

# Current Relevance and Expansion of Marijuana Attention Cycles in Brazil

Brandão, M. D., & Fraga, P. (2024). Current Relevance and Expansion of Marijuana Attention Cycles in Brazil. *Revista Cultura y Droga*, 29(38), 71-89. <https://doi.org/10.17151/culdr.2024.29.38.4>

Marcílio Dantas Brandão\*  
Paulo César Pontes Fraga\*\*


Recibido: 18 de noviembre de 2023  
Aprobado: 22 de abril de 2024

## Abstract

This study revisits the ongoing debate on marijuana in Brazil, drawing from a literature review inspired by Hutchinson (1975), who identified three cycles of attention to cannabis in the country. Expanding on this framework, Brandão (2014a, 20214b) proposed a fourth cycle, which he termed the anti-prohibitionist cycle. Our research builds upon this discussion by highlighting the hypothesis of simultaneous continuity, demonstrating how these four attention cycles coexist, overlap, and influence one another. The study focuses on the Brazilian context, covering a historical period from the arrival of Europeans to the present day. The research methodology is based on an extensive literature review and documentary analysis. Findings indicate that the different attention cycles share common features, are not mutually exclusive, and persist simultaneously in the same time and space. Moreover, we observe mutual influence among these cycles, as certain aspects intersect, converge, and enable coexistence. While there has been a recent resurgence of professional health-related arguments in shaping the discourse, our study concludes that no individual or collective actor holds absolute authority on the subject within the investigated context. Consequently, marijuana in Brazil remains a topic of multiple and ongoing controversies, shaped by overlapping attention cycles.

**Keywords:** Marijuana, Brazil, attention cycles, controversies.

\*Sociology PhD. Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco (Univasf), Juazeiro, Bahia, Brasil. E-mail: marcelio.brandao@univasf.edu.br  orcid.org/0000-0003-2978-4278 **Google Scholar**

\*\* Sociology PhD. Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, Brasil. E-mail: paulo.fraga@ufjf.edu.br  orcid.org/0000-0001-9140-8586 **Google Scholar**



## Actualidad y expansión de los ciclos de atención a la marihuana en Brasil

### Resumen

Este texto retoma un importante debate sobre la marihuana en Brasil a partir de una revisión de la literatura inspirada en Hutchinson (1975) quien identificó tres ciclos de atención al cannabis en Brasil. Ampliando este marco, Brandão (2014a, 2014b) propuso un cuarto ciclo, al que denominó ciclo antiprohibicionista. Regresamos a este debate enfatizando la hipótesis de continuidad simultánea y demostrando cómo estos cuatro ciclos de atención coexisten, se superponen y se influyen mutuamente. El estudio se centra en el contexto brasileño, abarcando un período histórico desde la llegada de los europeos hasta la actualidad. La metodología de investigación se basa en una extensa revisión bibliográfica y análisis documental. Los hallazgos indican que los diferentes ciclos de atención comparten características comunes, no son mutuamente excluyentes y persisten simultáneamente en el mismo tiempo y espacio. Además, observamos una influencia mutua entre estos ciclos, ya que ciertos aspectos se entrecruzan, convergen y facilitan la coexistencia. Si bien ha habido un resurgimiento reciente de los argumentos profesionales relacionados con la salud en la configuración del discurso, nuestro estudio concluye que ningún actor individual o colectivo tiene autoridad absoluta sobre el tema dentro del contexto investigado. En consecuencia, la marihuana en Brasil sigue siendo un tema de múltiples y continuas controversias, condicionado por la superposición de ciclos de atención.

**Palabras clave:** marihuana, Brasil, ciclos de atención, controversias.

### Introduction

Anthony Downs (1972) proposes that each public issue follows an issue-attention cycle, a process that provides analytical elements that could lead to its resolution. According to the cyclical analysis model developed by Downs, public concern over a given problem progresses through five successive phases: pre-problem stage (existence without discussion), alarm, search for solutions, decline in attention, and post-problem stage (limbo). This model is based on the assumption that public issues eventually reach a resolution. However, empirical analyses of enduring problems—such as environmental concerns, which initially motivated Downs' discussion—

demonstrate that some issues remain subject to ongoing controversy and persist indefinitely, never reaching the post-resolution limbo phase.

The historical debate surrounding marijuana in Brazil, as first examined by Hutchinson (1975), reflects this adaptive persistence, making it a compelling case for the application of issue-attention cycles to understand public concerns related to cannabis. This perspective has been considered in prior studies, such as Brandão (2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017 and 2019), Fraga and Campos (2020) and Brandão et al. (2024), which observed how marijuana regulation and transactions remain an ongoing issue in Brazil. These studies support the argument that rather than following a single cycle, multiple overlapping attention cycles coexist—a pattern that aligns with the broader theory of economic cycles in Brazilian history—.

As Clóvis Melo (1969) demonstrated, since the arrival of Europeans in what is now Brazil, the economy has followed cyclical patterns, in which one economic arrangement dominates a period without entirely displacing other preexisting activities. This framework, widely discussed in Brazilian primary education, categorizes economic history based on successive cycles associated with specific commodities—such as redwood, sugar, minerals, and coffee—. However, the emergence of a new economic cycle does not necessarily mean the complete disappearance of previous industries.

