

**Five Faces of Presidential Governance:
Insights from Policy Making in Democratic Brazil**

Tracy B. Fenwick, Sean W. Burges, and Timothy J. Power

Accepted at *Policy Studies* (CPOS), 31 January 2017

The DOI will be 10.1080/01442872.2017.1290232

Tracy Beck Fenwick (tracy.fenwick@anu.edu.au), Director, Australian Centre for Federalism and Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Relations, The Australian National University, Acton, ACT, 2601, Australia, T. +61 (0)2 6125 9741.

Sean W Burges (sean.burges@anu.edu.au), Senior Lecturer in International Relations, School of Politics and International Relations, The Australian National University, Acton, ACT 2601, Australia (tel. for 2016-2018 +1 613-884-6614) – Corresponding Author

Timothy J. Power (timothy.power@lac.ox.ac.uk), University Lecturer in Brazilian Studies, St Antonys College, University of Oxford, Oxford, OX2 6JF, United Kingdom, T. +44 (0)1865 284 779.

Key words:

Brazil; presidentialism; public policy; intergovernmental relations; politics; Lula; Cardoso; Dilma; Latin America

Abstract:

By drawing on the five Brazilian case studies presented in this special issue we propose five ‘faces’ of presidentialism as a guide for examining the role of president in the public policy process: face to the general public; face to the bureaucracy; face to the subnational executives; face to congressional coalitions; and face to the outside world. How effectively the president succeeds in formulating and implementing their public policy priorities depends on their ability to execute the roles of each of these faces. A president’s ability to successfully pursue their policy agenda is both constrained and facilitated by exogenous factors that impact the amount of attention, authority, and engagement that they are able to exert across the five faces they wear in the public policy process.

Acknowledgments:

Timothy Power acknowledges the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom for “Coalitional Presidentialism in Africa, Latin America, and Postcommunist Europe: Dynamics of Executive-Legislative Relations in New Democracies” (grant reference RES-062-23-2892). He is grateful to the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS) at ANU for a visiting fellowship in 2015.

In the vast literature on the institutional design of democracy, much has been written about how the executive format—presidential, parliamentary, or semipresidential— impacts the making of public policy. In separation of powers systems it is broadly accepted that the president is responsible for the processes of policymaking, the introduction of legislation, and the allocation of resources, yet remains in varying degrees dependent on legislative cooperation (Haggard and Shugart 2001; Persson and Tabellini 2003; Scartascini, Stein and Tomassi 2010). In sharp contrast to parliamentary systems, the chief executive is elected directly by the people, and claims legitimacy based on a personal mandate that is unmediated by the legislature. In order to deter an excessive personalization of power, presidential regimes are generally constructed around a system of checks and balances. Yet despite these horizontal constraints, Linz (1990) was concerned by the high discretion that presidents enjoy vis-à-vis their cabinets. He noted that ministers hold their power “purely at the sufferance of their chief” which gives the president the power to either dismiss them from public life, or, shield them from direct scrutiny (Linz 1990, 63). This leads to the assumption therefore that the president is ultimately responsible for the quality and direction of the public policy agenda and that presidential cabinets *ought* to be more stable.

Presidentialism has been particularly important to the study of Latin America, which holds the world’s only significant concentration of pure presidential systems. Latin American presidentialism has been frequently criticized as “hyperpresidential” because of the extent of power that has accrued to the executive over time. In countries such as Argentina and Mexico, hyperpresidentialism has normally been associated with strongly majoritarian regime dynamics and weak, reactive legislatures. Taking a historical perspective, some authors noted that a two-party format seemed to be the one most strongly associated with the sustainability of presidential democracy (Mainwaring 1993; Stepan and Skach 1993). By contrast, the extreme multipartism of modern Brazil has long cited as leading to

“ungovernable” (Lamounier and Meneguello 1986) or “feckless” (Mainwaring 1995) democracy. Many analysts assumed that in a system with between 20 and 30 political parties represented in Congress, it would always be difficult to make coherent policy, regardless of the agenda-setting role of the president (e.g. Ames 2001). The basic problem is not unique to Brazil: currently about two-thirds of Latin America’s chief executives belong to parties that lack a majority in Congress (Table 1). But even in a region where minority presidentialism is routine, the degree of political fragmentation in Brazil is staggering in comparative perspective.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

