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Brazil Public Opinion Monitor: Causes of Poverty Survey Results

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1   Scope and aims of the Brazil Public Opinion Monitor

The Brazil Public Opinion Monitor (BPOM) is a longitudinal panel of 2,672 opinion leaders from across Brazil that aims to provide an ongoing monitor of opinions and perspectives on the economic and social development of Brazil, and on Brazil's place in the wider world. A particular sub-theme is Brazil's relations with other emerging and developing economies in South America and globally.

Reflecting the logistical difficulties and costs associated with surveys involving a representative sample of the Brazilian population, the BPOM specifically focuses on opinion leaders. Here, opinion leaders are defined as individuals who are actively engaged in economic and/or political issues in Brazil and are willing to participate in a continual panel, which means that they will be asked to respond to questions on an ongoing basis. A further rationale for the focus on opinion leaders is that they provide both an effective 'pulse' on opinions relating to economic and social issues in Brazil, and also act as key drivers of those opinions.

The BPOM is an internet-based survey platform through which members are presented with short questionnaires every two months. Members are sent an email inviting them to participate in each survey and containing a link to the survey. After a period of seven days, members who have not responded are sent a reminder.

The current survey was undertaken in December 2013. Of the 2,672 members of the panel, 1,294 returned the fully completed questionnaire. A summary of the results is provided below.

The focus of the current survey was poverty in Brazil. Panel members were asked about current levels of poverty in Brazil, how they expected the level of poverty to change looking to the future, and what factors they considered to be the major determinants of poverty in the country. The same questions were put to panels in India and South Africa, enabling comparisons to be made with other BRICS countries.

2 Level of poverty in Brazil today

Panel members were first asked about the level of poverty in Brazil today. Estimates ranged from 8 to 60 per cent of the population, with an average of 37 per cent. Looking to the future, 64 per cent of opinion leaders expected the level of poverty in Brazil to decline in the next five to ten years, with only 23 per cent expecting levels of poverty to increase (Figure 2.1). Amongst those expecting the level of poverty to decline, the majority expected relatively small improvements, with an average decline in rates of poverty over the next five to ten years of only 15 per cent.

Figure 2.1   Expected change over the next five to ten years in proportion of population that is poor
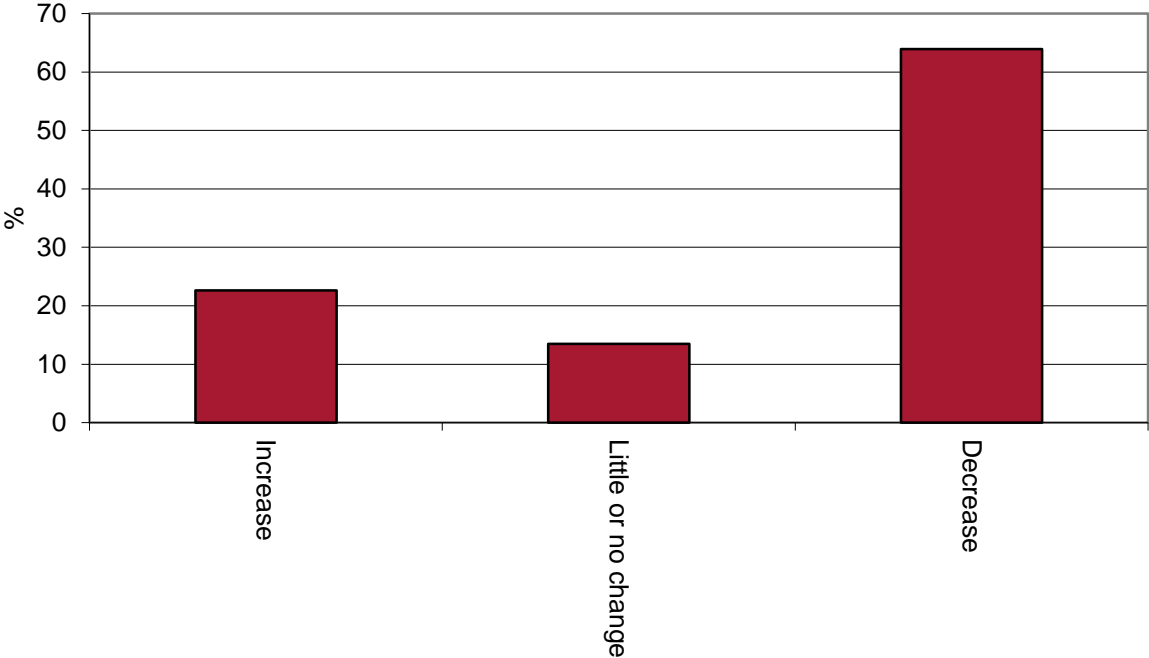
3   Causes of poverty

