

## **Brazil Is Not (Perceived as) a Serious Country: Exposing Gaps between the External Images and the International Ambitions of the Nation**

Daniel Buarque<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*This paper analyses international perceptions about Brazil and shows that there is a gap between the images of the nation to the rest of the world and the country's historic aspirations to be a relevant player in global affairs. By discussing these perceptions, this article brings the study of nation branding closer to the debate of international relations constructivist theories, arguing that images do matter. It analyses secondary data about Brazil from ten different brand surveys, then discusses what it means to be a "serious country" and how that is related to foreign perceptions about the nation. The idea of Brazil as one the "coolest" nations in the world could be considered positive in terms of nation branding, but it may be in contrast with the historic foreign policy agenda of an ambitious nation that tries to project itself as an emerging power in international politics. Being "cool" is often associated with being a nation of parties and fun, which reinforces the frequent description that Brazil "is not a serious country".*

### **Resumo**

*Este artigo analisa as percepções internacionais sobre o Brasil e mostra que existe uma defasagem entre as imagens do país para o resto do mundo e as aspirações históricas das políticas exteriores do país de tornar o Brasil um ator relevante nos assuntos globais. Ao discutir essas percepções, este artigo aproxima os estudos de 'nation branding' do debate das teorias construtivistas das relações internacionais, argumentando que as imagens e percepções são importantes nesse debate. O artigo analisa dados secundários sobre o Brasil de dez pesquisas sobre marcas, e discute o que significa ser um "país sério" e como isso está relacionado às percepções estrangeiras sobre o país. A ideia de o Brasil como uma das nações "mais legais" do mundo pode ser considerada positiva em termos de marca nacional, mas não corrobora a ambiciosa agenda histórica da política externa de uma nação que tenta se projetar como uma potência emergente no mundo. Ser "legal" é frequentemente associado a ser uma nação de festas e diversão, o que reforça a descrição frequente de que o Brasil "não é um país sério".*

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<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate in the joint programme King's College London – University of São Paulo.

## **Perceptions and ambitions**

The photo of a smiling samba dancer parading during the carnival in Rio de Janeiro illustrated a CNN report on the "coolest" nationalities in the world (Neild, 2017). "Without Brazilians we wouldn't have samba and Rio carnival; we wouldn't have the soccer beauty of Pele and Ronaldo; we wouldn't have the minuscule swimwear and toned bodies of Copacabana beach" (Neild, 2017), claims the CNN report, in what seemed to summarize what Brazil represents in the eyes of many in the rest of the world: a place for fun and parties by the beach.

This account would ordinarily be seen as a good thing for Brazil since it shows the country has positive images in the rest of the world. After all, the brand of a "cool" nation is one of the most desired in nation branding approaches, one of the vehicles through which the commodification of countries takes place (Valaskivi, 2016). This perception seems to be, however, at odds with the main ambitions of the Brazilian foreign policy agenda, historically connected to the goal of achieving the prestige of a Great Power (Buarque, 2017a; Mares and Trinkunas, 2016; Ricupero, 2017; Stolte, 2015; Stuenkel and Taylor, 2015). There seems to be a gap, thus, between the general perceptions populations across the globe hold about Brazil and the role the country plays internationally, and therefore its prestige.

Despite the fact that Brazil has long aspired to achieve recognition as a modern and developed nation with a powerful voice in global politics (Mares and Trinkunas, 2016; Ricupero, 2017; Souza, 2008, 2002), the country still faces a lot of challenges in the perceptions held about it in the developed world, and is not seen as a nation able to assume the responsibilities that come with Great Power status, including the duty of upholding the international order, by the rest of the world (Lebow, 2016). The country faces limitations even though it has real capabilities, it is one of the most respected foreign policy communities in the world, has a continental size and enormous natural resources, more than 200 million people, and is one of the ten biggest economies in the world. (Chatin, 2016, 2013; Souza, 2008).

This study is inspired by ongoing research to understand the perceptions about Brazil among foreign policy elites of powerful countries, and how that might affect the role of Brazil in the world. The aim of this paper is to analyze the general perceptions about Brazil among the global population and to discuss the gaps between the external images and the international aspirations of the country while bringing the study of nation branding closer to the scholarship of international relations, since these are "two worlds and two epistemic

communities that show all too little awareness of each other, although they share an interest in concepts such as globalization, identity, and power" (Van Ham, 2002). There is a established of literature about the influence of perceptions and stereotypes in international relations (Anholt, 2011; Buchanan, 1951; Buchanan and Cantril, 1953; Jeanneney, 2000a, 2000b; Jervis, 2017, 1970) as well as evidence of images being source of problems in international negotiations of Brazil (Spektor, 2009; Stuenkel and Taylor, 2015), even if it is still not possible to actually measure the connections between them. However, most recent researches that analyze countries' images as if they were commercial brands come mostly from a marketing-oriented background and are usually ignored by serious IR scholarship. This paper argues that these can be relevant sources of information and data about how nations perceive one another, which may influence policy.

Although Brazil has strived to project positive images, and it is recognized as a cool nation, surveys show that the country is perceived as "decorative" and has become associated with stereotypes not generally applied to responsible countries (Buarque, 2009, 2013a; Mariutti and Giraldi, 2012). Ever since the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers in the sixteenth century, the images of the new territory held in Europe has been one of exoticism (Buarque, 2017b). Until today, most of the literature on national images describe the foreign perceptions of Brazil as a country that is exotic in nature (Amancio, 2000; Bignami, 2002). The successful organization of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics in the country reinforced the association of such stereotypes with Brazil (Buarque, 2017c). Although the crises in the country overshadowed the efforts to project a more modern and "world-class" nation to the rest of the planet, in the coverage of the international press, the two events were acclaimed as big global parties and showed that Brazil knows how to celebrate, even in the middle of its crises (Buarque, 2017c). The stereotype of Brazil as a country of parties is so strong that almost every time the international media talks about it, images of parties appear in the text, photo, or video.

