

Brazil's elections in 2014 – an attempt to summarize

Elecciones de 2014 en Brasil – un intento de resumen

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SUMMARY

Brazil's elections held in 2014 were some kind of test for the office of the President and the policies pursued by Dilma Rousseff. In 2011, when she took office, the state recorded high economic indicators, successful social programmes were introduced and its position in the international relations increased. However, during her first term of office, the Brazilian economy was affected by the consequences of the economic crisis. The result of that situation was a decline in living standards and also a drop in support for the President as well as for the Workers' Party. In the current term of office the President faces many challenges: economic stimulation, struggle against corruption, electoral reform and strengthening the role of Brazil as a regional power. The reforms of the electoral system are important in the context of strengthening democracy. The results of the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 show the necessity to answer some questions. Firstly, how will the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies defined by Dilma Rousseff look like in the current term of office? Secondly, how will political reforms affect Brazil's political system?

KEYWORDS: *Brazil's elections, political system, political reform, democracy.*

RESUMEN

Las elecciones de Brasil que tuvieron lugar en 2014 eran una especie de prueba para el cargo de la Presidenta Dilma Rousseff y sus políticas. Cuando ella asumió el cargo en 2011, el Estado registraba altos indicadores económicos, se introducían programas sociales exitosos y la posición del país en las relaciones internacionales se incrementaba. Sin embargo, durante su primer mandato presidencial, la crisis económica afectó al país causando una disminución de los niveles de vida y también una caída en el apoyo a la Presidenta, así como para el Partido de los Trabajadores. Durante el actual mandato, la Presidenta se enfrenta a muchos retos, tales como: el desarrollo económico, la lucha contra la corrupción y la reforma electoral.

Los resultados de las elecciones presidenciales de 2014 muestran la necesidad de responder a algunas preguntas. En primer lugar, ¿cuál será la eficiencia y la eficacia de las políticas implementadas por Dilma Rousseff? En segundo lugar, ¿cuál será el efecto de las reformas políticas sobre el sistema político de Brasil?

PALABRAS CLAVE: *elecciones brasileñas, sistema político, reformas políticas, democracia.*

Introduction

In 2013, Brazil's public protests were a harbinger of the turbulent upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014. The protesters expressed a lack of confidence in politicians, which was the result of the corruption scandals involving members of the government. The protesters also demanded to improve the level of education and better health care. Therefore, the reelection of Dilma Rousseff was not so obvious as expected due to the large-scale protests among the poorest part of the population, the primary electorate of the current President. We have seen an interesting phenomenon during the presidential campaign. The social dissatisfaction expressed a year before the election did not have any direct influence on the voting results and did not polarise Brazilians to the extent presented in the analyses done by Brazilian political observers. However, the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections indicate that the protests were not directed against a particular political party, but rather were directed to the state institutions. In addition, it shows that society in Brazil accepts the fact that profound and gradual economic and social changes require time and absorb cost.

Since the first presidential democratic elections in 1989, Brazil has undergone a change in its internal and international position, both in the region and in the world (Brudzińska 2013: 71). After the establishment of democracy, efforts to develop an internal economic system were a priority. The evolution of the international environment caused that Brazil is faced with the necessity of adapting to the changes in foreign policy, which has had a more proactive approach in this regard since then. As noted by Katarzyna Krzywicka "the democratization of Latin American political systems has brought very positive results in the field of neighbourhood conflict resolution and improved bilateral relations in the region" (Krzywicka 2009: 28). It has undoubtedly influenced the gradual and consistent construction of a strong regional position by Brazil.

Brazil has made a qualitative change, which resulted in strengthening its position in the international relations (Meacham, Kalout 2014: 1–3, 12–14). The expression of this growth is the fact that Brazil belongs to the group of the fastest developing states in the BRICS. The change would not have been possible without the effectively implemented economic and social reforms, which had begun during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso –

so-called Plan Real – and were continued and developed by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who became their symbol. During his presidency in the years from 2003 to 2010 the social programme Bolsa Família was being carried out, which improved the life quality of the poorest Brazilians (Hevia 2011: 206–208). The efficiency and effectiveness of the changes to the programme caused that President Dilma Rousseff made a decision to continue them. She began a new social programme – Brasil Sem Miséria (Brazil without poverty).

