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Brazil court rejects Rousseff's push to halt impeachment vote

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Dilma Rousseff

Brazil's Supreme Court early on Friday rejected a last-minute effort by the government of Dilma Rousseff to avert a vote on the president's impeachment.

The marathon session of Brazil's top court ran for more than seven hours and culminated in a vote of 8-2 by justices against Ms Rousseff's appeal to halt Sunday's vote in the lower house of congress.

José Eduardo Cardozo, the attorney-general who is leading Ms Rousseff's defence, had argued that procedural flaws in the impeachment process rendered it illegal.

Deeply unpopular and facing Brazil's worst recession in more than a century, Ms Rousseff is

in eleventh-hour talks to persuade her remaining allies in congress to vote against Sunday's impeachment motion.

The challenge in the Supreme Court was a tactical move designed to try to delay the impeachment process and steal some of the momentum from the opposition, analysts said.

“According to the petition from the AGU [attorney-general's office], the process [of impeachment] contains errors that impede its continuation,” the attorney-general's office said.

It said a special committee that prepared a report for congress on the impeachment considered matters that were not relevant to the process.

This included subjects that did not relate to Ms Rousseff's current mandate and testimony from a scandal dogging Petrobras, the state-run oil company, that had nothing to do with her handling of the budget.

This had turned the impeachment process into a “true Kafkaesque trial in which the defendant can never ascertain exactly of what he is being accused”, it said.

Some people close to the pro-impeachment camp, which is led by the centrist PMDB, until recently Ms Rousseff's main coalition partner, and the PSDB, the main opposition party, say they already have the votes needed for victory.

A two-thirds majority of the 513-seat lower house of congress, or 342 lawmakers, must approve the motion, which would then go to the senate.

If accepted in the senate by a simple majority, the formal impeachment process — essentially a political trial — would begin during which Ms Rousseff would be suspended and her vice-president Michel Temer become acting president. If she were to be impeached, Mr Temer would take office until the next elections in 2018.

The pro-impeachment camp is basing the impeachment action on allegations that Ms Rousseff fiddled the national accounts to hide the true state of the budget deficit.

She contests the charges and argues that they are insufficient to justify her removal, calling the impeachment process a coup being orchestrated by the opposition, conservative media and partisan police, prosecutors and judges.

But impeachment is supported by a large part of the population who are angry at the president over her handling of the economy and the vast corruption scandal at Petrobras, of which she was once chairman.



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