Still, the images of Brazil as the coolest country in the world had everything to be very positive for Brazil in its aspiration for international recognition (Valaskivi, 2016), but in fact, it creates an ambivalent interpretation of the nation. According to these external perceptions, Brazil is synonym "only" of parties. Carnival is the most prominent symbol of the country in the rest of the world, explains Rosana Bignami (2002). Although the brand of a "cool" nation can position a state within the framework of modern Westernized civilization (Valaskivi, 2016), in the case of Brazil, it seems to work in a different direction. Being the

country of the carnival means not being the country of anything else. It means being a country where the population lives because of parties and does not perform other activities (Bignami, 2002).

These perceptions also appear in international cinema depictions of Brazil. Stereotypes about the country in movies are of it being an excellent place for parties and nothing else. There is never any mention of the world of work in foreign films that mention Brazil, which strengthens the idea that it is just a great place to visit and enjoy oneself. It is seen as only a great seaside resort (Amancio, 2000). Although Dennison (2017) argues that this analysis of the representations of Brazil in international cinema omits many other depictions of Brazil that paint a more complex picture of the country, her study confirms the idea that Brazil is a victim of negative stereotypes on foreign films. Marsh (2012) offers a more contemporary reading of how Brazil is pictured in US films in the second decade of the Twenty-First century and similarly argues that the brand of Brazil in Hollywood is of a sensual, tropical place.

These stereotypes of Brazil are also often projected in international media. In an analysis of what was published about Brazil in five of the most influential press publications in the world during the World Cup in 2014 seems to confirm that Brazil is seen as a “decorative” country (Buarque, 2015; Guimarães, 2016). Going a little further than the projections of the images of Brazil and how it appears in culture, media, cinema, and tourism, however, it is possible to see that these assessments are also evident in the significant international surveys about the external images of countries. This paper analyses the most prevalent stereotypes attached to the foreign perceptions of Brazil according to ten different global studies that seem to confirm the idea that Brazil is seen as a country of parties, and thus is not perceived as a serious nation. It discusses the concept of nation images, how it may be relevant in international relations, what are and the methods developed to attempt to measure it, and then proceed to analyze the general images constructed in different international surveys conducted through nation branding agencies. After that, the paper will discuss what it means for a country to be considered “serious” and argue that the images of Brazil is of a nation of fun and games, not a serious politically and economically one, and thus it may confirm the traditional adage that Brazil is not a serious country, or at least is not perceived internationally as one, which this paper proposes is relevant in order to discuss the projection of Brazil in global politics.

It is true that perhaps the general images of a country may not have much influence on actual policy debates. International relations tradition is often quick in criticizing image surveys and arguing that there is no proof that stereotypes may affect the prestige of a country, which is built on the diligent work of diplomats. However, constructivist international theories, as well as the literature on perceptions and misperceptions in international politics, show that it is essential to understand how nations think about one another, while studies developed on national stereotypes in Europe already shows that many of the preconceptions and clichés about countries are also held by diplomats, politicians, and stakeholders in general (Jeanneney, 2000b; Jervis, 2017; Lebow, 2016, 2008; Moscovici, 2000; Wendt, 1992). The paper draws a connection between studies about international images of countries, such as nation branding, and constructivist international relations theory. It shows that there is a substantial literature on international relations discussing the role of prestige, perception, and images on the contact between different nations.

The paper contributes to the study of international relations by showing that the analysis of data from nation branding surveys can be used to understand the reputation a country like Brazil has in the rest of the world, how it relates to the actual foreign policy agenda of the country, and it suggests that further analysis can be developed in trying to understand possible practical impacts from the gaps between images and ambition. While it does not offer a definitive conclusion on what possible effects are there from such disparities and contrasts, it argues that it is definitely important to gather all the possible information about what are the images of a country to use it in analyzing the country's standing in the world.

### **A bridge between different scholarships**

This paper analyses the images of Brazil as described by ten different international surveys of nation branding and soft power to understand the stereotypes held in the world and to show that there are gaps and contrasts between these general perceptions and the foreign policy agenda of Brazil. The theoretical focus of the analysis, thus, will be on approaches to the international reputation of nations, their images abroad, and the possible impact of that in international relations, building a bridge between the two areas which Van Ham (Van Ham, 2008, 2002) argues show too little awareness of each other while sharing interests in similar concepts and ideas.

After the development of a first rush to understand the impacts of images in international relations in the 1950s, after World War II, the area has been a focus of attention closer to marketing and business approaches, being left out by the mainstream IR studies. However, building on a constructivist analysis of international relations and considering that there is a lot of literature that discussed how stereotypes might influence policy, it is essential not to disregard the data that nation branding surveys have gathered, as they can offer a relevant amount of information about international perceptions. The goal of this paper, thus, is to try to reconnect the two areas, showing that there is a gap between images and global ambitions in the case of Brazil.

Before that, however, it is essential to discuss what does the idea of “image” means and how it would be possible to measure it. Boulding (Boulding, 1956) argues that image is a synonym for subjective knowledge, personal knowledge, and belief. It is what determines the behavior of a person or group. The definition is similar to the one Lippman (2015) develops to stereotypes, which he defines as “pictures in our heads”. So far, though, the literature on the subject is evident in admitting that it is hard to have a consensual definition of what exactly are the images of a country. Bignami (2002) argues that images should be understood as the majority of representations of the nation in the mind of individuals. According to her, social and historical factors, geographic position, weather, and the media contribute to the definition of this average image. Go and Govers (2011) argue that image and reputation are a matter of perception, and cannot be thought of as synonymous with reality. The overall status of a nation, they argue, is a function of its reputation among various stakeholders and multiple categories. Roth and Diamantopoulos (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009) provide a state-of-the-art review of conceptualizations regarding nation images. According to them, there is still no consensus on how to conceptualize and operationalize nation image, even though since the 1960s more than 1,000 publications have analyzed the concept. Their study explains, however, that many researchers define images of nations as “perceptions,” “impressions,” “associations,” “stereotypes,” “schemas,” and “beliefs,” but they defend the word “image” is more comprehensive. According to Jiménez-Martínez (2017), it may be a stretch to even talk about one single “image” of a country, and it would seem more appropriate to discuss “images”, in the plural, since it depends on who is looking at the nation at each time.