The temporal dimension is central to the theory of economic cycles, which, since Schumpeter (1939), has been graphically represented as a fluctuating wave rather than a strictly defined cycle. These fluctuations—described as boom, recession, depression, and recovery—suggest a continuum rather than discrete phases. The adaptive model we propose seeks to pluralize the notion of issue-attention cycles, offering a truly cyclical representation in which overlapping areas illustrate the coexistence of multiple cycles. Instead of assuming, as Downs (1972) does, that each problem follows a distinct and sequential cycle, we adopt a pluralist perspective, demonstrating how multiple cycles can coexist and interact within the same issue. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding marijuana policy in Brazil, as we will argue throughout this study.

The foundation for our analysis is Hutchinson's (1975) framework, which identifies three primary areas of interest structuring the different attention cycles surrounding marijuana in Brazil.

Harry William Hutchinson, a U.S. citizen, was active in Brazil at different times and in various roles. In the early 1940s, he was stationed in northeastern Brazil as a member of the United States Marine Corps. During this period, the president of the newly established National Commission for Narcotics Oversight (CNFE) reported that profits from illegal marijuana transactions had increased significantly due to the war and the temporary presence of foreigners from a “higher social class” who consumed the plant (Farias, 1943).

Later, as an anthropologist trained at Columbia University, Hutchinson studied race relations in Brazil, collaborating with Charles Wagley (Hutchinson, 1952). Subsequently, he became a professor at the School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo and later at the University of Bahia. In the early 1970s, Hutchinson was invited to participate in an international colloquium on marijuana and returned to Brazil to investigate its various uses. It was during this period that Hutchinson produced the seminal text (Hutchinson, 1975) that forms the basis of our study. Initially, he emphasized the exotic nature of the marijuana plant in Brazil and analyzed historical records of its presence since the arrival of Europeans. Through this analysis, he identified three key areas of interest associated with marijuana in Brazil: economic, medical, and law-and-order. Over time, new developments introduced additional perspectives, leading to the emergence of a fourth attention cycle, which is rooted in a libertarian ideology and has progressively been identified as the “anti-prohibitionist” cycle. In the following sections, rather than reiterating previous discussions presented in Brandão (2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017 and 2019), we will focus on outlining the main characteristics of these cycles, demonstrating how they overlap, evolve, and mutually influence one another in the Brazilian context.

## **The economic cycle**

The plant *Cannabis sativa* L., classified by Linnaeus in 1753, was already known to Portuguese colonizers at the onset of their presence in the New World (Orta, 1891[1563]). Introduced to Brazil during the early colonial period, some of its derivatives are believed to have arrived on the first European ships, whose sails and ropes were made of hemp fiber (Pinho, 1975; Robinson, 1996).

Between the 16th century and their expulsion in 1759, Jesuit missionaries cultivated cannabis in Brazil, for textile production (Levene, 1952; Miranda Neto, 2010; Mott, 1986; Wehling, 1979). Within their religious framework, this cultivation was

justified by what they deemed a necessity: clothing the Indigenous populations. However, their expulsion—part of a broader geopolitical strategy to consolidate Portuguese control over the territory—led to the Portuguese Crown taking over their economic enterprises (Sousa, 1789). Rather than ceasing production, the Portuguese authorities expanded cannabis cultivation, aiming to strengthen the colonial economy in a territory under dispute with Spain (Bento, 1992; Menz, 2005; Wehling, 1979). Reports of cultivation dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries in present-day Santa Catarina, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, and Pará are corroborated by Portuguese administrative records (Sousa, 1789) and more recent studies (Levene, 1952; Miranda Neto, 2010; Mott, 1986; Wehling, 1979).

According to Menz (2005), cultivating marijuana in Brazil was part of Portugal's strategy to reduce textile imports from Spain, France, and Russia. However, Wehling (1979) and Bento (1992) also argue that the initiative was a means to populate the colony and reinforce Portuguese dominance in South America. During this period, hemp fibers were among the most advanced raw materials in the textile industry (Herer, 1985; Pinho, 1975; Robinson, 1996). As part of these expansion efforts, incentives for cannabis cultivation were extended to regions such as São Paulo, where, as Fonseca (1994, p.16) describes:

[...] on the 4th of August, [when] the Vice-King sent a letter to the chief of the government requesting efforts to promote the cultivation of hemp [...] and] sent sixteen sacks with 39 bushels of seeds of this plant to the Port of Santos. (Fonseca, 1994, p. 16)

The economic relevance of cannabis began to decline following the rise of cotton as a dominant natural fiber in textile production. By the early 20th century, the introduction of synthetic fibers, particularly nylon, further contributed to the industry's decline. Nonetheless, during World War II, interest in hemp-based textiles briefly resurged (Evans, 1942). More recently, there has been a renewed economic interest in hemp due to its unique material properties, signaling a potential revival in specific industrial sectors.

### **The medical-scientific cycle**

The decline of marijuana in the textile industry due to the emergence of alternative plant fibers without psychoactive properties significantly reduced economic interest

in hemp by the 19th century. However, as reports from travelers indicate (von Tschudi, 1953 [1840]), the plant had already adapted to the Brazilian territory and its use had expanded beyond its economic applications. At the same time, Brazil experienced the rise of homeopathy in the early 19th century, a medical trend that strongly advocated for the therapeutic potential of marijuana. From this moment onward, a new attention cycle emerged, characterized by scientific debate and controversy over the plant's medical uses and risks to human health.

