazon. Unlike most Brazilians' grief-focused funerals, the Yawalapiti wear body paint and bird feathers, perform ceremonial dances, and hold feasts to celebrate the circle of life and that of their deceased leaders.

## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Overview

Traditionally, Brazil has had a male-dominated society, whereby ***machismo*** (strong masculine pride) is counterbalanced by ***modelo de María*** (female subservience). The Brazilian social system is patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority. Brazil ranked 70 of 146 countries in a 2024 gender equality index, well below neighboring Argentina (32) but above Uruguay (71).



### Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Work:** Historically, Brazilian society maintained a strict division between genders, with women responsible for most household chores and childcare, even if they worked outside the home. Today, in some urban households, men increasingly help with domestic chores.

**Labor Force:** In 2024, some 54% of women worked outside the home, higher than Argentina (53%), but lower than Uruguay (57%) and the US (57%). Although men tend to dominate skilled and professional positions, women hold about 39% of managerial roles, higher than in Argentina (38%) and Uruguay (34%). As of 2024, about 6% of companies have female CEOs. Women account for most informal sector workers (see *Economics and Resources*), of which more than six million are domestic employees, many of whom are underpaid. While Brazilian law outlines labor rights (see *Time and Space*), most informal workers lack access to social security and other benefits.

### Gender and the Law

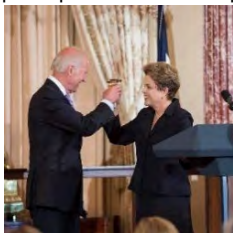
Although Brazilian law prohibits gender discrimination in hiring and sexual harassment in the workplace, it does not protect against sexual harassment in public spaces or schools. Further, some employers consider marital status when hiring, which disproportionately affects women employees, who are entitled to various childcare benefits. Women are guaranteed 120 days of

maternity and men 5 days of paternity leave. Laws also prohibit women from working in jobs that require them to lift 55 lbs for occasional work and 44 lbs for continuous work. If a company is enrolled in the **Programa Empresa Cidadã** (Corporate Citizen Program), parental leave may increase to 180 days for women and 20 days for men.

Although the legal marriage age is 18, children can marry at age 16 with parental consent. About 36% of girls are married before they turn 18 years old, South America's highest and the world's fourth-highest child marriage rate.

### Gender and Politics

Women gained the right to vote in 1932. Although the law made voting compulsory in 1934 (see *Political and Social Relations*), it applied only to men and women with paid employment. Voting became compulsory for all women in 1946. Dilma Rousseff, was Brazil's first and only woman President, in office from 2011-16 (see *History and Myth*). Although Brazil has a 30% quota for female electoral candidates, party lists do not always meet this quota, and many women are not elected. Women also often receive less electoral funding than men, which hinders their political involvement. In 2024, women held 18% of seats in Congress, far lower than Argentina (44%) and the US (29%). Further, in 2020, some 81% of sitting Congresswomen experienced gender-based violence, contributing to the low participation rate. In response, in 2021, Brazil passed a law to combat political violence against women.



### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is widespread and became more prevalent due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (see *Sustenance and Health*). In 2024, the country had about 1,450 femicides (murder of a woman based on her gender), with most victims killed by their husbands. In 2023, rape case hit a historic high of 83,988, roughly one rape reported every six minutes. About 70% of rape survivors are under 18 years old. Moreover, these data are likely underestimates, as reporting is rare, partly due to social stigma attached to GBV.

To combat GBV, Brazil passed the *María da Penha Law* in 2006, its first law against domestic violence. Since then, Brazil passed a femicide law in 2014, and in 2019, criminalized homophobia (prejudice against gay people,). The law stipulates sentences of 6-30 years for rape and 12-30 years for femicide convictions. Various services assist GBV survivors, such as hotlines and shelters. Emergency centers provide health, psychological, and legal services. However, during the Bolsonaro Presidency (see *History and Myth*), budget cuts prevented more centers from opening and hindered hotlines and shelters from operating at capacity.

### Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2023, Brazil's fertility rate decreased from 6.1 births per woman to 1.6, equal to the US (1.6) and higher than Argentina (1.5). Largely due to a lack of comprehensive sex education and sexual abuse, Brazil's adolescent fertility rate was 43 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2023, significantly higher than the US (13) but lower than Paraguay (70). Abortion has

been illegal with exceptions for rape and life-threatening conditions since 1890. As of 2024, unsafe abortions are the fourth cause of maternal deaths in Brazil. Just 3.6% of Brazilian municipalities allow legal abortions making safe and legal abortions more difficult to attain.



### Homosexuality in Brazil

Brazil legalized same-sex marriage in 2013. Today, all legally recognized couples are entitled to the same rights and benefits. While laws criminalize homophobia, discrimination and violence against such persons persist. However, in 2020, a record 281 homosexual candidates ran in municipal elections. São Paulo's **Parada Gay** (Gay Pride) is known as the world's largest pride parade, with three-five million people attending annually

At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Brazil. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Language Overview

Portuguese is the official and primary language of government, business, education, and entertainment. While some Brazilians who live along the border speak Spanish, minority groups often retain their German, Italian, Japanese, English, indigenous, or other languages.

### Portuguese

While nearly all residents speak some Portuguese, over 94% (203 million) speak it as their first language. Portuguese was first introduced to the region in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*). For years, Portuguese coexisted with a Tupi *lingua franca*, or shared language, known as **Língua Geral** (General Language), primarily spoken between Jesuit explorers (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and diverse indigenous communities (see *Political and Social Relations*). After centuries of colonization, Portuguese became the national language in the 18th century.



Portuguese uses the same alphabet as English without “k,” “w,” and “y,” and with additional consonants – rr (pronounced like the guttural French “r” and similar to “h”), ch (like the “sh” in the word shave), nh (like the “ny” in the word canyon), and lh (like “ly,” which sounds similar to “lyuh”). Likewise, several vowels have a nasal pronunciation, in which the tongue closes off the soft palate in the back of the mouth, such as “õe” (pronounced similar to the “oin” in the word oink) and “ã” (like an inquisitive “uh?”).

Brazilian Portuguese has some features that distinguish it from European Portuguese, including different pronunciation (as with a soft “d” and “t” before an “i” or an unstressed “e” at the end of a word), slang terms, and the more frequent use of third-person singular **você** (“you”), over the second-person **tu**. Brazil is home to regional dialects that have their own slang and pronunciation,



such as Northern (spoken in the Amazon and the North), **Baiano** (state of Bahia), **Fluminense** (Rio de Janeiro), **Mineiro** (Minas Gerais), and **Sulista** (Southern Brazil), among others.

With Brazil's massive population, South America has as many Portuguese speakers as Spanish. As such, Portuguese is an official language for many regional organizations, notably Mercosur (or Mercosul in Brazil), a South American economic and political bloc (see *Political and Social Relations*).

## Other Languages

Brazil is home to many distinct indigenous language families, most of which are spoken in rural areas of the interior. Some of the most spoken indigenous languages, many of which belong to the Tupian language family, are Ticuna (35,000 speakers), Xavante (19,000), Kaingang (18,500), Kaiwá (18,000), Terêna (15,800), and Ninam (15,700). Many Brazilians speak foreign languages such as Spanish, Japanese, Italian, or German, though English is the most common. Brazil is home to about three million speakers of German-language variations like Hunsrik and Pomeranian, primarily in the country's South, where



some municipalities recognize them as co-official languages. While estimates vary, Brazil has at least 380,000 Japanese speakers, most of whom are descendants of Japanese laborers, who arrived in the early 20th century (see *History and Myth*).