During the election campaign in 2010, then incumbent President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva backed Dilma Rousseff, a candidate of the same political party, who took office on 1 January 2011. According to the assumptions made during the presidential campaign, during the first term of office she continued the social reforms of her predecessor. The social support was high, but not as high as her predecessor's. According to the polls, she got 56% of public support and her opponent – 44%.¹ Furthermore, she announced to continue the policy of dynamic growth and equitable distribution of income. During the first term of office, the role of the state was defined as a distributor of wealth and a regulator of the economy, as well as a private equity partner (Langevin 2014: 6–8). The main goal of the first term of President Dilma Rousseff was to bring Brazil out of extreme poverty, but the key challenge was to introduce reforms in the education sector, as well as reforms in the infrastructure sector.

Dilma Rousseff achieved victory in the presidential election in 2014. However, it was obtained only with a slight advantage of votes in the second round (51.6%) over her opponent, the centre-right representative, Aécio Neves (48.4%).² Moreover, the elections to the legislative bodies showed a drop in support for two major political parties in the parliament – the Workers' Party and the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party.

The results of the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 show the necessity of answering some questions. Firstly, how will the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies defined by Dilma Rousseff look like in the current term of office? Secondly, how will the political reform affect Brazil's political system?

Political system in Brazil

Brazil is a federative republic formed by the indissoluble union of the states, municipalities and the Federal District, formed as a legal democratic state. The main values are based on: sovereignty, citizenship, dignity of human beings, social values of labour and free enterprise, and political pluralism as well. Adoption of the constitution in 1988 was the final step in the implementation of democracy. Nevertheless, the experience of authoritarian rules meant that initially democratic institutions and democratic values had been perceived

¹ <http://www.eleicoes.ibope.com.br>, access on 10/11/2014.

² <http://www.eleicoes2014.com.br>, access on 12/19/2014.

negatively. Olga Brudzińska noted that it was caused by the fact that the military governments abusively used the concept of democracy describing so their own governments (Brudzińska 2013: 65). Democratic transformation that has been taking place in Brazil is multidimensional and refers to the reform of the political, economic and social system.

In accordance with art. 76 of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic, assisted by the Ministers of State. In practice, this means that the President is both the head of state and the head of government, the unity of executive power occurs. The ministers are appointed by the President and this is not assessed by the National Congress. The President as the head of state has a wide scope of competences to conduct the internal and foreign policy of the state: to promulgate and order the publication of laws, as well as to issue decrees and regulations for their true enforcement. Apart from that, the President exercises creative functions by granting powers in the appointment and dismissal of ministers, commanders of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force for crimes of the same nature connected with them and the declaration of war. Also, he or she manages the work of the government. The presidential system in Brazil has specific features, which differentiate it from the American patterns from which it drew inspiration. The executive branch received a strong position in the political system under the Constitution by transferring a lot of the powers reserved for the legislature. Besides the veto bills, the President has the power to issue decrees and the right to control the legislative power.

With a number of competences given by that kind of presidential system, the President has a strong position in Brazil's political system and, as pointed out by Jarosław Spyra, the President "is the leader of the political party and leads its own policy" (Spyra 2001: 39). In other words, the President has a lot of competences, which give him or her a real opportunity to determine the directions of domestic and foreign policy. At the same time he or she has the real power of its actual implementation. If the President is supported by the majority in the National Congress, then his or her power is further enhanced. And we can define the executive power as a model of hegemony. Thus, the content of the draft legislation submitted by the President does not need to be agreed with the Parliament. This is particularly evident at the time of Congressional sessions, when the President of the State proposes regulations as temporary decrees. When he or she has the support of deputies and senators, the Ministers of States prevent from putting them on the agenda of both chambers. After thirty days, the regulation ceases to apply under the law, and then the President again announces the regulation. The procedure is repeated until the approval or rejection of regulation (Spyra 2001: 37–38). The effectiveness of the legislative branch is weakening because the President abuses its competence. In the broader context these actions have impact on the quality of democracy in Brazil. However, in the case when the majority in the National Congress is in opposition to the President, bills have to be agreed with the parliamentary majority.

The President has a number of competencies, among which relevant are the right of legislative initiative and the right to veto the bills passed by Congress. The latter reduces the political role of the Parliament. And at the same time, the Constitution granted the President the exclusive legislative initiative to introduce bills that determine or modify the number of Armed Forces troops, public offices, ministries, and to establish new departments, and – as the only body in the state – the right to submit bills relating to the tax system (art. 61 (1)). In Brazil and other Latin American countries, as noted by Piotr Łaciński, only the President has the legislative initiative beyond the scope of the budget of the state (Łaciński 2012: 42–43).