This medical-scientific cycle developed into two opposing perspectives: the pharmaceutical approach, which viewed cannabis as a potential therapeutic agent, and the pathologizing approach, which associated marijuana with degeneration, addiction, and disease. This divergence mirrored the broader conflict between homeopathy and allopathy, a dynamic extensively analyzed in the United States by Abbott (1988) and in Brazil by Luz (1996), and previously related to the topic of marijuana in Brandão (2023).

One of the most notable proponents of medical cannabis was Alexandre José de Mello Moraes, who recommended its use for treating cataracts, amaurosis, catarrh, gonorrhea, impotence, kidney pain, urinary retention, and spasms (Moraes, 1881). However, his personal history hindered his recognition within the medical field (Brandão, 2017, 2019 and 2023). Typically employing herbs in the treatments of his patients, this doctor was a great enthusiast of homeopathy and started advocating for this specialty in the medical sciences. Mello Moraes was elected president of the Homeopathic Institute of Brazil in 1851. He published a vast body of medical and historical literature, edited the journal *Médico do Povo* (The People's Doctor) (Nava, 2003), and disseminated the homeopathic teachings of Samuel Hahnemann, who, in the first comprehensive compendium on homeopathy, recorded 330 symptoms and effects of cannabis on the human body (Hahnemann, 1921 [1834], pp. 320-333).

Cannabis played a major role in homeopathic pharmacopeia and was widely used in early Brazilian medicine, a fact acknowledged by contemporary experts such as Carlini (2005). However, homeopathy faced intense criticism from allopathic practitioners. Determined to discredit homeopathy, allopaths—well-represented within the Imperial College of Medicine—launched a defamation campaign against the homeopathic field. In their efforts to undermine homeopathy, allopaths—duly represented in the Imperial College of Medicine—accused Benoît Mure, the French founder of the Homeopathic Institute of Brazil, of participating in a communist

conspiracy to overthrow the emperor. As a result, Mure was extradited to Europe in 1848, and homeopathy—despite attempts by figures such as Mello Moraes (elected the new president of the Homeopathic Institute)—failed to regain the state’s confidence. Consequently, homeopathic knowledge was excluded from medical jurisdiction for over a century, until its legal recognition in the 1970s (Luz, 1996).

Despite homeopathy’s historical importance, many Brazilian texts from the first half of the 20th century deliberately omit or reject these facts. Instead, they frame marijuana as a narcotic secretly imported from Africa by enslaved people. A key figure in shaping the negative medical discourse on marijuana was José Rodrigues da Costa Dória, who participated in the 2nd Pan-American Scientific Congress in Washington in 1915. During the event, he presented the paper “Marijuana Use: The Effects and Harm of the Addiction” (Dória, 1915), often cited as the first Brazilian study to analyze marijuana’s effects on human health. Dória portrayed marijuana smoking as a degenerative addiction, which he framed as a form of revenge by Black people against their “more advanced and civilized white brothers” (Dória, 1915, p. 16). His arguments aligned with the scientific racism of the time, as carefully analyzed by Schwarcz (1993), who demonstrated how the “white race” was then considered genetically superior.

To support his hypothesis of clandestine importation from Africa, Dória referenced botanical studies and synonyms for cannabis used in northeastern Brazil. Despite listing its popular medicinal uses, he failed to mention the legal importation of European cannabis-based medicines into Brazil before his study (Carlini, 2005). He also ignored homeopathic literature and dismissed any potential therapeutic benefits of cannabis for human health. Dória denied any commercial application of the plant in Brazil, arguing that its consumption was confined to the North, mainly among Black, Indigenous, and mestizo populations of lower social classes. According to him, those who consume the plant by smoking it or in infusions sought hallucinations, excitement, luck, well-being, and happiness, but in cases of abuse, the drug suppressed nervous functions. Among its supposed effects, he emphasized delirium, madness, aggression, and violence. He also claimed that marijuana addiction had severe criminal consequences.

Dória enjoyed significant scientific and political prestige, with state-backed support and recognition from major scientific authorities of his time. As a result, his anti-marijuana arguments were widely accepted, establishing the second pole of the

medical-scientific attention cycle in Brazil. His work heavily influenced national studies on marijuana, shaping scientific and political discourse for decades. The pathologization of cannabis use, originally framed within a racist and classist perspective, continues to inform public policy and social attitudes toward the plant in Brazil today.

### **The Law-and-order cycle**

The second pole of the medical-scientific attention cycle in Brazil extended beyond healthcare studies and practices, significantly influencing national legislation and drug policy. By the early 20th century, a judicial approach was introduced as a medical prescription for addressing marijuana use—namely, the prohibition of any transactions involving the plant or its derivatives within Brazilian territory—.

Research by Lucena (1934) and Carlini (2005) highlights Brazil's active participation in international conferences that shaped global prohibitionist policies on cannabis and other substances. From the early 20th century, Brazil played a key role in establishing restrictive frameworks, influencing the adoption of drug prohibition strategies worldwide. Although local bans on marijuana transactions had already been implemented in certain regions—such as Northeastern markets in the 19th century (Dória, 1915), Rio de Janeiro in 1830, Santos in 1870, and Campinas in 1876 (Vidal, 2009)—international agreements were instrumental in consolidating nationwide drug prohibition policies.