For Brazilian presidents, the default response to their minority status has been to construct multiparty alliances in the legislature: Abranches (1988) coined the term “coalitional presidentialism” to describe this particular institutional matrix. Over time more optimistic evaluations of Brazilian governance appeared as a result of improved understandings about how coalitional presidentialism works in practice (Figueiredo and Limongi 1999; Amorim Neto 2002; Pereira, Power, and Rennó 2005; *inter alia*). These works unveiled various presidential “tools” that could overcome the disincentives to policy cooperation caused by extreme party fragmentation (Raile, Pereira, and Power 2011). Such mechanisms—which included portfolio allocation, discretionary budgeting, and strong decree and veto powers available to the president—were increasingly linked to Brazil’s improved policy results in the 2000s.

However, the key institutional variables cited as contributing to Brazil’s poor performance in its early democratic years (1985 to 1993) have not disappeared. Generalizing broadly, these explanatory factors are first, Brazil’s party system, second, its electoral rules, and third, strong federalism. Party fragmentation and a weak party system since 1985 have been linked to legislative paralysis (Lamounier 1996; Ames 2001). Brazilian electoral laws

are acknowledged to lend themselves to the personalization of elections, further fragmentation, and low levels of party institutionalization (Mainwaring 1999). Strong federalism is hypothesized as privileging governor power over federal deputies (Abrucio and Samuels 2000; Samuels 2003), as well as generating additional veto points in the policy making process (Stepan 2004). The empirically driven conclusion of the 1985 to 1993 period was that Brazilian governance was hampered by minority presidentialism, a surplus of veto players, and low levels of executive accountability at all levels. The institutions of Brazilian presidentialism changed little after 1994,¹ although policy results began to improve, especially in economic growth, price stability, poverty reduction, and income inequality. This raises a broad question, still unresolved in the literature, as to whether institutional variables, leadership, or exogenous factors are the main drivers of presidential “success.”²

To appraise the purported causal effects of presidentialism, we must turn our attention to the public policy process. Regardless of whether we view Brazilian presidentialism positively or negatively, two questions immediately come to the fore. The first question is: what are the policy consequences of the way in which the presidential agenda is defined and approved? The second is: what is the impact of Brazilian presidentialism on how policy is delivered and implemented?

The main goal of this special issue is to carefully analyse policy changes across multiple administrations in Brazil. We focus specifically on the role of the president—bounded of course within identifiable institutional constraints—in five strategic public policy areas. In examining policy, can we link the observed policy changes (or continuity) to the long-identified characteristics of Brazilian presidentialism, inclusive of the “toolbox” that the

¹ Perhaps the most important change was the 1997 constitutional amendment which allowed consecutive reelection of the president for the first time in Brazilian history. This led directly to a string of two-term presidents: Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff (who did not finish her second term).

² Campello and Zucco (2016) argue that in Brazil, the two main factors affecting presidential popularity and reelection prospects are actually exogenous: global commodity prices and U.S. interest rates.

president uses to streamline the policy process (Raile, Pereira, and Power 2011)? To pursue these questions, this special issue brings together contributions from leading researchers of specific policy areas who address a common range of questions using similar concepts and analytical tools. The central questions raised in the articles of this special issue include:

1. Which policy changes can be identified in various policy sectors across presidential administrations?
2. What role did each president play in standing between the public and the public sector?
3. Is there evidence that the changes observed were the result of demands from the public?
4. Did varying styles of managing either the governing coalition and/or subnational executives have an impact on sector-specific policymaking?
5. What general lessons can be drawn for future research on how coalition based presidentialism impacts policymaking?

[TABLE 2 HERE]

The papers addressing these questions were first presented at the 2015 annual conference of the Australian National Centre for Latin American Studies (ANCLAS) at the Australian National University. Discussion of the papers and a comparison of the role of the presidency across the policy areas of environmental policy, infrastructure, law and order, social policy, and foreign policy illuminated five roles of the presidency in Brazil's public policy process. In each of the papers, a comparison was made across at least two presidencies, and in some cases as many as five. This allows for the possibility of variation in ideology from the centre-right (Collor and Cardoso) through to the left (Lula and Dilma), in governance style from the charismatic (Lula and Collor) through to the technocratic (Dilma), and in electoral legitimacy

ranging from first-round ballot victors (Cardoso), to resounding runoff wins (Lula and Dilma) and the first case of post-impeachment elevation to the presidency (Franco).³