**Spanish:** Over six million residents, many of whom live near Brazil's borders with Spanish-speaking countries, speak Spanish. In these places, a pidgin language (a simplified means of

communication), known as **Portunhol** in Brazil, combines elements of Spanish and Portuguese. Although it has no native speakers, *Portunhol* enables speakers of these similar languages to communicate.

If not close to the border, many Brazilians avoid receiving foreign nationals speaking Spanish to communicate. Brazilians tend to

perceive the assumption that everyone in South America can speak Spanish as a lack of cultural competence. Spanish is not an official language in Brazil in any locality.

**English:** It is the second most spoken language in Brazil. Numbering nearly 11 million, English speakers predominantly concentrate in large cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and are often under 35 years old. Primary and secondary schools offer English courses, of which some 95% of Brazilian students take at least one class (see *Learning and Knowledge*). However, most Brazilians are not fluent, as lessons tend to target grammar instead of speaking and writing.

### Communication Overview

Communicating in Brazil requires both knowledge of Portuguese and the ability to interact effectively using language. This notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). These forms of communication ensure statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

### Communication Style

Brazilians tend to be expressive communicators and typically speak with animated gestures, at times interrupting conversation due to their passion or interest in a topic. They generally avoid humor in serious situations, as it implies a lack of decorum. In everyday life, however, they use humor to entertain others during conversation.

Many Brazilians are consensus driven, seeking agreement in conversations. They are typically diplomatic in their statements, especially with those whom they do not know well.

Brazilians often avoid conflict in conversation, tending to speak indirectly and imply an intended meaning to shift the conversation towards preferred topics (see “Conversational Topics” below).



Nonverbal communication and eye contact are important, the latter of which shows respect and attentiveness while listening and honesty while speaking (see *Time and Space*). Many Brazilians touch their conversation partner's arm, shoulder, or back while talking to convey affection. They also tend to stand close to each other (see *Time and Space*), as backing away from someone during a conversation is considered rude.

## Greetings

Brazilians value greetings, which they consider welcoming and conveying acknowledgment. Standard greetings vary by region, though the most common is a firm handshake with eye contact, especially when greeting individuals for the first time or in formal settings. In group or social settings, Brazilians expect the person arriving to greet all group members before engaging in conversation. Family and close friends greet each other with an **abraço** (hug), which consists of a handshake and a hug among men and a hug and a kiss on the right cheek among women or between sexes. Men often pat male friends and family on the back during a handshake. Occasionally, Brazilians greet with a kiss on the right cheek, often reserved for more distant relatives.

Greetings are accompanied by the phrase **olá** (hello), **bom dia** (good day), **boa tarde** (good afternoon), or **boa noite** ("good evening" or "good night"). Brazilians also typically make polite initial inquiries when meeting someone, asking **Tudo bom?** (All good?), for which the polite reply is **Tudo bem** (All is well).



personal identity. Many second names are biblical, as Brazilians tend to be Christian (see *Religion and Spirituality*), or a relative's name. Brazil adopted Portuguese naming patterns by using their mother's and father's paternal surnames. Women typically keep

## Names

Brazilian names consist of one or two first names and one or more last names. A first name is an individual's

their maiden name or attach their spouse's surname to the end of theirs, sometimes adding **e** (and) or **do, dos, or da** (of the) between their maiden name and their married surname.

### Forms of Address

In formal settings, Brazilians use professional titles like **Doutor(a)** (Doctor) or titles of respect such as **senhor** (Mr.), **senhora** (Mrs.), or **senhorita** (for young/unmarried women), sometimes with last name. To demonstrate special deference to elders or those of a higher social class, Brazilians use the honorifics **Dom** or **Seu** (for men) or **Dona** (for women). Friends of the same age often address one another by first name or a nickname.

### Conversational Topics

Brazilians typically converse about the health and wellbeing of each other and their families. Common conversational topics are



Brazilian culture, cuisine, and natural landscapes. Soccer (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) is also a popular topic. To avoid offense, foreign nationals should not discuss politics, poverty, or religion. Recent political polarization (see *Political and Social Relations*) has resulted in some political discussions causing conflict. Many Brazilians appreciate when one tries to speak Portuguese, regardless of proficiency.

### Gestures

Brazilians use many gestures in conversation to emphasize discussion points. They rub their hands together to convey that an idea does not matter or is unimportant. Like in the US, the thumbs-up gesture signals approval, and shaking one's head is a sign of disapproval. Foreign nationals should avoid making the "ok" hand gesture, which many Brazilians consider rude.

### Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

## Useful Words and Phrases

English	Brazilian Portuguese
Hello	Olá
How are you?	Como está?
I am well	Estou bem
Excuse me	Com licença / Desculpe
Yes	Sim
No	Não
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Obrigado/a (m/f)
You are welcome	De nada
I'm sorry	Sinto muito
I don't understand	Eu não entendo
What is your name?	Qual é o seu nome?
My name is ____	O meu nome é ____
Where are you from?	De onde é?
I am from the US	Eu sou dos EUA
Goodbye	Tchau / Adeus
Good morning/day	Bom dia
Good afternoon	Boa tarde
Good evening	Boa noite
What does ____ mean?	O que significa ____ ?
What is this?	O que é isto?
I would like a ____	Eu gostaria de um ____
How do you say ____?	Como você diz ____?
...in English?	... em inglês?
...in Portuguese?	...em português?
What do you want?	O que é que você quer?
What time is it?	Que horas são?
Yesterday	Ontem
Today	Hoje
Tomorrow	Amanhã
Where is the doctor?	Onde está o/a médico/a? (m/f)
Who?	Quem?
When?	Quando?
Where?	Onde?
Which?	Qual?
Why?	Por que?
Car	Carro
Plane	Avião
Bus	Ônibus

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 95%
- Male: 94%
- Female: 95% (2022 estimate)

### Early Education

Before the arrival of Portuguese colonists (see *History and Myth*), indigenous communities informally transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations through stories, proverbs, fables, myths, and legends (see *History and Myth*). Rites of passage were also an important means of perpetuating morals and values (see *Family and Kinship*).

### Portuguese Education

In the Portuguese colonial era (see *History and Myth*), the primary focus of education was to impart basic literacy and instruction in Roman Catholicism. Various Roman Catholic orders founded schools for the sons of local elites and some indigenous groups (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1549, the Jesuits arrived in Brazil and established **aldeias** (villages, see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) for the indigenous Tupi and Guaraní communities (see *Political and Social Relations*). These *aldeias* initially focused on Portuguese-language instruction and religious education. As these communities grew, the Jesuits added the production of handicrafts, military tactics, and European-style farming practices to their educational offerings.



After the Portuguese Crown expelled the Jesuits from its empire in 1759, the *aldeias* and schools for elite youth changed hands, with the former eventually shutting down. For the remainder of the colonial period, most Brazilians received only a rudimentary religious education. The departure of the Jesuits also impacted

schooling for the sons of the colonial elite, with new educational institutions called ***aulas régias*** (royal halls) introducing secular studies and Enlightenment ideals of logic and reason to young Brazilians. Regardless of the curriculum, the sudden change in educational priorities and structures left an institutional vacuum that negatively impacted education across the entire spectrum of colonial society.

## Education in the Brazilian Empire

Brazilian Emperors Pedro I and II (see *History and Myth*) prioritized education during their reigns. Accordingly, Brazil's 1824 constitution established free primary schooling for all non-enslaved children. Later laws mandated the creation of post-secondary institutions and technical schools, notably the São Francisco Law School in 1827 and the ***Academias Médico-Cirúrgicas*** (Medical-Surgical Academies) in 1832. In 1827, Congress passed a law that called for the creation of a boys' and girls' primary school in every village and established a broad general curriculum for educators to follow nationwide. In practice, education remained stratified by socioeconomic class,



with indigenous and enslaved African communities largely denied basic education.