In order to identify the factors that opinion leaders consider to be the most critical causes of poverty, respondents were presented with a list of 25 potential causes compiled through a review of the research literature on antecedents of poverty. They were asked to indicate the importance of each of these factors in explaining why poverty exists in Brazil, India and South Africa today, on a five-point scale ranging from 'very unimportant' (1) to 'very important' (5). The resulting scores for the 25 factors were then categorised using Principal Components Analysis (PCA).[1] Specifically, PCA was applied to the pooled scores provided by survey respondents (n=4,653) from Brazil, India and South Africa so that common principal components were identified for the three countries.

A total of seven broad causes of poverty were identified as follows:[2]

- **Actions of the poor:** This principal component is closely related to items such as 'they have too many children', 'they are lazy' and 'financial mismanagement by the poor', suggesting it relates to beliefs that poverty results from the personal actions and behaviours of the poor themselves.
- **Fate or bad luck:** With close relations to items such as 'it is the will of God' and 'they have had bad luck', this suggests that poverty is outside the control of the poor and rather is the result of fate and/or bad luck.
- **Low social status:** Items such as 'exploited by the rich', 'inequality in Brazilian/Indian/South African society' and 'low social status' are most closely related to this principal component. This suggests that it relates to low status in society.
- **Lack of opportunities:** This principal component is most strongly related to items such as 'lack of economic opportunities for the poor', 'lack of education' and 'their parents were poor', suggesting lack of opportunities as a cause of poverty.
- **Government incapacity:** This principal component relates to the incapacity of government to help the poor with strong relations to items such as 'government corruption', 'government inefficiency or incompetence' and 'inadequate social welfare or assistance'.
- **Lack of societal concern about poverty:** The items 'lack of community spirit in Brazilian/Indian/South African society' and 'lack of concern about the poor within Brazilian/Indian/South African society' were heavily related to this principal component, suggesting it relates to a lack of societal concern about the poor.
- **Actions of rich countries:** This final principal component related to 'inadequate or inappropriate aid from rich countries' and 'exploited by rich countries', suggesting it is related to the actions of rich countries.

The loadings of each of the 25 items on these seven principal components are reported in Annex 1.

The average score for each of the seven identified causes of poverty is reported in Figure 3.1 below. The most important factors explaining levels of poverty in Brazil today were considered to be: government incapacity; lack of opportunities for the poor; and the low

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[1] PCA is a statistical technique that aims to identify the underlying patterns or structure in data. Thus, underlying the 25 items presented to respondents here, there are likely to be a smaller number of latent variables (or 'principal components') that are not immediately observable but with which the 25 items are related. PCA is a technique of identifying these latent variables and, in so doing, allowing better sense to be made of the scores provided by respondents.

[2] Seven principal components had eigenvalues exceeding one. These seven principal components accounted for 78 per cent of the variation in the data. Note that one of the 25 items did not load appreciably onto any of the seven eigenvalues and was excluded from the analysis.

social status of the poor. Fate or bad luck was considered by far the least important factor. Personal responsibility was also considered a relatively unimportant factor driving current levels of poverty in Brazil. Taken as a whole, these scores suggest that poverty in Brazil today is not seen as resulting from the actions of the poor themselves and/or chance, but rather the lack of government action and the fact that the poor lack economic opportunities. A secondary factor is the low social status of the poor.

