

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1

Introduction

Brazil is the largest and most populous country in Latin America. In 1980, the census bureau counted nearly 120 million people, a figure more than twice that of second-ranked Mexico. Brazil's 8.5 million square kilometers of national territory stretch from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the foothills of the Andes in the west; from the Guiana plateau in the north to the Plate River basin in the south. The country's continental proportions dominate the geopolitical map of the southern hemisphere, making it the fifth largest country in the world, surpassed in area only by the Soviet Union, the United States, China and Canada.

In the nineteenth century, the change from colony to independent empire (1822), from monarchy to republic (1889–91) and from slaveholding society to a free one (1888) occurred essentially without violence. Brazil's early history thus imparted to the country a legacy of political stability and national unity rare in the New World (Burns 1970). Unlike many of its neighbors in the continent, direct military control of the state has been the exception in Brazil. From the late 1800s through the first three decades of the twentieth century, Brazil's presidents were duly elected. The democratic tradition was interrupted in the period 1930–4 and again in 1937–45 when Getúlio Vargas, a civilian backed by the military, ruled by decree. After World War II, Brazil experienced a succession of democratic regimes until 1964, when the military forcibly took power and initiated a period of authoritarian rule that was to last twenty-one years. Brazil's return to democracy in 1985 represents the most significant political event in recent decades.

Brazil was predominantly an agrarian society for most of its history. From the colonial period onward, the country's export-oriented economy relied heavily on a series of commodities such as hardwoods, sugar, rubber, cotton and coffee (discussed in chapter 3). Since the end of World War II, the economy, especially the industrial sector, grew in size and complexity. Two growth cycles were of particular importance

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

in the postwar period: the “inward-looking” import substitution industrialization (ISI) from the early 1950s through the mid-1960s; and the “outward-looking” post-ISI export promotion cycle from the 1960s to the present. The first period emphasized the domestic production of previously imported finished goods. The second period saw the diversification of industrial growth and a closer integration into the world economy. Brazil continues to export traditional commodities, yet, as a consequence of recent industrial and trade policy, the country now produces a growing number of manufactured goods that successfully compete in international markets with products from the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

A long-run perspective shows that Brazil’s economy, although subjected to cyclical downturns, experienced an annual rate of growth that averages out to around 7 per cent a year between 1956 and 1984 (chapter 3). Industrial sector growth in the postwar period nearly always surpassed the overall rate by 2 or 3 percentage points. With a Gross National Product (GNP) of around \$250 billion in 1980, the Brazilian economy is approximately equal to Canada’s and ranks as the tenth largest in the world. Per capita income reached \$1,800 in 1981, placing Brazil closer (in aggregate terms) to the advanced industrial nations than to most countries in Asia and Africa. With the largest and the most complex economy in Latin America, and with an abundance of natural and human resources to draw from, Brazil is a country that vies for position in the small but growing class of world powers.

Social and demographic changes are closely tied to the structure of Brazilian development. The industrialization of south-central Brazil has lured migrants from rural areas to the country’s more dynamic urban metropolises, especially Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte. By 1980, the proportion of the population residing in urban places for the first time surpassed the number of people living in the countryside. The spatial redistribution of the population has been accompanied by substantial gains in educational attainment and greater access to public services. Between 1970 and 1980 the mean number of years of school attended rose, as did the proportion of households with piped water and sewage facilities.

Changes in the structure of economic production, as well as the increase in educational attainment and in provision of health-related services have profoundly altered reproductive behavior in Brazil (chapter 7). There has been a sharp rise in the proportion of women using contraception, and the fertility rate has fallen nearly 30 per cent, from an average of 5.8 children per woman in 1970 to 4.2 in 1980. The decade

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

of the 1970s also saw a decline in death rates, causing the average number of years of life expected at birth to increase over six years during the period, reaching 59.6 years by the time of the last census. Today, the average Brazilian enjoys a higher standard of living, a smaller family size and a longer length of life than ever before.

Paralleling this promising picture lies another less positive side of Brazil. It is one of sharp socioeconomic inequalities, of entrenched and widespread poverty and malnutrition, and of an economy heavily burdened by a huge and growing external debt. Although average real income rose by nearly 50 per cent between 1970 and 1980, the structure of Brazil's recent development has done little to attenuate the high concentration of income in the hands of an affluent elite (chapter 3). The top decile of the income-earning population in 1980 appropriated nearly half (47.9 per cent) of all income earned, while the share of income accruing to lowest decile barely exceeded 1 per cent of the total. After rising in the 1960s, the degree of income inequality remained about the same in the 1970s despite increases in Gross National Product.