Emperor Dom Pedro II, a proponent of education as a method to modernize the empire, sought to

improve the quality of schooling, which still had not recovered from the expulsion of the Jesuits in the 18th century. By the mid-19th century, the government had shifted the responsibility of financing schools to each province and formed secondary schools to replace the largely independent and unregulated elite ***aulas régias***. Government ministers examined educational models from Europe and the US to implement in Brazil and subsequently introduced reforms in different secondary schools across the country. Nevertheless, enrollment at this level remained reserved mostly for the children of wealthy families, and quality varied widely across the different institutions.

## Education in the 20th Century

Brazil's economic growth in the early 20th century (see *Economics and Resources*) provided funding to improve the quality of public education and increase the number of children able to access primary studies. With the 1888 abolition of slavery (see *History and Myth*), many governing elite sought to use public education to incorporate the formerly disenfranchised Afro-Brazilian community into larger Brazilian society (see *Political and Social Relations*). Nevertheless, educational opportunities remained mostly inaccessible for Afro-Brazilians and working-class families, who encountered discriminatory educational practices inspired by models in the US South and the newly established fascist governments in Western Europe.

In the 1920s and 30s, educational quality continued to improve when the government and Catholic Church founded Brazil's first modern research universities, often by reorganizing and consolidating disparate academies and post-secondary schools into unified institutions. The pro-worker policies of Getúlio Vargas's government (see *History and Myth*) and those of subsequent Presidents moved to make education more accessible and enacted other measures to reduce Brazil's relatively high illiteracy rate in the mid-20th century. This trend continued into the 1960s, when Congress instituted national-level standards and guidelines for educational institutions.



## Modern Education System

Today, education in Brazil is free and compulsory for all citizens, with a mandated minimum of 14 years of schooling starting at age 4. Most students attend free government-run schools, although some enroll in private, often religious schools. In 2022, about 18% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, lower than neighboring Argentina (25%), Paraguay (20%), and the average in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC–19%), but higher than neighboring Uruguay (16%).



While the Ministry of Education oversees all school accreditation and is responsible for assuring that educators meet national benchmarks; municipal, state, and federal governments share the responsibility for funding schools, depending on the level. In 2022, Brazil spent about 6% of its GDP on education, higher than the LAC average (4%) and neighboring Argentina (5%) and Paraguay (3%) and the US (5%). Nevertheless, in a 2018 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science; Brazil ranked below the US and some other South American countries surveyed, with similar scores to Peru and Argentina.



Many schools, especially in cities, operate multiple 5-hour shifts each day. Students attend either morning, afternoon, or evening lessons. While educators designed this system to allow existing infrastructure

to serve many students and reduce truancy (children not attending school), some educators say the system burdens teachers. Some smaller schools and wealthier private schools operate less shifts or offer a single, longer school day. This discrepancy has led to unequal educational outcomes. In 2020, the school dropout rates were eight times higher among the poorest 20% of Brazilians than the wealthiest 20%.

The language of instruction is Portuguese, although Brazil's constitution allows indigenous groups to form their own schools and conduct lessons in their native languages (see *Language and Communication*) to improve educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized communities (see *Political and Social Relations*). Likewise, a 2008 law mandates that students must learn about indigenous and Afro-Brazilian culture, history, and their communities' contributions to society. To make university admission more equitable, a law effective from 2012-22 set quotas for the minimum percentages of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous students in each institution. While initially controversial, the Supreme Court upheld the law, stating it

reenforced pre-existing racial quotas that were self-imposed in many post-secondary institutions. In August 2023, Congress approved permanently extending the law, subject to review every 10-years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*), many students in indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, and rural communities could not access remote learning tools due to a lack of Internet access (see *Technology and Material*). This shortfall negatively affected these marginalized communities, which already had faced difficulties accessing quality schooling. In response, some groups, like the **Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra** (Landless Workers' Movement), created communal schools. While largely outside the public system, these schools have sought to provide more educational resources to rural communities.

**Pre-Primary:** Brazilian children under 6 years old may attend free public pre-primary programs, though some attend fee-based private institutions. Provided by municipalities and overseen by each state, pre-primary education is a constitutional right and mandatory for children ages 4-5. Some 86% of children of the appropriate age attended pre-primary programs in 2020.



**Basic Education: *Ensino fundamental*** (elementary or primary education) begins at age 6 and divides into two cycles – grades 1-5 and 6-9.

Most schools follow the national curriculum, which covers Portuguese, history, geography, arts, mathematics, natural sciences, religion, and physical education. For the second cycle, which generally corresponds to middle school in the US, students no longer have a single teacher and change classes for each subject. Foreign language classes, usually English or Spanish, are often mandatory in the second cycle. About 96% of children of the appropriate age attended primary school in 2022.

**Secondary Education:** *Ensino médio* (secondary education) comprises the final 3 years of schooling and is largely a continuation of primary education, although courses in philosophy, sociology, and a second foreign language are often compulsory additions to the curriculum. Students are assessed on a grading scale of 1-10 and must obtain at least a 5 in every



class to proceed to the following year. While not mandatory, students in their final year of *ensino médio* can sit for the **Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio** (National Secondary School Exam, or ENEM). Brazilians use the ENEM as proof of graduation for those finalizing their

education, and as a university entrance exam for those continuing to post-secondary studies. Some 94% of children of the appropriate age attended secondary school in 2022

**Post-Secondary Education:** Brazil has a large network of public universities that offer free tuition for Brazilians. To determine admission, each institution either administers its own entrance exam, known as a **vestibular**, or uses ENEM scores. Competition for public university spots is intense, as Brazilians across the socioeconomic spectrum apply for a limited number of seats at prestigious universities, such as the **Universidade de São Paulo** (University of São Paulo). Despite no tuition, the high cost of living in cities (see *Family and Kinship*) has caused many young Brazilians to struggle to complete their degrees. More evening and weekend courses have been introduced in recent years to accommodate working schedules.

Primarily for wealthier residents, Brazil has a variety of private universities, such as the **Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul** (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul). Some of these schools offer prestigious degrees with less demanding admissions processes. At the end of university studies, some faculties administer a **provão** (standardized exam) to test graduates' capabilities and gauge the quality of the department in comparison to peer institutions nationwide.

## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Overview

Brazilians tend to view interpersonal relationships, reputation, and etiquette as key to conducting business transactions. While many Brazilians have casual attitudes regarding punctuality in personal relationships, they often value timeliness and formality in professional settings. Brazilians' personal space preferences tend to vary by degree of familiarity.

### Time and Work

Brazil's workweek runs Monday-Friday, during which normal business hours are 8am-6pm, with an hour break in the afternoon for lunch. In addition, many shops open on a reduced



schedule on the weekends. Banks and government offices also typically follow this schedule but sometimes only open to the public from 10am-4pm. Supermarkets and shopping malls are often open 7am-10pm, although some in urban areas remain open 24 hours. In rural areas, operating hours tend to be more informal, varying according to owners' preferences.

**Working Conditions:** Brazilian labor laws establish a 44-hour workweek, national minimum wage, paid vacation, sick leave, severance pay, and other benefits. Brazilian law also requires employers to pay an extra month of salary during the December holidays, as well as a vacation bonus. Despite these and other benefits and protections, lax enforcement sometimes results in unsafe working conditions. Moreover, around 40% of Brazilians are engaged in informal employment (see *Economics and Resources*), whereby labor codes such as the minimum wage and other workplace standards are inapplicable.