The legislative power belongs to the Brazilian National Congress, composed of two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies, which represents the interests of the voters, while the Federal Senate is a chamber which consists of representatives of the states. The solutions adopted in the current electoral system imply a number of negative consequences associated primarily with the overrepresentation of sparsely populated states (Brudzińska 2013: 73). Also, problems connected with the electoral system apply to issues related to membership of the political parties. A frequent changing of political parties by politicians during the term weakens mainly the coalition formed by the ruling party. This weakens directly effectiveness and efficiency of the President. This forces the need for further political reforms, mainly related to the electoral system.

The President has the competence to issue decrees and regulations, but those require the countersignature of the appropriate Minister of the State. Brazil's presidential system does not guarantee the President the possibility of shortening the parliamentary term. The Constitution has also introduced a ban on combining positions in the Parliament with the positions in the system of the executive power. It should be noted that the power of the President is balanced by the legislative branch, which controls the power of the executive body, with the help of parliamentary committees. This control is based on the consent given by the Parliament in the conduct of the foreign policy: the signing of international treaties and agreements, which are important for national heritage or issues of war and peace and the decision as to the presence of foreign troops on Brazilian territory.

The President is involved in the current political activities. The goal is to secure a stable majority in Congress, which determines President's ability to conduct the effective policies and implementation of the adopted policies.

Elections in 2014 – an attempt to summarize

In 2010, Dilma Rousseff became president at the time when Brazil was recording high economic indicators. The economic growth reached over 7%³

³ www.ibge.gov.br, access on 10/10/2014.

in 2010. Both former Presidents, Cardoso and Lula, had strengthened the role of Brazil in the international relations and internally by reducing the level of poverty and they introduced the country to the path of dynamic development. Some optimistic forecasts in politics and the economy assumed continuation of the growth. Trying to summarise Rousseff's first term, we should note that only part of the demands of the first presidential campaign has been implemented. The most important among them were the results of the social programmes such as the struggle against unemployment, as well as activities which aimed at achieving the position of regional power by Brazil. But the government could not keep GDP growth at the same level as during the President Silva's office. The sudden economic downturn, caused by decline in trade, mainly with China, resulted in inflation of approx. 6,7%⁴, while the social discontent was growing. In addition, it was fuelled by the corruption scandals which involved members of the government. As a result, support for Rousseff fell steadily. Furthermore, when the economic growth was declining, the government did not make any decisions to stop or eliminate negative consequences of changes in the economy. During four years of Rousseff's presidency, the economic and political situation went through a radical change. The election was difficult due to the strong polarization of the society – divided into north-south line – and also due to unfavourable phenomena which occurred during the first term of Dilma, such as: an increase in crime, the economic slowdown and alarmingly rising costs of living, as well as the growing expectations of "the new middle class". After the elections in 2010 Dilma took office in the country with huge economic potential. She set on the fast growth and decline in poverty. All in all, it should be noted that in the first term Dilma introduced full employment, higher wages, effective social programmes, affordable housing, scholarships, an electric power programme and an irrigation in the north-eastern part of the state. She has taken action to address the structural problems, such as: poor infrastructure, punitive tax system and bureaucracy – she has introduced tax incentives and preferential loans. When she started the election campaign, Brazilian economy was stagnant and the social progress decreased. In 2014, the budgetary situation worsened by 3–4% of GDP over the past three years.⁵ Moreover, Brazil is still the country with the largest income gap. During the election campaign, the main opponent of Dilma Rousseff, Aécio Neves, announced that she would be reelected as a communist president, who will be matching the Brazilian economy to the questionable economy of Venezuela and Argentina. During the election campaign in 2014, President Rousseff announced a new economic beginning, restoring social confidence. She announced a rigorous struggle against corruption and the start of economic growth. She also stressed the need to maintain state intervention. It seems that the year 2015 will be difficult due to Brazil's economy

⁴ www.ibge.gov.br, access on 10/10/2014.

⁵ www.ibge.gov.br, access on 10/10/2014.

state. It should be noted that it is a challenge, both to democracy and economic growth – after a decade of easy resource-based economic growth – to meet the increasing economic and political expectations. Because of other candidates' priorities in their campaigns, Rousseff called for dialogue.

