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# The Americas

## Let the games begin

Helen Joyce SÃO PAULO

Brazil's election could go to penalties

**E**lections and a football World Cup: 2014 will be a big year for Brazil. Since 1989, when the president was elected by popular vote after the military dictatorship stepped aside, presidential elections have become routine. But South America has not hosted a World Cup since 1978, and Brazil not since 1950.

Until recently the 2014 presidential race looked likely to be dull, the only doubt being by what margin the president, Dilma Rousseff, would win a second term. But in June small protests in a few cities about an increase in bus fares grew into Brazil's biggest mass marches since 1992, when the *caras pintadas* ("painted faces") took to the streets to demand the impeachment for corruption of the president, Fernando Collor. The anger the marches revealed about high prices, poor public services and endemic political corruption took its toll on Ms Rousseff, who slumped in the polls. Though she has since recovered a bit, she is unlikely to gain the 50% of the vote needed to avoid a run-off.

But she will still win a second term unless a front-runner emerges from her would-be challengers. Aécio Neves, the likely candidate of the biggest opposition group, the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PDSB), seems to lack the mettle to face a strong incumbent. Marina Silva, a former environment minister who came third in 2010 with 20m votes, was boosted by the protests: she is regarded as a rare principled voice in Brazil's venal political class. But her proposed new party, the Sustainability Network, failed to jump the bureaucratic hurdles in time to nominate a candidate. Rather than stand as the candidate of some small party-for-hire, she switched to the Brazilian Socialist Party, which recently abandoned Ms Rousseff's governing coalition to field its own candidate, Eduardo Campos, the governor of the north-eastern state of Pernambuco.

Whether having Ms Silva as his running mate will attract young, green and disaffected voters to Mr Campos's side is an open question. But if his campaign picks up steam, businessmen tired of Ms Rousseff's heavy-handed statism will line up to back him—and Mr Neves's PDSB, which has come first or second in every presidential race of the past two decades, will start to fall apart. A victory for Mr Campos would be a big upset; a strong second place would gain him a national profile and position him well for 2018.

A creditable showing by the national team in the football World Cup in June and July, three months be-

fore the election, would add some fizz to Ms Rousseff's campaign, though the extent to which soccer success translates into votes is questionable. Luiz Felipe Scolari, who took over as coach in 2012, has forged a group with some brilliant youngsters into a disciplined team that defeated Spain, the favourites, to win the 2013 Confederations Cup, a dry run for the 2014 tournament.



Return of the *caras pintadas*

But poor project management and cost overruns mean the government has failed to prepare the host cities' transport infrastructure for the influx of foreign fans. Schools and government offices will be closed so that spectators can get to the games. At least the stadiums will be ready, which seemed in doubt during 2013. Of the six used in the Confederations Cup, four were barely completed by kick-off.

The marches in June were boosted by the chance they afforded Brazilians to air grievances as the world was watching. The "Black Bloc", a loose grouping of anarchists who wear black masks while fighting the police and smashing up bank branches, has tried and failed to keep the protests going. Its antics have alienated the moderate majority. And national pride and passion for football mean that mass protests during the World Cup itself are unlikely. The football matches and election campaigns of 2014 will be hard-fought, but Brazil's national squad and its president both begin the year as the competitors to beat. ■

### 2014 IN BRIEF

In Brazil, the Supreme Court hears the appeals of politicians convicted in 2012 in the *mensalão* corruption case

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