**Time Zone:** Brazil has four time zones. Most Brazilians live in the Brasília time zone (BRT), which is 3 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time and 2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. While

the country's westernmost time zone is Acre time, which is 2 hours behind BRT, Amazon time is 1 hour behind BRT, and Fernando de Noronha time is the easternmost time zone, 1 hour ahead of BRT. Since a legislative change in 2019, Brazil no longer observes daylight saving time.

**Date Notation:** Like the US, Brazil uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Brazilians write the day first, followed by the month and year.

### National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February/March: Carnival (dates vary—see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*)
- February/March: Ash Wednesday (dates vary)
- March/April: Good Friday (dates vary)
- April 21: Tiradentes Day (see *History and Myth*)
- May 1: Labor Day
- May/June: Corpus Christi (dates vary)
- September 7: Independence Day (see *History and Myth*)
- October 12: Feast of Our Lady Aparecida (see *Religion and Spirituality*)
- November 2: All Souls' Day
- November 15: Proclamation of the Republic (see *History and Myth*)
- December 25: Christmas Day

Any holiday that falls on a weekend is observed on the following Monday.

### Time and Business

Many Brazilians value punctuality and generally adhere to deadlines, especially when dealing with foreigners. However, interpersonal relationships are key in business settings, and meetings frequently begin with substantial polite conversation to establish rapport (see *Language and Communication*). The *jeitinho* ("little way") is a common business practice, whereby

people call in personal favors, leverage relationships, bend official rules, or make exemptions to policies to simplify otherwise burdensome tasks or procedures. Foreign nationals should avoid discussion of the *jeitinho* or implying that rules are flexible, either of which may offend Brazilians.

### Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Brazil depends on the nature of the relationship. Most Brazilians maintain about an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand closer to family and friends, especially as compared with the US.

**Touch:** In business settings, greetings usually include minimal touching beyond the initial handshake (see *Language and Communication*), though women may clasp hands loosely and exchange cheek kisses. Brazilians usually reserve physical affection for family and friends.

**Eye Contact:** Brazilians typically make brief but direct eye contact during greetings and maintain eye contact throughout conversations, considering it evidence of interest and respect.

### Photographs

Some churches, museums, landmarks, and military installations prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Brazilian's consent before taking his photo. Explicit permission



is particularly important when photographing children and indigenous people.

### Driving

In urban areas, roads tend to be well-lit and maintained. Urban drivers often disobey

traffic laws and ignore lane markings while maneuvering congested streets. In rural areas, poor road conditions combined with a lack of lighting, signage, and security can make driving hazardous. Like Americans, Brazilians drive on the right side of the road. Brazil's rate of traffic-related deaths was 16 per 100,000 people in 2021, higher than both the US rate (14), and the average in Latin America and the Caribbean (14).

## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION



### Overview

Brazilian clothing, arts, and recreation reflect the country's rich history, cultural diversity, and mix of African, European, and indigenous folk traditions.

### Dress and Appearance

**Traditional:** This dress is most common in rural areas, especially among indigenous groups (see *Political and Social*

*Relations*), and typically worn on holidays and special events. Traditional dress varies by region and occupation. Near the southern border with Argentina, some men wear the **gaúcho** (cowboy) style, consisting of colorful ponchos, wide-brimmed hats, white shirts, **bombachas** (wide-legged capri pants), and boots. Women also wear ponchos and **bombachas**. In the northern Amazon region, some indigenous peoples wear tunics and colorful paints made of natural dyes. In Bahia, Afro-Brazilian women (see *Political and Social Relations*) who sell **acarajé** (black-eyed pea fritters—see *Sustenance and Health*) often wear traditional **Baiana de Acarajé** clothing, with long white dresses, headscarves, and colorful jewelry.

**Modern:** In urban areas, many people follow the latest Western fashion trends. Men typically wear jeans, shirts, and well-kept shoes. Women often wear jeans or short skirts with a blouse or t-shirt, or dresses. In business settings, Brazilians typically prefer formal styles, such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits.

### Recreation and Leisure

Brazilians often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are sharing meals or gathering for **churrascos** (barbecues), playing sports, going to bars and dance clubs, and watching television – especially **novelas** (soap operas).

**Holidays and Festivals:** Brazilians hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's

Catholic roots (see *Religion and Spirituality*), European traditions, or historical events. **Festa Junina** (June Festival) celebrates Saint John the Baptist for the month of June. In rural areas, festivities include food and dances inside an **arraial** (large tent). In urban areas, the *arraial* is often a decorated building with flags and balloons. Brazilians typically dress in checkered shirts with straw hats, and children don face-painted freckles.



Brazil hosts many festivals annually, such as the 5-day Carnival (see *Time and Space*) that coincides with the days before Ash Wednesday. Rio de Janeiro hosts Brazil's and the world's largest Carnival. About five million people annually attend over 500 **blocos** (street parties) and a giant parade with elaborate floats and **samba** dancers (see "Music and Dance" below) at the **Sambódromo**, a 90,000-seat parade area. Generally, festivities include dance competitions, music, fireworks, and processions of dancers in colorful, sparkly costumes.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in the country's history. Brazilians celebrate **Dia da Independência** (Independence Day, see *History and Myth*) with military parades, air shows, and fireworks. **Dia da Consciência Negra** (Black Consciousness Day) memorializes Zumbi dos Palmares, a leader of the Afro-Brazilian resistance against slavery. In 1695, Portuguese soldiers beheaded Zumbi after he fled enslavement. Today, Brazilians celebrate Zumbi on November 20, the anniversary of his death, with nationwide marches.

### Sports and Games

Brazilians participate in a wide variety of sports, such as **futebol** (soccer), basketball, volleyball, surfing, tennis, fishing, swimming, and auto racing. Brazilian **Jiu-jitsu**, a combat sport developed from Japanese judo, and **capoeira**, a martial art form combining dance, acrobatics, and music, are also popular.

Brazil participates in numerous international competitions, such as the Summer and Winter Olympics, FIFA World Cup, **Copa**



**América** (America Cup), Pan American Games, and FIVB Volleyball World Grand Prix, which it has won 12 times. Brazil hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and Summer Olympics in 2016. Notable athletes are Maria Esther Bueno, a tennis player, who won four US Open and three Wimbledon singles titles in the 1950s and 60s, and Ayrton Senna, three-time winner of the Formula One World Drivers' Championships in the 1980s and 90s. *Futebol* player Edson Arantes do Nascimento (known as Pelé) is one of the world's most celebrated athletes. Pelé won many *futebol* trophies, including three World Cup titles in 1958, 1962, and 1970, more than any other player. In 1958, Brazil's government declared him a national treasure.



**Soccer:** *Futebol* is Brazil's most popular sport, with youth learning through pick-up games called **peladas** in neighborhood streets. In lower-class areas, kids often create makeshift balls and goals. Some players wait in lines to

play in **quadras** (small courts fenced in with metal). Brazil's national team, nicknamed the **Seleção Canarinho** (Canary Squad) and known as just the **Seleção** (Selection), has won the FIFA World Cup five times, making it the world's most successful national team. In 2022, Brazil lost in the quarterfinals at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Today, Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior (known as Neymar) is one of Brazil's best athletes, playing for the national team and Paris Saint-Germain Football Club.

**Games:** A popular Brazilian game, **porrinha** (or **porra**, a Brazilian expletive term), is a guessing game typically played in bars. In the game, competitors are given small items, such as coins or pieces of paper, to hide in their hands as the other players place bets on the number of items each player holds. Typically, the loser pays for drinks.

