

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



Years | 1964–2014

German Development
Institute

Brazil in focus: the mighty South-American country decides on its coming future

By Enrique Saravia,
*Senior Research Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg /
Centre for Global Cooperation Research in Duis-
burg-Essen & Public Policy Professor, Federal
University of Rio de Janeiro*

The Current Column

of 7 October 2014

Brazil in focus: the mighty South-American country decides on its coming future

Duisburg, Rio de Janeiro, 7 October 2014. In two weeks, on 26 October 2014, almost 143 million Brazilian voters will decide who will rule the country's Executive power for the next four years. The reason is that in the first round, held last Sunday, no candidate reached 50 % of the preferences.

Notwithstanding, Brazilians have already selected 14 state governors (Brazil is a federal republic composed by 26 states and the Brasilia Capital District) – 13 states will go to a run-off – members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as members of the federal states' parliaments.

At this moment, and looking at the polls and the results of the first round, it is not possible to guess who will be the winner. The ones who fight for the trophy are Dilma Rousseff, current president, candidate of the ruling Workers' Party (PT), and Aécio Neves, current senator and former governor of the State of Minas Gerais (the second most important by population and the third by GDP) representing the Social Democratic Party (PSDB). Marina Silva, presently senator for the State of Acre and candidate of the Socialist Party (PS), who got the third place and 21.32 % of the votes, is out of contest, but her support will be decisive for the next round. She has already expressed her preference for Aécio Neves.

Last May, nobody was in doubt about the probability of Dilma Rousseff's re-election. Her government was strongly approved by the public opinion and the surveys confirmed her popularity. Her predecessor, President Lula da Silva, who belongs to the same political party, left the government with a high percentage of approval. But during the weeks previous to the opening of the Football World Cup, millions of Brazilians walked in the streets of almost all main cities in the country, showing their discontent with the huge investment – estimated at 27 billion dollars – for building stadiums and the infrastructure needed for the tournament, and the precarious situation of schools, hospitals, public transportation and other social needs. The political observers were looking at some favourable economic indicators as the low rates of unemployment and inflation and the evident diminution of poverty and improvement of income distribution as well as the growing presence of Brazil on the international stage. They had been highly surprised when about five million people protested in the streets all over the country. They did not perceive that the social advances of the last 20 years enhanced new expectative by a big sector

of the population that until then only desired to satisfy their elemental surviving needs. Nowadays people do not want "panem et circenses". They desire recognition of their citizen rights, political participation, democratic transparency and social justice.

In that difficult moment, the Socialist Party nominated Eduardo Campos, a former governor of the State of Pernambuco, as presidential candidate. Unfortunately he died in an airplane crash. The vice-president candidate, Marina Silva, who belongs to the environmentalist political group, became the PS presidential candidate. The problem was that she supported some issues deriving from her position as a member of the Assembly of God church that does not satisfy her new political supporters. But the surveys began to show a strong support by the people.

Aécio Neves has been a successful governor of his state and is now a member of the Federal Senate. He has a long political tradition, including the fact of being a grandson of the late Tancredo Neves who in 1985 was nominated for the presidency after the end of the military dictatorship, but who died before taking office. He is a member of the center-left wing of the Social Democratic Party and as governor he was in a permanent alliance with Fernando Pimentel, at that time PT major of Belo Horizonte, the state capital, and elected state governor on last Sunday. But all the groups of the political right spectrum are now supporting his candidacy which could be considered the political right-wing option.

Even without knowing the final result, at least two important issues are clear. Brazil has walked a long way since the times of slavery (abolished in 1888), the end of the last military dictatorship (in 1985), and the formal elimination of women discrimination. In fact, the Presidency was being disputed by three people, two of them women, one the daughter of a Bulgarian immigrant and the other a black African descendent.

Since 1990, this has been the seventh presidential election. The six preceding periods were accomplished with whole respect to the constitutional rules. The political normality confirms that democracy in Brazil is sound and stable. And considering the personality and the programme of the two possible new leaders, Brazil's democracy and economy will continue their positive way.