Dilma Rousseff won the presidential election in 2014 and it clearly shows that, firstly, Brazilians succumbed to campaign of fear, prepared by her campaign team. It claimed that if Aécio Neves had won the election, he would have ceased to implement the social programmes. Secondly, President Rousseff succeeded in convincing Brazilians that political reforms and a new economic beginning needed to be introduced in their country. During the second term of office, the actions will be taken to stimulate economic growth in Brazil. The fundamental factor of the changes will be a deeper state intervention in the economic sphere. On the other hand, political activities will focus on increasing public confidence in state institutions, which had been lost by the corruption scandals during the previous term. Thus, one of the main slogans of the presidential campaign was the announcement of the struggle against corruption. Holding the second term, she starts with a corruption scandal in state oil company Petrobras.

In this context, the challenges during the second term are associated with the fragmentation of the political system, the presence of a large amount of lobbies and the construction of political party systems in Latin America, whose distinctive feature is a multi-party system (Alcántara, Freidenberg 2001: 8). Together with a strong presidential power, it may cause a kind of dissonance and difficulties, particularly, when there is no majority in the Parliament. Due to the divisions in the Chamber of Deputies, the President has to take actions aimed to build a broad coalition. Since the last parliament election in the Chamber of Deputies, we can observe much more fragmentation than before. At the moment in the Parliament there are twenty-eight political parties. In other words, in the following term the President will have some difficulties to implement her policies, both in case of development and implementation of any reforms. Thus, a satisfactory situation and a guarantee of President's effective actions depends on the cooperation with the parliament and its support for her.

Dilma Rousseff's proposals of changes in the political system

Since 1985, the political system in what concerns presidential elections and political parties has undergone several reforms, including the introduction of direct presidential elections (1985), the introduction of the second round of presidential, governor and mayor elections, as well as introducing the possibility of reelection (1997), lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 (1988), the on-line voting (introduced in 1996–2000), and finally the introduction of a clean record act (2010). The last reform prohibits the candidate who was convicted

by a court ruling to participate in elections. In addition, in 2007 the Superior Electoral Court, a body which organises, supervises and conducts elections, introduced so called party loyalty rules. According to that rule, the deputy elected in the parliament election cannot change the political party. If the deputy makes a decision about changing the party, they can lose their mandate (Fleischer 2001: 3; Fleischer, Barreto 2010: 140–142).

Since 2011, President Rousseff has been calling to introduce further reforms in this field. During a speech after winning, she announced that the priority of the next term would be political reforms. In her speech, she stressed the focus on “giving” citizens the right to comment on the proposals for reforms. This reform can be implemented by means of a referendum and a plebiscite. Also, she referred to the funding of political campaigns.⁶

Changing the electoral system of voting for the Chamber of Deputies is the priority for the current President. This reform in this field is somewhat forced by the necessity to stabilise the government. Currently, in order to effectively and efficiently implement the policy directions, the President has to build a coalition. As we can see, the Workers’ Party has been ruling since 2003, in this term of office it has failed to get a majority without entering into a coalition. The current multi-party system in connection with the presidential system in unfavourable conditions – i.e. when the President of the State fails to build a majority coalition – may lead to paralysing the government in an extreme situation. Although the proportional system allows to articulate the interests of the greater part of citizens, it implements some unfavourable consequences such as playing an excessive political role by small political parties. In an extreme situation, it may lead to a paralysis of the whole political process. Secondly, the level of representativeness of legislative authorities decreases and the problem of forming a coalition occurs. As a result, as mentioned above, the fragmentation of the Chamber of Deputies and powerlessness in the implementation of the adopted policies occurs. Rousseff proposes a new way to the parliamentary election. According to her proposal, the election to the Chamber of Deputies should be held in two rounds. One half of the candidates would be selected from open lists – as is currently the case – and half of the candidates from closed party lists, with a guarantee of 50% of the seats for women (currently 30%) (Fleischer 2011: 2). Therefore, in the first round of the elections voters will vote for political parties, and in the other for specific candidates. Considering the fact that the proportionate system is not favourable for the presidential system, the purpose of introducing the mixed system is to reduce the number of political parties participating in the Parliament.