## Music and Dance

Brazil's rich musical and dance traditions reflect European, Afro-Brazilian, and indigenous influences. Developed in Rio de

Janeiro in the 19th century, **choro** (cry) is traditionally cheerful instrumental music. It is often unscripted and may include the clarinet, guitar, flute, and **cavaquinho** (small Portuguese guitar). Alfredo da Rocha Viana Filho, known as Pixinguinha, was a famous *choro* composer, who integrated jazz harmonies and Afro-Brazilian rhythms in much of his music.

Featured during *Festa Junina* and performed across Brazil, the **forró** dance ranges from slow and intimate shuffles to fast-paced footwork with jumps. *Forró* music features the accordion, triangle, acoustic guitar, **zabumba** (drum), and **pandeiro** (hand-held drum similar to a tambourine). While traditional lyrics focused on life's hardships, today, lyrics vary and are more romantic. Luiz Gonzaga and Solange Almeida are famous *forró* artists. Originating in Salvador, **axé** is a blend of musical styles, such as reggae, salsa, and *forró*, featuring upbeat Afro-Brazilian percussion and electric guitars. Today, *axé* is performed in Bahia's Carnival. Some famous *axé* artists are Daniela Mercury and Ivete Sangalo.



Often performed as a play, **bumba-meu-boi** is an 18th-century story told through song and dance. Created by lower-class enslaved and rural workers in the North, the performance mocks upper-class society with a story of the death and resurrection of a colorfully decorated ox that represents a colonial master.

**Samba:** This iconic dance first originated in 17th-century Afro-Brazilian communities in Bahia, where enslaved Africans and their descendants mixed percussion techniques and traditional folk music. In the 1900s, *samba* developed into **samba de morro** (samba from the hills) in Rio de Janeiro **favelas** (shanty towns – see *Family and Kinship*). Typical traditional instruments include the **ganzá** (rattle), **agogô** (bells), and many drums, such as the **pandeiro** and **surdo** (bass drum). Lyrics vary from political to Carnival themes. The genre gained popularity in the late 1960s, led by artists like Cartola, Zeca Pagodinho, Nelson

Cavaquinho, and Guilherme de Brito. *Samba* dance is characterized by its simple steps and body tilts that correspond to the beat of the music. Since the music tempo and beat differ by region, dance movements and pace vary. Today, **escolas de samba** (samba schools) perform during Carnival, where many dancers wear extravagant themed outfits while dancing and competing.



**Bossa Nova:** During the 1950s and 60s, **bossa nova** (“new style” or “new trend”) emerged as a genre combining *samba* rhythm with jazz chords and harmonies. Lyrics typically focus on love, longing, and nature. Instruments often include the guitar, *surdo*, **cabasa** (metal and wood shaker), double bass, drums, and other jazz instruments like saxophone and trumpet. Guitarist João Gilberto and composer Antônio Carlos

Jobim pioneered *bossa nova*. In 1965, the *bossa nova* and jazz song *The Girl from Ipanema* won record of the year, while João Gilberto and American Stan Getz won album of the year for their joint album *Getz/Gilberto*.

**Other Musical Genres:** While many Brazilians listen to foreign musical styles like pop, classical, rap, electronic, hip hop, and jazz, Brazil’s local genres like **sertanejo** (countryside, similar to US country music) and **funk carioca** (Brazilian funk, a hip hop-inspired genre based in Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas*), are widely popular. Created in the 2010s, Brazilian Bass is a subgenre of house music with emerging artists, such as DJ Alok and Bruno Martini. Brazil’s Anitta is a famous Grammy-nominated popstar who sings in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English.

## Literature

With roots in oral traditions, Brazil has a rich literary history. Written in 1500 during explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral’s voyage (see *History and Myth*), Pêro Vaz de Caminha’s letters to King Manuel I narrated the initial Portuguese encounter with Brazil’s nature and indigenous groups. Other early literature came from Jesuit priests (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and immigrants (see *Political and Social Relations*). Father José de Anchieta wrote

theater dramas and the first Tupi-language and grammar book in 1595. Author Bento Teixeira was a crypto-Jew – a Jewish person who practices Judaism in secret – to survive widespread antisemitism. His book *Prosopopéia* (Personification, 1601) is an epic poem about the adventures of a governor in the Northeast with hints of the Jewish struggle in colonial Brazil.

The 19th century produced novelist José de Alencar. His stories and poems, such as *O Guarani* (The Guarani, 1857), which tells a story of a hero in a mythical colonial setting, are still celebrated today. Antônio de Castro Alves wrote antislavery poetry. His collections in *The Slave Ship* (1880) and *The Slaves* (1883) were published after his death. Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis is also a celebrated author. His short stories and novels, such as fictional memoir *Dom Casmurro* (1899), shaped Brazil's realism movement.



Modern literature emerged with Euclides da Cunha, author of *Rebellion in the Backlands* (1902). Notable authors of the period are Jorge Amado and José Pereira da Graça Aranha. Mário de Andrade's work focused on national culture and ethnic diversity, while Rachel de Queiroz's novels addressed women victimized by the male-dominated society (see *Sex and Gender*).

After the military dictatorship (see p. *History and Myth*), which forced many authors into exile, cultural freedom returned to Brazil. Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist* (1988), is an acclaimed novelist, who has won many international prizes.

### Folk Art and Handicrafts

Brazil has a rich history of pottery, woodwork, leatherwork, basket weaving, lace, embroidery, artisanal rugs, and jewelry. Decorated ceramic pieces are common on Marajó Island in the North. In the Amazon, the Tapirapé peoples' *cara grande* (great face) masks are made of wood and feathers, and worn during rituals. Some Brazilians wear a *figa*, a hand pendant with the thumb between the index and middle finger, for good luck.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, with family and friends lingering for conversation and companionship. Brazilian cuisine reflects the country's geographic diversity, large agricultural sector, and Portuguese, African, and indigenous influences.

### Dining Customs

Most Brazilians eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Traditionally, breakfast is light, while lunch, served in the early afternoon, is the heartiest meal. While many Brazilians have a mid-day break at work for lunch (see *Time and Space*), business schedules in cities cause many Brazilians to eat in the office or at a nearby restaurant instead of returning home, as was customary in previous generations. Dinner is often slightly smaller than lunch and typically served between 7-8pm. Before lunch and dinner, some Brazilians drink **cachaça** (distilled sugarcane liquor, see "Beverages" below) as an aperitif to increase their appetite. Many Brazilians also have a **lanche** (snack) in the late afternoon, which usually consists of foods such as **coxinha** (shredded chicken and dough molded into a teardrop shape and deep fried), **kibe** (spiced ground meat with bulgur wheat) or **pastel** (a fried dough pastry with sweet or savory fillings).

When invited to a Brazilian home, guests usually arrive a few minutes late and bring sweets, flowers, or a bottle of liquor to thank the hosts for their hospitality. Hosts typically serve their guests first, who after finishing their portions, must decline several offers if they do not want additional servings. Diners tend to take their time eating and may linger for hours over lively conversation. After-dinner espresso or liqueur may follow an evening meal. Many Brazilians consider it impolite to eat with their hands. Accordingly, most diners eat all their meals with cutlery and use a napkin for finger food.



Due to Brazil's ethnic and geographic diversity, regional cuisine often varies significantly. Many dishes in the Northeast, home to a large Afro-Brazilian population (see *Political and Social Relations*), are adaptations of cuisine that enslaved Africans originally brought to the country. Likewise, much of the South's food reflects the German and Italian heritage of many residents.

