



Freedom in the World - Brazil (2011)

Capital: Brasilia

Population:
191,481,000

Political Rights Score: 2 *

Civil Liberties Score: 2 *

Status: Free

Status Change Explanation

Overview

Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party (PT) was elected as Brazil's first female president in run-off elections held on October 31, 2010. The PT did well in concurrent congressional elections, giving president-elect Rousseff an even larger majority in Congress than her predecessor. Despite some improvements, criminal violence remained a problem in Brazil's major cities during the year, and official corruption continued to stoke political debate.

After gaining independence from Portugal in 1822, Brazil retained a monarchical system until a republic was established in 1889. Democratic governance was interrupted by long periods of authoritarian rule, and the last military regime gave way to an elected civilian government in 1985. However, Brazil's democracy has been marred by frequent corruption scandals. One scandal eventually led Congress to impeach President Fernando Collor de Mello in 1992.

Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) leader Fernando Henrique Cardoso—a market-oriented, centrist finance minister—was elected president in 1994, and he subsequently oversaw a highly successful currency-stabilization program that included fiscal reform, privatization of state enterprises, and a new currency pegged to the U.S. dollar. He also ushered in a new era of dialogue with international human rights and good-governance groups. In 1998, Cardoso handily won a second term in a rematch against his 1994 opponent, former labor leader and political prisoner Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the left-leaning Workers' Party (PT).

Lula finally won the presidency in 2002, promising to maintain orthodox economic policies while initiating meaningful social-welfare programs. These included "Bolsa Família," a cash-transfer program that benefited approximately one-fourth of the population, and "ProUni," a fund providing low-income students with scholarships to private colleges.

Lula was reelected by a comfortable margin in the October 2006 presidential runoff, drawing on his popularity among working-class voters. Despite the fact that the legislature was widely seen as the most corrupt in the country's history, the PT did not suffer losses in the concurrent congressional elections.

In August 2007, the government released a report outlining the fate of political dissidents who were "disappeared" by the military between 1961 and 1988. Unlike in other Latin American countries with recent histories of military rule, former officials in Brazil remained protected by a 1979 amnesty law, and none had faced charges for human rights violations. In May 2010, the Supreme Court blocked a reinterpretation of the amnesty law that would have allowed for members of the military to go to trial for extrajudicial killings and torture.

A number of major government corruption scandals that began in 2004 continued into 2010. The earlier affairs involved vote-buying, kickbacks for public-works contracts, and the abuse of congressional power in awarding jobs and salary increases to favored recipients. After being accused of accepting bribes in 2009, the governor of the Federal District—the quasi-state that includes the capital Brasília—resigned and was jailed in February 2010. In September 2010, Dilma Rousseff's presidential campaign was complicated by a corruption scandal involving Lula's chief of

staff, Erenice Guerra. Having succeeded Rousseff as chief of staff in April, Guerra resigned in September following allegations that she had received kickbacks from public contracts. While Rousseff was never directly involved, the affair revealed the degree of entrenched corruption in Brazil's political institutions. During Lula's two terms, two of his three chiefs of staff were forced to resign amid corruption scandals.

Rousseff, Lula's chosen successor, was elected president on October 31, 2010 with 56 percent of the vote, defeating rival PSDB candidate José Serra's 44 percent. The PT and its coalition partners also did well in congressional elections held in early October, strengthening their majorities in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. The governing center-left coalition increased its representation in the 81-seat Senate from 43 to 59, and its share of seats in the 513-seat lower house rose from 357 to 372.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Brazil is an electoral democracy. The 2010 national elections were free and fair. The constitution provides for a president, to be elected for up to two four-year terms, and a bicameral National Congress. The Senate's 81 members serve eight-year terms, with a portion coming up for election every four years, and the 513-member Chamber of Deputies is elected for four-year terms.

The four largest political parties, accounting for more than half of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, are the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, the leftist PT, the conservative Democratic Party, and the center-left PSDB. Seventeen other parties are also represented in Congress. The electoral system encourages the proliferation of parties, a number of which are based in a single state. A 2007 Supreme Court decision outlawed party switching after elections, though lawmakers have continued to switch parties on occasion for financial and other inducements.

Corruption is an endemic problem in Brazil, ranking 69 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index. Despite a constitutional right of access to public information, the country does not have specific laws to regulate and guarantee transparency.

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, and both libel and slander were decriminalized in 2009. The press is privately owned, and while foreigners can acquire a 30 percent stake in a media company, they are restricted in their ability to influence editorial decisions and management selection. There are dozens of daily newspapers and a variety of television and radio stations across the country. The print media have played a central role in exposing official corruption. However, journalists—especially those who focus on organized crime, corruption, or military-era human rights violations—are frequently the targets of violence. Among other attacks in 2010, a journalist who had repeatedly received death threats for his coverage of drug-trafficking and other crimes was shot and killed outside his home in northeastern Brazil in October. The government does not impose restrictions on access to the internet.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. The government does not restrict academic freedom.