Also, since 2011 the President has taken efforts to further reform the political system. The proposed changes included: the change of date for the inauguration of the President on January 15, governors on January 10 and mayors

⁶ *Dilma changes course*, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21635056-appointment-capable-economic-team-good-brazil-signals-its-presidents?zid=309&ah=80dcf288b8561b012f603b9fd9577f0e>, access on 01/12/2015.

on January 5 from the current date of 1 January; reducing the amount of alternate congressmen from two to one, with the indication that such a person shall not be a relative, and every free vacancy should be filled by election; introducing a single date for all elections in 2018 and also a plebiscite in case of any changes in Brazil (Fleischer 2011: 4).

Another point of the electoral reform is associated with the financing of elections. The new regulations would allow companies to participate in a fund managed by the Electoral Court. The financing system in its current form favours corruption and undermines the government. The current solutions hinder the process of implementing profound economic and political changes, which often are in conflict with the interests of lobbies. Nowadays, the political parties may form coalitions during election campaigns. This procedure allows them to get more votes and accumulate more airtime for election spots broadcast on television. The office of the President proposes banning the creation of such electoral coalitions. In this regard, the aim of the proposed change is to form coalitions that would have to cooperate with each other for at least three years after the parliamentary election and maintain the principle of the party loyalty rules (Fleischer 2011: 3).

In conclusion, we should note that the consent for every demand can be difficult to achieve. Currently, the ability to conduct open lists is favourable and used by various pressure groups, corporations and churches. These groups constantly convince to choose a particular candidate. The reform aims at strengthening the political parties. The electoral policy in Brazil clearly shows that citizens vote for specific individuals, rather than for political parties. The political awareness is low, and thus it is easier to get support for the candidates who appeal in their election programmes to populist slogans.

In addition, the reform is some kind of challenge and novelty for the candidates themselves. The positive result will depend on two factors, a high election result achieved by the candidate and a high support for the party list. If the above-mentioned reform is adopted, as stressed David Fleischer, the cost of election campaigns will increase, this is connected with carrying out the election campaigns for the political parties. Thus, closing the lists similarly decreases campaign costs, and simultaneously it is compatible with campaigns based on public funding only (Fliescher 2001: 6).

Conclusion

The electoral victory of President Dilma Rousseff can be treated as the expression of trust, which she received from the electorate, and a guarantor of the continuation of the social programmes. The President has a lot of challenges, both in economic and political areas. In addition, the President is faced with a difficult task of building a coalition in the Parliament. At the same time we can observe an increasing fragmentation of the political system affecting

the quality of her policies. The practice of cooperation between the executive and the legislative bodies points out to the need for a consensus among many political parties. Simultaneously, society has expressed its discontent and opposition to corruption scandals involving members of the government. This kind of situation puts in a bad light the government and the President who emphasises that the struggle against corruption is one of her priorities. Thus, during the new term the President will be forced to take decisive actions to fight corruption. It is undoubtedly a challenge in the context of the continued building of democracy in Brazil.

A large number of political parties in the Parliament is the reflection of social divisions. The last elections showed a clear social distinction along the north-south line. In the current term, the President is forced to take up activities reducing social inequalities. During a speech inaugurating her second term, the President stressed the need for programmes aimed to solve electricity and water infrastructure problems in the north-eastern part of the state.⁷

The need to continue social reforms is closely associated with the economic changes, but also with the political ones. It seems that the effective implementation of reforms to the electoral system is desirable from the point of view of strengthening democracy. Undoubtedly, announcing changes in the electoral system will help to stabilise the system of government. The reform proposals presented by the President Rousseff are necessary for the smooth conduct of policies by the President. In addition, tightening up the rules for campaign financing can help to reduce corruption activities.

In conclusion, the current term of office of President Dilma Rousseff will be extremely difficult. This is due both to the challenges faced by the President and to the decline in support for the office. The quality of this term of office is very important, not only for Rousseff, but also for the Workers' Party. The upcoming presidential election in 2018 will be an evaluation of current activities of President Rousseff. Therefore, she has to take effective actions and fulfil election promises. This will have an impact on the perception of the next candidate from the Workers' Party. Thus, the actions that involve rebuilding public trust and preparing appropriate conditions for the next candidate are important for the next presidential election in 2018.

⁷ *Dilma defende ajustes na economia em primeira reunião com ministros*, <http://cbn.globoradio.globo.com/editorias/reporter-cbn/2015/01/27/DILMA-DEFENDE-AJUSTES-NA-ECONOMIA-EM-PRIMEIRA-REUNIAO-COM-MINISTROS.htm#ixzz3QUhi8R5E>, access on 01/10/2015.

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