



The roll call begins: presidential succession and direct voting in 1894

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The first direct presidential election was a decisive moment in the process of establishing the republican regime in Brazil. Affected by several revolts and by regional political conflicts, the forces that aligned themselves for the poll would reflect the fragmentation of the political groupings of a regime so far characterized by a state of constant institutional crisis. In the midst of the splits in the political forces across different states, the São Paulo Republican Party (PRP) would present itself united in the search for civilian control of the Presidency. This union established the politicians from São Paulo as the leading players in deciding the future of the election. However, at a time of extreme political uncertainty, moves to secure the candidacy of someone from São Paulo for the Presidency would take place under the threat of military intervention, represented by the charismatic figure of Marshal Floriano Peixoto.

The first moves surrounding the 1894 election took place within a framework of persistent institutional crisis. Born out of a peaceful change of regime, the first years of the Republic would be marked by coups, by threats of the establishment of dictatorships, and by regional armed conflicts which would lead to a long civil war in the south of the country and the Navy Revolt in the federal capital. During this

period, the promulgation of the republican Constitution in 1891 would have little effect in a political context of weak institutions.

The federalist principle enshrined in the Constitution would find state leaders involved in conflicts, as well as the national Executive with difficulty in dealing with these disagreements. Finding himself increasingly isolated by his opponents, Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca, elected president of the Republic by the Constituent Congress, decides to close the National Congress and declares a state of emergency in November 1891. This attempt to centralize power in the hands of one of the main symbols of the nascent regime would not last long. In alliance with part of the Army, the Navy and other republican political leaders, the Vice-President, Marshal Floriano Peixoto, launched a successful counter-coup, culminating with the overthrow of the first president.

The victory of the forces allied with Floriano Peixoto would not resolve the institutional crisis. Following the counter-coup, Floriano Peixoto ensured the removal of all the state governments, except for the governor of Pará, Lauro Sodré, the only one who had positioned himself against Deodoro da Fonseca.





Charge sobre a indefinição em torno da realização das eleições presidenciais após a posse de Floriano. *Revista Ilustrada* de 1892, nº 641, p. 4. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

The political atmosphere grew more tense and conflictual. Forces that supported Floriano Peixoto started to demand more influence over public affairs, including the leaders of the Navy. Former supporters of Deodoro da Fonseca organized themselves in bitter opposition. A disagreement arose around the interpretation of the Federal Constitution regarding the holding of a presidential election. Rumors of a new coup circulated in the federal capital.

Floriano Peixoto's reaction to this time of uncertainty would give him the nickname of the *Iron Marshal*. Driven by legalistic rhetoric, Floriano Peixoto decided to remain in the position of vice-president and refused to call new elections. Implacable with his opponents, he jailed and exiled several opposition leaders on allegations of conspiracy, and with the approval of the National Congress. Although these measures sought to weaken his adversaries, on the other hand, his supporters actually began to split. Moreover, Floriano Peixoto was not successful in settling all the regional armed conflicts.

The outbreak of the Federalist Revolution in 1893 increased the tensions around Floriano Peixoto.

The marshal's insistence on intervening in the politics of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in favor of the political faction led by Júlio de Castilhos—whose centralizing and positivist ideas were close to those of Floriano Peixoto's supporters—had led to political radicalization. In February 1893, the federalists in the state of Rio Grande do Sul—made up of former liberal monarchist leaders—began their incursions across the south of the country against Castilhos's forces.



Cartoon about the lack of decision about the holding of the presidential elections after the swearing-in of Floriano. *Revista Ilustrada* magazine of 1892, No. 641, page 4. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

The consequences of the civil war in southern Brazil, the clashes in the federal Congress, and the manifesto of the 13 generals—a text in which 13 leaders of the Armed Forces criticized the actions of Floriano Peixoto and asked for the holding of a new election—were advance warnings of the next crisis: the Navy Revolt. In September 1893, Admiral Custódio José de Melo, who had supported Floriano Peixoto's counter-coup, began the Navy Revolt, keeping control of the fleet in Guanabara Bay. The *Iron Marshal* had to fight on two fronts.



However, the civil war and the rising of the Navy would strengthen the president. Put together to defend the Presidency and the Republic, the patriotic battalions were the strongest expression of the *Jacobin* movement, consisting of radical, nationalistic republicans who prized military virtues. Their hero was Floriano Peixoto. The extreme nationalism—satirized by the Brazilian writer Lima

Barreto in his work *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (published in English as *The Sad end of Policarpo Quaresma*)—of Jacobin, pro-Floriano Peixoto oratory would lead to a kind of popular mobilization in the federal capital that had not been seen when the Republic was first proclaimed.