Five Faces of the Brazilian Presidency

Domestically, the Brazilian presidency is considered the “center of gravity of the political system” (Amorim Neto 2007), and internationally, it has consistently been rated as one of the most institutionally powerful presidencies in the world (Shugart and Carey 1992; Doyle and Elgie 2014). However dominant, the role of the president should not be oversimplified: the office is multifaceted and multidimensional, and presidents may be called upon to exercise a series of roles, both sequentially and simultaneously. We identify five such roles, which we refer to as the five “faces” of the Brazilian presidency. Although these are developed with specific reference to the Brazilian case, our contention is that these five faces provide a useful starting point for understanding policy processes in other presidential systems.

The first role is that of the president as the face of the government to the general public. This is a definitional feature of presidentialism: a single person serves as both head of state and as head of government, and is directly elected by the people. Presidents must not only win election, but must also continue to communicate directly with the citizenry throughout their fixed term in office. As the U.S. presidential historian Richard Neustadt famously put it, presidential power is “the power to persuade” (Neustadt 1990).

Second is the president as the face towards the federal bureaucracy. The president is sovereign within the executive branch of government, and this role is magnified by the size and complexity of Brazil’s modern state. In this sense, his or her role is much like that of the “mayor” of the *Esplanada dos Ministérios* in Brasília, coordinating the contending interests

³ We do not analyze the second such elevation, that of Michel Temer in 2016, which occurred after the ANCLAS conference that produced the articles in this special issue.

of the different ministries and agencies as well as distributing some 22,000 patronage jobs across the federal administration.

The third face of the president looks to subnational executives: he or she is the coordinator of vertical alignments among incumbents. Historically, this role obligated the president to engage with Brazil's powerful state governors, but after the Constitution of 1988, local mayors became increasingly salient as well (Fenwick 2016). The president sits at the apex of inter-governmental relations and is perpetually involved in negotiations between the Union (the federal government), the state governors, and municipal mayors. Intergovernmental bargaining often occurs outside of formal institutions, for example in specially convoked "summits" between the president and the 27 state governors.

The fourth face of the president is as the manager of an interparty coalition. The president must serve as *formateur* of the coalition — that is, the president is always the coalition-proposing actor — but then must cultivate this coalition on a daily basis. Although this role as coalitional captain is historically absent in a two-party system such as the United States, it is fundamental in Brazil, a country where elected presidents face almost permanent minority status. This role requires substantial leadership skills given the federal and ideological heterogeneity of Brazil's party system.

Finally, the fifth face positions the president as the face of Brazil to the outside world, making the office holder Brazil's ultimate and most authoritative diplomatic representative. This of course ties back to what Linz (1990) called the "two-dimensional" and "ambiguous" nature of the presidential office: the president is both the head of state (representative of the entire nation) and head of government (representative of a specific partisan option). When a presidential state is not active on the international stage, and/or the incumbent president prefers not to be involved in the day-to-day management of foreign policy, the tensions inherent in this presidential role may be somewhat attenuated. Yet over the past two decades,

Brazil has been internationally proactive and so have its elected presidents (Cason and Power 2009; Burges 2017).

A Multidimensional Presidency: The Issue Ahead

In the five articles in this special issue of *Policy Studies*, we see the president take on each of these “faces” with varying degrees of intensity, depending on the policy area. As our case studies make clear, the effectiveness of the president as policy innovator and driver depends to a significant extent on his/her ability to “own” each specific presidential role and use it to mobilize the relevant actors in its orbit. Generalizing broadly, both Lula and Cardoso “overperformed” on all of five dimensions described above, which in part explains the high degree of policy success and innovation that marked their respective presidencies.

Conversely, Dilma appears to have significantly underperformed on all five presidential roles, which offers some insight into the circumstances that led to her eventual impeachment in 2016. A broader takeaway lesson from the articles is that presidents are challenged on multiple fronts, and their ability to exercise multiple roles depends on the salience and complexity of the issue-areas in play, as well as the interdependent complexities deriving from simultaneous challenges.

