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Brazil's poverty rate at lowest level in 25 years, survey shows

The Associated Press

Published: September 22, 2006

RIO DE JANEIRO Poverty in Brazil has dropped to its lowest level in 25 years under President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's administration, boosting the president's popularity in the country's poorest sectors, according to a study released Friday.

The Getulio Vargas Foundation survey showed that under Silva the number of poor Brazilians dropped to about 42 million — or about 22.7 percent of the country's 185 million people.

The rate was 28.1 percent in 2003, when Silva took office.

The poverty rate is at the lowest level in 25 years, when the foundation began measuring it, said Marcelo Neri, head of the foundation's Center for Social Policy Studies.

The survey also showed that the

number of Brazilians considered to be living in extreme poverty — or those earning less than US\$1 (€0.78) per day — dropped by 19.2 percent between 2003 and 2005. That translates to about 10 million people.

"The poor were the ones who made out best, because their income grew at an annual rate of 8.4 percent, almost double the 3.7 percent of the rich," Neri said.

He said the change can almost entirely be attributed to the Bolsa Familia program which provides monthly subsidies to Brazil's poorest families in exchange for a commitment to send their children to school or risk losing the benefits.

"Bolsa Familia is the big rising star of the fight against poverty," Neri said.

The program, a hallmark of Silva's administration, has also been an important factor in his continued popularity.

Polls show that Silva seems likely to be re-elected in the first round of the Oct. 1 presidential election, despite a wave of corruption scandals that have tarnished his administration but have so far failed to implicate him personally.

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