Despite the popularity of nation branding studies, especially in marketing circles, a more critical approach to this interpretation of images as brands has been developed later



on. These measures of nation images are criticized because, for critics, national character matters primarily in terms of its fitness for market exchange (Aronczyk, 2018; Valaskivi, 2016). According to Aronczyk (2013), by conflating public opinion research with marketing research, the index seeks to elide differences between citizens and consumers. On a similar approach, Fehimović and Ogden (2018) argue that branding is a tool related to neoliberalism. Although this type of studies of national images have been criticized for their approach comparing countries to brands, and despite the superficiality of some of those analyses, the data compiled in the surveys developed to measuring these images do say a lot about external perceptions of nations, and how it may have influence over international politics.

While it is true that the concept of images in nation branding does not have much direct relation to the international relations of a given country, Jeanneney (Jeanneney, 2000a) argues that it is futile or inutile to ignore the real impacts of the national stereotypes in the relation between different nations. Every political reflection, Jeanneney (2000b) explains, requires that the dialectic of facts and representations are taken into account, which in turn becomes a decisive motor of history. Jeanneney (2000b) discusses how politicians also carry stereotypes of other nations with them. Even diplomats, he explains, hold stereotypes in their minds while working on international politics, and official dispatches and the telegrams show that the ambassadors are not exempted from ready-made ideas about the countries where they work. A similar approach is reinforced by Frank (Frank, 2000), who argues that images that nations make of one another play a fundamental role in international relations, that stereotypes alter the judgment of diplomats and political actors, creating prejudices and misconceptions To take stereotypes into consideration while thinking about foreign affairs, Moscovici (2000) argues, is to remind that humans are behind politics, even if all the public debate seems like it is developed by impersonal machinery, the human being is always in the background.

The discussion about images has long been meaningful when analyzing the relations between nations, and it is said that these symbolic images can even be understood as one of the major causes of international warfare and is "the principal threat to the survival of our present world" (Boulding, 1956, p. 111). Studies focusing on the importance of perceptions, images, and reputation in international relations can be traced back to the post-World War II global debate on war and peace. The United Nations decided to study the subject in the late 1940s. Their assumption was that wars begin in the minds of men, so that would be

important to understand how images are associated with defending peace (Buchanan and Cantril, 1953)

Decades after these first analyses of images and stereotypes and their importance for international relations, peace, and war, the main focus on the study of foreign perceptions of nations has been dominated by marketing researchers, however, starting to be called nation branding. Although the importance of impressions and recognition are fundamental to the debate on power status (Gardini and Almeida, 2016), one of the most popular line of thought in this area more recently has been the idea that countries have reputations that are like brands, which build on their identity and become their international images (Anholt, 2011).

After the first wave of studies discussing images, stereotypes, and perceptions in international relations, after WWII, one of the early efforts to develop a model to measure nation images with this approach close to marketing was established by Martin and Eroglu (1993). For them, the image of a country is a multidimensional concept and can be understood as “the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country” (Martin and Eroglu, 1993, p. 193). Although it is an interesting early approach to the research of nation images, it does not take into consideration matters related to international relations and politics, considering the question of perceptions only from the perspective of consumption. More than two decades later, however, there are already many different approaches to measuring images of countries with varied methodologies and going beyond marketing.

Kaneva (2011) argues that nation branding scholarship can be divided into three areas: technical-economic, political, and cultural approaches. Of those, the political perspectives are the ones that are of interest to this paper, since it includes studies interested precisely in the impact of national images on nation-states’ participation in a global system of international relations. Her analysis of 186 publications on the subject shows that 35% of that scholarship can be labeled political. However, this approach is often connected only to the idea of public diplomacy, and further researches about the connections between branding and IR are still necessary.

One of the early and few IR scholars to reflect over the role of nation branding in international politics, Van Ham (2001, 2002, 2008) argues that having a strong brand is essential not only in attracting foreign direct investment, recruiting people but also for wielding political influence. He criticizes scholars who reject the importance of thinking



about images and reputations of nations and argues that ignoring it oversimplifies a complicated geostrategic process. Further analysis leads him to draw connections between branding and constructivist IR scholarships, since images are related to constructivists' interest in the differences among states, how and why states behave differently towards others, and both focus their attention on ideas, reputation, and reflectivity.

The studies of images in international relations are especially important when analyzing the case of Brazil because they are also often discussed concerning the idea of soft power, which is strongly related to how the country is perceived internationally (Anholt, 2007). While the concept of soft power and its application has often been contested, the ability to get another country to do what one wants without the use of economic or military power (Nye, 2004), is described as the main means through which Brazil has pursued international recognition as a significant player (Mares and Trinkunas, 2016). Thinking that Brazil has been trying to present itself as a global power without hard power (Chatin, 2013), it is crucial to analyze what are the perceived images of Brazil to understand how they relate to the ambition of the country to be recognized as an important player in the world politics.

This paper attempts to do that by analyzing global surveys about how Brazil is seen in the rest of the world. The results seem to confirm the idea that the rest of the world knows Brazil well, which is relevant, but the detailed analysis of the pictured of Brazil in other countries appear to show that the images are not of a country with a lot of soft power, but of a “decorative” country, a nation that is not that is associated only with stereotypes that seem to confirm the old repeated idea that Brazil is not a serious nation –which in turn could hinder the aspirations of Brazil in the world.

### **Understanding images through surveys**

The object of this paper is the international images of Brazil according to ten different nation branding surveys and studies, in order to construct a general portrait of the external perceptions of the country and to evaluate them in comparison to the objectives of the Brazilian foreign policy in order to reveal possible gaps between what the general public in the world thinks about Brazil and the foreign policy agenda of the country.

Buchanan and Cantril (1953) were early defenders of the use of surveys to measure foreign perceptions of nations. By asking questions and treating the results statistically, they argued, one can achieve a sort of composite “map” for a country’s images. Go and Govers

(2011) defend the indexing of nation images as a vital tool for measuring external and internal perceptions. An index, they argue, is a useful and impartial guide for stakeholders. Reibstein (2016) claims survey research can provide valuable feedback to nations about how they are perceived globally, because the rankings reflect how a large sample of residents and stakeholders worldwide subjectively see a given country, regardless of whether or not the perceptions are accurate.