If the recent pattern of economic growth did not significantly reduce income inequality, the same can be said for the pronounced spatial differentiation that has long characterized Brazil. Ever since the decline in sugar prices in the eighteenth century, which left the once wealthy northeastern plantation economy in ruins, development has favored central and southern Brazil. Today the northeastern states of Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe and Bahia lag far behind the rest of the country in terms of income level, educational achievement and other indicators of living standards.

The ability to capture regional differences is central to the study of population and development in Brazil. The five macroregion breakdown suggested by the Council of Statistics (NORTH, NORTHEAST, SOUTH, SOUTHEAST and CENTRAL WEST) offers a broad view of the most salient features of Brazil's spatial diversity. This study uses these divisions, which appear in upper case letters in the text, whenever further disaggregation is unwarranted or precluded by the absence of data. More detailed inter-regional comparisons subdivide the five macroregions into ten smaller and more homogeneous units (lower case letters). The states and territories included in the five- and the ten-region classifications are given in Table 1.1. Map 1.1 shows their spatial locations.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

*The demography of inequality in Brazil*Table I.I. *States and territories in each region and macroregion*

Macroregion	Region	State or territory
NORTH	Amazônia	Acre, Amazonas, Pará, Roraima, Rondônia, Amapá
NORTHEAST	Northern Northeast	Maranhão, Piauí
	Central Northeast	Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Fernando Noronha
SOUTHEAST	Southern Northeast	Bahia, Sergipe
	Minas	Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo
SOUTH	Rio	Rio de Janeiro
	São Paulo	São Paulo
CENTRAL WEST	Paraná	Paraná
	South	Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina
	Central West	Goiás, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brasília

In all regions of the country, land ownership in the rural area is highly concentrated in a small property-holding class, leaving the vast majority of rural families without land, or with plots too small to support themselves. In 1975, well over half of all agricultural establishments were less than ten hectares in size, yet occupied only 2.7 per cent of all land. At the other end of the distribution, landholdings in excess of 1,000 hectares comprised 0.8 per cent of all farms, yet appropriated 42.9 per cent of all land (chapter 3). Analyses of land tenure in Brazil indicate that the degree of land concentration, which is among the highest in Latin America, may have become even more skewed in recent years.

In the densely populated drought-prone rural NORTHEAST, subsistence farmers rely on centuries-old agricultural methods. Meanwhile, in central and southern Brazil, agriculture has become highly industrialized as farmers increasingly depend on machinery, fertilizers and other manufactured goods. The modernization of agricultural production has been accompanied by a shift away from labor-intensive crops, such as coffee, to machine-harvested soybeans sold mainly to buyers abroad. Developments such as these mean an increase in productivity and a contribution to foreign exchange earnings. Yet the benefits of changes in the structure of agricultural production also entail social costs which are disproportionately borne by those population groups

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

5



Map 1.1 Brazil: states, territories and regions

that can least afford them (chapters 9 and 10). Recent trends imply a slower increase in the production of domestically consumed food crops, a decline in labor absorption in rural labor markets and the substitution of permanent employees, sharecroppers and tenant farmers by low-paid wage workers hired only at harvest time.

The difficult conditions people face in the countryside enhance the lure of employment opportunities thought to exist in the cities. In the last two decades this has led to a rural exodus of unprecedented proportions (chapter 9). The massive transfer of people to metropolitan centers of the country has strained the urban economy's capacity to provide productive and well-paid employment to the growing number of job seekers, whose ranks are swelled by high rates of population growth in years past and by the recent infusion of migrants into urban labor markets. Caught between poorly remunerated jobs and the high cost of city life, the result for many migrant and native urbanites is

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

poverty, inadequate housing and poor diet (chapter 11).

A national nutrition survey in 1975 showed that only 33 per cent of the Brazilian population met the FAO/WHO "Low" calorie requirement. Approximately 17 per cent experienced deficits of over 400 calories a day (averaging 543 calories consumed). Although experts disagree as to the proper way to represent nutritional standards, consumption deficits of this magnitude are unmistakable evidence of nutritional problems since they average 2.7 times a margin of error of 200 calories in deficit estimation. The National Household Expenditures Study (ENDEF) found that this degree of malnutrition afflicted 29 per cent of the population in the NORTHEAST and around 9 per cent in the SOUTHEAST. The total shortfall in consumption amounted to over 10 billion calories per day (World Bank 1979: 18).