A pivotal moment in global drug regulation occurred at the Second International Opium Conference, concluded in February 1925. According to Lucena (1934), during the conference, a Brazilian doctor, Pedro Pernambuco Filho, declared that marijuana was “more dangerous than opium” and advocated for its inclusion in the international narcotics classification. Pernambuco Filho, who claimed to have treated over one hundred marijuana addicts, presented his findings without any significant challenge to his professional authority. At this time, Brazil was increasingly portrayed internationally as a major consumer of marijuana. The initial economic interest in hemp cultivation—once viewed as a means of colonial consolidation and economic development—had by then been replaced by fears of racial degeneration, reframing marijuana use as a public health crisis that medical professionals claimed they could treat through prohibitionist policies.



The National Narcotics Commission (CNFE) was established in 1936 to oversee drug control efforts, aligning with international agreements. The commission's first president, Dr. Roberval Cordeiro de Farias, was widely supported by both military officials involved in international relations and leading health professionals within the Ministry of Education and Health. After years of leading the CNFE, Farias took charge of the National Department of Health, eventually assuming full control of the Ministry of Health in 1946 under Dutra's administration. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, federal and state governments in Brazil intensified repressive drug policies, officially framing them as public health measures. However, as noted by Fraga, Martins, and Rodrigues (2020) and Rosa (2019), these efforts were implicitly aimed at eradication, often relying on policing and punitive actions rather than medical treatment or rehabilitation.

### **The Anti-prohibitionist cycle**

With the military regime that began in 1964, marijuana use became a symbol of resistance, representing the struggle for individual and collective freedoms. As illustrated by the testimony of Salinas Fortes, a professor at the University of São Paulo (USP), marijuana consumption during this period was framed as an act of defiance against state repression:

As committed activists, we smoked freely every day, from dawn till dusk, from the bathroom to the kitchen, at the table and in bed, dressed and undressed, madly pursuing our visionary dreams. Committed, brave activists in permanent revolt, each lit match was like an act of protest against everything and everyone. Actually, we maintained in whatever way possible the failed attempts at existence and political organization of a whole generation. We continued in the same fight, transfiguring it. (Fortes, 2012 [1988], p. 94)

Historically, marijuana had already been associated with cultural resistance among Afro-Brazilian (Freyre, 1937) and Indigenous communities (Henman, 1980; Wagley and Galvão, 1949). However, during the military dictatorship (1964–1985), marijuana use expanded beyond marginalized groups, reaching middle-class sectors across diverse regions of Brazil (Cavalcanti, 1998; MacRae and Simões, 2000; Velho, 1975). Despite its broader social reach, the racialized and class-based repression of marijuana use remained unchanged. By the early 21st century, the majority of those

arrested for marijuana-related offenses were still young, poor, Black men (Boiteux and Pádua, 2013), demonstrating how law enforcement continued to reflect historical racial inequalities. While marijuana consumption spread across social classes, state repression remained concentrated on its original users.

Although marijuana's role as a symbol of resistance in Brazilian society was limited, its association with cultural and political defiance signaled a broadening of the debate beyond the medical and economic spheres. Under the military dictatorship, the controversy surrounding marijuana use engaged diverse segments of society (Brandão, 2025), both for and against its prohibition. The issue gained greater visibility, with increasing public discussions and a wider array of voices and disciplines participating in the debate. The repressive tactics of the military government unintentionally amplified resistance movements, further drawing attention to marijuana and encouraging a diversification of perspectives on the issue. Marijuana consumers were not merely passive subjects in the discourse—they actively contested their criminalized image—, asserting their role as agents of resistance within an intensely repressive environment—as exemplified in Salinas Fortes' (2012 [1988]) reflections—.

Marijuana had already been referenced in Brazilian literature and music before the 20th century, appearing in novels (Cavalcanti, 1998) and in samba songs by Noel Rosa in the 1930s, or even earlier in popular folk songs (Iglésias, 1918). However, from the 1970s onward, references to the plant proliferated across the artistic and cultural landscape. The famous Brazilian musical duo Roberto Carlos and Erasmo Carlos released the classic song “Maria Joana” in 1971, using one of the many colloquial names for marijuana in its title. The Novos Baianos music group, as well as Gilberto Gil, a leading figure in the Tropicália movement, also became embroiled in marijuana-related controversies. In 1970, members of Novos Baianos were arrested for drug possession, and in 1976, Gilberto Gil was imprisoned and institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital after being caught with marijuana. He publicly defended his use of the plant, asserting that it caused him no harm and did not incite him to harm others (Mundim, 2006).