## Diet

While varying by region and socioeconomic status, meals tend to highlight animal protein and make ample use of starchy foods. Common sources of protein are beef, chicken, and pork, while animal fats such as butter, cheese, and lard are also popular ingredients in many dishes. Brazilians along the coast and rivers consume seafood, with **bacalhau** (cod), **pacu** (a large freshwater fish), shrimp, and crab being common options.

Starches, used for their versatility and relatively low cost, also feature prominently in Brazilian cuisine. Among these are beans, **mandioca** (cassava), plantains, rice, and to a lesser degree, potatoes and bread. Brazil's varied climate also lends itself to the cultivation of a variety of fruits, with **açaí** (a red-purple berry from the *açaí* palm), **cupuaçu** (a fleshy fruit related to cacao), passion fruit, guava, and **caju** (the astringent fruit of the cashew tree) appearing in different dishes or their own. Common flavorings are garlic, cilantro, tomato, chiles, annatto (a peppery orange-red condiment and food coloring), and onion.



## Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Brazil is typically small and eaten quickly. The morning meal often features toast eaten with butter or cheese and fruit jams, baked goods such as **pão de queijo** (cheese and *mandioca* bread), or a fruit smoothie.

For lunch, dishes are heavier and more elaborate. A popular meal is **feijoada** (a bean stew made with pork and beef, served with greens, rice, and **farofa**, *mandioca* flour), which most Brazilians consider their national dish. Some other options are **moqueca** (shrimp or whitefish stew made with onion, tomato,

and sometimes coconut milk), **bobó de camarão** (shrimp and coconut milk chowder), and **galinhada** (chicken and rice stew).

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. For special occasions, **churrasco**, a barbeque in which rotating cuts of meat (mostly beef) are served in successive rounds, is popular. **Empadão** (chicken pot pies), **frango com quiabo** (chicken with okra), and **vatapá** (a peanut and coconut milk paste served with shrimp) are other options. For dessert, **brigadeiros** (truffles made from sweetened condensed milk and chocolate powder rolled in sprinkles) are common, as is **canjica**, (sweet corn pudding made with coconut milk and cinnamon). Other options for sweets are puddings, notably **quindim** (a soft flan made from eggs, butter, and sugar), and **goiabada** (sweetened guava paste served with a soft white cheese).



## Beverages

Brazilians drink tea, coffee (particularly for breakfast or after a meal), and various fresh fruit juices throughout the day. Some Brazilians also consume **mate**, an herbal tea drunk out of a gourd (**chimarrão**) or served iced with sugar (**tereré**). **Guaraná Antarctica**, a soft drink flavored with highly caffeinated **guaraná**, an Amazonian plant, is especially popular with fried foods. Brazilians often drink **cachaça** (also called **pinga**) neat before meals or in cocktails like a **caipirinha** (**cachaça**, lime, and sugar), often served with **feijoada**. Beer is another option, with **chope** (or **chopp**, ice-cold draft beer served in small glasses) one of the most popular alcoholic beverages in the country, drunk with meals, at bars, or on beaches.

## Eating Out

Restaurants in urban centers like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Street food is popular in cities, and stalls often sell **acarajé** (black-eyed pea fritters stuffed with shrimp or **vatapá**), **bolinhos de bacalhau** (cod fritters), or **pipoca** (popcorn). Many dining establishments include a 10% service charge in the bill.

## Health Overview

While the overall health of Brazilians has improved in recent decades, they continue to face high rates of non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 2000-24, life expectancy at birth increased from about 70 to 76 years, equal to the the average of Latin American and Caribbean countries (76), and less than the US (78). During the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 30 deaths per 1,000 live births to 13, a figure slightly lower than the LAC average (14) but higher than the US rate (6).

## Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population’s beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Brazilian medicine relies on prayer and herbal treatments to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Today, some Brazilians, especially in rural and indigenous communities, use traditional religious and herbal remedies overseen by a **curandeiro** or **pajé** (healer) in addition to modern Western medicine. Beginning in 2008, the Brazilian government has sponsored research of traditional healing practices and herbal remedies to possibly integrate them into the national healthcare system.



## Healthcare System

Brazil’s Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) lists comprehensive medical care as a right for all Brazilians. The government established the country’s main healthcare provider, the **Sistema Único de Saúde** (Single Healthcare System, or SUS), in 1988 during the country’s transition to democracy (see *History and Myth*). Federal, state, and

municipal governments pay into the healthcare scheme, which is overseen by local- and national-level health councils that are composed of patient advocates and providers. The SUS covers



all residents of Brazil, including undocumented migrants, and provides primary care, hospitalization, dental, and mental health services, along with subsidized access to prescription pharmaceuticals. While the quality of care in the public system is high, the large number of patients sometimes overburdens it, leading to long wait times.

Brazil's private healthcare network traditionally caters to wealthy, urban Brazilians. Some 26% of Brazilians have private healthcare, which workers in the formal sector usually receive as a fringe benefit financed by paycheck deductions and employer contributions. Private hospitals and clinics typically offer a higher standard of care with shorter wait times. The resultant disparity in the accessibility of medical care has led to unequal health outcomes among different segments of the population, with some lower-income and rural residents either unable to access care or postponing needed procedures (see *Political and Social Relations*).



Brazil has one of the LAC region's most comprehensive public healthcare networks, and budgetary adjustments in 1996 and 2007 expanded access to more residents. However, the country's 2014-16 economic downturn (see *Economics and Resources*) and subsequent budget cuts under the Temer and Bolsonaro administrations (see *History and Myth*) negatively impacted efforts to expand access, which the Lula administration has pledged to remedy. As of 2022, Brazil spends some 9% of its GDP on health expenditures, above the LAC average (8%) but below the US rate (17%), despite achieving more equitable health outcomes than the latter.

### Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases, which accounted for about 61% of deaths in 2020. Of these, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes, cancer, and Alzheimer's are the most common.

Preventable “external causes,” such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries resulted in about 9% of deaths, higher than the US rate (7%). While rates of external causes of death have dropped from a 30-year high in 2017, interpersonal violence is among the leading causes of death for Brazilians, but especially men. In 2023, the country had some 23 intentional homicides per 100,000 people, higher than the rates in neighboring Argentina (4) and Uruguay (11), as well as the US (5).

Public health officials point to regional disparities in the concentration of SUS services as a major challenge for effective and equitable care. Most services and medical professionals focus on urban areas, particularly in the wealthier Southeast. As such, some rural Brazilians, especially those living in the North and Northeast, have difficulty accessing quality care in a timely manner. Likewise, working-class Brazilians in urban centers, particularly in *favelas* (shanty towns, see *Family and Kinship*), often encounter more difficulty accessing care than counterparts in wealthier parts of the same cities. To remedy this disparity, the government has invested in health outposts in disadvantaged communities and instituted programs such as *Bolsa Família* (Family Stipend), which provides cash transfers to mothers in exchange for participating in vaccination drives and ensuring children attend school, among other requirements (see *Economics and Resources*).



As of June 2024, the Brazilian government has confirmed nearly 38 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in over

700,000 deaths, more than any country except the US. However, some 80% of Brazilians have received at least two doses of a vaccine against COVID-19, and 59% an additional dose. During the Bolsonaro administration, public health experts criticized Brazil's pandemic response, accusing the government of politicizing vaccination, mismanaging oxygen supplies for intensive care units, promoting the use of untested medications to treat the disease, and blocking local mask mandates.

## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Overview

Archaeological findings indicate Brazil's early agrarian and semi-nomadic indigenous groups (see *History and Myth*) in the Amazon and Cerrado (see *Political and Social Relations*) had complex economies that included urban planning infrastructure and waste disposal schemes. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas with Spain (see *History and Myth*), Portugal developed Brazil's hardwood trade, establishing the region's first **feitoria** (trading station) to the north of present-day Rio de Janeiro in 1502.



After founding settlements in São Vicente and Olinda in the early 1530s, the Portuguese built large sugarcane plantations

with sugar mills known as economic **engenhos** (engines) across the Northeast. At first, the Portuguese enslaved indigenous peoples to work the plantations, but after the Jesuits, a Catholic order (see *Religion and Spirituality*), protested this practice, Portugal enslaved millions of Africans to perform the labor (see *History and Myth*). In search of new income sources, colonists invested in cattle ranching and moved inland, where they discovered precious metals that led to Brazil's 18th-century gold rush.

Soon after gaining independence in 1822 (see *History and Myth*), Brazil faced economic decline, as population outpaced GDP growth. Between 1866-70, coffee replaced sugar as the country's economic growth engine. Brazil built over 4,000 mi of railways to transport coffee grown on inland farms, largely in the Southeast, to coastal ports. By 1891, coffee accounted for 63% of the country's exports, and the center of Brazil's economy had shifted from the Northeast to the Southeast. Meanwhile, facing a labor shortage after abolishing slavery in 1888 (see *History and Myth*), Brazil used immigrant labor, much of which was from Italy, to fill the gap. In the 1890s, around 733,000 people immigrated to the country, many to work on coffee farms.

After Brazil's 1889 transition to a republic (see *History and Myth*), the economy deteriorated due to financial crises in Argentina, as the countries' economies were closely intertwined. In response, many low-income Brazilians moved onto **fazendas** (farms) or **latifúndios** (estates), some of which were bigger than small European countries. In a feudal-like system, **fazendeiros** (estate owners) made their tenants harvest labor-intensive cash crops in exchange for land, neglecting local consumption and forcing Brazil to import some 80% of its grain needs. In lieu of an interconnected domestic economy, Brazil had disparate regional economies that were dependent on commodity exports, such as Amazonian rubber that led to a boom in the North from about 1880-1910. Through the 1920s, economic activity concentrated in the Southeast and South, with four states – São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Rio Grande do Sul – harvesting 60% of crops and producing 75% of industrial products.



In the 1930s, the Great Depression halted global coffee demand, slashing the country's economic growth. The Depression's lasting effects caused an external debt crisis that helped lead to the rise of Getúlio Vargas's populist dictatorship (see *History and Myth*). Brazil responded to World War II by diversifying into textiles, food products, and tobacco to meet growing global demand.

For much of the mid-20th century, the economy grew via import substitution industrialization (ISI), as consecutive Presidents used tariffs and subsidies to foster domestic manufacturing and swap foreign for domestic products. Despite some initial foreign direct investment (FDI) and average GDP growth of 7% from 1950-61, the ISI policies partially caused economic stagnation and high external debt. Upon taking power in 1964, the military dictatorship (see *History and Myth*) established reforms like investment incentives, currency devaluations, and public infrastructure spending to end the stagnation. These policies resulted in what became known as the "Brazilian Miracle," an industrial boom and average GDP growth of 10% from 1969-73.

In 1973, facing an oil shock and overvalued currency, Brazil acquired debt to keep growing, and with FDI, built steel and aluminum industries. Despite global recessions between 1974-80, Brazil averaged annual GDP growth of 7%. Interest rate rises in response to a second oil shock in 1979 ballooned Brazilian debt, and in the 1980s, inflation surpassed 1,000%. Overwhelmed by economic turbulence, Brazil enacted the 1986 Cruzado Plan to slow inflation through price and exchange rate freezes and wage adjustments. However, increased wages led



to higher domestic spending and inflation. Subsequent plans to control similar outcomes failed.

Facing hyperinflation and bankruptcy, Brazil's newly democratic governments (see *History and Myth*) implemented plans to

restore order. While the Collor Plan privatized state-owned companies in 1990, real GDP declined by 4% from 1990-92. In 1994, the **Real** Plan indexed inflation and introduced a new dollar-pegged currency, the Brazilian *real*, which limited inflation and increased FDI. In the late 1990s, financial crises that befell emerging markets led President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to devalue and float the *real*, beginning an era of robust growth.

Benefitting from Cardoso's reforms and a commodity boom, in 2003, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula), instituted **Bolsa Família** (Family Stipend), a program providing conditional cash transfers to low-income residents. Lula's efforts to redistribute wealth were somewhat successful (*Bolsa Família* contributed 28% of the total reduction in poverty from 11% to 5% from 2002-12). Nevertheless, inequality prevailed and economic activity remained in the historically wealthier Southeast and South. In an attempt to help reduce inequality, Lula legalized the landholding claims of a million Brazilians living in the Amazon.

Lula's successor, President Dilma Rousseff, faced a commodity price crash and industrial decline. From 2010-12, GDP growth slowed, and Brazilians protested spending on infrastructure over social services. Meanwhile, Odebrecht, a major construction

company, had paid over \$350 million in bribes for favorable government contracts, particularly to Petrobras, the state-owned oil company. Known as Operation Car Wash, the corruption probe revealed high-level corruption that contributed to a deep recession from 2014-16. Faced with rising inflation and unrest, President Michel Temer implemented pro-market policies to revive the economy, but political deadlock and corruption scandals impeded their success (see *History and Myth*).

In light of Operation Car Wash, Brazil elected Jair Bolsonaro as President in 2018 (see *History and Myth*). Bolsonaro led a much-needed national pension reform and reduced barriers to developing the Amazon. Although he opposed many COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, allowing businesses to open (see *Sustenance and Health*), the economy suffered. From January 2020-21, some 8.1 million people lost their jobs and GDP shrank by 4%. The economy rebounded in 2021 but slowed in 2022.

Despite these issues, Brazil is Latin America's largest economy, worth about \$2.17 trillion in 2023. About 40 % of residents work in the informal sector, and inflation averaged 4.5% in 2023. Although experts expected Brazil's economy to slow in 2024, it grew by 3%. They predict economic stagnation thereafter, largely due to drops in global commodity prices and rising interest rates.

## Services

Accounting for about 59% of GDP and 72% of employment in 2023, services form the economy's largest sector. Key subsectors are tourism and banking.



**Tourism:** Accounting for around 8% of GDP and 7% of employment in 2022. In 2024 international tourism generated some \$7.3 billion. Visitors, mostly from Argentina, the US, and Paraguay, tend to visit cities like Rio de Janeiro and biodiversity hotspots like the Atlantic Forest Reserves and the Amazon Rainforest.

**Banking:** Brazil's well-developed banking subsector consists of over 17.1 bank branches for 100,000 adults. Online banking is particularly popular, with 88% of Brazilians using virtual bank platforms and digital payment system, as of March 2024. Brazil's ***Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social*** (National Bank for Economic and Social Development) is the world's second-largest development bank. It primarily supplies funding for domestic economic endeavors.

## Industry

As the second-largest sector of the economy, industry accounts for around 22% of GDP and 20% of employment.

**Construction:** This subsector accounted for almost 7% of GDP in 2022, with infrastructure construction contributing more than \$81 billion to the economy. In the same year, construction companies in Brazil employed some 2.3 million persons.



**Mining and Extraction:** This subsector focuses primarily on iron, oil, gold, and niobium commodities. As of 2023, Brazil devotes over 700,000 acres to mining, which contributed nearly

\$43 billion to the economy. Accounting for about 16% of total global extraction, Brazil is the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest iron producer. Brazil is also Latin America's largest oil producer, as Petrobras produces around 3 million barrels each day.

