



# LATIN AMERICA

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## BRAZIL: POLITICS OR PUBLIC HEALTH?

After months of politics overshadowing the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil continues to fall into a deeper public health crisis. Now, with the world's second highest death toll, it appears that President Bolsonaro still has not changed his controversial stance. Since day one of the outbreak, President Bolsonaro has maintained a carefree attitude, calling the virus a "little flu" and defying public health measures recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Bolsonaro has even threatened to withdraw from the WHO, accusing the organization of acting irresponsibly in response to the crisis – a sentiment shared by US President Trump.

More recently, when questioned about the total death toll, Bolsonaro responded callously "I'm not a grave digger." Bolsonaro even responded, "so what?" when asked for a comment about how the death toll in Brazil has surpassed that of China. This indifferent response from Bolsonaro is thought to be strategic. Some experts believe that Bolsonaro does not want to take responsibility for what is likely to be the country's worst economic crisis. In an effort to remain in power, Bolsonaro has worked fervently to keep the economy open and discredit scientists.

The political divide has been clear since the beginning. Weeks after Bolsonaro fired Brazil's health minister, his replacement resigned, evidencing a deep political division. The President's newest replacement is a military general with no medical background. These

political battles have overshadowed the COVID-19 pandemic and further endangered the population of Brazil. With little transparency, a lack of testing, and conflicting priorities, the death toll and poverty continue to rise in Latin America's largest country.

The country has also not been forthcoming about COVID-19 infection and death rates. Just two weeks ago, the health ministry stopped releasing cumulative totals of cases and deaths in the country. This move caused a major uproar and led to a Supreme Court decision that ordered the government to release the figures. While Bolsonaro says the goal was to improve COVID-19 reporting, others are calling the move censorship.

While the crisis continues to deepen, Bolsonaro has reopened malls and beaches in major cities. With politics overshadowing a major health crisis, many are worried about where Brazil is headed.