

Tribe near Brazil's biggest city fights to hold on

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The Jaragua reservation, just 12 miles (20 km) from the Brazilian mega city of Sao Paulo, easily passes under the radar

Located next to Sao Paulo, one of the world's biggest cities, the Guarani-Mbya tribe's reservation here was always easy to miss. Under a new law, it risks disappearing almost altogether.

"People think there aren't any Indians in Sao Paulo," says Antonio Awa, a tribal leader from the related Tupi-Guarani, with a smile.

The Jaragua reservation, just 12 miles (20 km) from the Brazilian mega [city](#), easily passes under the radar. The territory of 1,312 acres (532 hectares), which was agreed to in 2015, doesn't amount to much in this vast country.

Last month, however, President Michel Temer tore up the agreement, meaning that the 720 tribespeople will be left with one little corner that had been set aside in 1987—just 4.2 acres (1.7 hectares). Only one village of the current five would remain.

"The whites don't understand our connection to the land because they don't live in the forest," said Tupa Mirim, one of Jaragua's embattled inhabitants.

The village due to remain, Ytu, is in relatively good shape. In other villages, the native people live in basic conditions, the children barefoot, the houses rudimentary and toilets shared.

In Ytu, there's running water in houses built by the state in the 1990s. There's also the one health center and school for the [tribe](#), where children learn their maternal Guarani until eight and then Portuguese.

But even here, there is a feeling that life is being squeezed out of the community.

Jurandir Karai Jekupe, 41, lost his infant daughter in June, when she was less than one. "The death certificate said it was because of a bacteria but no one explained to me what happened," he says, noting that infant mortality is a constant worry on the reservation.

At the health center, which is open eight hours a day, respiratory infections are a common complaint, a nurse, who asked not to be identified, said.

"The center's very small and not equipped to attend to the community in an adequate way," said Thiago Karai, 22.



Village councils in the Pico de Jaragua national reserve are discussing the issue of President Michel Temer's bid to shrink their territory

Blame the 'whites'

Jekupe, a school teacher, said most of the shrinking community's problems come from what the Guarani call "the whites"—the outside world.

That starts with the pollution and then the drought killing the local river Ribeirao de las Lavras. "We made a documentary about it but nothing changed," he says sadly.

The Guarani also describe a plague of stray dogs and cats that they say were abandoned by outsiders. "It's another problem brought by the whites," Jekupe said.

Even though charity workers have sterilized the strays there are 480 dogs and almost half that number of cats.

In these changing times, surrounded by pressures of a culture they don't want to be part of, the natives are discussing whether to remain part of a government anti-poverty program called the Bolsa Familia.

It helps, but "in our traditional way of life we don't need money for food," said another villager, Evandro Tupa. He said the money was creating dependency, a "bad habit," especially for children.

Now the village councils are discussing the issue of Temer's bid to shrink their territory.

Since this is a dispute resonating across Brazil's indigenous lands, they hope to resist.

"Temer is not master of the land. If we unite, Temer won't know what to do," said Elizeu Lopes at a protest attended by tribal leaders.

"We were afraid at first, but we're not going to take it lying down. We've been fighting for more than 500 years," since colonization, said another, Tupa Mirim, 19.

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