The case studies begin with Tracy Beck Fenwick’s article “Presidents and Policymaking: Has Brazil’s CCT-led Anti-Poverty Agenda Gone Far Enough?,” which examines the evolution of conditional cash transfer programs across the Cardoso, Lula, and Dilma presidencies. Here, three of the five faces of the presidency emerge as critical—the president’s ability to make decisions that are compatible with the complexity of Brazil’s federal bureaucracy, the president’s capacity to shape the preferences of subnational executives and incentivize their support, and the public’s evaluation of presidential decisions. Adopting a bounded rationality perspective, Fenwick argues that the ability of presidents to

fulfil their roles is determined by exogenous factors such as time, attention, motivation, and resources, and not by leaderships skills *per se*. The critical factor underlying attempts to develop and deepen Brazil's poverty alleviation agenda was the ability of the president to be a rational learner and take advantage of the circumstances surrounding his or her presidency. For Cardoso, this meant corralling existing CCT-style programs throughout the country and (to the extent that his economic stabilization plans permitted) bolstering them, ultimately consolidating these programs under federal control near the end of his second term. His successor Lula was able to neutralize external fears about Brazil's economic direction by focusing on a "good enough" approach mediated by certain contextual factors. The commodity boom provided Lula with the resources needed to establish a centralized social development ministry with which he engaged energetically on a personal basis: he was fully aware that *Bolsa Familia* was the signature policy of his tenure. For Dilma, the context was far less favorable: an economic slowdown combined with changing social policy objectives to force innovation attempts at a time when her options were highly constrained (Kingstone and Power 2017). Dilma lacked the necessary support of Congress, the governors, and even of the public as she attempted to change the status quo of CCTs in Brazil.

In the second article, "Explaining Infrastructure Underperformance in Brazil: Cash, Political Institutions, Corruption and Policy *Gestalts*," Leslie Elliott Armijo and Sybil Rhodes examine the challenges Brazil's coalitional presidentialism is creating for presidents seeking to push desperately needed infrastructure programs through Congress. Although the authors highlight the extent to which coalitional hunger for "pork" creates a drag on infrastructure policy planning and implementation, they are nevertheless clear that strong presidential leadership can bring about positive results. Their study sheds light on two particular "faces" of the Brazilian president. The first is that of president as coalitional manager. Coalitional politics has the distorting side-effect of causing a bias in favor of road construction rather

than investment in the waterways, ports, and railroads that might better serve the country's needs. The second 'face' is that of the president as director-general of the federal bureaucracy, which takes on a different character depending on the ideology of the party in power. Under Cardoso's centre-right PSDB government this meant a greater emphasis on private sector competition with enhanced regulatory oversight mechanisms detached from direct political manipulation. Conversely, the leftist PT governments of Lula and Dilma saw a preference for state-led concession approaches that guaranteed majority stakeholding for the Brazilian state. The ultimate conclusion is that a coalitional presidential system places even the most effective of presidents at the mercy of congressional demands, which in turn degrades both the efficiency and effectiveness of spending and policy setting to the detriment of Brazil's overall infrastructure stock.

Fiona Macaulay's article "Police Politics and Presidents: Law-and-Order Policy from Cardoso to Dilma," also highlights the extent to which the presidential role of coalition manager remains important, but with the twist that party-based alliances are now carrying less weight in the law-and-order area than in previous years. As Macaulay points out, during the Cardoso and Lula presidencies this policy area did not occupy a great deal of presidential attention in the face of the equally serious economic challenges confronting the country. This created a space for individual legislators—often former policy officers and prosecutors—to carve out a policy voice for themselves. Even though authority in this policy space has increasingly concentrated in the hands of the executive over the last twenty-five years, the so-called *bancada da bala* (the "bullet caucus" in Congress) is able to limit the policy options open to the president. It does so effectively by practicing issue-linkage politics with other *bancadas* in Congress in order to drive through hard-line positions, such as reducing the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16. At the heart of this development is the nature of Brazil's open-list proportional electoral system, which not only results in a plethora of parties

sitting in Congress, but also makes these parties exceptionally weak and poorly able to impose discipline in the Chamber of Deputies. The implication for the presidential role in public policy is a stark warning about the danger of “producer capture” in areas where cross-bench interests are highly mobilized. Generalizing to policymaking more widely, Macaulay’s analysis suggests that the ability to build and maintain the coalitions needed to get legislation through Congress will become increasingly complicated as issue-specific cross-bench caucuses proliferate.

