

Brazil is recovering its faith in democracy ... sort of

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BY The Brazilian Report

In 2017, the Americas Barometer study showed that the percentage of Brazilians who believed democracy was the best form of government reached the dangerously low level of 52 percent. Seventy-eight percent stated they were not satisfied with the functioning of the country's democracy at the time.

The Americas Barometer study is carried out every two years by Vanderbilt University, in partnership with think-tank Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV) in Brazil. It is part of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (Lapop) and seeks to measure the public's experience with democratic governance across South and Central America.

With the country entering an election year, 2017's results were worrying. Public demonstrations saw an increasing—yet still marginal—presence of groups calling for military intervention. Jair Bolsonaro launched his presidential campaign with an authoritarian discourse, while praising prominent figures of Brazil's military dictatorship.

The election, while heavily polarized, took place as planned. And in 2019, results from the latest Americas Barometer study have shown a reasonable increase in public opinion of democratic governance.

When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement “democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government,” 60 percent of the Brazilian population concurred—up eight percentage points from 2017. Fifty-eight percent showed their dissatisfaction with Brazil's current manifestation of democracy, an even more significant shift from two years ago.

Brazilians becoming more satisfied with democracy

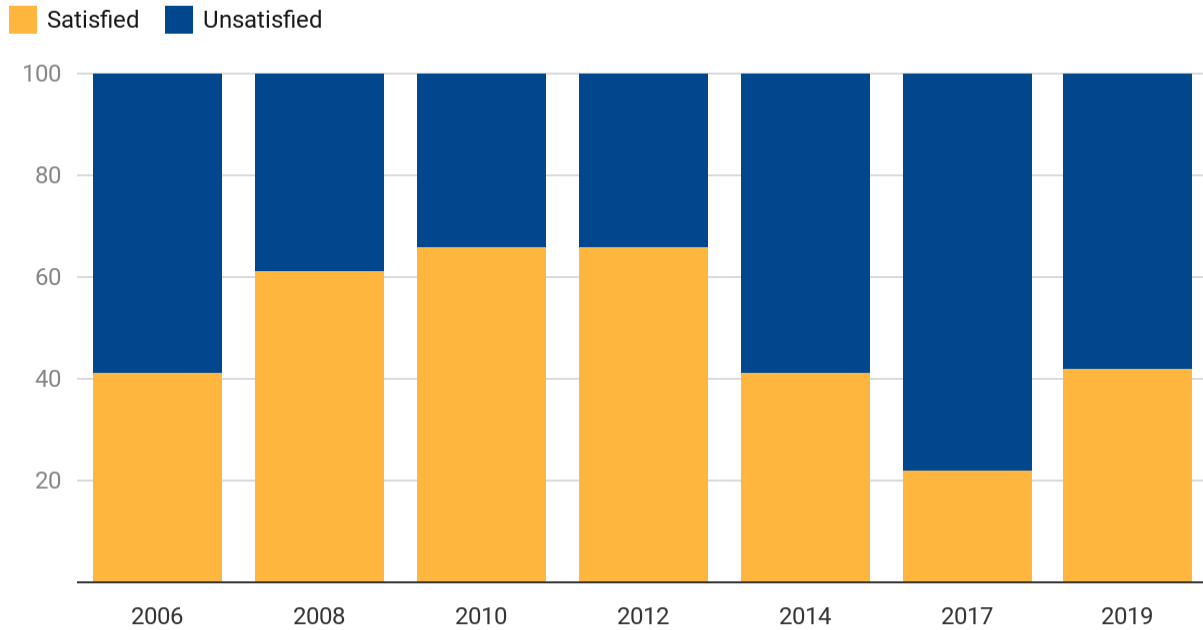


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Brazil to the right of the center

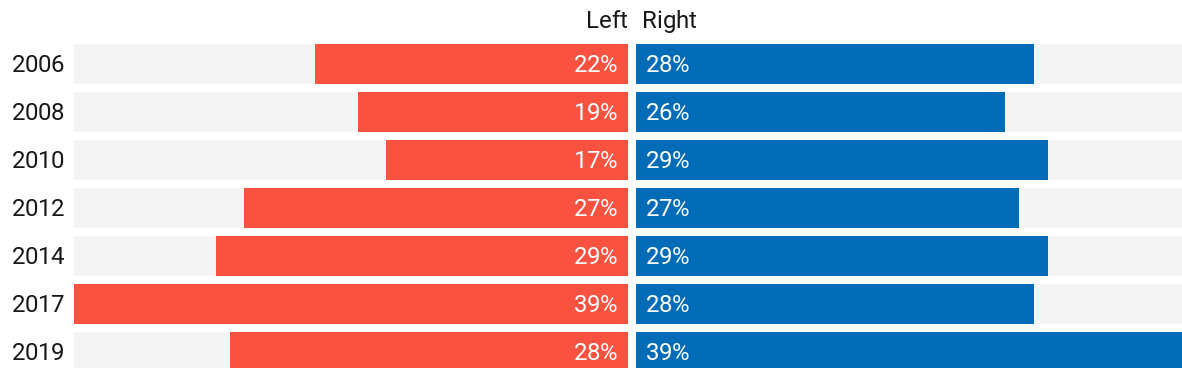


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One-third open to military coup

However, the results may not be as validating of democratic governance as they seem at first hand. An increase in satisfaction is to be expected after an election—with a large part of the population having backed the winning candidate—and some underlying figures showed the mistrust of democracy in Brazil remains significant.

Over one-third of the country would support a military coup “when there is a lot of corruption,” a segment which increases to 43 percent among right-wing voters. Also notable is the proportion of the population who would be in favor of dissolving the

Supreme Court: 38 percent in total, and over 50 percent among those on the right. Shutting down the country's highest court was among the demands of the recent pro-government protests which took place in over 156 cities in all Brazilian states.

The study also measured the political leanings of the Brazilian population, showing that the number of respondents declaring they are more to the right of center has surpassed those on the left. Furthermore, since the Americas Barometer began in 2006, the number of right-wing Brazilians has never been higher: 39 percent, as opposed to 29 percent two years ago.

Institutions riding high

With the launch of Operation Car Wash and the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the 2010s have seen the public image of Brazil's institutions dragged through the mud. Since 2017, however, the numbers show that public trust is gradually increasing—at least for some parts of the Brazilian state. Lapop's study shows that 51 percent of the population trust political institutions, a ten percentage point increase from 2017. However, Brazil still ranks ninth out of the 13 countries surveyed, with countries such as Nicaragua and Guatemala having more respect for their institutions.

In line with the third of the population open to the idea of a military coup, the Armed Forces remain Brazil's most respected institutions—and by some distance. Seventy percent respect the military, in comparison to the paltry 13 percent who place their trust in political parties.