**Figure 3.1   Average score for causes of poverty scales**
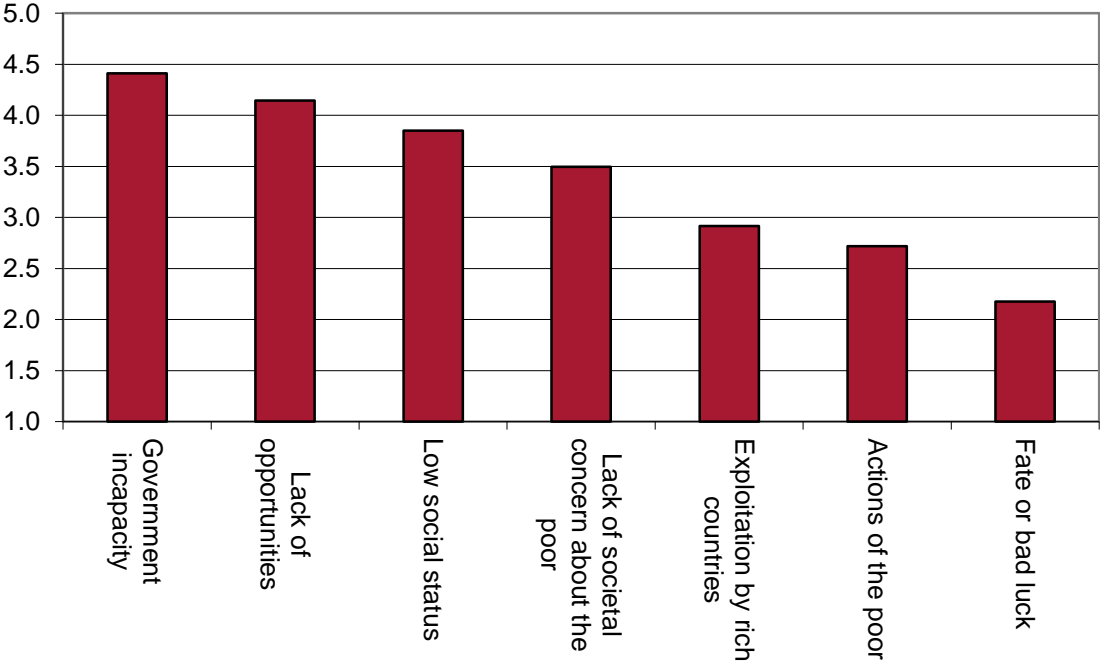
4 Views on alleviating poverty in Brazil today

The final part of the survey explored the views of opinion leaders on approaches to alleviating poverty in Brazil. Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements on a five-point scale ranging from 'disagree strongly' (1) to 'agree strongly' (5).

The results suggest that opinion leaders support the greater redistribution of income in Brazil in order to reduce levels of poverty. Thus, 67 per cent of respondents agreed with the statements 'the poor do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth' and 'the government should redistribute more income from the better off to the poor' (Figure 4.1). Given that almost 60 per cent of panel members disagreed that poverty is inevitable in a country like Brazil, it is clear that opinion leaders see the eradication of poverty as possible if the right actions are taken. Responsibility for such actions is clearly seen as residing with Brazil itself rather than with donors. Accordingly, 92 per cent agreed with the statement 'it is the responsibility of Brazil to get rid of poverty in its own country', whilst only 41 per cent were of the view that 'rich countries should do more to reduce poverty in Brazil'.