Following the final phase of Brazil's military government in 1985, music became a powerful medium for artistic reflection on social issues, including marijuana policies. Across diverse regions, artists used stages, lyrics, and performances to

engage with these themes. From samba to rock, contemporary funk, reggae, and hip-hop, marijuana maintained a strong presence in Brazilian music and popular culture. Beyond the stage, its influence extended to streets, bars, homes, and mainstream media—including cinema, radio, and television—. Through music, films, and public figures, discussions about Brazil's sociopolitical landscape—including marijuana laws—gained visibility and resonance. Generally, marijuana has remained a symbol of libertarian and individualist values, reinforcing the new attention cycle that emerged in Brazil from the 1970s onward. Beyond the arts, marijuana entered the political arena, particularly in electoral debates surrounding decriminalization. In Brazil's first parliamentary elections since the 1964 military coup, the issue—though largely confined to the Rio-São Paulo axis—gained national prominence—. During the 1982 election campaign, politicians such as Caterina Koltai and Ruth Escobar (São Paulo) and Liszt Viera (Rio de Janeiro) made history by openly advocating for marijuana legalization alongside other controversial issues (Rocco, 1999). In the 1986 elections, former guerrilla fighter and political exile Fernando Gabeira, then a candidate for Governor of Rio de Janeiro, further amplified the debate by making marijuana policy a central issue in his campaign. In the following decade, as a parliamentarian, Gabeira revisited the topic, this time advocating for industrial hemp production in Brazil (Gabeira, 2000).

Beyond the arts and electoral politics, the post-dictatorship era also saw a notable increase in academic research on marijuana. Although interest in the topic was already strong within social sciences in the 1980s, fear of legal repercussions often delayed or hindered publications. Many researchers hesitated to publish findings that could endanger individuals involved in marijuana-related activities. This caution is reflected in the work of Gilberto Velho, a renowned anthropologist whose doctoral dissertation on drugs use, defended in 1975, remained unpublished until 1998 (Velho, 2008 [1975]). Nevertheless, scholarly engagement with the issue expanded rapidly in the post-dictatorship period, as indicated by a growing body of research (Adiala, 1986; Henman, 1980; Maggie, 1985; Misse, 1985; Pessoa Júnior, 1986; Ronca, 1987; Velho, 1985).

With the fall of the military dictatorship and the increasing publicization of social debates, the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) took a significant step in 1984 by unanimously deciding to create a cannabis-use working group, following a proposal by anthropologist Luiz Mott (Macrae and Simões, 2000, p. 111). Mott

described marijuana smoking as a “traditional practice” present in diverse segments of Brazilian society, both in urban and rural settings (Mott, 1986). Though less visibly, the judiciary also began engaging with the issue around this time (Batista, 1985; Costa, 1985; Silva, 1985; Toron, 1986), signaling shifting legal perspectives on marijuana. Consequently, the conditions for demanding changes to legal and social norms regarding cannabis use were being established.

According to Valença (2010, p. 290), the first public demonstration advocating for marijuana decriminalization in Brazil took place in 1976 at the Faculty of Philosophy, Literature, and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo (USP).

The movement gained further traction: Still at the end of this decade [1970s], social sciences students from UFRJ edited an anti-prohibitionist journal, *O Patuá*. The first Brazilian paper advocating for cannabis legalization was written at the Faculty of Philosophy at PUC-São Paulo at the start of the 1980s, alongside the First Carioca Symposium for Studies into Marijuana, “Marijuana Under Debate,” which was held at the Institute for Social Sciences and Philosophy at UFRJ [in 1982] (Valença, 2010, p. 291). Within a few years, the anti-prohibitionist discourse expanded beyond academia and the arts, manifesting in public demonstrations and street activism. As these events gained momentum, a new, less restrictive attention cycle surrounding marijuana transactions began forming. Initially focused exclusively on marijuana, this anti-prohibitionist cycle progressively expanded (Brandão, 2020).

### **Mutual Influences and Simultaneous Continuity of Marijuana Attention Cycles in Brazil**

This study has aimed to illustrate how the diversification of interests in marijuana has led to multiple cycles of contestation that continue to shape public discourse. Since 1932, marijuana transactions have remained illegal in Brazil, yet their revolutionary significance—as described by Salinas Fortes (2012 [1988])—has diminished over time. As the issue evolved, it became increasingly evident—much like in Becker’s (1963) analysis of marijuana use in the United States—that Brazilian law enforcement gradually deprioritized marijuana possession as a significant criminal concern. By the final years of the military dictatorship, police enforcement against marijuana users weakened, with repression becoming increasingly limited to cases involving “public order disturbances” or “trafficking”. However, the definitions of “public order disturbance” and “trafficking” remain highly discretionary, subject to police interpretation and ultimately shaped by judicial rulings. Despite this ambiguity, in

many large Brazilian cities, marijuana transactions have approached what Goffman (1971) describes as a “normalized appearance”. Conversely, beginning in the 1990s, drug trafficking became a central focus of the state’s repressive apparatus. The mobilization of public security forces escalated, leading to frequent violent confrontations, with killings perpetrated by both criminal gangs and law enforcement units operating outside legal frameworks (Fraga, 2019). Over time, Brazilian public security forces increasingly framed drug trafficking as the nation’s primary public menace (Misse, 2016; Fraga, 2012; Muniz, 2014).

As marijuana consumption lost its status as a major transgression, a global movement advocating for marijuana reform gained traction. Known as the Marijuana March Movement, this movement not only calls for legislative change but also seeks to reshape social norms surrounding marijuana use. Rooted in free expression advocacy, the Marijuana March in Brazil emerged in the early 2000s, a few years after its inception in the United States in the late 1990s (Brandão, 2017). The movement exemplifies the anti-prohibitionist cycle, expanding its discourse to incorporate arguments from other attention cycles: Medical-scientific cycle: Advocating for medical cannabis research and therapeutic applications. Law-and-order cycle: Reframing security concerns in legalist terms, emphasizing individual rights and judicial reform. Economic cycle: Highlighting the industrial potential of cannabis, emphasizing high agricultural productivity in Brazil, particularly in the Northeast—one of the country’s most impoverished regions—.