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected, as is the right to strike. Industrial labor unions are well organized. Although they are politically connected, Brazilian unions tend to be freer from political party control than their counterparts in most other Latin American countries. Labor issues are adjudicated in a system of special labor courts. Intimidation of rural union leaders continued to be a problem in 2010.

The country's largely independent judiciary is overburdened, plagued by corruption, and virtually powerless in the face of organized crime. The judiciary is often subject to intimidation and other external influences, especially in rural areas, and public complaints over its inefficiency are frequent.

Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Most violent crime in the country is related to the illegal drug trade. Highly organized and well-armed drug gangs frequently fight against the military police as well as private militias comprising off-duty police officers, prison

guards, and firefighters. These militias have intimidated human rights activists and residents by instituting their own form of extortion, sometimes charging citizens a mandatory tax for ousting drug traffickers from their areas or actually selling weapons to drug dealers. Severe criminal violence continued in Rio de Janeiro in 2010, as gang members took 35 people hostage at a luxury hotel in August after an intense 40-minute gun battle with police in the streets. Following a three-hour standoff with police, the hostages were released unharmed. In October, Rio was rocked by a number of mass robberies by armed drug gang members who arranged road blocks, robbed drivers, and held residents hostage while battling local police. In an effort to bolster Rio's security ahead of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva committed federal police and \$60 million in federal aid to the city starting in 2009. This has contributed to some improvements in Rio's violence, including the successful pacification of several of the city's dangerous favelas, or slums, by offering social work programs and a longer-term presence of "peace police" forces.

Brazil's police are among the world's most violent and corrupt, and public security remains a serious problem. Nearly 50,000 homicides occur each year, making Brazil's murder rate approximately five times higher than that of the United States. Torture is used systematically to extract confessions from suspects, and extrajudicial killings are portrayed as shootouts with dangerous criminals. Police officers are rarely prosecuted for abuses, and those charged are almost never convicted; typically the cases are dismissed for "lack of evidence."

The prison system is anarchic, overcrowded, and largely unfit for human habitation. According to official estimates, Brazil's prisons hold over 460,000 inmates, 50 percent over the system's intended capacity. Overcrowding sometimes results in men and women being held in the same facilities, and human rights groups claim that the torture and other abuses common to most of the country's detention centers have the effect of turning petty thieves into hardened criminals.

Racial discrimination, long officially denied as a problem in Brazil, began to receive both recognition and remediation from Lula during his first term. Afro-Brazilians earn less than 50 percent of the average earnings of other citizens, and they suffer from the highest homicide, poverty, and illiteracy rates. When he assumed office, Lula took the unprecedented step of naming four Afro-Brazilians to his cabinet, and appointed the country's first Afro-Brazilian Supreme Court justice. While Congress has yet to pass federal legislation for university-based affirmative action, 70 percent of Brazil's public universities have adopted some form of affirmative action.

The owners of large estates control nearly 60 percent of the country's arable land, while the poorest 30 percent of the population hold less than 2 percent. Land invasions are organized by the grassroots Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which claims that the seized land is unused or illegally held. Progress on land reform has been slow due in part to a strong farm caucus and the economic importance of large-scale agriculture.

Although Brazil abolished slavery in 1888 and has benefited in recent years from a relatively successful antislavery taskforce, between 6,000 and 8,000 rural laborers still work under slavery-like conditions. Landowners who enslave workers face two to eight years in prison, in addition to fines. However, the fines are minimal, and no one has ever been imprisoned for using slave labor.

Brazil's indigenous population numbers around 460,000. The government promised in 2003 to demarcate large swaths of ancestral lands as the first step in creating indigenous reserves. A 2009 Supreme Court ruling defended the creation of one of the largest protected indigenous areas in the world, and the non-indigenous farmers living there peacefully left the 1.7 million hectare reservation that year. Violence and discrimination against indigenous people continues; half of the indigenous population lives in poverty, and most indigenous communities lack adequate sanitation and education services.

A 2001 decree granted same-sex partners the same rights as married couples with respect to pensions, social security benefits, and taxation. While discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited by law, violence against homosexuals remains a problem.

In 2003, a new legal code made women equal to men under the law for the first time in the

country's history. However, violence against women and children is commonplace, and protective laws are rarely enforced. Forced prostitution of children is widespread. While the number of child workers has fallen over the past 15 years, 4.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 still work in Brazil, particularly in the informal sector. The government has sought to address the problem by cooperating with various nongovernmental organizations, increasing inspections, and offering cash incentives to keep children in school. Human trafficking continues from and within Brazil for the purpose of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. However, the Lula administration rescued several thousand slave labor victims through mobile labor inspection operations in 2010.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*