Based on their relevance and international impact, this paper selected ten of the most cited surveys and studies about images in academic works of nation branding and in the media --both in Brazil and in English speaking countries to develop a more detailed compilation about the different descriptions of Brazil in these reputable branding studies (Go and Govers, 2011; Mariutti and Tench, 2016, 2015; Martin and Eroglu, 1993). From the references in this literature about studies of images, this paper compiled the data from the following surveys: Nation Brands Index; Country RepTrak; Country Brand Report (Latin America); Country Brand Index; The Soft Power Survey of Monocle Magazine; Soft Power 30; Best Countries; JWT Personality Atlas; Brasil aos Olhos do Mundo (Brazil in the eyes of the world), by CNT/Sensus; the Good Country index.

The paper engages in a qualitative analysis of the information published by the surveys. All the data available from the most recent of those studies were compiled to form the dataset of this analysis. Private communication and marketing companies conduct most of these surveys about international images, so not all of the data is publicly available. However, a lot of these data are published both as annual reports and as media articles, including interviews with some of the coordinators of those surveys. The first step of the analysis was to find all the publicly available secondary data from each of those studies.

With the dataset formed, the first part of the analysis was to understand the different methodologies used by these studies, as well as finding out how Brazil appeared in each of the rankings and analysis published. This information was compiled in a table so that it would be possible to visualize the differences and similarities between them (Table 1). After that, the study developed a search for all the mentions to Brazil in the full dataset, finding all of the specific analyses and descriptions these surveys published about the country. This part of the investigation focused on how the portrayal of the country in the survey reports compared to one another, helping to grasp the general perceptions of Brazil in the world.

The study conducted a discourse analysis, using a qualitative approach to the data. This process engages in characteristics of the text, description of topics, consistency, and

connection of words aiming at typifying media representations and thus can be more helpful in identifying reasons and modes for changes in the projection of Brazil (Barker et al., 2001; Neuendorf, 2016). Woods (2014) defines discourse as language plus context and argues that language is a social practice that shapes how people think about and constructs the world.

The data analyzed here was compiled in the summer of 2018, so most of the data available was related to surveys developed until 2017, which can be influenced by the political and economic instabilities in the country, with the images being impacted by the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff –although not yet any effects from the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018. Buarque (2017) showed that different surveys registered the impact of those crises, with the country falling in most of the rankings analyzed for this paper. Still, looking at the description of Brazil in earlier of the same survey reports on branding, it is easy to see that the depictions of Brazil are often similar to the ones found in the data analyzed in this paper. Even if the classification of Brazil in the rankings changed, most of the discourse used to describe Brazil holds historically for a more extended period. Thus, the analysis adopted a historical perspective without trying to engage directly with some of the domestic political developments in the country since 2016, with the impeachment of Rousseff and an attempt to change some of the foreign relations interests of the country under Jair Bolsonaro, elected in 2018. The paper aims to focus on the gaps between the images of the country in those surveys and the long history of the country attempting to increase its international prestige.

One of the main analytical contributions of this paper is to evaluate and compare these different descriptions of Brazil in the surveys to show that they align with the traditional description of Brazil as a country that is not serious. The following section details the different portrayals of the country in the surveys and discusses the gaps between this international perception and the historical aspirations of the Brazilian foreign policy.

### **Pictures of a decorative country**

Brazil wants to project itself internationally as a significant nation in global politics and has the ambition of being recognized as a Great Power. Although it has one of the most respected diplomatic bodies and one of the ten biggest economies in the world, with real capabilities of international leadership most of this ambition of prestige has been pursued

through the use of soft power (Mares and Trinkunas, 2016; Ricupero, 2017; Stolte, 2015). The general perceptions about Brazil in the rest of the world, however, are not of a strong country. Brazil is associated throughout the globe with stereotypes related to the idea of frivolity. The country is seen as “decorative,” a great place to travel for tourism, for beaches and parties, not as a leader in global politics and economics. In short, surveys conducted in dozens of countries confirm a very popular adage about Brazil, that it is not a serious country –at least it is not perceived as one.

This section will present the analysis of secondary data from ten of those statistical measures, each with a different methodology, but all confirming the same perception. Brazil is associated with soft attributes and not linked to any idea of seriousness. In the case of Brazil, all of the ten surveys present a similar portrait of the country, confirming the repeated idea that it is a frivolous country, always linked to parties, carnival, beaches, tourism and hedonism, and rarely positively connected to anything related to work, to power, to business and economics. Whenever the surveys separate different categories in which the image is evaluated, Brazil fares well among the “soft” attributes of a hedonist country and is negatively perceived in “harder” characteristics.

As discussed above, it is natural to assume that these studies are not a complete picture of what is thought about the country by everyone in the entire planet, but the fact is that these are some of the most respected and debated researches considering the international perceptions about nations, thus, they do offer an interesting insights into what are the general images of these countries, which are relevant for global relations analysis. As much as many of the criticism about the study of images may be justified and that the use of these surveys to project a discussion about nations as brands may have its problems, the fact is that images of countries are important for international relations, and that surveying is a legitimate method to uncover external perceptions of nations (Anholt, 2007; Buchanan and Cantril, 1953; Jeanneney, 2000a, 2000b; Jervis, 2017, 1970; Van Ham, 2008).

Thus the gaps between the ambition for greatness and the perceptions of a country that is not serious may become a limitation for the international projection of the country. So much so that the literature on Brazilian foreign policy also offers some fascinating insights about the perceptions of Brazil in other countries and how the country is often not taken seriously even by the elites and politicians in other countries. Spektor (2009) describes a study conducted by the US government in the 1970s, which has shown that the Americans did not know much about Brazil and thought it was not relevant. According to Stuenkel and

Taylor (2015), Washington policymakers often seem to consider Brazil an interloper in world affairs, a nation that does not quite measure up to the status and power it has achieved and whose foreign policy judgments are often uninformed and misguided –a nation that is not serious. Washington officials often ridicule Brazil's foreign policy stances as “quixotic and naïve” (Stuenkel and Taylor, 2015, p. 2).

The table below goes further in understanding these images. It shows the general perceptions about Brazil in the ten studies compiled for this paper, briefly explaining their methodologies and how they describe the country. Evaluated in general, these results are especially relevant given that images and soft power are the primary basis on which Brazil has built its case for a stronger role in international politics, and even its candidacy for a permanent seat at the Security Council of the United Nations, as well as its attempt to become recognized as a powerful player in global politics. Although the country is generally well perceived, its images are not linked to serious attributes and are only associated with stereotypes of fun and games, as it will be hard to achieve anything in the global arena when it is seen merely as a good place for parties.