The anti-prohibitionist movement has gained traction within Brazilian political circles, particularly among left-wing parties. The Freedom and Socialism Party (PSOL), for example, has integrated drug policy reform into its political platform, focusing on the inequalities produced by the War on Drugs. Several PSOL parliamentarians have proposed legislative initiatives aimed at reforming Brazil’s drug laws, reinforcing the association of anti-prohibitionism with progressive political movements. Despite its liberal ideological foundations, the anti-prohibitionist stance has become strongly aligned with leftist politics in Brazil.

### **Bill 399/2015 (PL 399/2015)**

While we could further explore and discuss the interconnectedness of marijuana attention cycles in Brazil, the scope of this article limits us to highlighting one

particularly relevant contemporary example: Bill 399/2015 (PL 399/2015), currently under consideration in the National Congress.

This legislative initiative seeks to facilitate cannabis production for medicinal and commercial purposes within Brazilian territory. The bill restricts cultivation to legal entities, requiring government authorization, pre-established quotas, and defined purposes. Notably, PL 399/2015 allows for cannabis cultivation within Brazil's Universal Healthcare System (SUS), enabling the free distribution of medicinal cannabis in the form of herbal medicines or patient-specific pharmaceutical formulations. Additionally, the bill proposes measures to enhance national research capacity, reduce reliance on imported medical supplies, and streamline bureaucratic barriers to accessing cannabis-based treatments. The debate surrounding PL 399/2015 led to numerous public hearings, primarily held between 2019 and early 2020. These hearings engaged a diverse array of political, academic, and civil society actors, signaling the emergence of a new attention cycle within the legislative sphere. While the discussions underscored growing demands for expanded access to cannabis for therapeutic and commercial applications, they also exposed the persistence of strong opposition against any modifications to Brazil's existing drug laws.

Despite significant resistance, the bill was approved—by a margin of just one vote—by a special congressional commission created specifically for its evaluation. However, PL 399/2015 has yet to be put to a full assembly vote, leaving its final status uncertain. This ongoing legislative debate exemplifies the simultaneous and overlapping nature of marijuana attention cycles in Brazil. The discussions surrounding PL 399/2015 continue to highlight competing perspectives, reaffirming that marijuana remains a deeply contested issue, shaped by historical, medical, legal, economic, and political dimensions.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings presented, we can affirm that the fundamental characteristics that gave rise to Brazil's marijuana attention cycles remain active today. The renewed discourse on the therapeutic, economic, and social benefits of cannabis continues to reinforce the anti-prohibitionist cycle, the most recent of the four cycles analyzed.

At present, all four marijuana attention cycles operate simultaneously in Brazil. Their commonalities, interconnections, and ongoing coexistence demonstrate that these cycles are not mutually exclusive but instead overlap and influence one another within the same temporal and spatial context.

Revisiting this debate underscores the enduring relevance of the cyclical attention model for analyzing marijuana-related issues in Brazil. The mutual influence between cycles, their convergent aspects, and the conditions that allow them to coexist reinforce the idea that no single individual or collective actor holds absolute authority over the matter—despite the increasing prominence of healthcare professionals in the current discourse—. Ultimately, the only assurance regarding marijuana in Brazil is the absence of certainty. The topic remains a subject of significant controversy, with its legal, social, economic, and medical dimensions continuing to shape national debates.

### Bibliographic references

- Abbott, A. (1988). *The system of Professions – an essay on the division of expert labor*. Chicago University Press.
- Adiala, J. C. (1986). *O problema da maconha no Brasil: ensaio sobre racismo e drogas*. IUPERJ.
- Batista, N. (1985). A penalização do prazer. In M. Sabina (Org.), *Maconha em debate* (pp. 107-117). Brasiliense.
- Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. The Free Press.
- Bento, C. M. (1992). *Real Feitoria do Linhocânhamo do Rincão do Canguçu, 1783-89*. Prefeitura Municipal.
- Boiteux, L., & Pádua, J. P. (2013). *A desproporcionalidade da lei de drogas: os custos humanos e econômicos da atual política do Brasil*. Coletivo de Estudos Drogas e Direito (CEDD).
- Brandão, M. (2014a). O ‘problema público’ da maconha no Brasil: Anotações sobre quatro ciclos de atores, interesses e controvérsias. *Dilemas - Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, 7(4), 703-740. <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/dilemas/article/view/7258>
- Brandão, M. (2014b). Ciclos de atenção à maconha no Brasil. *Revista da Biologia*, 13(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.7594/revbio.13.01.01>



