



Washington's « Regime Change » in Brazil: Dilma Rousseff Impeached, Temer Installed as Brazil's President

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Brazil's right wing finally achieved what it couldn't for years at the ballot box, ending 13 years of left-wing governance.

Brazil's de facto president Michel Temer was sworn in on Wednesday afternoon, after the country's Senate voted to impeach suspended President Dilma Rousseff, a trial that many international critics have described as a farce and a parliamentary coup.

So sure ahead of time that Rousseff would be impeached, Temer had scheduled an address to the nation and meetings with officials, hoping to be officially sworn into office before 5 p.m. The ceremony was quick and Temer didn't wear a presidential band, as sworn presidents do. He is now set to fly out to China, where he will attend the G20 summit.

Temer, a right-wing member of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party—loudly booed at the Olympic opening ceremonies in Rio de Janeiro—has been implicated in major corruption allegations, including bribery, and is barred from standing in another election.

« Today we inaugurate a new age (...). We have to leave here with the applause of the Brazilian people, » the 75-year-old said Wednesday.

The Senate voted 61 to 20 in favor of Rousseff's ousting, installing Temer in office until the 2018 election. There were no abstentions among the 81 Senators, who easily passed the two-thirds majority threshold of 54 votes to confirm the impeachment.

In a separate vote on whether or not to ban Rousseff from office for the next eight years, Senators voted 42 in favor and 36 against, with three abstentions, falling short of the threshold required to pass. The ousted president will be permitted to continue to hold office, while the installed president, Michel Temer, has already been banned from running for office for eight years.

In the immediate leadup to the vote, Supreme Court President Ricardo Lewandowski ruled to separate the vote on whether to impeach Rousseff from a vote on whether to suspend her « political rights » to hold any public office. Lewandowski announced the decision after Rousseff's Workers Party requested the votes be split in two. The decision sparked a heated debating, further delaying the final vote.

Speaking from the Presidential Palace after the final decision, Rousseff reiterated her innocence in the face of baseless charges and vowed not to give up the political struggle against poverty and inequality to which she has dedicated herself during her first and partial second terms in office.

« I will fight tirelessly for a better Brazil, » she said, thanking her supporters, particularly Brazilian women, for their support during the impeachment process that she slammed as a discriminatory and misogynistic coup. « We will be back. We will come back to continue our journey towards a Brazil in which the people are sovereign. »

« I wouldn't want to be in the place of those who think they're the winners, » she continued. « History will be relentless with them, as has happened in the case of past decades. »

Rousseff, suspended from office since May, is charged with spending money without congressional approval and using an accounting sleight of hand to make the government's budget appear better than it was ahead of her 2014 reelection — a technique used by many previous presidents that critics of the process have argued is not an impeachable offense as defined in the constitution.

Her allies both nationally and internationally point out that many of the lawmakers who have plotted the coup are implicated in corruption cases far more serious than accounting tricks. According to the public interest organization *Transparencia Brasil*, some 60 percent of the 594 members of the Congress face major criminal charges, from corruption to electoral fraud.

Closing arguments in the week-long trial began Wednesday. Tuesday, 66 of the chamber's 81 senators took to the floor in a marathon session.

Rousseff and her supporters have, from the beginning, called her ouster a coup. Social movements, trade unions, campesinos, youth, Afro-Brazilian and youth groups have erupted in massive street protests across the country to support both Rousseff and democracy. The largest country in South America with a population of nearly 200 million, Brazil only at only rid itself of a military dictatorship 31 years ago.

« We are 54 million Dilmás, » read signs at many of the protests, referring to the number of votes Brazil's first woman president received in 2014. Police are trying to crack down on protesters ahead of Wednesday vote.

Rousseff's dismissal consolidates a political shift to the right and the end of 13 years of leftist Workers Party rule that helped lift some 30 million Brazilians out of poverty.

In testimony to the senate Monday, the 68-year-old leader denied any wrongdoing and said the impeachment process was aimed at protecting the interests of the economic elite in Latin America's largest country, comparing the trial to her persecution under Brazil's military dictatorship when she was tortured as a member of an urban guerrilla group.

According to a recent poll by *Datafolha*, 60 percent of Brazilians would want snap presidential elections if Rousseff is removed to vote in a new leader to the country's top office before the scheduled 2018 polls. Recent surveys have repeatedly shown that Rousseff's Workers Party predecessor Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is the favored candidate in the next election.

In his few months in office, Temer has rolled back many of the social programs aimed at lifting marginalized communities out of poverty and isolation. Food subsidies, health care measures and education policies have been overturned and he has promised more austerity if he stays in office.

Workers' Party Senator Angela Portela said it was a sad day for Brazil's democratic system because an elected president was being unjustly impeached. « This is not a fair trial. It is a political lynching, » she said.

A lead lawyer for the case to impeach Rousseff, Senator Janaina Paschoal, asked forgiveness for causing the president « suffering, » but insisted it was the right thing to do.

Rousseff's counsel, Jose Eduardo Cardozo, retorted that the charges were trumped up to punish the president for her support of the huge corruption investigation into the national oil company Petrobras, known as Operation Car Wash, that has snared many of Brazil's elite.

« This is a farce, » he said in a speech, « We should ask her forgiveness if she is convicted. »

« History will treat her fairly. History will absolve Dilma Rousseff if you convict her, » he added.

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