Scene of the Navy Revolt, in *Revista Ilustrada* magazine of 1893, No. 666, page 4.
Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Front page of the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper of 8.2.1893, reporting the creation of the Federal Republican Party and publishing the party's program. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

This same movement was increasingly distrustful of the state oligarchies, some of which had been defeated by the interventions of Floriano Peixoto following the counter-coup that made him president. Even so, the Jacobins and a large number of the civilian republican leaders, came together under the banner of the Federal Republican Party (PRF – 1893)—defined as *a cathedral open to all creeds*—in support of Floriano Peixoto. The battle lines of the presidential succession were now drawn: on one side, Jacobins hoping that their senior leader would remain in power to defend the Republic; on the other side, the state oligarchies, with the PRP at their head, fearing the action of the military, but who sought the support of the Presidency to establish their local dominance.

The PRP had won its leading role by uniting to defend Floriano Peixoto at the start of his presidency. Holding central positions in the government from that moment onward, the politicians from São Paulo made use of their growing economic influence by allying with the central authority but without becoming identified with it. The air was full of doubts about the *Iron Marshal's* intentions. Leading the PRF, the *paulista* federal deputy from São Paulo, Francisco Glicério presented himself as someone who was sympathetic to Floriano Peixoto, but who found himself obliged to note the anxieties of his state's oligarchy, fearful that the man who held the Presidency would take the Brazilian Republic down the path of rule by a totalitarian strongman—common in neighboring Latin American countries at that time.

This ambiguous relationship between the two leading forces in national politics would become visible at the start of the conversations about the succession. Floriano Peixoto had repeatedly postponed the legislative and presidential elections due to the threats of bombardment of the capital by the Navy insurgents, and the civil war in southern Brazil. The politicians from São Paulo accepted this. Once the date of the presidential election had been set for the start of 1894, the PRF scheduled a party meeting for September 25th, 1893, to launch the candidacy of the leading republican from São Paulo, the speaker of the Senate, Prudente de Moraes. The situation of the country, plagued by conflicts between the state oligarchies, led the Marshal to fear that his supporters would be persecuted after the swearing in of the new president. Historians disagree as to whether, in fact, Floriano Peixoto went so far as to consider



the possibility of a coup in order to remain at the head of the government. There are accounts that say that the Marshal gave up the idea because of the opposition of some of his supporters, and due to the decline in his own state of health. Some argue that Floriano Peixoto had considered nominating his own successor. According to this version, the Marshal suggested the name of Rangel Pestana, a leading São Paulo republican, and that of the governor of the state of Pará, his fellow soldier Lauro Sodré. The politicians from São Paulo allegedly rejected the nominations, insisting on the name of Prudente de Moraes. Even so, the *São Paulo's politicians* took care to nominate—or to accept—a representative of the Jacobin tendency for vice-president on the slate, this being the president of the state of Bahia, Manuel Vitorino Pereira.



Image: collection of the Biblioteca da Presidência da República.

The nomination of this politician apparently displeased the political group of his fellow from Bahia, Rui Barbosa, who was part of the opposition to Floriano Peixoto. There then emerged the name of Afonso Pena, a politician from the state of Minas Gerais with plenty of experience and a national profile. However, the then president of Minas Gerais seems to have rejected, as early as 1893, any suggestion that he be put forward—which did not prevent him from winning substantial numbers of votes in Bahia, coming away with approximately 24 thousand votes of the 38 thousand cast in the whole election in that state.

Prudente José de Moraes Barros

He was born on a farm near Itu (state of São Paulo) on October 4th, 1841. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in law from the Law Faculty of São Paulo. He was a local

councilor in the São Paulo municipality of Piracicaba (1865-1868), and deputy to the Provincial Assembly in 1867. He broke with the Liberal Party to join the Radical Party. He became one of the leaders of the Republican Party, defending the republican cause. He was elected deputy for the Republican Party in 1884. After the proclamation of the Republic on November 15th, 1889, Prudente de Moraes was appointed governor of the state of São Paulo. He was appointed speaker of the Constituent Assembly from 1890-1891. He was elected president of Brazil in 1894 for the Federal Republican Party. After the end of his term, he remained active in politics until his death, which occurred on December 3rd, 1902.

The first direct election for president of the Republic would have one official candidate, like so many others that followed during the course of the First Republic. Prudente José de Moraes Barros was a name identified with the new regime. Having been one of the leading republican propagandists in his state, he held legislative positions for the Republican Party during the monarchy. In the republican period, he became speaker of the Constituent Assembly in 1890, after a brief term as governor of the state of São Paulo. In his campaign platform, he supported certain ideas that were dear to republicans from São Paulo, such as the defense of the autonomy of the federated states, as well as reflecting his contemporaries' concern about the institutional disorder that had followed the proclamation of the Republic, when he argued that the Constitution should be obeyed.