Figure 4.1 Level of agreement with statements on alleviating poverty in Brazil today
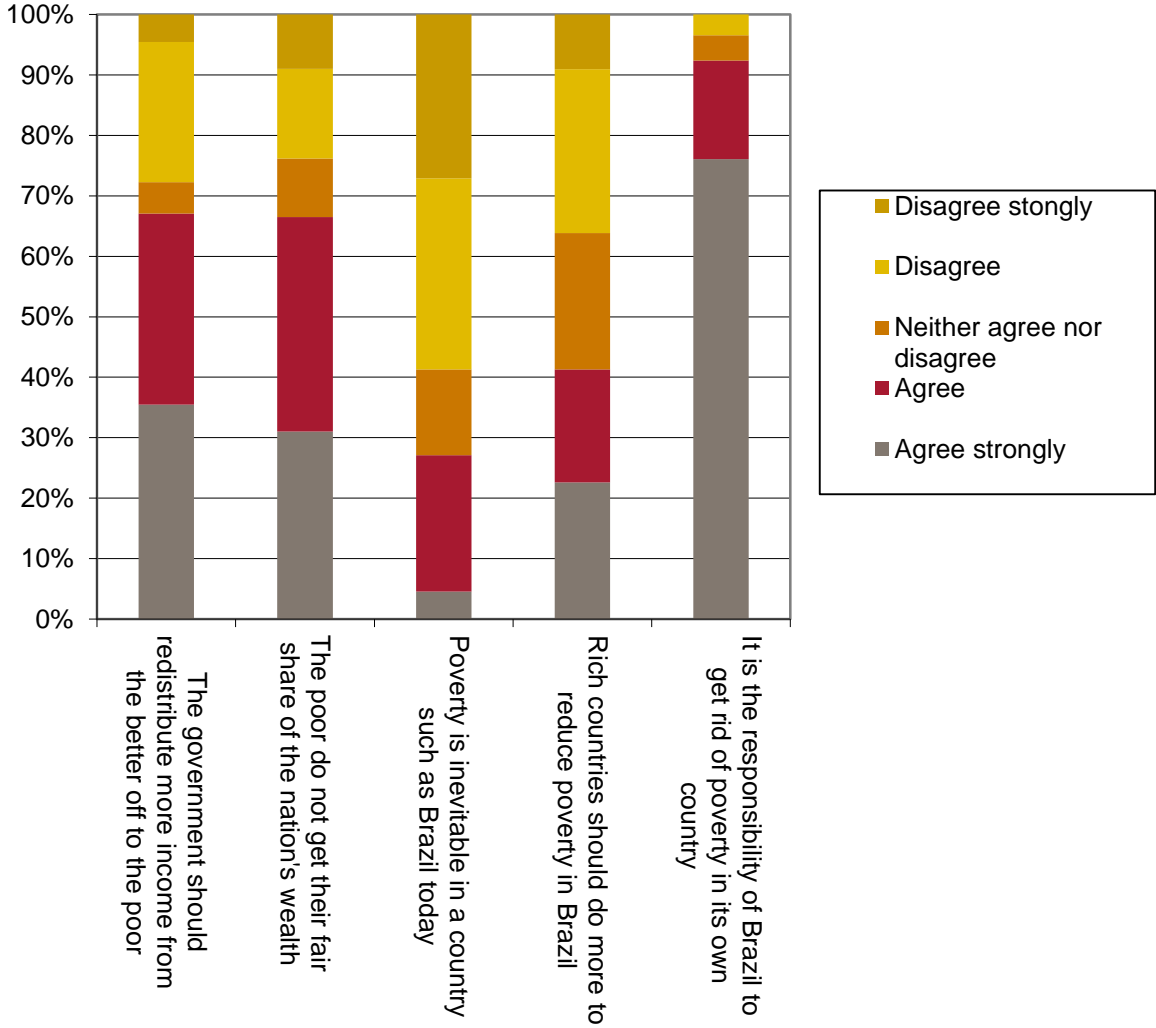
Finally, panel members were asked to score a range of actors in terms of their responsibility for reducing poverty in Brazil on a five-point scale from 'very little' (1) to 'very great' (5). On the basis of the average score across respondents to the survey, the government was judged to have greatest responsibility, followed by business and civil society (Figure 4.2). Governments of rich countries and people living in rich countries were judged to have the least responsibility.

Figure 4.2 Responsibility for reducing poverty in Brazil
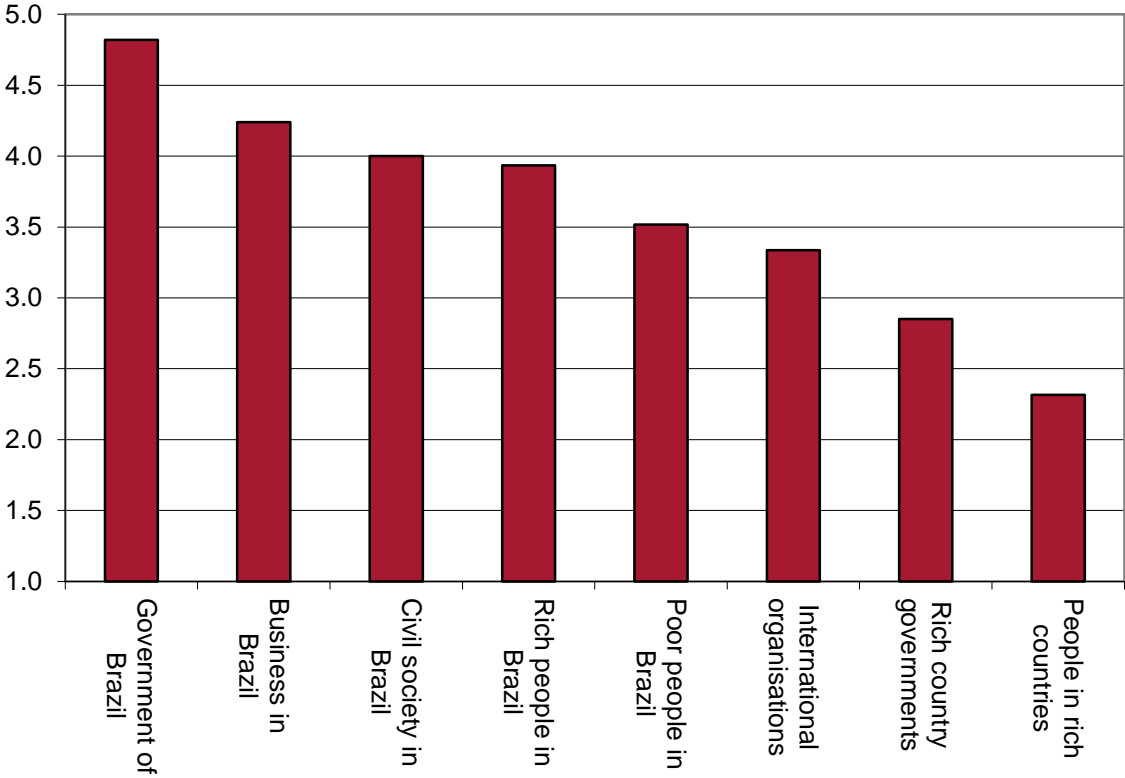
5   Further information

