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FEATURED Q&A

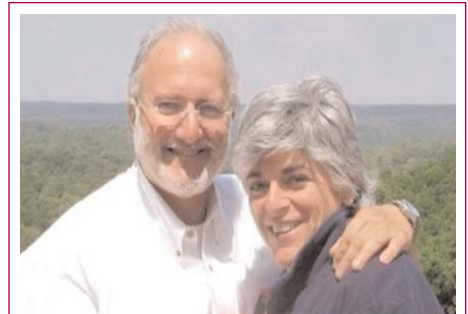
Should Brazil Change its Open-List Electoral System?

Q Brazil's electoral system, which *The Economist* earlier this year called a 'global oddity,' could be reformed under proposals up for debate in Brazil's Congress. Currently, the country's 'open-list' system allows excess votes for candidates to go toward electing members of their party or political coalition. The proposed reforms would do away with the open-list system and make the electoral system not just 'legal,' but also 'legitimate,' said Brazilian Senate leader José Sarney. What are the benefits and drawbacks or the current system? Should it be changed, and if so, how?

A João Augusto de Castro Neves, Brazilian political analyst based in Washington: "Much of the political bickering, scandals and even legislative stalemate in Brazil have some connection with the country's 'open list' electoral system. Voters who choose between individual candidates are led to believe that those who receive the most votes will be elected. That is not always the case. A party that receives more votes may have an 'electoral quotient' to seat more of its members, regardless of their individual votes. There are two main drawbacks to this system. First, it creates an incentive for parties to seek candidates among celebrities. Most of these 'vote pullers,' as they are known, not only have questionable credentials but they also carry with them to Congress members with insufficient individual votes to be elected. Second, the open

list system promotes struggles among candidates within the same party. This diminishes party identification, increases the chances of infidelity or defection in the future and may also lead to more expensive campaigns. So is the answer a 'closed list' system instead? Yes and no. On paper, the closed system, in which the voter chooses a party and not an individual, enhances party identification by eliminating bickering among its own candidates and thus highlighting the competition among parties and, most likely, ideas and programs.

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Cuban Supreme Court Rejects Gross' Appeal for Release

Cuba's Supreme Court on Friday rejected jailed U.S. contractor Alan Gross' Appeal for release. Gross, with his wife Judy, has been imprisoned in Cuba since his arrest there in December 2009. See story on page 2.

File Photo: Associated Press.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Haitian Human Rights Activist Jean-Claude Bajeux Dies

Former Haitian culture minister Jean-Claude Bajeux died Friday at 79, the Associated Press reported. Bajeux, who had a long history of advocating for human rights, died of lung cancer at his home near Port-au-Prince, a relative said. After fleeing the regime of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, Bajeux earned a Ph.D. from Princeton University in Romance languages and literature. He returned to Haiti after Jean-Claude Duvalier was ousted and joined the pro-democracy movement associated with Aristide, with whom he later broke.

Peru-China Trade Expected to Surpass \$13 Billion This Year

Trade between Peru and China is expected to rise 32 percent this year to more than \$13 billion, state-run Agencia Andina reported Sunday, citing the head of the Chinese-Peruvian Chamber of Commerce. "During the first half of 2011, bilateral trade increased 31.68 percent and, if this growth rate continues, it will amount to over \$13 billion by the end of 2011," said Eduardo McBride. "Undoubtedly China will become the first trading partner of Peru, even before the United States."

Banco do Brasil to Open First Colombian Office

State-run **Banco do Brasil**, Latin America's largest financial institution, announced Friday that it would open its first office in Colombia, said Allan Toledo, the vice president of international business, EFE reported. The office will "promote business between Brazil and Colombia" and "support the internationalization of Brazilian companies" that are located in Colombia, said Toledo.

