Brazil: Political parties

Brazil is a federal republic with a presidential system. The 2014 Presidential elections marked the fourth consecutive victory for a Workers' Party (PT) candidate. Dilma Rousseff was elected for a second term (2015-19), on the same platform as her predecessor Luís Inácio (Lula) da Silva.

Background

The first Republican period in Brazilian history (1889-1930) was characterised by antagonism between the strong regional parties of the two powerful states of São Paulo (PRP) and Minas Gerais (PRM). The first ideological parties appeared early in the 20th century. Chief among these were the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB) – inspired by the Italian Fascist Movement. Until 1929, the position of President alternated between candidates supported by PRP and PRM in successive electoral periods. This came to be known as 'milk and coffee politics'. The 1930 revolution, which initiated the Vargas Era, marked the end of this agreement. Getúlio Vargas governed in various forms until 1945, most significantly between 1937 and 1945, under the New State (Estado Novo) regime. During this time, political parties were prohibited and only returned with re-democratisation in 1945. The period between 1945 and the military coup of 1964 saw the creation of the first Social Democratic Party (PSD), initiated by Vargas's most conservative allies, the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB), founded by Getúlio Vargas himself, and to the conservative right-wing National Democratic Union (UDN), which brought together most of Vargas's opponents. In 1951, Getúlio Vargas was democratically elected for a term with PTB. After the military coup of 1964, the new regime banned existing political parties. In 1966, it introduced Institutional Act No 2 (AI-2) establishing a bipartisan system: the National Renewal Alliance (ARENA) represented the regime, and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) the formal opposition. Brazil gradually returned to a multiparty system after 1979. When civilian government was restored in 1985, ARENA split, forming the Progressive Party (PP) and the Democrats (DEM). The MDB was renamed PMDB in 1980. The current coalition government includes the PT, the centrist PMDB and several smaller, centre-left parties.

Political and electoral system

The President of the Republic is both Head of State and of the executive. Presidential elections are held every four years, together with those of the members of the two Chambers of Congress and of the 27 governors (26 States and the Federal District (DF)). The electoral process is governed by Brazilian Electoral Law No 9054 of 1997, by the Constitution, and by the resolutions of the Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral* (TSE)); it is carried out electronically by universal suffrage and direct and compulsory vote for citizens between 18 and 70 years of age. For those aged between 16 and 18, or over 70, voting is voluntary. The President and State Governors are elected by majority vote. According to the Brazilian Constitution (art. 14 § 5º), the President can be elected for no more than two consecutive terms but reserves the right to run for President again in the future. If no candidate receives an absolute majority, a second round between the two leading candidates is convened. The bicameral Congress consists of:

The Federal Senate (*Senado Federal*): has 81 Members (three per state and three for the DF), elected on a majority basis for a term of eight years. Representation in the Senate is renewed every four years, as one third or two thirds, respectively, of seats are filled in alternate national elections.

The Chamber of Deputies (*Camara dos Deputados*): with 513 Federal Deputies, elected by proportional representation, who serve a four-year term. Seats are distributed according to state population, from a minimum of eight seats (for the eight smallest states and the DF), to a maximum of 70 seats (State of São Paulo). Currently there are 46 women (9%) in the Lower House and 11 in the Senate (13.6%). The latest Presidential elections took place in October 2014, and were won by Dilma Vana Rousseff of the PT, who

pledged to revitalise the economy and fight corruption. Her main opponents were Aécio Neves of the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB) and Marina Silva of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). In a second round between Dilma Rousseff and Aécio Neves, the current President won her second term by a 51.65% majority.

Current political parties

The Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) is a centre-left party created in 1980 out of the labour union movement. It represents the battle for greater participation of workers in politics and the emancipation of exploited sectors of society. PT is ideologically situated in the socialist and social democratic camp, but criticises social democracy for the lack of an alternative to neoliberalism. Former President Lula (2003-10), was one of the founders of the party. Of all Brazilian political parties, the PT holds the largest number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (14%).

The Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, PMDB) is the government's main coalition partner and the party of the current Vice-President, Michel Temer. PMDB is a centrist neoliberal party and the successor to the 1966 MDB party. Since the end of the dictatorship in 1985, it has consistently maintained the largest representation in at least one of the two houses of Congress, currently the Senate (22%). Some members of the PMDB have recently criticised the government for its isolationist policy in the area of trade and argued that Brazil should pursue trade agreements more actively.
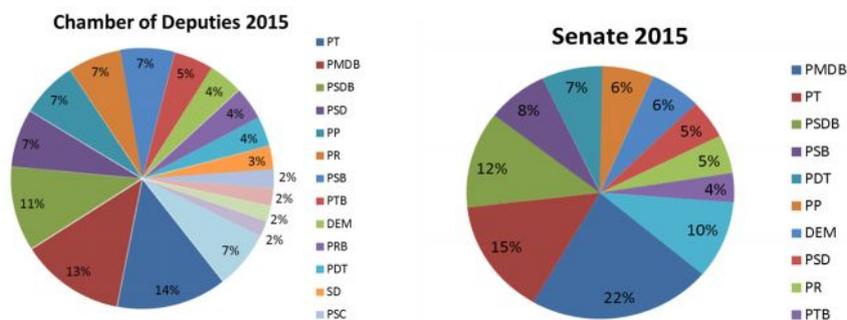
The Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) is the main opposition party. It was founded in 1988 by social democratic PMDB dissidents, who disagreed with that party's growing relations with the right-wing under President José Sarney. PSDB adopted a modernising, social-democratic programme. Under Fernando Henrique Cardoso, PSDB President (1995-2002), Brazil adopted a new currency, the *Real,* and managed to reduce longstanding inflation. In 2010, the PSDB candidate, Aécio Neves, won 48.35% of votes.

The Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) dates back to 1947. It was outlawed during the military regime of 1964, when many of its members joined the MDB, and was recreated in 1985 as a left-wing party situated between social democracy and radical socialism. In 1989, it cooperated with the PT and the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) to create the Popular Brazil Front (FBP), which put forward Lula da Silva's first candidacy.

The Democrats (DEM), renamed in 2007, succeeded the PFL (Party of the Liberal Front), which emerged from the division of ARENA and brought together its more liberal members. A conservative party, it advocates economic neoliberalism and forms part of the main opposition to the current government.

The governing coalition also includes the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Progressive Party (PP), the Republican Party (PR), the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), the Republican Party of the Social Order (PROS) and the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). Other parties represented in Congress include the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB) – Getúlio Vargas's old party re-established in 1981; the Green Party (PV); the nationalist National Order Reconstruction Party (PRONA); the Social Christian Party (PSC); the communist Socialism and Liberty Party (PSoL) and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). Political parties are governed by the law on political parties. There are 32 parties registered with TSE.

Figure 1 – Current shares of seats in Parliament, by party

Data source: IPU.

Brazil and the EU

Since 2007, Brazil and the EU have a Strategic Partnership, which is implemented through Joint Action Plans. High-level summits are held annually. Brazil is a founding member of Mercosur, which has been in the process of negotiating an Association Agreement with the EU since 1999. Relations at regional level are also conducted in the framework of the EU-CELAC Summit. The EU is Brazil's biggest trading partner and foreign investor. In July 2014, the EP created a new Delegation for Relations with Brazil, in addition to the existing Delegation for Mercosur. In 2014-17, the EU will give support to Brazil via the new Partnership Instrument.