Planners and politicians in Brazil have long endorsed the precepts of modernization theory that poverty and insufficient employment are transitory features of the development process. To speed the transition to a fully modern society, the Brazilian government in recent decades adopted a range of aggressive policies designed to streamline the economy, attract foreign investment and stimulate capital accumulation and reinvestment. Over the last twenty years or so these initiatives have suffered setbacks and revision. Nonetheless, the policies formulated during the military regime, in power from 1964 to 1985, were sufficiently consistent in substance and intent that they came to be called the "Brazilian model of development" (chapter 3).

Judged strictly on the basis of aggregate indicators, the Brazilian model was eminently successful, at least in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period when the economy grew at an impressive rate of around 10 per cent a year. The rapid increase in GNP, dubbed the "economic miracle," was regarded the world over as one of the legendary accomplishments of development planning. Yet, even before the growth rate began to fall in 1974, the Brazilian model of development drew criticism on a number of counts (chapter 3). Critics singled out: the loss of individual rights and freedom of expression during the authoritarian regime (Soares 1979); the use of violence by the military to repress political activity and to limit the power of organized labor (Singer 1972); the fall in real wages from 1964 to 1974 and the consequent rise in infant mortality rates in some cities (Wood 1982); the deterioration in the distribution of income during the 1960s (Hoffman 1972; Fishlow 1972) and the failure to reduce income inequality in the 1970s (Denslow and Tyler 1984); the increase in foreign control over the most dynamic sectors of industry, and the "dependent" character of domestic growth

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

(Cardoso 1973); the development policies that favored capital-intensive investment and the failure of new production technology to generate sufficient jobs to employ the growing supply of urban labor (Lluch 1979); and, in rural areas, the relative decline in labor absorption caused by the combined effects of demographic increase, the concentration of landholdings and the expansion of capitalist social relations of production.

In the early 1980s, Brazil entered a period of economic crisis, caused in large part by a recession in the international economy. The annual rate of change in Gross Domestic Product turned negative in 1981 and again in 1983, a slowdown with far-reaching social and political consequences (chapter 5). The evidence for the first half of the decade, spotty as it is, shows a decline in real income, a rise in unemployment, an expansion of poorly paid informal jobs and a drop in the rate of labor absorbed in the formal sector (Pfeffermann 1985). The economic downturn was severely felt, especially among the urban poor.

In mid-1984 the global economy began to recover from its worst recession in forty years. Yet, it is unlikely that the current improvement will be enough, by itself, to restore Brazil to past growth rates. The lasting consequences of the world crisis, as well as the external debt and the legacy of deep-rooted socioeconomic and regional inequalities, challenge Brazil's future ability to achieve sustained and equitable economic growth. As we will show in this volume, whether or not this effort is successful will determine the life chances of millions of Brazilians.

Population, development and inequality

A population's demographic behavior is linked to social and economic inequalities, such as the ones noted above, because the material conditions that people confront in their daily lives, and the expectations that they have for themselves and their children, exert a strong impact on the pattern and level of births and deaths, and on the propensity to migrate from one place to another. If a privileged minority enjoys access to a disproportionate share of wealth and other amenities – a characteristic not unique to Brazil – we can expect to find sharp variation in the demographic behavior of population subgroups. Similarly, a change in income or education, or a change in the degree to which people have access to public services, or any transformation in socioeconomic and political organization that improves or erodes the quality of life of one group relative to another, modifies the pattern of differences by social strata in births, deaths and geographic movement.

It is the composite of these changes among strata of the population

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

that accounts for demographic shifts observed in the aggregate. If we note, say, a drop in the national mortality rate, we can be sure that, underlying this overall decline changes have taken place that are more or less specific to different regions of the country and to different socioeconomic strata of the population. The fall in the overall death rate may be due to a large decline among middle income households, while mortality rates for the rest of the population remain the same. Or the aggregate outcome may be the (unlikely) result of a sharp reduction in deaths solely among the poorest stratum of society. National-level changes in the transition from high to low death rates generally occur as a consequence of a combination of events, such as a rapid shift in mortality among the middle class, and a slower rate of change among the poor. Yet other patterns are possible, including the offsetting effects of opposite trends among different social strata. A moderate decline at the aggregate level, for example, could be the result of a rapid drop in the death rate among middle and upper strata of the population, the national-level effect of which is blunted by a mortality rise among low-income groups.

Which demographic trajectory a country follows tells us a great deal about the kind of social change underway. Other things being equal, a development model that raises aggregate economic output, and which equitably distributes the benefits of growth, will have different demographic consequences compared to a highly concentrationist development strategy the results of which favor a small elite, or cause an absolute deterioration in living standards among particular social groups or geographic areas. Fertility, mortality and migration rates are thus closely tied to the structure of inequality which itself changes in the course of development.

