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Americas - Brazil

Ban lifted

Brazil's highest court takes stand against prior censorship

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Reporters Without Borders hails last week's ruling by the Federal Supreme Court overturning a ban on distribution of the latest issue of the leading national newsweekly *IstoÉ*, which a lower court had ordered at the request of Cid Gomes, governor of the northeastern state of Ceará.

Gomes requested the ban on 12 September, on the eve of the issue's publication, after *IstoÉ*'s reporters asked him to comment on his being linked to a case of alleged corruption involving Brazil's biggest company, the oil multinational Petrobras.

Accepting his claim that *IstoÉ* intended to libel him, judge Maria Marleide Queiroz issued an order the same day prohibiting the magazine from distributing the issue on pain of being fined 2.5 million dollars for every day it defied the ban.

Federal Supreme Court judge Luís Roberto Barroso overturned the order five days later, on 17 September, on the grounds that prior censorship of a publication was unconstitutional and that the governor could sue *IstoÉ* for damages after publication if he thought he had been libelled.

IstoÉ was able to resume distribution of the issue.

"We welcome this ruling by the Supreme Federal Court, which has taken a firm stand against censorship, and we urge the authorities to prevent defamation laws being used as a method of prior censorship in the pursuit of political interests," said Camille Soulier, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk.

"There is a greater tendency to resort to judicial harassment of news media and journalists in the run-up to elections," Soulier added.

Gomes claimed that the attempts to implicate him in the alleged Petrobras corruption case were part of a scheme by his political opponents to upset the outcome in Ceará state of next month's general elections.

The Brazilian Investigative Journalism Association (ABRAJI) has set up a [website](#) to monitor lawsuits by candidates against news media and news websites. It has so far registered no fewer than 128 cases nationwide, more than three quarters of them targeting Google.

Brazil is ranked 111th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
