

The Leadership and Democracy Lab

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Brazil's Election: A South American Pattern?

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After almost perfect division amongst the approximately 142 million eligible voters in Brazil, a leader was ultimately selected in the most recent Brazilian presidential elections. Dilma Rousseff, the incumbent, won over Aécio Neves, with [51.6%](#) of the popular vote.

This came as a surprise to a large number of people, and disappointed the nearly 50 million people who voted against her. Rousseff's first term was [rocky](#), she was accused of money laundering with state owned oil companies, dragged Brazil into a recession, and sparked protests by millions over a proposed bus fare hike.

Despite Rousseff's less than stellar first term and the accusations mounted against her, Neves was not able to pull off the victory. Why is that? It's the classic tale of South American politics. Even with the backing of the economists and big business, Neves could not pull off the win in the state of recession because of the welfare spending promised and made by Rousseff. [Welfare spending](#) appeals highly to those in the lower and lower middle classes within many South American countries. Brazil, being plagued with a [declining economy](#) and a pre existing issue with poverty, has been in economic turmoil. Appealing to those in need is what enabled Rousseff to secure a victory. This is a direct parallel to Venezuela. By aiding the poor via welfare and government spending, the Venezuelan government gained popularity. Similarly, there were mass protests in Venezuela around election time as well, sparking controversy and creating extreme violence. The Brazilian protests did not receive the same media coverage because they were tame in comparison, but clearly there are underlying issues in South American politics and a great divide amongst the rich and poor.

Another parallel to Venezuela is the [relationship](#) between the presidency and oil companies. South America is reliant on oil, and Brazil's government has [extensive](#) ties to the resource. Like Chavez, who was heavily invested in the world of oil, Rousseff is also involved. She has been [criticized](#) for embezzlement, and abusing economic ties to state owned oil companies. The scandal abused the trust of political followers, but was no match for the popularity of welfare spending. Coincidentally, this contributes to the economic divide that exists in Brazil, which is distinct between social classes.

Overall, Brazil is currently in negative light. Recession, poverty, and a recent election that leaves roughly half of the voting population upset bodes uneasy for the future of the country. With tension growing in the country between social classes and displeasure with the government growing, Brazilian leader Rousseff has to tread carefully moving forward.