**Table 1**

<b>Survey</b>	<b>Images of Brazil</b>
<p><b>Anholt/GFK Nation Brands Index (GFK)</b></p> <p>Measures images of 50 nations through a survey of 20,000 interviewees</p> <p>Uses six "channels": Tourism; Brands; Policy; Investment; Culture; People.</p>	<p>Brazil is the 25<sup>th</sup> country in the Ranking of 50 nations (2017).</p> <p>It is well evaluated for its “Culture” (10<sup>th</sup> place in the category) but not in “Policy” (33<sup>rd</sup> place in the category).</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> “Decorative, but not really useful.”</p> <p>"Attractive but not taken very seriously by general populations."</p> <p>"Everyone loves Brazil, but the country needs more respect."</p> <p>"Brazil has this stereotyped image of a country of parties."</p> <p>"Beautiful men and women, wonderful weather. Nobody works, it's a poor and unequal economy, but it's fun, there's football, carnival, and samba. Chaos and corruption".</p>
<p><b>Country RepTrak (Reputation Institute)</b></p> <p>Assesses the images of 55 countries based on</p>	<p>Brazil appears in 31<sup>st</sup> place in the ranking of 55 nations (2017)</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> “Traditionally, Brazil scores better on emotional dimensions such as the beauty and friendliness of the</p>

<p>interviews with 39,000 people in G8 countries.</p>	<p>population, losing ground on more technical issues such as skilled labor, education, government effectiveness, and security.”</p>
<p><b>Country Brand Report (FutureBrand)</b></p> <p>Compiles quantitative and qualitative data from 2,500 opinion leaders and frequent international business or leisure travelers across 15 countries.</p>	<p>Brazil ranks in 43rd place out of 118 nations globally (2014-5)</p> <p>Brazil is listed in 2nd place in a separate survey focused only in Latin America (2017)</p> <p>The country has weak perceptions in attributes like “Standard of living,” “Safety” and “Value for money”</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country::</b> The whole region’s "key strengths are a natural beauty, range of attractions, holidays and historical points of interest, while its key weaknesses are political freedom, health &amp; education, the standard of living, advanced technology and good infrastructure."</p>
<p><b>Soft Power 30 (Portland)</b></p> <p>Combines data and international polling 10,000 interviewees in 25 different nations.</p>	<p>Brazil appears in 29th place out of 30 countries (2017)</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country::</b> "Political problems, impeachment, instability, economic turmoil, and corruption scandals take its toll on the projection of power of the country"</p> <p>"Perform moderately well in the Culture sub-index"</p> <p>"Brings diverse cultures to the world. Football, arts, food festivals, Carnival and beyond."</p>
<p><b>Best Countries (US News &amp; World Report, BAV Consulting and WPP)</b></p> <p>Analyses perceptions about 80 countries from the perspective of 21,000 survey respondents in 36 countries.</p>	<p>Brazil ranks in 29th place out of 80 countries (2017)</p> <p>It appears as 63rd best in “Open for Business,” 58th in “Quality of Life,” 38th in “Entrepreneurship,” 1st place in “Adventure,” 8th in “Cultural Influence”</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> “Giant,” a “melting pot” of cultures, where people love football (and volleyball), but which is in constant political and economic turmoil, in part because of corruption.</p> <p>Mentions the Amazon, Carnival, and argues that Brazil is "ranked number 1 as a fun and sexy place."</p>
<p><b>Soft Power Survey (Monocle Magazine/Institute for Government)</b></p> <p>Assesses countries’ soft power based on official data in five categories: Business/Innovation, Culture, Government Diplomacy, and Education</p>	<p>Brazil ranks in 25th out of 25 countries (2017/2018)</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> “Amid the political crisis, crime has increased. Thus it is difficult to promote the brand of a country built on happiness and hedonism”</p>



<p><b>Personality Atlas (JWT)</b></p> <p>Survey of 6,075 adults in 27 different countries</p>	<p>Brazil appears in 14th place out of 27 countries (2012)</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> Part of the continent called "Funland"</p> <p>"Charismatic, fun, humorous and passionate"</p> <p>It is not included in a group of countries associated with a hardworking and orderly ethos.</p>
<p><b>Brazil in the eyes of the world (CNT/Sensus)</b></p> <p>Survey with 7.200 interviewees in 18 countries</p>	<p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> "Brazil continues to be known much more because of its cultural richness and sports prowess than because of its economic dynamism and political influence."</p> <p>A beautiful country with hedonist people.</p> <p>Brazilians are "happy," "party-goers," "popular," "good at football," and "good neighbors."</p>
<p><b>Good Country Index (The Good Country)</b></p> <p>Ranks 163 nations based on 35 databanks from the United Nations to consider the "good" they do for the world.</p>	<p>Brazil ranks in 80th place out of 163 nations (2017)</p> <p>It is the number 162 in Prosperity and Equality, 109 in Science and Technology, 61 in Peace and Security, 50 in World Order, 53 in Planet and Climate</p> <p>Ranks in 119th in Culture, 40th in Health and Wellbeing.</p> <p><b>Descriptions of the country:</b> "Brazil could contribute much more to the world, be more open and have more international cooperation."</p>

### 'Le Brésil n'est pas un pays sérieux'

The description of Brazil as a country that is not serious has entered Brazilian political folklore as a kind of permanent slogan, and it has hurt Brazilians' self-images and Brazil's aspirations to play a role in the world stage (Rohter, 2012). "If there is one thing Brazil wants above all else in its relations with the rest of the world, it is to be taken destined for greatness, and they crave the respect of others, which they interpret as confirmation of their own belief in Brazil's greatness" (Rohter, 2012, p. 275). The phrase "Brazil is not a serious country" is considered one of the founding acts of the international images of Brazil (Blay, 2017), the most long-standing anecdote of the Brazilian foreign relations (Lessa, 2003), something that has traditionally been discussed by Brazilians themselves (Montero, 2013).