**Manufacturing:** Accounting for nearly 10% of employment in 2022, the manufacturing subsector grew by almost 11% over the previous year. Major manufactured products are automobiles, refined oil, machinery, and textiles.

## Agriculture

The agricultural sector accounts for about 6% of GDP and 8% of the labor force in 2023.

**Farming:** About 9% of Brazil is naturally arable, and as of 2016, farming contributed some \$89 billion to Brazil's GDP. The country is the world's largest coffee, soybeans, sugarcane, and oranges producer. Other common crops are corn, cotton, rice,

tobacco, cacao, and tropical fruits. Brazil also has a massive livestock subsector and is the world's largest poultry and beef exporter. In 2024, agribusiness produced about 49% of Brazil's exports. Still, agribusinesses face accusations of razing forests for farms and ranches, with rates of deforestation rising in recent years (see *Political and Social Relations*).

**Forestry:** Large tree plantations produce wood pulp for export, while natural forests yield lumber. Illicit loggers operate in the Amazon Rainforest and charge up to 40% less for the same products as legal producers. Logging depletes the Amazon by about 1,931 sq mi each year, roughly the size of Delaware.

**Fishing:** Although most Brazilians live near the Atlantic, coastal waters are too warm to support many fish, resulting in a relatively small industry. Major products are haddock, shrimp, and tuna.

### Currency

The Brazilian *real* (R\$) is issued in seven banknotes (2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200) and one coin (1). It divides into 100 **centavos** (cents, issued in 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50-centavo coins). Between 2015-24, US\$1 ranged between R\$2.6-R\$5.8.



### Foreign Trade

Brazil's imports, totaling about \$253 billion in 2023, primarily consisted of oil, vehicles, fertilizer, and gas from China (22%), the US (16%), Germany (5%), and Argentina (5%). In the same year, exports totaled some \$340 billion and consisted of iron, soybeans, oil, and sugar sold to China (30%), the US (11%), and Argentina (5%).

### Foreign Aid

In 2022, Brazil received about \$577 million of official development aid, including \$8 million of US bilateral aid, mostly for humanitarian assistance and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. In recent years, Brazil has also supplied aid, primarily through the **Agência Brasileira de Cooperação** (Brazilian Cooperation Agency), most of which went to countries in Africa and Latin America.



## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Overview

In recent decades, Brazil's physical and telecommunications infrastructure has grown considerably, yet it is still hampered by financial and geographic barriers, especially in rural areas. Although media freedom is protected by law, Brazil's broadcast and telecommunications regulations are antiquated and inefficient, resulting in a burdensome media landscape.

### Transportation

Most Brazilians travel by bus in cities and over longer distances. Bus fares are typically cheap, and Brazil's buses are often well maintained with legally required amenities, such as cooling and Wi-Fi. Many of Brazil's largest cities have extensive rapid-transit metro systems, such as São Paulo's **Metrô** (Metro) and Rio de Janeiro's **MetrôRio**, with a combined 1.5 billion riders annually. Taxis and ride-sharing services are also widely available in many cities, like Belo Horizonte and Fortaleza. With 11.6 cars per 1,000 people in 2024, Brazil has one of South America's highest personal vehicle ownership rates. Motorcycles are also a popular means of travel. Brazil has the largest motorcycle markets in South America.



**Roadways:** Only about 153,000 mi of Brazil's 1,243,000 mi of roadways are paved. Brazil's size, geography, and large swathes of sparsely populated land make travel by road between regions or to remote parts of the country difficult. Many rural roads are poorly maintained, particularly in the Amazon. Nevertheless, Brazil's road network continues to expand, especially for tourist travel.

**Railways:** Brazil's 18,550 mi of railways operate on separate rail networks, which makes the development of a single national network difficult. Although Brazil has one of the world's largest rail networks, it lacks nationwide passenger transport, as private train companies have discontinued this service due to poor track

maintenance. Today, Brazil mostly operates freight lines, which move over 20% of its cargo, often from the interior to seaports.

**Ports and Waterways:** Brazil has 31,000 mi of navigable waterways, mostly along the Amazon, Pará, and São Francisco rivers. Major river ports are Belém, Manaus, and Petrolina. Brazil's 4,655 mi of coastline are also vital to commerce, with major seaports in Itajaí, Paranaguá, Rio Grande, Rio de Janeiro, Santos (South America's busiest port), São Sebastião, and Tubarão.



**Airways:** Of Brazil's 5,297 airports, the world's second most after the US, around 698 have paved runways. São Paulo's

Guarulhos International Airport (GRU) is the country's main hub, serving 43.6 million passengers in 2024. Of Brazil's 14 national airlines, LATAM Airlines Brasil, a subsidiary of Santiago, Chile-based LATAM Airlines Group, is the national flag carrier. Based in São Paulo, LATAM Airlines Brasil flies to 140 global destinations, primarily in the Americas.

## Energy

In 2023, Brazil produces most of its energy supply from hydroelectric (60%), other renewables (29%), fossil fuels (9%), and nuclear (2%). Brazil produces significant electricity from the Itaipu hydroelectric dam that it shares with Paraguay and has untapped potential for wind, geothermal, and solar power. As of 2024, Brazil is the world's eighth-largest oil producer and has some 1,230 mi of oil, 7,270 mi of natural gas, and 3,700 mi of petroleum gas pipelines.

## Media

Although Brazilian law protects freedoms of expression and the press, journalists critical of politicians often face persecution. Journalists are regularly the targets of slander, as politicians use their online followings to coordinate attacks against the press. Politicians often intimidate reporters using outdated regulations and abusive legal procedures. In 2024, Brazil placed 63 of 180 countries on a press freedom ranking, South America's fourth-lowest score. While journalist murders have declined in recent

years, observers report intimidation and assaults, and various politicians openly praise violence against reporters. Moreover, media ownership is highly concentrated, as a few large Brazilian corporations control many TV, radio, and print media outlets.

**Print Media:** Brazil has robust print media, offering daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazines. Most national print media are based in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro, though smaller cities also have local papers. Major national dailies are *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, and *O Globo*. *Folha International* is a major English-language newspaper. Additionally, Brazil has tabloid-style publications focused on sports and entertainment that are widely available for purchase, often from street vendors.

**TV and Radio:** TV is a popular source of news and entertainment. Brazil has 14 major national TV networks, of which one (*TV Brasil*) is state-owned. Brazilians can purchase multi-channel cable packages and get international programming via satellite or Internet TV. Radio is also popular and another source for news and information, particularly in rural areas, where TV stations are less accessible. Brazil has about 8,500 radio stations that offer news, music, entertainment, and sports content. Most programs broadcast in Portuguese, though some are in English or Spanish.



### Telecommunications

While Brazil's telecommunications network covers many rural areas, some remote regions lack coverage. In 2023, Brazil had 12 landlines and 99 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 residents, slightly below the Latin American regional averages. As of 2022, the 5G mobile network is accessible in major cities.

**Internet:** About 84% of Brazilians access the Internet daily, making Brazil the country with the world's fourth-most Internet users. While Internet access is generally unrestricted, politicians and media personalities spread false narratives about political events, making disinformation common. Further, disinformation has helped cause increased political polarization in Brazil.



For more information on  
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:  
[airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC](http://airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC)

For more information on  
United States Air Forces Southern visit:  
<http://www.12af.acc.af.mil>



## CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field  
guides in our mobile app!



GET IT ON  
**Google Play**



Available on the iPhone  
**App Store**



DoD Enterprise Mobility  
**Personal Use  
Mobile Apps**