Political News**Cuban Supreme Court Rejects U.S. Contractor's Appeal for Release**

Cuba's Supreme Court on Friday rejected an appeal from jailed U.S. contractor Alan Gross for release from his 15-year prison term for alleged spying. The communist country's highest court said Gross, who has been imprisoned in Cuba since December 2009, was part of a U.S. effort "aimed at destabilizing the country," according to a statement posted on Cuban government-run Web site Cubadebate. The U.S. State Department criticized the ruling and called on the government of Cuban President Raúl Castro to release

“The family is heartbroken by today's decision, but remains hopeful that there continues to be room for a diplomatic resolution of this matter.”

— Peter J. Kahn

Gross at once, Bloomberg News reported. The United States will use all diplomatic means to demand his release, said the State Department's acting spokesman Mark Toner. Gross, 62, worked for Bethesda, Md.-based **Development Alternatives International**, a subcontractor on a project of the U.S. Agency for International Development at the time of his arrest in Cuba. He was arrested for distributing computers and satellite communications equipment to members of Cuba's Jewish community. "While we are not surprised, we are extremely disappointed with today's ruling, which marks the end of Alan's legal process in Cuba," Peter J. Kahn, an attorney for Gross, said in a statement, *The Washington Post* reported. "The family is heartbroken by today's decision, but remains hopeful that there continues to be room for a diplomatic resolution of this matter." Gross weighed about 250 pounds at the time of his arrest, but he has lost about 100

pounds while in prison. One of his daughters is fighting cancer, which has led to calls for his release on humanitarian grounds. "Alan and the entire Gross family have paid an enormous personal price in the long-standing political feud between Cuba and the United States," said Kahn. "Now, more than ever, we call upon the two countries to resolve their dispute over Alan's activities diplomatically, and request that President Raúl Castro release Alan immediately on humanitarian grounds."

Chávez Appoints Official to Reform Venezuelan Prison System

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez on Saturday vowed to fix the country's violent and corrupt prison system as he swore in a new official responsible for reforming the system, the Associated Press reported. Chávez named lawyer Iris Valera to the new cabinet post, expressing confidence that she would reduce the level of violence and fight corruption in the crowded prisons, which lack adequate staff. Chávez decided to create position of minister for penitentiary affairs after inmates at Venezuela's Rodeo I and adjacent Rodeo II prisons led an armed uprising that lasted for 27 days. Seven people were killed in the uprising



Chávez

File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

before negotiations brought it to a peaceful ending. "We need success in an issue that's still a pending task," Chávez said in his televised speech Saturday. Chávez urged government officials to work with Valera to make the new effort at reforming the prisons a success. Chávez added that his administration's previous efforts to fix the prison system failed. Rival gangs have fought for control of prison cellblocks and sell drugs and weapons inside their walls with the help of corrupt guards. The country has more than 44,000 inmates, according to the government. However, the country's 34 prisons were built to house only 12,500, according to the Venezuelan Prisons Observatory monitoring group.

Economic News

Brazil Not Planning to Change Holdings After U.S. Downgrade

Brazil, the world's fourth-largest holder of U.S. Treasuries, is not planning to change its foreign reserves holding after **Standard & Poor's** downgrade Friday of the U.S. credit rating, Bloomberg News reported Sunday. Brazil is not under any requirement to sell any of its U.S. debt holdings as a result of the downgrade, an official who was unnamed because he is not authorized to speak publicly on the matter, told the news service. Brazil will maintain the strategy it began in 2008 of gradually diversifying its foreign reserve holdings away from the U.S. dollar. It implemented the strategy after the collapse of New York-based investment bank **Lehman Brothers**. Brazil's central bank has lowered its holdings in dollars



Rousseff

File Photo: Brazilian Government.

to 81.9 percent of its total reserves in 2009 from 90 percent two years earlier, the bank said in its latest report. Brazil is not expecting investors to dump Treasuries because they are among the safest and most liquid assets available, said the official, who added the administration of President Dilma Rousseff is prepared to take action if needed to protect the country's economy from a global crisis. The foreign currency reserves of Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, have soared 35 percent in the past year to \$348 billion as of Aug. 4. Brazil holds approximately \$211 billion in Treasuries, making it the United States' fourth-largest creditor, after China, Japan and Britain. Friday's downgrade by S&P was the first in U.S. history. In lowering the U.S. credit rating from AAA to AA+, the ratings agency criticized political wrangling in Washington over the nation's debt and said legislators did not cut spending enough. **Moody's Investors Service** and **Fitch Ratings**, last week both affirmed their AAA ratings on the United States.