Kathryn Hochstetler’s article “Tracking Presidents and Policies: Environmental Politics from Lula to Dilma” brings tight focus on the interplay between the president as face to the public and the president as face to the bureaucracy and as coalitional manager. As she observes, environmental policy has two characteristics particularly pertinent to our study of presidentialism and policy making in Brazil. First, it is a policy area where a weak party system should allow a president to easily push a legislative agenda through Congress, but does not. Second, it is a policy domain subject to both civil society demands and international pressures. The challenge for even a committed president in the Brazilian case is that environmental regulations often stand in the way of major infrastructure projects, which are important sources of the “pork” needed to maintain congressional coalitions. The result is that the unipersonal role of environment minister becomes particularly important, working to broker tensions between the very strong demands of national and international lobbies versus the larger governmental agenda of the president. Strong ministers such as Marina Silva can push the president in a more pro-environmental preservation direction, but only to a limited extent. As Marina’s resignation highlighted, contending policy and political pressures put a major brake on how far a president is willing to go, creating a paradoxical situation where it is the president who not infrequently works to weaken the government’s environmental policy objectives, against their own better intentions. Although sobering in its implications,

Hochstetler's analysis highlights that a great deal of progress has nevertheless been made across a range of key environmental policies in Brazil *despite* the obstructionism of congressional factions.

In the final article, "The Importance of Presidential Leadership in Brazilian Foreign Policy," Sean W. Burges and Fabrício Chagas Bastos argue that innovation in Brazilian foreign policy comes about only when there is direct and sustained presidential engagement. Rather than focusing solely on the idea of president as the face to the outside world—the role undergirding "presidential diplomacy"—the authors argue that the president's role as face to the bureaucracy is no less important. Foreign policy is highlighted as an area that has traditionally received little attention from Congress and civil society, and scarcely more from the rest of the federal bureaucracy. Yet, tracing this policy domain across five presidents, the authors highlight that the major changes in Brazilian foreign policy over the last twenty-five years—Mercosul, South American integration, the turn to the global South—have all taken place when either the president or a strongly presidentially empowered foreign minister have introduced new ideas and compelled the Foreign Ministry to internalize and systematize them. Ideational innovation must be supported by presidential policy pressure. This extends beyond broad presidential directives to the very mechanics of the process itself, with a view to enlarging the bureaucratic constituencies engaged with the implementation of foreign policy. When presidential engagement is absent, the reversionary outcome is one of inertia: diplomacy is characterized by low risks, low costs, and weak innovation. The implication, contrary to reigning assumptions in the literature, is that the president is a central figure in the foreign policy process with a role that extends far beyond the externally visible one, i.e. globetrotting diplomat serving as the international face of Brazil. If Brazilian leaders want to succeed at presidential diplomacy, they must simultaneously act as their own ideational champions within the federal bureaucracy.

Concluding Remarks

While we cannot provide a definitive answer to the broad question unresolved in the literature as to whether institutional variables, leadership, or exogenous factors are the main drivers of presidential “success”, we do offer some tentative conclusions. Each of the respective policy sectors analysed herein are unique in their own right. They differentiate in their importance to the public—with law and order, poverty, and infrastructure being areas that Brazilians encounter daily, while for the majority environmental issues and foreign policy are less obviously present in daily life. What is clear in all of the contributing papers is that “the president matters” for the quality and direction of public policy. Beyond simple presidential leadership however, it is specifically “attention”, “authority”, and “the level of direct engagement” that the president devotes to particular policy issues that appears most salient in accounting for changes over time.

Beyond conclusively demonstrating that coalitional presidentialism requires a strong president, the main contribution of this special issue is to show that, in varying ways, the president’s ability to play the five roles we have identified is in fact constrained by exogenous factors extending beyond formal institutions *per se*. In particular, these exogenous factors can pragmatically and strategically constrain the amount of “attention” a president can afford to devote to specific policy issues. For example, during the Dilma presidency, pressing domestic factors marginalized foreign policy; the commodity boom’s end placed similar limitations on infrastructure policy. The papers are also clear that the president must be able to not only “engage” with a variety of actors along the chain of command, but also do so in a “sustained” manner if policy success is to be achieved. In the case of environmental policy, such engagement with civil society and activists declined over time. Lastly, exogenous factors constrain the president’s ability (and, or, willingness) to exercise “authority” over

certain key issue areas. In policy areas such as poverty, and, law and order, the ability and the willingness of a president to exercise this authority is conditioned by the amount of actors necessarily involved, all with competing agendas across three levels of government, and the ever changing nature of these complex problems to be solved.