- Brandão, M. (2016). Os ciclos de atenção à maconha e a emergência de um 'problema público' no Brasil. In E. Macrae & W. C. Alves (Org.), *Fumo de Angola: canabis, racismo, resistência cultural e espiritualidade* (pp. 103-132). EDUFBA. <https://doi.org/10.7476/9788523217334>
- Brandão, M. (2017). Em Marcha: maconha e a reversão de um estigma. *Praça, 1*, 47-69. <https://periodicos.ufpe.br/revistas/index.php/praca/article/view/25200>
- Brandão, M. (2019). Como um problema se torna público? Anotações pragmatistas a partir da marcha da maconha no Brasil. *Estudos de Sociologia, 1*(25), 45-73. <https://doi.org/10.51359/2317-5427.2019.243754>
- Brandão, M. (2020). Do lugar de maconheiro ao corredor dos movimentos sociais: A Marcha da Maconha em Recife. *Teoria e Cultura, 15*(2). <https://doi.org/10.34019/2318-101X.2020.v15.29334>
- Brandão, M. (2023). A maconha na jurisdição médica brasileira. In P. Fraga; L. Rosa & D. Rezende. (org.), *De maconha à cannabis: entre política, história e moralidades* (pp. 21-39). Editora UFJF.
- Brandão, M. (2025). De muitos maconhismos a um único antiproibicionismo no Brasil. *Saúde e Sociedade, 34*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-12902025240339pt>
- Brandão, M., Fraga, P., Policarpo, F., & Rezende, D. (2024). Continuidade da atenção cíclica à maconha no Brasil. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, vol. 39 e39009. <https://doi.org/10.1590/39009/2024>
- Carlini, E. (2005). A história da maconha no Brasil. In E. Carlini et al. *Cannabis sativa L. e substâncias canabinóides em medicina* (pp. 4-13). CEBRID.
- Cavalcanti, B. C. (1998). *Danças e bandeiras: um estudo do maconhismo popular no nordeste do Brasil*. [Dissertação Mestrado em Antropologia]. UFPE.
- Costa, A. M. (1985). Da necessidade de reformar as leis. In M. Sabina (Org.), *Maconha em debate* (pp. 95-105). Brasiliense.
- Da Rosa, L. (2019). *Terra e ilegalidade: Agricultura de maconha em Alagoas e Pernambuco (1938-1981)* [Doutora em Desenvolvimento Econômico, Universidade Estadual de Campinas]. <https://doi.org/10.47749/T/UNICAMP.2019.1127198>
- Dória, J. R. C. (1915). Os fumadores de maconha: efeitos e males do vício. *II Pan American Scientific Congress*, IEEE.
- Downs, A. (1972). Up and Down with Ecology – the 'Issue-Attention Cycle'. *The Public Interest, 28*, 38-50 [https://www.nationalaffairs.com/public\\_interest/detail/up-and-down-with-ecologythe-issue-attention-cycle](https://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/up-and-down-with-ecologythe-issue-attention-cycle)
- Evans, R. (1942). *Hemp for Victory*. Department of Agriculture of the United States.



- Farias, R. C. de (1943). *Relatório apresentado aos senhores membros da Comissão Nacional de Fiscalização de Entorpecentes*. CNFE.
- Fonseca, G. (1994). *O submundo dos tóxicos em São Paulo: séculos XVIII, XIX e XX*. Resenha Tributária.
- Fortes, L. R. S. (2012/1988). *Retrato calado*. Cosac Naify.
- Fraga, P. C. P. (2019). A economia do plantio extensivo de cannabis no Brasil e as estratégias de repressão. In P. C. P. Fraga & M.C. Carvalho (Eds.), *Drogas e sociedade: Estudos comparados Brasil e Portugal* (pp. 140-154). Letra Capital.
- Fraga, P. C. P. (2012). Les actions d'éradication des plantations considérées illicites en Amérique Latine et au Brésil. *Déviance et Société (Revue)*, 36, 115-135. [https://bdoc.ofdt.fr/index.php?lvl=notice\\_display&id=69795](https://bdoc.ofdt.fr/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=69795)
- Fraga, P. C. P., & Campos, M. da S. (2020). Drogas: Novas abordagens e novos desafios acadêmicos e sociais. *Teoria e Cultura*, 15(2). <https://periodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/TeoriaeCultura/article/view/32747>
- Fraga, P. C. P., Martins, R. S., & Rodrigues, L. (2020). Discursos sobre a maconha na imprensa brasileira na primeira metade do Século XX. *Teoria e Cultura*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.34019/2318-101X.2020.v15.32745>
- Freyre, G. (1937). *Nordeste*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio.
- Gabeira, F. (2000). *A maconha*. Publifolha.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in Public*. Basic Books.
- Hahnemann, S. (1921/1834). *Materia Medica Pura*. B. Jain Publishers.
- Henman, A. (1980). War on drugs is war on people. *The Ecologist, Cornwall*, 10(8-9), 282-289.
- Herer, J. (1985). *The emperor wears no clothes*. Ah Ha Publishing.
- Hutchinson, H. W. (1975). Patterns of marihuana use in Brazil. In V. Rubin (ed.), *Cannabis and Culture* (pp. 173-183). Mouton.
- Hutchinson, H. W. (1952). Race relations in a Rural Community of Bahian Reconcavo. In C. Wagley (ed.), *Race and Class in Rural Brazil* (pp. 16-46). UNESCO.
- Iglésias, F. (1918). Sobre o Vício da Diamba. *Anais Paulista de Medicina Cirúrgica*, 9(12).
- Levene, R. (1952). *Investigaciones acerca de la Historia economica del Virreinato Del Plata*, vol. II. Ateneo.
- Lucena, J. (1934). Os fumadores de maconha em Pernambuco. *Arquivos da Assistência a Psicopatas de Pernambuco. Recife*, 4(1), 53-96.
- Luz, M. T. (1996). *A arte de curar versus a ciência das doenças: História social da homeopatia no Brasil*. Dynamis Editorial.

