

## **Brazil Congress Charges 72 Lawmakers with Fraud**

The Washington Post  
August 11, 2006

A congressional investigative committee charged 72 lawmakers Thursday with allegedly embezzling public health funds and recommended they face impeachment proceedings.

Three senators and 69 representatives in the Lower House were charged. All but nine of the 72 accused congressmen are part of the government coalition backing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who is running for re-election in October.

Owners of a company that sold ambulances to 450 municipalities told police they bribed mayors and congressional lawmakers with cash, cars and travel expenses. In several cases they presented checks and deposit slips as proof, according to transcripts of their testimony before investigators.

The congressmen were charged with embezzlement, influence peddling and corruption. They will likely face a congressional ethics committee that could expel them.

The scandal, dubbed the "bloodsuckers case" because of the ambulances link, could refocus attention on corruption ahead of the Oct. 1 general election.

A campaign finance scandal involving the ruling Workers' Party dogged President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva for much of last year.

Lula recovered from the scandal and leads opinion polls by a wide margin over his closest rival. But opposition parties are trying to link members of his government to the latest congressional probe.

The scandal could further tarnish an already poor image of politicians. According to an opinion poll conducted this year, only 0.3 percent of Brazilians trust Congress.