

## **“Brazil shall never go without us again”: Indigenous peoples in the 2022 Population Census**

*“Nunca mais o Brasil sem nós”:* povos indígenas no  
*Censo Demográfico 2022*

*“Nunca más Brasil sin nosotros”:* los pueblos  
 indígenas en el *Censo Demográfico 2022*

Alessandra Traldi Simoni <sup>1</sup>

Bruno Nogueira Guimarães <sup>2,3</sup>

Ricardo Ventura Santos <sup>4,5</sup>

doi: 10.1590/0102-311XEN232223

On August 7, 2023, the event *Indigenous Brazil: A New Picture of the Indigenous Populations (O Brasil Indígena: Uma Nova Foto da População Indígena)* took place in Belém, Pará State, Brazil, organized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, acronym in Portuguese) and presented the first results of the *2022 Demographic Census* on the country’s Indigenous peoples. The striking figure of 1,693,535 individuals who declared themselves Indigenous represents an 88% increase compared to the previous 2010 census, which recorded approximately 890,000. At the event, Sônia Guajajara, the minister for Indigenous Peoples, stated “*Brazil shall never go without us again*” which emphasizes the centrality of census data for inclusion and visibility.

In the history of national censuses in Brazil, the first of which took place in 1872, the Indigenous population was included in various ways, usually subsumed under the *parda* [mixed-race] category or variants. It was only after the 1991 census that the category “Indigenous” has been systematically accounted for in the question “What is your color or race?”. In recent times, the IBGE has continuously collected data on the Indigenous population in four censuses, namely: 1991, 2000, 2010, and 2022. It is a relatively short historical series, but of enormous significance and implication in terms of demographic visibility for this population.

Data collection on the Indigenous population in national censuses, as well as the existence of records in other public statistics sources – such as health information systems – is closely associated with changes implemented after enactment of the *1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution*, which states that “*Indians shall have their social organization, customs, languages, creeds and traditions recognized*” (Article 231). Making Indigenous peoples visible in public statistics is thus part of this national historical and sociopolitical process, which is also associated with the increased focus on Indigenous populations internationally and in Latin America, with an effort by statistical institutes to promote methodological changes in the censuses, seeking to portray ethnic-racial diversity <sup>1,2</sup>.

As for detailed ethnic and sociocultural characteristics, it was only after the 2010 census that data such as specific ethnic belonging and Indigenous languages spoken in households began to be collected. In the 2022 census, the topics investigated were expanded, with the creation of a specific questionnaire on Indigenous communities, for example. There were also efforts to expand the “territorial base” for identifying Indigenous households, with the updating of Indigenous Lands from 2010 to 2022, and the identification of so-called “Indigenous localities” in the national territory, through a “collaborative cartography” <sup>3</sup>, with information provided by Indigenous organizations, government

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brasil.

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

<sup>3</sup> Centro de Apoio Operacional às Promotorias de Justiça para Apoio Comunitário, Inclusão e Mobilização Sociais, Ministério Público do Estado de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brasil.

<sup>4</sup> Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sergio Arouca, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

<sup>5</sup> Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

### Correspondence

A. T. Simoni  
 Rua Orivaldo de Barros 11,  
 Campinas, SP 13049-581,  
 Brasil.  
 lele.traldi@gmail.com



institutions, and Indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). A wide network of social and institutional actors was created for planning and executing the 2022 census, including specific situations such as Indigenous peoples of recent contact and in displacement conditions. Indigenous individuals participated from the planning (involving Indigenous leaders and organizations) to the execution stage (with Indigenous guides, translators, census workers, and supervisors). These elements certainly had an influence on the census results, including by potentially favoring greater capillarity and coverage of the IBGE operations.

When approaching the results of the 2022 census about the Indigenous population in Brazil, with its figure of over 1.5 million, it is essential to consider the figures recorded in previous censuses for a comparative perspective: 294,148 in 1991; 734,127 in 2000; and 896,917 in 2010. In 2022, the Indigenous population is almost six times larger than in the 1990s, and almost double compared to 2010. If in 2010 the Indigenous population constituted 0.4% of the national population, it grew to 0.8% in 2022. Nevertheless, Brazil remains one of the countries in the Americas with the lowest proportion of its population made up of Indigenous people.

These census variations, as highlighted by various IBGE analyses and studies by the scientific community, cannot be interpreted as deriving solely from interrelations between demographic factors, such as birth and mortality, nor due to migration<sup>2,4,5</sup>. Changes in the figures for the Indigenous population are certainly closely linked to methodological issues, both in terms of survey coverage and capillarity at a territorial level, as well as the content of the questions and the greater number of people recognizing themselves as Indigenous.