On March 1st, 1894, the first direct elections for president of the Republic were held. After the vote counting period, the name of Prudente de Moraes emerged victorious, winning more than 290 thousand votes, against approximately 38 thousand for the runner-up, Afonso Pena, despite the fact that the latter had rejected his own candidacy and supported the winner. In an era when candidates did not have to be officially registered, the counts produced a long list of names that had received votes—205 *candidates* were voted for as president—including 105 votes for Floriano Peixoto. Similarly, the PRF candidate for vice-president, Manuel Vitorino Pereira, received 266 thousand votes; followed by a list of two hundred or so names. Given this diverse picture, it would not be possible to say that there was one main opposition candidate.



Headline on inauguration day with illustrations of Prudente de Morais and Floriano Peixoto. *Revista Ilustrada* magazine of 1894, year 19, No. 667, page.4. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

Held on November 15th, 1894, the inauguration of Prudente de Morais encapsulated the uncertain times through which the nascent Republic was passing. Nobody knew how the radical supporters of Floriano Peixoto would react to the arrival of the new government. Adding to the uncertainty, Floriano Peixoto himself did not take part in the inauguration ceremony, saying that he had health problems. The popular reception and the presence of national leaders at the swearing-in ceremony, as well as the participation of the Army and the students of the Military College suggested that the new president of the Republic had a wide base of support. Nothing could have been more misleading. Five months later, the Escola Militar da Praia Vermelha would organize the first of two revolts that would seriously challenge the presidency of Prudente de Morais. The twisting and turning path of presidential successions in Brazil had begun.

The fervor of the Jacobins would still persist even after the death of Floriano Peixoto, in 1895. Important national political leaders, such as elements of the Army, did not hide their mistrust of the president. In his first few months as president, Prudente de Morais would have to deal with a parliamentary base dominated by a single party divided into hostile groups, and the need to pacify the revolt in southern Brazil. The first civilian presidency was emerging under the threat, even if veiled, of a military intervention.

The economic crisis, the conflictive political situation in the states and the fiery speeches of the Jacobins in the federal capital kept the Presidency under the tutelage of the PRF, and by extension, dependent on the political skill of its top leadership, Francisco Glicério. Savaged by the criticisms of Jacobin elements of the PRF itself, but supported by the PRP, Prudente de Morais's room for maneuver was limited by the ambiguity of his support base and by the influence of Francisco Glicério over the Congress. A situation that would worsen with his removal from the government, in November 1896, due to his state of health. Manuel Vitorino, his pro-Floriano vice-president, would shatter the fragile balance of forces supported by the single party. The Jacobin voices from the patriotic battalions were taking over the streets and their conspiratorial movements were becoming more and more open.