Our concluding proposition for testing with other cases of presidential regimes is that savvy presidents can overcome the institutional complexities that coalitional presidentialism brings to policymaking by mastering the five faces of the presidency outlined in this introduction. The ability to do so, however, is both constrained, and facilitated, by exogenous factors that impact the amount of attention, authority, and engagement that is required for each to devote to making good policy.

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Table 1

**Brazilian Presidentialism as an Outlier:
Political Fragmentation in Latin America as of 2016**

Country	ENP Lower House ^a	Seats of Presidential Party (%)	Index of Coalitional Necessity ^b	Last Legislative Election ^c	President and his/her Nominal Party ^d
Brazil	13.23	13.06	115.02	2014	Temer, PMDB ^e
Chile	6.57	12.50	57.48	2014	Bachelet, PS
Guatemala	6.07	14.83	51.70	2015	Morales, FCN
Colombia	6.41	25.93	47.48	2014	Santos, PU
Costa Rica	4.91	22.80	37.95	2014	Solis, PAC
Panama	3.46	15.50	29.28	2014	Varela, PP
Argentina	4.19	33.85	27.71	2015	Macri, Cambiemos
Mexico	4.14	40.60	24.62	2015	Peña Nieto, PRI
Peru	2.83	15.83	23.95	2016	Kuczynski, PPK
Honduras	3.58	37.50	22.39	2013	Hernández, PN
Salvador	3.31	36.90	20.86	2015	Sánchez C., FMLN
Uruguay	2.65	50.50	13.12	2014	Vázquez, FA
Venezuela	1.87	32.93	12.54	2015	Maduro, PSUV
Paraguay	2.39	55.00	10.76	2013	Cartes, ANR-PC
Dom. Rep.	2.68	55.26	11.99	2016	Medina, PLD
Bolivia	1.91	67.69	6.16	2014	Morales, MAS
Ecuador	1.83	72.99	4.95	2013	Correa, MPAIS
Nicaragua	1.63	76.10	3.90	2016	Ortega, FSLN

^a Effective number of parties in lower house or single chamber, using the Laakso-Taagepera formula.

^b The Index of Coalitional Necessity (ICN) is calculated by multiplying the effective number of parties by the complement of the percentage of seats held by the president's own party, then dividing by 10 for ease of interpretation.

^c Election year in which the current distribution of seats was generated, which may occur via either partial or full renovation of the legislature. This may not be concurrent with the month or year of the presidential election.

^d Specifies the party that was used to calculate the values in the third column; this is the president's nominal party regardless of whether he/she was elected by a coalition.

^e Not directly elected; former vice-president of Dilma Rousseff (PT) who was impeached and then removed from office on 31 August 2016. The ICN value under Rousseff was almost identical.

Table 2**Brazilian Presidents Under Democracy, 1985-2017**

<i>President</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Prior Elective Offices Held</i>	<i>Key Events</i>
José Sarney* (1985-1990)	PMDB / PFL ^a	deputy, senator, governor, vice president	foundings elections, hyperinflation, constitutional convention
Fernando Collor (1990-1992)	PRN	mayor, deputy, governor	failed shock therapy, impeachment
Itamar Franco* (1992-1994)	no party	mayor, senator, vice president	Real Plan, stabilization
F.H. Cardoso (1995-2002)	PSDB	senator	privatization, state reform, fiscal recentralization, reelection
Lula da Silva (2003-2010)	PT	deputy	commodities boom, poverty reduction, reelection
Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016)	PT	none	reelection, corruption scandals, recession, protest, impeachment
Michel Temer* (2016-)	PMDB	deputy, vice president	took office August 31, 2016 when Rousseff impeached

*Denotes individuals who were originally elected to the vice presidency but acceded to the presidency.

^a Sarney entered an electoral coalition as the vice presidential candidate supplied by the PFL in 1984, but due to legislation in effect at the time he was forced to change his legal party registration to the PMDB, the party of his running mate.