The phrase is often mistakenly attributed to the former French President Charles de Gaulle, and mentioned in French – "Le Brésil n'est pas un pays sérieux." Its origins are marked by controversies, however. Some versions argue that De Gaulle said the phrase

during a visit to Brazil in the 1960s. The most reliable version is that the sentence was, in fact, first used by the former Brazilian ambassador to France Carlos Alves de Souza (Blay, 2017; Gravina, 2017; Rohter, 2012; Souza, 1979). The case is explained by Souza in his autobiography, arguing that the lack of connection between the government and the Brazilian embassies showed disorganization typical of a country without seriousness. He blames the Brazilian correspondent in Paris for *Jornal do Brasil*, Luiz Edgar de Andrade, for spreading the phrase and its attribution to De Gaulle (Souza, 1979). Andrade, however, always denied his part in popularizing the phrase (Edgar, 2016). The first mention of "Brazil is not a serious country" in Portuguese or French in the archives of *Jornal do Brasil* appears already denying that De Gaulle was responsible for saying that ("Campos adverte mercado comum para se afastar da política irrealista," 1964).

Whether or not the French President said it, the popularity of the phrase shows the importance that Brazil gives to the question of the international images and its external perceptions. There are more than a dozen articles, chapters, and books aimed at understanding the origin of the phrase, or its importance to the country. So much so that the phrase continues to be repeated to this day (Blay, 2017; Gravina, 2017; Lessa, 2003). This famous description of Brazil also reflects what many Brazilians think about their nation. Duque (2016) argues that Brazil sees itself as a democracy dominated by corruption, which is not a serious country but aspires to global greatness. According to Blay (2017), Brazilians do agree that the country is not serious, and thus they end up projecting this idea in the rest of the world.

The idea of this lack of seriousness in the character of Brazil is also in line with the results of the research on perceptions about Brazil among the general population in other countries of the world. According to these global studies, the world perceives Brazil as a decorative, but not precisely useful nation (Buarque, 2009). The images of Brazil are often linked to light attributes --such as beaches, football, and parties. "Everyone loves Brazil, but the country needs more respect," as Anholt explains (Buarque, 2010). There is an ambivalence in the way Brazilians see themselves and project their country, through which the nation wants to be admired and respected, wants to be "cool," but at the same time has to deal with the adverse effects of being seen as "decorative." "The image of Brazil as the land of soccer and samba, of beaches and beauties in bikinis, and only that, both irks and embarrasses them" (Rohter, 2012, p. 275).

## The role of being a fun nation

The idea that the rest of the world does not perceive Brazil as a serious country, but just as a fun nation, is evident in the results of most large global surveys conducted that counterweight countries' images. Studies like the Nation Brands Index (NBI) and the Personality Atlas, for example, describe the perceptions of Brazil as a "decorative" nation, while separating it from groups of countries that the world sees as more serious.

Created in 2005, the NBI is widely recognized as the most high profile existing measure of images with a nation branding approach (Niesing, 2013). It serves as a relevant tool for assessing the brand Brazil has in the world and helped shaping the knowledge of nation branding (Feinberg and Zhao, 2011; Mariutti and Tench, 2016; Mariutti and Giraldi, 2012). The NBI allows us to see that public opinion classifies countries into two types, one is fun and decorative, but not very serious, while the other is efficient, competent, but not very amusing. Germany and Switzerland are in the second group, while Italy and Brazil are in the first group. This led to the description of the international images of Brazil as of a country that "is decorative, but not really useful", meaning that it is seen as an excellent destination for tourism and parties, but does not have a lot of credibility in terms of trade and foreign policy (Buarque, 2013b; Guimarães, 2016). According to the NBI, the world sees Brazil as a country of parties, one of "beautiful men and women, wonderful weather. Nobody works, it's a poor and unequal economy, but it's fun, there's football, carnival, and samba — chaos and corruption" (Guimarães, 2016).

This separation into different groups of countries, listing Brazil among the ones that are not serious, appears repeated in the Personality Atlas, a comprehensive map of the world organized by the predominant personality trait of each country, both as perceived by outsiders and internally by its people. Based on the data collected, the maps move the states from their real-life locations so that they border other countries with similar personality traits (Irving, 2017). The recreation of the world map includes Brazil as part of a fictional continent called "Funland," meaning it is a country about fun, good humor, along with other nations such as Italy and Spain --countries perceived as charismatic, fun, humorous and passionate. The observed characteristics of these nations contrast to continents like "Uniformany", for countries associated with a hardworking and orderly ethos (Germany, Hong Kong, and Japan), "Geniustan," with countries perceived as smart (China) (*Personality Atlas: The World Map Redrawn*, 2012). With the creation of categories of countries according to the perception held by the rest of the world, these two indexes reinforce the idea that

Brazil is not seen as serious, and that other nations perceive the country as a great place for parties, but not for business or political negotiations.

The reputation of the frivolity of Brazil is also clearly captured by the Best Countries index, which ranks nations on public perceptions of their characteristics (Gerzema and Reibstein, 2016). The opinions described at the Best Countries show that Brazil is well regarded as a country for tourism and adventure, but does not fare well in terms of business and citizenship, and does not have real power --in sum, again, a good place for parties, but not a serious country. Brazil is well perceived in terms of Cultural influence, in which it is 8th in the category that favors countries that are synonymous with food, fashion, and easy living ("Best Countries - Brazil," 2018). At the same time, Brazil appears as number 29 in a ranking of the most powerful nations in the world. This shows that although the country has some soft power, the lack of hard power makes it not being considered powerful at all.

This perception of Brazil as a place for fun, not for serious business is repeated in the Country RepTrak, in which Brazil traditionally scores better on emotional dimensions such as the beauty and friendliness of the population, losing ground on more technical issues such as skilled labor, education, government effectiveness, and security (Lins, 2017; Mariutti and Tench, 2016). While not the best place for business or politics, Brazil is a global synonym to coffee, football, meat, music, carnival, gastronomy, samba, and Havaianas, according to another survey that measures the international images of countries, the FutureBrand Country Brand Report (Latin America). This index is a specific and detailed report of perceptions about Latin America. The Country Brand Index 2014-2015 Survey places Brazil in 43rd in general and argues that it has a weaker than average impression overall against both status and experience dimensions. Brazil has more vulnerable perceptions of attributes like "Standard of living," "Safety," and "Value for money." And Latin America continues to suffer from relatively weak perceptions in important areas like "Quality Of Life" and "Value System." The Country Brand Index classifies all of Latin America as "decorative." It describes the region's key strengths as natural beauty, range of attractions, holidays, and historical points of interest, while its key weaknesses are political freedom, health & education, the standard of living, technology, and infrastructure (*Country Brand Index 2014-2015*, 2014).