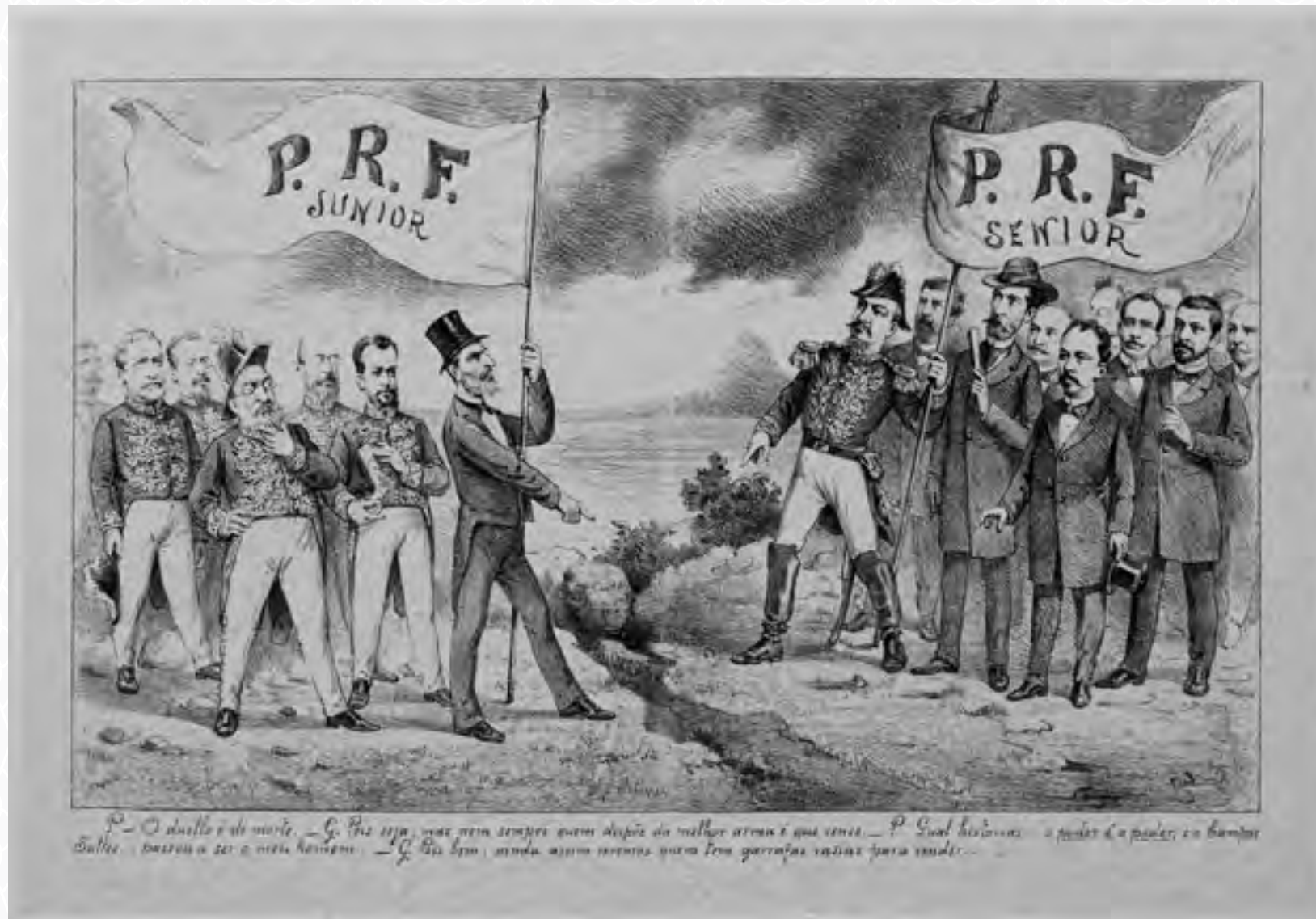


Canudos, scene celebrating the soldiers' courage. Published in *Revista Ilustrada* magazine of 1897, No. 729, page. 1. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



In his return to the presidency in March 1897, without any prior warning to Manuel Vitorino Pereira, Prudente de Moraes would find a political situation that was rapidly deteriorating. The outbreak of the Canudos war served as fuel for the Jacobins. The latter saw the armed movement in the interior of the state of Bahia as

an attempt to restore the monarchy—the social tragedy caused by the conflict and its religious dimension would only become understood after the publication of the epic work of literature by the journalist and writer Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões* (published in English as *Rebellion in the Backlands*). The defeats handed out to



Cartoon announcing the split in the Federal Republican Party. *Revista Illustrada* magazine of 1897, No. 731, page 4. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



the first Army expeditions by Antonio Conselheiro's forces were described by the Jacobin newspapers as a sign of the president's weakness. The revolt of the Military College of Rio de Janeiro—which broke out in May 1897—would also use the events in the interior of Bahia as its pretext. The energetic reaction of Prudente de Morais in putting down the Jacobin revolt created an opportunity to make explicit and thus dissipate the ambiguities of the PRF. Following the end of the revolt, the federal deputy from Bahia, José Joaquim Seabra, known J. J. Seabra, submitted a motion of support for the actions of the president of the Republic, in a clear provocation to the Jacobins. There was no way of maintaining the unity of the PRF.

In a show of strength, Francisco Glicério was defeated in the election for speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, a few days after Seabra's motion. The PRF would disappear. The president went on to have the support of a sizeable part of the parliamentary representations from the states of São Paulo, Bahia, Pernambuco and Minas Gerais. But the final defeat of the pro-Floriano Jacobin forces would take place after the attack of November 5th, 1897. That day was to see a welcoming ceremony for the military forces who had won the war of Canudos. Despite the end of the conflict, the Jacobin forces were still in a heightened state of fervor, and there was therefore a similarly high level of threat to the president's life. The attempt to assassinate the president during the ceremony left its target unharmed but took the life of the minister of War, Marshal Carlos Machado de Bittencourt. The popular commotion in the following days was accompanied by the arrest of Jacobin leaders, who were suspected of taking part in the attack.

Three years after his inauguration, Prudente de Morais was establishing relative political stability. With a support base in the National Congress, the process of nominating the candidate to succeed him began.

The newspaper *A Notícia* in its edition of November 6th, 1897, devoted the whole front page to the assassination attempt. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Recommended further reading

CASALECCHI, José Ênio. *O Partido Republicano Paulista: política e poder (1889-1926)*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987.

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