In fact, the questions for capturing the Indigenous population in the 2010 and 2022 censuses are crucial to understanding the observed increase in the number of Indigenous people. The appropriateness of the “color or race” question for the purpose of capturing figures on the Indigenous population has long been debated<sup>1,2,5</sup>. Considering this issue, a “coverage question” was created in 2010 that should only be applied to specific territorial areas, in this case only to census tracts located in Indigenous Lands<sup>6</sup>. If the interviewee declared themselves in a category other than Indigenous (white, black, Asian, or mixed-race), an additional question was asked – “Do you consider yourself Indigenous?”. The Indigenous population then became the sum of those who “declared themselves” and “considered themselves” to be Indigenous, the latter accounting for 9% of the total in 2010. In the 2022 census, this question was extended to all “Indigenous localities”, inside and outside Indigenous Lands, in rural and urban areas, making up 27% of the total of 1.6 million Indigenous people<sup>3</sup>. This finding that approximately 1/4 of the Indigenous population included does not derive directly from the “Indigenous” category in the question about “color or race” will require reflection over the next few years.

IBGE’s adopted methodology in the 2022 census, which expanded the application of the “Do you consider yourself” coverage question, contributed to a significant increase in Indigenous declarations in locations and regions where there had previously been low inclusion<sup>3</sup>. This can be exemplified by the variations observed in the capital cities of Northern Brazil, considered the region with the largest Indigenous population. The figures increased in practically all the capitals in the region, except for Belém. A striking example is that of Manaus, the capital of Amazonas, with an Indigenous population of just over 70,000 in 2022, compared to 4,000 in 2010. Also largely due to the presence of Indigenous people outside the Indigenous Lands, the State of Bahia has become the second, after Amazonas, with the largest Indigenous population in Brazil. Also, the increase in the Indigenous population outside the Indigenous Land in municipalities close to demarcated areas, such as Tefé (Amazonas State), Altamira (Pará State), Pesqueira (Pernambuco State) and Dourados (Mato Grosso do Sul State) is remarkable.

From the results already published for Indigenous people living outside Indigenous Lands, information will be generated with significant implications for public policies in health and various other fields, especially in urban areas<sup>3</sup>. It is well known that several urban centers have areas with a strong Indigenous presence, such as Parque das Tribos in Manaus, the Paraisópolis community in São Paulo and Aldeia Marçal de Souza in Campo Grande (Mato Grosso do Sul State). Many other examples could be mentioned in cities of various sizes, which stress the importance of disseminating information, considering the analysis of ethnic belonging, socio-economic profiles, and housing conditions.

So far, few details of the 2022 census results on the Indigenous population have been released, such as the total population and according to certain geographical levels (state, municipalities, Indigenous Land, for example). Information about ethnicities, languages spoken, age and gender composition is being released over the months. In 2010, IBGE results indicated the existence of 305 Indigenous peoples and 272 Indigenous languages spoken in Brazil. The emerging profiles from the 2022 census data will outline new scenarios about Indigenous distribution and sociodiversity in the country.

The results will also be fundamental in broadening discussions to promote the rights of Indigenous peoples internationally, such as the *2030 Agenda* and the *Montevideo Consensus*. Also noteworthy is the importance of the 2022 census information for implementing initiatives such as the pioneering *2023 Resolution on the Health of Indigenous Peoples* <sup>7</sup> by the World Health Organization (WHO), which, among many issues, addresses the importance of information sources and systems for analyzing health inequities amid Indigenous peoples.

In research into the social determinants of health, with a focus on the ethnic-racial dimension, the results of the 2022 census have many implications for studies into inequalities in Brazil. Census data are used as denominators in the most diverse indicators related to the illness and death of populations. Data from the 2010 census resulted in numerous studies that pointed to the socioeconomic and health inequalities of the Indigenous population compared to the general Brazilian population <sup>8</sup>. A thorough discussion and a great deal of caution will have to be exercised by public health studies when using the 2022 census data, given that some locations have observed a significant increase in the Indigenous population, as in Manaus, the municipality with the largest Indigenous population in Brazil. In this case, temporal analysis of the indicators will need to consider the increase of more than 66,000 people, which will have a direct effect on their denominators, possibly reducing rates. Given the implications, these results should be analyzed considering that the variations also result from changes in data collection patterns and ethnic recognition, so it is necessary to use explanatory keys that go beyond population variation due to demographic factors.

