



## ARTS & CULTURE

# First All-female Samba School to Compete in Brazil's Carnival

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In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Carnival is back.

The Carnival is a week-long celebration marking the beginning of the Easter season in the Catholic church. Brazil's federal government expects 46 million people to join the **festivities** that officially begin Friday and run through Feb. 22.

It features many parades filled with music and samba dancing. Among them is a group from Turma da Paz de Madureira, or TPM, samba school.

What makes TPM special is that it is the city's first all-female samba school.

In Brazil, it is rare for women to be leaders of samba groups.

"The big samba schools are **coordinated** by men, which means women are used to receiving orders," said Barbara Rigaud. She is the 54-year-old leader of the new TPM samba school.

"Here, a woman can express her desires, her ideas, her opinions . . . it is empowering," Rigaud added.

TPM started in 2011 as a bloco, the name for musical groups that play in the streets during the Carnival season. Rigaud decided she wanted to take the women-only group further and compete in the city's samba **leagues**. She won approval from city officials and the school was opened last September. It now has 320 members.

However, the group is still a target of insults from some men.

Gisele Rosires is one of several TPM **drummers**. “Men look me up and down, they think I’m not capable,” she said. She remembered her first performance with the school a year and a half ago in Madureira’s park. A man took the instrument from her and said, “You’re a woman, get out.”

In Brazil, women make up the majority of the population, but they hold few positions of leadership in government and business. Women won only 18 percent of Lower House seats in the National Congress and an even smaller percentage in the Senate.

Meanwhile, sexual attack and **harassment** continue to happen at Carnival’s street parties. However, over the last ten years, women have pushed back and spread the message “No means No!”

For their first parade, on Feb. 19, TPM will honor Iansã, a female warrior of Candomblé. But parade rules require two men to lead the parade. Rigaud noted that “It has to be a man for now, until it changes, until this **machismo** ends.”

TPM will compete in Rio’s lowest-level samba league. If the women perform well enough, they can climb to a higher level for next year’s parade. Already, Rigaud wants to reach the Sambodrome, where only the top schools compete.

“We’re not here to play around,” Rigaud said. “We’re here to fight, to win.”

I'm Ashley Thompson.

*Eléonore Hughes wrote this story for The Associated Press. Andrew Smith adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**festivities** - n. enjoyable activities at the time of a holiday or special occasion

**coordinate** - v. to make arrangements so people or groups can work together

**league** - n. groups or teams that compete against each other

**drummer** - n. person who plays the drum, a musical instrument

**harassment** - n. the action of annoying or bothering repeatedly

**machismo** - n. strong and aggressive male pride

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