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## **Will Brazil's First Female President Be Impeached? 5 Things You Need To Know**

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When Brazil elected the first female president in its history, many were understandably excited.

Dilma Rousseff is one of just 17 elected female heads of state or government out of the nearly 200 countries in the world. And Rousseff, a member of the left-wing Workers' Party, campaigned on promises to help the poor in one of the countries with the greatest income inequality in the world, according to the World Bank.

But five years later, Rousseff is now trying to fight off those who want to oust her from office. In a humiliating move that means she might be forced out, Brazil's lower house of Congress voted Sunday by a wide margin to approve an impeachment.

After three days of debates, the vote tally from the Chamber of Deputies in favor of impeachment against Rousseff was 367 versus the 137 legislators who voted against the measure. The tally easily surpassed the required two-thirds majority. There were seven abstentions and two deputies did not vote.

"This is a sad moment" for Brazil, said Paulo Sotero, director of the Brazil Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. It's the second time in 25 years that a Brazilian president is facing impeachment. Fernando Collor de Mello, president from 1990 to

1992, stepped down before the impeachment vote.

"It is not a very good average," Sotero told Refinery29 from São Paulo. "There is something very wrong with the system and you have to reform it, otherwise we are going to continue to produce the type of politicians that we are producing today."

But just what is going on in Brazil, and what happens next? Refinery29 breaks down what you need to know.

### **Who is Dilma Rousseff?**

Rousseff was sworn in on January 1, 2011, and was reelected by a narrow margin in 2014. She was born in 1947 and in her youth, Rousseff was a Marxist guerrilla who fought against Brazil's brutal military dictatorship. She was imprisoned for several years and tortured in the early 1970s.

Rousseff was a protégé of and the chosen successor to the former and hugely popular President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Rousseff served as Lula's chief of staff. Recently, Rousseff appointed Lula as her chief of staff. Some critics have said this was an effort to shield him from charges linked to corruption.

### **What are the accusations against her?**

Rousseff has been accused of concealing budget deficits to strengthen her re-election prospects in 2014, and [Article 85 of Brazil's Constitution](#) stipulates that infringing on budget laws is a crime for which a president can be impeached.

Whether a charge of hiding budget deficits should be reason enough to impeach the president is up for debate, but from a strict legal point of view, Congress is entitled to do so "and they have a case, so be it," Juan Carlos Hidalgo, a policy analyst on Latin America at the right-wing Cato Institute, us.

"Regardless of the fact that most of the Congress is also corrupt, I think this is a good start by removing the president and showing the world that nobody is above the law in Brazil," Hidalgo said. And this is not just about Rousseff, Hidalgo added, "This is about the entire political class."

But others have likened it to a coup. "This is just pretext to take down a president who was elected by 54 million people," Pedro Arruda, a political analyst at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, [told the \*New York Times\*](#). "She doesn't have foreign bank accounts, and she hasn't been accused of corruption, unlike those who are trying to impeach her."

Alex Main, from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, told us that he believes the

efforts to impeach Rousseff are "clearly politically motivated and, as such, are in clear violation of the country's constitution."

Rousseff also believes that she is discriminated against simply because she is not a man. "Mixed up in all this is a degree of prejudice against women. There are attitudes towards me that would not exist with a male president," she said.

### **Has she been charged with corruption? Have others been charged with corruption?**

While Rousseff has not been charged with corruption or fraud, the same cannot be said about lawmakers who have voted or will vote on her fate, including the lower house speaker Eduardo Cunha, who himself is facing money laundering and other charges.

From 2003 to 2010, Rousseff was the chairperson of the state-run oil company Petrobras, which is at the heart of the Brazil's massive billion-dollar scandal. In short, Petrobras executives in cahoots with other companies are said to have coordinated bids with kickbacks benefitting politicians and others.

"There is an enormous demand for ethics in politics," led in part by a new, younger generation of judges and prosecutors who have exposed corruption, said Sotero. "There is a problem not of legality, but of legitimacy, in this process," Sotero added.

There are dozens of members of Congress, including the president of the Senate, who are being investigated by federal prosecutors in Brazil or who are under suspicion for having committed "major corruption crimes."

However, Rousseff "is accused of crimes of responsibility, like hiding the true state of federal accounts, manipulating fiscal accounts," Sotero said. "This is a crime in Brazil."

The impeachment proceedings are following the strict rules of Brazil's highest court and therefore "the fact that many congressmen are facing corruption charges does not impair the legitimacy of the result," Jorio Dauster, former Ambassador of Brazil to the European Union, told Refinery29.

"Nevertheless, the extremely positive point is that very few countries are really facing endemic corruption the way Brazil is, and I'm quite sure that a good number of crooked politicians will be expelled from our parliament in the near future," Dauster added.

### **How does this impact Brazil's huge economy?**

Brazil's economy is anything but stable right now, with the country facing its worst recession in more than 85 years. The impeachment vote also comes as Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world and seventh largest economy, is struggling to combat the Zika virus epidemic. Brazil will also host the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro this summer.

Unemployment is currently at 9.5% and inflation is 9.4% – figures that are in line with Rouseff's popularity, which is currently hovering at similar digits, Hidalgo noted.

### **What happens next?**

If a simple majority of the 81 senators in the upper house vote to accept the impeachment motion, which analysts say is likely, Rouseff must cede power for 180 days while she is investigated. Vice President Michel Temer will then temporarily assume power. Following the 180-day period, the senate will decide if she should be forced from office; but this time, a higher vote of a two-thirds approval is required.

Hidalgo thinks the senate will vote to impeach Rouseff, as her party has proportionally less power in the senate than in the chamber of deputies. Parties once allied to the president have also peeled away, including minor parties. "Her chances are very, very slim" of surviving the vote, Hidalgo said.

If Rouseff is impeached, Temer takes over and will serve out her term, which is set to end in 2018.

Rouseff can appeal the charges to Brazil's highest court, the Supreme Federal Tribunal. Eight of the 11 current justices were named by either Rouseff or Lula. The court, however, has so far refused motions to dismiss previous impeachment proceedings.