Dissemination of census results always leads to debates. In the case of the Indigenous population, discussions about data gathering in previous censuses led to changes in the collection methodology <sup>3,4,6</sup>. Given that this is such a wide-ranging and comprehensive survey, and considering that many Indigenous communities are located in difficult-to-access regions, questions arise about the data collected. At the same time, censuses are today the most important source of data on Indigenous peoples in Brazil, and are an international benchmark in capturing data on this population group <sup>2,5</sup>.

In this upcoming phase of publicizing the results of the 2022 census, an important approach will be to encourage Indigenous communities, researchers and managers, among others, to get involved in analyzing and producing interpretations based on the census data. The importance of public statistics in the debates and initiatives of Indigenous ethno-political movements has been increasingly emphasized in various countries worldwide, including Brazil. One such example was the Indigenous leading role in producing and disseminating data during the COVID-19 pandemic <sup>9</sup>, a period in which the government assumed anti-Indigenous positions. It is also noteworthy the Indigenous participation in the 2022 census <sup>3</sup>, and recent post-census initiatives, such as training activities for Indigenous researchers and managers on census data, in initiatives by the Brazilian Association of Population Studies, in partnership with IBGE and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Brazil.

During the Belém event, Joenia Wapichana, president of the Brazilian National Indian Foundation (FUNAI, acronym in Portuguese), and Ricardo Weibe Tapeba, secretary of Indigenous Health of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, emphasized the centrality of census data for public policies aimed at Indigenous peoples. Reflecting the perspectives of the Indigenous ethno-political movement on the importance of the IBGE results, both pointed out how “giving visibility” to the Indigenous population is key to the government’s planning and implementation of public policies in the most diverse areas. In this regard, the census data should be an instrument for fulfilling Sonia Guajajara’s “*Brazil shall never go without us again*”.

## Contributors

A. T. Simoni contributed with the study conception and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing, and review; and approved the final version. B. N. Guimarães contributed with the study conception and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing, and review; and approved the final version. R. V. Santos contributed with the study conception and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing, and review; and approved the final version.

## Additional information

ORCID: Alessandra Traldi Simoni (0000-0002-7601-7189); Bruno Nogueira Guimarães (0000-0002-8565-995X); Ricardo Ventura Santos (0000-0001-5071-443X).

## References

1. Okamoto L, Antunes MO, Damasco FS. Povos indígenas nas estatísticas oficiais: identificação étnica, recomendações internacionais e a experiência brasileira. In: Simões L, Athias L, Botelho L, organizadores. Panorama nacional e internacional da produção de indicadores sociais: grupos populacionais específicos e uso do tempo. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística; 2018. p. 224-65.
2. Santos RV, Guimarães BN, Simoni AT, Silva LO, Antunes MO, Damasco FS, et al. The identification of the Indigenous population in Brazil's official statistics, with an emphasis on demographic censuses. *Stat J IAOS* 2019; 35:29-46.
3. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Censo Demográfico 2022: indígenas: primeiros resultados do universo. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística; 2023.
4. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Tendências demográficas: uma análise dos indígenas com base nos resultados da amostra dos Censos Demográficos 1991 e 2000. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística; 2005.
5. Azevedo MMA. Os povos indígenas e os censos demográficos no Brasil. In: Berquó E, organizador. Demografia na Unicamp: um olhar sobre a produção do Nepe Campinas. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp; 2017. p. 551-64.
6. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Censo Demográfico 2010: características gerais dos indígenas. Resultados do universo. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística; 2012.
7. Azevedo C. Resolução sobre a Saúde dos Povos Indígenas: Fiocruz tem papel de destaque na 76ª AMS. <https://agencia.fiocruz.br/resolucao-sobre-saude-dos-povos-indigenas-fiocruz-tem-papel-de-destaque-na-76a-ams> (accessed on 16/Dec/2023).
8. Santos RV, Welch JR, Pontes AL, Garnelo L, Cardoso AM, Coimbra Jr. CEA. Health of indigenous peoples in Brazil: inequities and the uneven trajectory of public policies. In: McQueen D, editor. *Oxford research encyclopedias of global public health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2022. p. 1-33.
9. Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil. Emergência indígena. <https://emergenciaindigena.apiboficial.org/> (accessed on 15/Dec/2023).

---

Submitted on 21/Dec/2023

Approved on 28/Dec/2023