



# Political representation in the First Republic (1889-1930)

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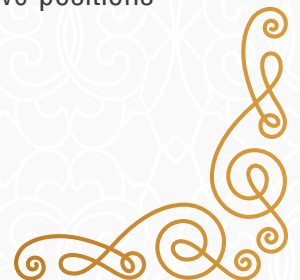
Following the Proclamation of the Republic, a provisional government was formed to establish the foundations of the new regime and dismantle the institutional legacy of the monarchy. A key step in this process was the calling of elections on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1890, to choose members of the Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting the new republican Constitution of Brazil.

The new Constitution, promulgated in 1891, marked the beginning of the republican regime in Brazil, organized under a federal system. This structure divided the country into three levels of government: municipal, state, and federal. Political representatives at each level were selected through elections. The exercise of power across these three levels of government was split among the Legislative Branch, responsible for making laws; the Executive Branch, responsible for enforcing them; and the Judicial Branch, whose members, while not elected, were appointed for their remarkable legal expertise to adjudicate, according to the legislation of that time, conflicts among citizens, entities, and the state.

The number of elected members was extensive. The Legislative Branch was organized similarly to the present system. At the municipal level, the City Council acted as the legislative body. At the state level, most states had a unicameral Legislative Assembly, composed of state deputies, mirroring the current system. However, six states (Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Bahia, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Pará) had a bicameral legislature, dividing legislative power between a State Assembly and a Senate. At the federal level, the system followed the current bicameral format, with the National Congress split into two houses: the Chamber of Deputies, representing the people, and the Federal Senate, representing the states. The current structure of the Executive Branch is reminiscent of that period. The mayor headed the municipal level, the governor led at the state level, and the president served as the head of state at the federal level. This institutional framework created a complex electoral process, as elections were held for numerous legislative and executive positions across all levels of government.



*O Malho* of 01.05.1918, cover.  
Artist: K. LIXTO (Calixto Cordeiro – 1877/1957).  
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The electoral rules and statistics for municipal and state elections were decentralized, and much of this information remains unknown today. In contrast, the newly discovered information on the electoral process at federal level, presented below is complete and reveals the effervescence of Brazil's representative regime during the First Republic.

### The rules and timetable for federal elections

Unlike today, presidential elections were not held at the same time as congressional elections. The Constitution set the presidential term at four years and prohibited re-election. It specified that presidential elections would always take place on March 1<sup>st</sup> of the last year of the president's term, *i.e.*, in the fourth year of the mandate. In contrast, the term for deputies was three years, and for senators, it was nine years, with ordinary legislation determining the regular election dates. However, the Constitution stipulated that congressional elections for both chambers would occur simultaneously, as one-third of the Senate had to be renewed every three years. This arrangement meant that the president's government had to navigate two different legislative bodies during its term. An important distinction in the legislative elections of the time was that no alternates were elected for the legislature, unlike in the case of the presidency, in which a vice-presidential candidate was also elected. If a vacancy occurred in the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate—due to resignation, death, or other reasons—supplementary elections had to be held.

Table 1 below outlines the dates of the regular federal elections held during the First Republic and the presidential administration in office at the time.

**Table 1 – Dates of federal elections held in the First Republic (1890-1930)**

Election dates	Chamber of Deputies	Federal Senate	Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the Republic	Federal government
9.15.1890	Constituent Congress (1890-1891)			Deodoro da Fonseca (November 1889 – November 1891)
3.1.1894	x	x	x	Florianô Peixoto (November 1891 – November 1894)
12.30.1896	x	x		Prudente de Moraes (November 1894 – November 1898)
3.1.1898			x	
12.31.1899	x	x		Campos Salles (November 1898 – November 1902)
3.1.1902			x	
2.18.1903	x	x		Rodrigues Alves (November 1902 – November 1906)
1.30.1906	x	x	x	
1.30.1909	x	x		Afonso Pena (November 1906 – June 1909)
3.1.1910			x	Nilo Peçanha (June 1909 – November 1910)
1.30.1912	x	x		Hermes da Fonseca (November 1910 – November 1914)
3.1.1914			x	
1.30.1915	x	x		Venceslau Brás (November 1914 – November 1918)
3.1.1918	x	x		
4.13.1919			x	Delfim Moreira (November 1918 – July 1919)
2.20.1921	x	x		Epitácio Pessoa (July 1919 – November 1922)
3.1.1922			x	
2.17.1924	x	x		Arthur Bernardes (November 1922 – November 1926)
3.1.1926			x	
2.24.1927	x	x		Washington Luís (November 1926 – October 1930)
3.1.1930	x	x	x	

Source: Authors' own drafting based on the Arquivos da Câmara dos Deputados (1890-1930).



The Constitution of Brazil, by leaving the date for legislative elections to be determined by ordinary legislation, allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling congressional elections. From 1891 onwards, four main laws governed the electoral process at the federal level. The first was Law No. 35, passed on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1892, which framed federal elections until 1903. This law set October 30<sup>th</sup> of the final year of the legislative term as the date for elections to the positions of deputy or senator. In 1904, Law No. 1,269, also known as the Rosa e Silva Law, reformed the electoral system and set new rules in place until the 1915 elections. Under this law, the date for federal legislative elections was moved to January 30<sup>th</sup>, after the conclusion of the previous legislature. In 1916, two more electoral reforms were introduced: Law No. 3,139, which regulated the voter registration process, and Law No. 3,208, which outlined the procedures for conducting the elections. Law No. 3,208 also established the rule that congressional elections should occur after the end of the previous legislature, with the election date set to the first Sunday in February. While the electoral calendar for federal legislative elections was followed only during the period regulated by the Rosa e Silva Law, the relaxation of other election dates did not significantly disrupt the formation and installation of new legislatures.

Regarding the timing of presidential elections, regularity was generally maintained. The only notable deviation occurred under the rule of Marshal Floriano Peixoto, who, in a period of authoritarian rule, postponed elections. The only other deviation from the regular schedule involved supplementary elections, triggered by the death of President Rodrigues Alves. Elected on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918, for what would have been his second term, Rodrigues Alves died before he could take office. According to the law, supplementary elections should be held if the presidency or vice-presidency became vacant within two years of the start of the term. As a result, Rodrigues Alves' vice-president, Delfim Moreira, served as interim president for approximately eight months. The subsequent elections were held in 1919, resulting in the election of Epitácio Pessoa.

### Recommended further reading

AGUIAR, L. de Souza. *Palácio Monroe: da glória ao opróbrio*. Rio de Janeiro: Arte Moderna, 1976.

SARMENTO, Carlos Eduardo. *Com o passado a nos iluminar: as representações da memória sobre a nação no prédio do Palácio Tiradentes*. Rio de Janeiro: CPDOC, 1997.

Monroe Palace housed the Chamber of Deputies from 1914 to 1922.  
Collection of the Museu do Voto (Superior Electoral Court).