Featured Q&A

Continued from page 1

However, a strong party is not necessarily a more legitimate party. In Brazil, most parties rely on the will of few powerful leaders. Without clear procedures within the parties to select the candidates, the closed list system would only sanctify an oligarchy."

A **Gilberto M.A. Rodrigues, professor of international relations at the Catholic University of Santos in Brazil and member of Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales in Buenos Aires:** "There is no doubt that Brazil's electoral system needs to be reformed, but the system's problems are not confined to the type of list system itself. First of all, voting should be only a right, not an obligation anymore. The very fact that millions of Brazilians are obliged to vote creates such terrible distortions, like the landslide election of a clown. If the country wants to be a real democratic leader in the hemisphere and abroad, it should end this legal imposition. As far as the kind of list: the open-list system needs to be changed, but not abolished. The country could not simply adopt a district-list type system and eliminate a traditional and rooted political culture so fast. A solution that could balance an open list with a district or

regional one, say, a mixed system, would be preferable and reasonable. Finally, the immoral possibility of a candidate with

“The very fact that millions of Brazilians are obliged to vote creates such terrible distortions, like the landslide election of a clown.”

— Gilberto M.A. Rodrigues

few votes to be elected as a result of the election of a more popular colleague, needs also, and urgently, to be changed, in order to avoid the existence of candidates—and parties—with few, if any, social and political responsibilities."

A **Michael D. Svetlik, vice president of programs at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in Washington:** "Within the current electoral reform debate in Brazil, in which a closed-list proportional representation, or PR, system is being proposed to replace the current open-list PR system,

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Company News

Workers End Strike at Chile's Escondida Mine

Workers at the Chile's Escondida mine voted Friday to end a two-week strike, Agence France-Presse reported. The miners at Escondida, the world's largest copper mine, approved an agreement between their union and the mine's management, accepting a special production bonus for 2010, when the mine saw record earnings, said union spokesman Marcelo Tapia. "The strike is going to be lifted," he said Friday. **BHP Billiton**, which controls operations at the mine, said in a statement Friday that "opera-

tions have gradually resumed after workers ended the illegal paralysis of operations." Workers accepted a 2.6 million

“Operations have gradually resumed after workers ended the illegal paralysis ...”

— BHP Billiton

peso (approximately \$5,800) bonus, which is half what they had originally demanded. The mine, which produces about seven percent of the world's copper, reported earnings of \$4.3 billion last year.

Featured Q&A*Continued from page 3*

it is important to bear in mind global practice. Across established and newly democratizing countries, both PR systems are widely utilized with each having positive and negative aspects. With closed lists, which are in the majority, voters

widely regarded as providing voters with greater freedom of choice as they allow voters to evaluate each party candidate. However, because candidates from the same party are essentially competing among themselves, open lists have led to

“Open lists have led to intra-party conflict and fragmentation in some cases.”

— *Michael D. Svetlik*

choose the party they prefer on a ballot paper and political parties determine the order of the list of candidates on their party list. Voters are not allowed to express a preference for a particular candidate. Closed lists are credited with encouraging party discipline and can, in some instances, be credited with some candidates being elected who might have difficulty getting elected otherwise, such as minority ethnic groups and women. With open lists, as currently used in Brazil, voters cast ballots indicating their preferred party and their favored candidate within that party. Open lists are

intra-party conflict and fragmentation in some cases. Both closed and open lists under PR systems have side-effects of which policymakers in Brazil are mindful. The primary question is not technical. The final decision depends on who has the necessary votes and whether the majority feels it has something to gain from adjusting the system. "

The Advisor welcomes reactions to the Q&A above. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org with comments.

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