

SOUTH AMERICA

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



17.8 million km²
= 4th largest continent



420 million people
= 5th most populous continent

12 countries & 4 dependencies

DID YOU KNOW?



The world's longest river, highest waterfall, longest mountain range, and biggest rainforest are all in South America

INDEPENDENCE

Every country was colonised by a European nation but gained independence in the 18th or 19th century (except for the 4 dependencies)

GOVERNMENT

Every country is a presidential republic, except Guyana which is a parliamentary republic

URBANISATION

This is highest in Brazil (95.3%) and Argentina (91.9%) and lowest in Guyana (26.6%) and Paraguay (61.6%)

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language in every country (about 200 million speakers), except for Brazil (where Portuguese is spoken by about 200 million). Quecha is the most widely spoken indigenous language (8 million speakers)

RELIGION

The continent is said to be 90% Christian (with the majority being Roman Catholic in all countries except Guyana and Suriname which have a Protestant majority)

ECONOMY

Brazil (8th in the world) and Argentina (28th) are the economic powerhouses of South America, but both are currently experiencing major slow downs. Chile (45th) experienced its best growth in 5 years, while Colombia (32nd) also saw some acceleration.

ASSOCIATIONS

Regional associations include:

- Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) - 3rd largest trade bloc in the world
- Latin American Parliament (LAN)
- Southern Common Market (Mercosur)



DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that around 40% of the world's plant and animal species are found in South America, despite it covering less than 12% of the earth's total land surface.

IN THE HEADLINES

VENEZUELA



"Thousands of people are leaving Venezuela"

Venezuela has some of the world's largest proven oil deposits (as well as huge quantities of coal, iron ore, bauxite and gold) but has been plagued by political instability and economic turmoil



- President Nicolas Maduro was re-elected in May 2018 for second 6-year term but the election was marred by an opposition boycott and claims of vote-rigging
- A dire economic situation has seen more than 2 million Venezuelans flee their country since 2014

BRAZIL



"Brazil's most unpredictable election in three decades"

- Far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro (in intensive care after being stabbed at a campaign rally) kept his first-round lead in an election opinion poll
- Popular former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was banned from running in the 7 October vote due to a corruption conviction for which he has been jailed



Over the past few years, Brazil has made major strides in its efforts to raise millions out of poverty, although the gap between rich and poor remains wide

PARAGUAY



"Paraguay's new president promises to cut poverty"

Political unrest, corruption and chronic economic problems have plagued the country's fragile democracy since it emerged from a 35-year dictatorship in 1989. Around a quarter of Paraguayans live below the national poverty line.



- New president Mario Benítez vowed to fight corruption and impunity and acknowledged God in his first speech: "We're no longer in campaign, but we continue to have the same chief - God!"
- Two members of his cabinet are well-known evangelical leaders

ARGENTINA



"Argentina senate rejects bill to legalise abortion"

- Argentina's senate rejected a bill to legalise abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy (38 to 31 votes)
- "Pro-life" protestors have also become active in a number of other countries across South and Central America

Argentina is rich in resources and has a well-educated workforce, but its political life has been troubled by military coups and populist movements, and the economy has been prey to dramatic booms and recessions.



COLOMBIA



"Colombia's new president calls off talks with leftist insurgent group"

Colombia has substantial oil reserves and is a major producer of gold, silver, emeralds, platinum and coal, but has also been ravaged by violent conflict involving outlawed armed groups, drug cartels and gross violations of human rights.



- In 2016, former president Juan Manuel Santos won the Nobel peace prize for a deal with the FARC guerrillas, ending a 50-year war
- His successor, Iván Duque, is facing another formidable leftist insurgency, the National Liberation Army (ELN)

BOLIVIA



"Bolivia president proposes law to 'punish liars' in the media"

- The proposed "law against lies" would penalise news about the government that the president doesn't like
- The Inter-American Press Association denounced the proposed law, saying it would impose an all-out censorship on the media



Bolivia has the largest proportion of indigenous people (in South America), who make up around two-thirds of the population. President Evo Morales is widely regarded as Bolivia's first president to come from the indigenous population.

SOURCES

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