- Macrae, E., & Simões, J. A. (2000). *Rodas de fumo: o uso da maconha entre camadas médias*. EDUFBA.
- Maggie, Y. (1985). Ocidente, maconha e misticismo. In M. Sabina (Org.), *Maconha em debate* (pp. 63-67). Brasiliense.
- Melo, C. de. (1969). *Os ciclos econômicos do Brasil*. Laemmert.
- Menz, M. M. (2005). Os escravos da Feitoria do Linho Cânhamo: trabalho, conflito e negociação. *Afro-Ásia*, 32, 139-158. <https://doi.org/10.9771/aa.v0i32.21090>
- Miranda Neto, M. J. (2010). A utopia possível: uma experiência de desenvolvimento regional, séculos XVII e XVIII. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geographico Brasileiro*, 171 (447), 95-143.
- Misse, M. (2016). Violência e teoria social. *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, 9(1), 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.4322/dilemas.v9.n.1.7672>
- Misse, M. (1985). Sociologia e criminalização. In M. Sabina (Org.), *Maconha em debate* (pp. 49-62). Brasiliense.
- Moraes, A. J. de M. (1881). *Phytografia ou Botânica Brasileira Aplicada à Medicina, às Artes e à Indústria*. Garnier.
- Mott, L. (1986). A maconha na história do Brasil. In A. Henman & O. Pessoa Jr. (Orgs.), *Diamba sarabamba: coletânea de textos brasileiros sobre maconha* (pp. 117-130). Ground.
- Mundim, P. S. (2006). *Das rodas de fumo à esfera pública: o discurso de legalização da maconha nas músicas do Planet Hemp*. Annablume.
- Muniz, J. O. (2014). Jogando o jogo democrático da segurança pública: Procedimentos, transparência e responsabilização policiais. In A. C. B. Pinho, J.-F. Y. Deluchey, & M. A. M. Gomes (Orgs.), *Tensões contemporâneas da repressão criminal* (pp. 147-158). Livraria do Advogado.
- Nava, P. (2003). *Capítulos da história da medicina no Brasil*. Cotia-SP: Ateliê Editorial; Londrina-PR.
- Orta, G. (1891/1563). *Colóquios dos simples e drogas da Índia*. Imprensa Nacional.
- Pessoa Jr., O. (1986). A liberação da maconha no Brasil. In A. Henman & O. Pessoa Jr. (Orgs.), *Diamba sarabamba: coletânea de textos brasileiros sobre maconha* (pp. 147-163). Ground.
- Pinho, A. R. (1975). Social and medical aspects of the use of cannabis in Brazil. In V. Rubin (Ed.), *Cannabis and culture* (pp. 293-302). Mouton.
- Robinson, R. (1996). *The great book of hemp*. Park Street Press.
- Rocco, R. (1999). *O que é legalização das drogas*. Brasiliense.
- Ronca, P. A. C. (1987). *Com-vivendo-com-a-maconha*. Moraes.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1939). *Business Cycles*. McGraw-Hill.

- Schwarcz, L. M. (1993). *O espetáculo das raças*. Cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870-1930. Cia. das Letras.
- Silva, T. L. (1985). A maconha e a lei. In M. Sabina. (Org.). *Maconha em debate* (pp. 119-127). Brasiliense.
- Sousa, L. de V. e. (1789). *Relação instructiva e circunstanciada para ser entregue ao seu successor*.
- Toron, A. Z. (1986). Alguns Aspectos Sócio-Jurídicos da Maconha. In A. Henman & O. Pessoa Jr. (Orgs.). *Diamba sarabamba: coletânea de textos brasileiros sobre maconha* (pp. 131-146). Ground.
- Valença, T. (2010). *Consumir e ser consumido, eis a questão! (Parte II): Outras configurações entre usuários de drogas numa cultura de consumo* [Tese de doutorado, Universidade Federal da Bahia].
- Velho, G. (2008/1975). *Nobres e anjos: um estudo de tóxico e hierarquias*. FGV.
- Velho, G. (1985). O consumo da cannabis e suas representações culturais. In M. Sabina (Org.). *Maconha em debate* (pp. 39-47). Brasiliense.
- Vidal, S. (2009). A regulamentação do cultivo de maconha para consumo próprio: Uma proposta de redução de danos. In A. N. Nery Filho et al. (Orgs.), *Toxicomanias: Incidências clínicas e socioantropológicas* (pp. 61-96). EDUFBA.
- Von Tschudi, J. J. (1953 [1840]). *Viagem às Províncias do Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo*. Livraria Martins Editora
- Wagley, C., & Galvão, E. (1949). *The tenetehara Indians of Brazil: a culture in transition*. Columbia University Press.
- Wehling, A. (1979). Conjuntura portuguesa e ação econômica no Rio Grande do Sul. *Anais do Simpósio Comemorativo do Bicentenário da Restauração do Rio Grande (1776-1976)*, vol. I. IHGB/IGHMB.