If you would like any further information about the BPOM and/or additional results, please do not hesitate to contact Spencer Henson (s.henson@ids.ac.uk). In addition, information about the BPOM and similar panels in India and South Africa is available at www.ids.ac.uk/ipom.

Annex 1 Principal component loadings for seven causes of poverty scales

Determinant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Personal responsibility	Fate or bad luck	Low social status	Lack of opportunities	Government incapacity	Lack of societal concern about the poor	Exploitation by rich countries
They have chosen to be like this	**0.637**	0.280	-0.217	-0.568	-0.229	0.249	0.007
Financial mismanagement by the poor	**0.671**	-0.077	0.160	-0.037	0.143	0.500	-0.182
They are lazy	**0.633**	0.133	-0.387	-0.436	-0.074	0.268	0.316
They have too many children	**0.818**	0.201	-0.126	-0.066	0.099	-0.169	-0.133
Alcohol or drug abuse	**0.831**	0.037	0.174	0.122	-0.087	0.167	-0.002
They don't plan for the future	**0.624**	0.071	0.017	0.044	0.030	0.252	0.267
It is the will of God	0.112	**0.768**	-0.136	-0.005	-0.152	0.038	-0.027
They have had bad luck	0.036	**0.822**	-0.087	0.014	-0.125	-0.100	0.189
Sickness	0.204	**0.643**	-0.068	-0.241	0.190	0.082	0.276
Exploited by the rich	0.066	0.190	**0.703**	0.023	0.531	0.031	-0.083
Prejudice or discrimination against the poor	0.276	0.139	**0.746**	0.243	0.018	0.223	-0.277
Inequality in Brazilian/Indian/South African society	0.029	-0.149	**0.815**	0.195	-0.021	0.158	0.089
Low social status	0.114	0.472	**0.693**	-0.160	0.013	0.000	0.416
Lack of economic opportunities for the poor	-0.307	-0.063	0.141	**0.734**	0.345	0.109	0.063
Lack of education	0.018	0.176	-0.154	**0.759**	-0.059	0.322	0.035
Lack of employment	0.104	0.046	0.169	**0.832**	0.243	0.044	-0.136
Their parents were poor	0.231	0.128	0.170	**0.648**	-0.026	0.029	-0.004
Government corruption	0.258	-0.156	0.152	0.298	**0.749**	0.139	-0.411
Government inefficiency or incompetence	0.079	-0.011	-0.028	0.164	**0.867**	0.076	0.092
Inadequate social welfare/assistance	-0.208	0.273	0.301	-0.081	**0.676**	0.276	-0.222
Lack of community spirit in Brazilian/Indian/South African society	0.267	0.083	0.107	0.094	0.034	**0.750**	-0.028
Lack of concern about the poor within Brazilian/Indian/South African society	-0.084	-0.048	0.301	0.152	0.295	**0.673**	0.043
Inadequate or inappropriate aid from rich countries	-0.007	-0.138	0.241	0.138	0.234	0.057	**0.744**
Exploited by rich countries	0.027	0.028	0.181	0.268	0.302	0.096	**0.655**

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