The decorative image of a country that is not serious is reinforced even by a study developed by Brazilian survey institutes. "O Brasil aos Olhos do Mundo" (Brazil in the eyes of the world) was commissioned by the Brazilian magazine *Veja* and tried to understand the

perceptions the rest of the world had about the country. One of the first things the survey shows is that the central stereotypes about Brazil in 2012 were carnival, beaches, and football. Ideas like poverty, the amazon forest, and economic development were mentioned, but never by more than 5% of interviewees. In the same line of thought, Brazilians were described as “happy,” “party-goers,” “popular,” “good at football,” and “good neighbors.” Brazil is described as a beautiful country with hedonist people. Confirming the idea that it is a “decorative image,” however, people want to visit, but not to live in the country. (Diniz and Coura, 2012).

After analyzing a series of studies about the international perception of nations based on surveys, it is essential also to consider researches that use a different methodology. Two of those focuses specifically on the idea of soft power as defined by Nye (2004), which is also crucial for Brazil, since it is supposed to be one of the strengths of Brazil in international politics, one of the means the country has been trying to use to achieve a better reputation and recognition in global affairs (Chatin, 2016, 2013; Mares and Trinkunas, 2016; Stolte, 2015).

The ranking Soft Power 30 places Brazil in 29th place, second to last, in the full list of 30 countries with more soft power in the world (McClory, 2017). Political problems, impeachment, instability, economic turmoil, and corruption scandals take its toll on the projection of power of the country. The soft aspects of the images of the country, however, continue to have a positive evaluation in the world with the appeal of carnival, football, and a beach lifestyle. The Soft Power 30 index combines objective data and surveys to gauge the appeal of countries’ soft power assets. According to the report, Brazil brings diverse cultures to the world. The report mentions football, arts, food festivals, and carnival, arguing that the country has an abundant culture (McClory, 2017).

With a similar approach, the Soft Power Survey developed by a partnership of Monocle Magazine and the think tank Institute for Government, also focuses on problems of Brazil when analyzing its place in the ranking. According to the study published in early 2018, Brazil was once a soft power star but appeared in the last position of the classification (25th place). The report argues that the country has not taken advantage of tourism's potential to host the Olympics, and amid the political crises, crime has increased in the country, which also stains the images and affects its soft power. The study based its methodology on the work of Nye (2004), focusing on what it calls the three primary

resources that generate soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policy, and developing a framework that assesses countries' soft power.

These two perspectives to the images of Brazil with a focus on soft power show how the perceptions of lack of seriousness could become a problem for the country while it tries to improve its global prestige. They are relevant since they deal more closely with concepts related to international relations and not only to nation branding. The negative lens through which serious aspects of the country, such as politics and economics, are seen make it clear that having positive images as a country of parties can become a limitation and hinder the rise of Brazil.

Apart from all the different methodologies to measure the foreign perceptions of a country like Brazil, another evaluation of the international standing of the nation that helps to show how Brazil stands in an international point of view and what is its global importance and soft power is the Good Country Index. This study ranks 163 nations based on the "good" they do for the world (Mariutti and Tench, 2016; Subramanian, 2017). It is a different approach to images and soft power, that evaluates what each country contributes to the common good of humanity (Anholt, 2017). Brazil ranks in 80th place in the list published in 2017. The evaluation points to the inferior performance of the country in categories such as Prosperity and Equality, Science and Technology, and Peace and Security. The study uses a wide range of data from the U.N. and other international organizations and indicates whether each country is a net creditor to humanity, a burden on the planet, or something in between. Although the GCI is not officially a measure of international perception, one of the directors of the analysis argues that there's nearly an 80% correlation between the breakdown of what a country does for the planet and its international reputation (Buarque, 2017d).

All of the ten studies analyzed in this section demonstrate that although Brazil might have positive images of a fun nation, it is not a perception that would help the country achieve the international ambitions it fosters. The country is not positively regarded in the "serious matters," and thus could have a harder time convincing the world to accept it as a powerful voice in global affairs. Although images are not on the center of international relations theory, this paper has argued that it matters for global relations and thus can influence the role Brazil plays in the world.



## **The meaning of being a 'serious country'**

The pictures drawn from the international surveys match the famous phrase often repeated about the lack of seriousness of Brazil. However, the literature on international relations and nation branding does not offer a clear definition of what a "serious country" is. The idea is not only related to Brazil, and it is often used in the media even to discuss crises in powerful countries, such as the UK under the debate about Brexit (Luyendijk, 2017) and the changes in the US foreign policy under Donald Trump (Manning, 2017). Still, there is not a consensus on what this seriousness means.

Considering the case of Brazil, a lot of the idea of the country not being serious can be grasped from studying the sociology and identity of the nation. As Duque (2016) discussed in her analysis of the self-identification of Brazilians, the perception that Brazil is not severe is part of the self-images of the country. Barbosa (2006) describes how this idea of lack of seriousness enters the Brazilian national identifications as part of the famous "jeitinho brasileiro" --the Brazilian way to deal with problems, state bureaucracy, and even the law. Her sociological analysis argues that "jeitinho" is a mechanism that transforms individuals into people, leaning on a discourse of equality between human beings and their ability to put themselves in the place of others. The "jeitinho" is understood as part of the national identifications and has ambiguous interpretations, being thought of at the same time as something positive and something negative --just as the external perception of being a country of parties can be great for attracting international sympathy and making Brazil the "coolest" nation, but at the same time makes it be seen as not serious. This internal identification can be extrapolated to a foreign perception since images and stereotypes are often drawn from national identities.

Evaluating the aspirations of Brazil in the global stage, Lebow (2016) argues that the rest of the world does not perceive the country as one that is ready to accept the duty of upholding the international order, which seems to fit within the concept developed from Barbosa (2006) and might serve as one explanation for the meaning of seriousness. Brazil is not serious because its people allow friendship to have more value than law enforcement, Barbosa (2006) continues, because all parameters of individualist ideology, embodied in an equal treatment of all before the law, are permanently leaked in the social practice of various domains of Brazilian society by a relational perspective, which transforms the public in private.

