Does Brazil need 37 ministries?

Fernando de Holanda Barbosa

The organization chart of the Brazilian government has been designed more to accommodate the demands of political parties for ministerial positions than for efficient public administration. Since there were more demands than ministries, the solution was to create new ones.

Brazil currently has 37 ministries divided among different areas of government.

- Agriculture has three: Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Development.
- The economy has four: Finance, Planning, Strategic Affairs Secretariat, and the Central Bank.
- The Presidency of the Republic has five: Chief of Staff, Department of Communications, Secretary General, Secretariat for Institutional Relations, and Institutional Security Cabinet.
- Justice is not far behind: the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, Racial Equality, the Attorney General’s Office, and the Comptroller General of the Union. The Special Secretariat for Women could also be counted here.
- Development has five: Industrial Development and Foreign Trade, Tourism, Environment, Communications, and Science and Technology.
- Integration has three: Integration, Cities, and Social Development.
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare was split into Work and Pensions.

Fernando de Holanda Barbosa is a professor at the Graduate School in Economics from FGV (EPGE).
• The Transport Ministry was split into Transport and Ports.
• Education, Culture, and Sports have become separate ministries.
• The Ministries of Mines and Energy, Health, and Foreign Affairs have not yet been split, but who knows when they might be?
• The Ministry of Defense was the only exception: the Army, Navy and Air Force were merged into a single ministry, now run by a civilian.

How many ministries do other countries have? The United States and France each have 14, Germany 15, Australia 18, and the United Kingdom 21. Is Brazil so different that it needs 37?

Many people in our country believe that the way to resolve a national administrative problem is to create a ministry. The same mentality exists in the states, which also create departments as a political accommodation. But experience has shown that swelling the government does not necessarily solve anything, though it does increase costs and inefficiency.

President Rousseff has realized that it is impractical to have a ministerial meeting with so many people. If each spoke for five minutes, it would take over three hours (185 minutes) just to hear what each has to say. The president has therefore grouped ministries in four thematic areas: Economic Development, Management and Competitiveness, Poverty Eradication, and Social Movements. The Ministries of Finance and Planning, and the Chief of Staff participate in all four groups. However, a better option would be to streamline the number of ministries to make government more efficient.