That subgroup demographic rates can serve as a kind of barometer or yardstick with which to investigate the distributional consequences of transformations in socioeconomic and political structure is an idea that calls for a particular research agenda. The methodological task is to decompose aggregate measures of fertility, mortality and migration into estimates that correspond to key dimensions of geographic and socioeconomic stratification in Brazil. The conceptual challenge is to situate the interpretation of these disaggregated estimates of demographic performance within a broader model of social, economic and political organization.

As a technique, decomposition of aggregate rates is hardly new to the field of demography. Yet, recently developed methods have greatly enhanced our ability to disaggregate demographic estimates. Tra-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

ditional measures of mortality and fertility rely primarily on vital registration statistics. In developing countries this limitation meant that demographic indicators were often of dubious quality and nearly always restricted to aggregate rates for large geographic units. The newer approach, developed mainly by William Brass (Brass et al. 1968) in the 1960s, uses indirect methods to measure vital rates from surveys and census data. As a consequence, more accurate estimates at the national and regional level are now available even in those countries where the record of vital events is precarious. So significant are the implications of the improved accuracy and flexibility of these methods that the availability of new estimates has led to what one observer (Escudero 1980) called the “silent revolution” in population studies.

Indirect estimation procedures have another important advantage, especially for the objectives of this volume. Unlike the vital registration system, census data contain a wide range of information about individuals, such as their income, educational attainment, family organization and place of residence. This means that we can make use of individual-level sample data drawn from the 1970 and 1980 censuses to generate demographic rates specific to different socioeconomic strata of the population. Although the information included in the census questionnaires is not always ideal for operationalizing concepts such as social class, samples of census data, because of their coverage and large number of cases, nonetheless represent a significant advance over other sources.

How we interpret disaggregated estimates of demographic behavior is primarily a conceptual matter. Given that fertility, mortality and migration rates are closely associated with numerous aspects of socioeconomic and political structure, a narrow approach that pays exclusive attention to demographic variables and their immediate determinants will not suffice. Birth and death rates, and the propensity to move from one place to another, are behaviors inextricably embedded in the very economic and institutional arrangements transformed by the process of socioeconomic development. Demographic change, as McNicoll (1978: 80) put it, “cannot properly be isolated from the overall style of the development process.”

In Latin America, each country’s “development style” is the outcome of the complex interplay of geography, history, economics, population and public policy. These factors are more or less unique to every national context. Yet, beyond the specifics of each case, commonalities remain. For our purposes, the most important is the “combined and uneven” character of the expansion of capitalist production

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10246-9 - The Demography of Inequality in Brazil

Charles H. Wood and Jose Alberto Magno Carvalho

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and trade (de Janvry 1981: chapter 1). Capitalist development is combined, because it forms a system on a world scale, with the result that its components – regions, nation-states and regions within nation-states – are organically interrelated. Capitalist development is uneven, in that the process is neither linear nor homogeneous. On the contrary, it is marked by inequalities over time (periods of expansion and stagnation), space (inequalities between and within countries) and individuals (social differentiation into classes and strata).

If development favors certain geographic areas and social groups over others, and if these differences have demographic consequences because of their impact on fertility, mortality and migration, then neither development nor population studies can proceed very far if we insist, as much work in both fields has done, on treating the economy and the population as undifferentiated aggregates. It follows that our conceptualization of population and social change must encompass a country's class structure, its system of socioeconomic stratification and the various mechanisms, both domestic and international, that determine how the benefits and costs of development are distributed, both spatially and socially.

These observations suggest the need to formulate a conceptual framework that incorporates the prominent issues in development studies as well as the conceptual and technical advances achieved in demographic research. The proposed framework, which we present in the next chapter, views a society's eco-demographic and sociopolitical organization as interacting dimensions of a single whole. In subsequent chapters we will draw on the framework as a guide to selecting and ordering a wide range of data relevant to our interpretation of disaggregated estimates of fertility, mortality and migration. The framework thus serves primarily as a heuristic device with which to conceptualize demographic behavior in terms of a broader model of developing society.

Social inequality, and the reciprocal relationship between inequality and demographic behavior, is the thread that ties together the various themes pursued here. By social inequality we refer to the distribution within a society of scarce material and non-material goods and services. The term encompasses the distribution of income, housing, education, nutrition, public services (water, sewage) as well as access to jobs and productive resources, such as the access to land in the countryside. Spatial distinctions, such as rural and urban residence and region of the country, play a central role inasmuch as geography is associated with differences in the distribution of quality of life indicators. The origin of these inequalities, in turn, can be traced to the structure of social,