Building on Barbosa (2006) and the sociological analysis of the "jeitinho brasileiro", as well as on the political perspective adopted by Lebow (2016) this paper proposes that a "serious country" could refer to a nation which upholds a Western view of modernity and individualism, a system in which the rule of law is above personalities. It can be thought of as a Western construct, to which peripheral less developed countries (like Brazil) can have a hard time to adapt because of their own cultures, identities, and traditions. This definition is especially relevant when considering that international stereotypes say a lot, not only about the country that is being described but also about the one thinking about it. Frank (2000) reflects the role of stereotypes in the formation of one's sense of identity, which seems to work in the case of Brazil's reputation. When other --more developed and prosperous-- nations say that Brazil is not serious, they are putting forward their own self-images as a serious nation --a superior identity, one could argue.

As Jiménez-Martínez (2017) argues, the foreign perception is not neutral. Building on the analysis of images of nations in the international media and on the work of Foucault, Kantola (2010) explains that external images work like disciplinary imperatives for countries and that the international assessment and indexes can be understood in terms of power, classifying and ordering states and creating hierarchies. When global surveys show that the general public in the world sees Brazil as only a country of parties and fun, they set it apart from the countries that are truly consequential, and thus seriously prepared to hold power in international relations.

The influence of this definition of a "serious country" is evident in the ways political and economic instabilities have hindered Brazil's attempts to project itself on the global stage in the past. While on the one hand, it weakens the country's bid for more international recognition (Mares and Trinkunas, 2016), it also exposes negative images of Brazil in the areas that are often linked to severe matters. Likewise, ruptures in Brazil's rules system throughout its republican life (from 1889 to 2018), for example, reinforce this. A series of coups and impeachments of elected leaders have reinforced the perception of lack of the rule of law in Brazilian politics.

At the same time, it is interesting to notice that in the end of the first decade of the Twenty-First Century, when the Brazilian economy was booming, and there was an apparent increase in the global status of the country, it was in part driven by political and economic stability while the country appeared to abide by the Washington Consensus (Buarque, 2013b). Although this would change when the country faced political crises and

its worst recession in history, which downgraded its “brand,” for some time, the country was perceived as a possible success (Buarque, 2017). At that time, though, Brazil achieved more recognition and international prestige and became seen by many as “serious at last” (Montero, 2013).

The difficulties in following this Western model leads to the perception that countries like Brazil are less serious. In the case of Brazil, it is showed by “jeitinho,” a tradition that applies a Brazilian personality treatment to the individualism of modernity. On the one hand, it makes the country the “coolest” nation, and an excellent place for tourism and parties; on the other hand, it makes it harder for the state to achieve more prestige in international relations. This concept of what it means to be a “serious country” could also be interpreted as a means of the most powerful countries to keep other nations in line with its proposed model for the world, while not accepting the differences and singularities of other nations. This helps to keep the status quo and the structure behind it intact (Aronczyk, 2013; Fehimović and Ogden, 2018).

### **Images matter**

The analysis of secondary data from ten different studies about the foreign perceptions of Brazil clearly confirms that the external images of the country are aligned with the long-standing sentence that defines Brazil as a frivolous country, a nation that is well admired for its cultural, touristic and party side, but that is not very positively regarded as an important country for global politics and economics. In short, Brazil is not perceived as a serious nation.

Although this results show what general people in different parts of the world think about Brazil and not the perceptions held by elites such as politicians and diplomats, these results are particularly important when considering that images and soft power are the primary basis on which Brazil attempts to become a more prestigious country in international relations, including its candidacy to a place in the UNSC and its attempt to become recognized as a significant player in global politics. Instead of focusing on the real capabilities of the country when pursuing global prestige, Brazil has often focused more on gaining recognition through a positive international perception of the nation as an active player in global affairs through negotiation and conciliation (Mares and Trinkunas, 2016; Ricuperio, 2017; Stolte, 2015). Although the country is generally well perceived, and

although it has a professional and respected diplomatic corps, it has to understand that its images are still not of a serious nation. This matters when thinking that the “brand” of the country, its perceptions abroad, is relevant for international politics, especially when thinking through the framework of constructivist theories of (Kaneva, 2011; Van Ham, 2008, 2002, 2001). Connecting studies of nation branding to international relations theory show that even if a country like Brazil has a desired “cool” image and a positive perception in other parts of the world, the stereotypes the other nations have about it can influence its place in global politics and make it harder to achieve anything in the global arena when it is seen just as an excellent place for parties.

As discussed above, while it may be true that perhaps the general images of a country do not directly influence actual policy debates globally, and although international relations tradition seems to ignore images surveys, by using a constructivist approach it is possible to see that the literature on perceptions and misperceptions in international politics shows that it is vital to understand how nations think about one another (Anholt, 2007; Frank, 2000; Jeanneney, 2000b; Jervis, 2017, 1970; Lebow, 2016, 2008; Moscovici, 2000).

This paper shows that there seems to be a contrast between the general perceptions populations across the globe hold about Brazil and the role the country plays internationally, and thus its prestige. This paper analyzed these perceptions to expose these differences and to create a starting point to discuss the relations between international images and foreign policy. Although there are pieces of evidence in the literature about images being a source of problems in international negotiations of Brazil (Spektor, 2009; Stuenkel and Taylor, 2015), it is still not possible to measure the connections between them. This paper does not offer a definitive conclusion on what possible effects are there from such contrasts, but it was essential to gather all the possible information about what are the images of the country to use it in comparison to what is the country’s standing in the world. Even if it does not show clear impacts of images hindering Brazil’s attempt to have a robust international role, this initial analysis of the general international perceptions about Brazil according to different global surveys show that the gap between images and ambition exists. These results suggest that it might be essential to develop further research into the importance of perceptions for international relations in the case of Brazil. More studies could try to understand how much these kinds of images hinder or helps the foreign policy agenda of a country like Brazil. It would also be interesting to understand, for example, if a country that is not perceived as serious can become a permanent member of the UN Security

Council, as Brazil wants to do. Further studies should develop a closer relationship between nation branding surveys and more traditional IR scholarship, in order to understand the real importance of images for international politics.

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