
Brazil High Court Complicates Push to Impeach Rousseff

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The 11 judges accepted the argument of a pro-government party that choosing the impeachment committee by secret vote was an unacceptable departure from standard procedure.

The initial vote, on Dec. 8, involved members choosing in secret between two lists: one put forward by Rousseff's opponents and the other by her supporters.

The opposition list prevailed in the first round of voting, but the second round was suspended after the appeal to the high court.

Besides banning secrecy, the Supreme Court said that the members of the impeachment panel must be elected individually, not in a bloc.

The lower house is considering the impeachment and removal of Rousseff over her administration's alleged manipulation of budget data to understate the size of the deficit.

While siding with the pro-government party on the procedure for electing the committee, the Supreme Court rejected the notion that the house should have given Rousseff a chance to offer a defense before deciding to consider impeachment.

Rousseff will have ample opportunity to defend herself before the impeachment panel, the court said.

Under the procedure ratified by the Supreme Court, the panel must submit a recommendation whether or not to proceed with the impeachment.

A pro-impeachment resolution would need the votes of two-thirds of the 513 members of the lower house to pass to the Senate, which would then decide whether to shelve the matter or convene a trial of Rousseff.

In the event of a trial, Rousseff would have to take a leave of absence from the presidency for the duration of a process that could last up to six months.
