

10-6-2006

Brazilian Presidential Election Goes to Second Round

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Brazilian Presidential Election Goes to Second Round." (2006). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13528>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Brazilian Presidential Election Goes to Second Round

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Brazil

Published: 2006-10-06

Incumbent President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva failed to win 50% of the vote in Brazil's Oct. 1 election, meaning he will have to run in a second round against top opposition candidate Geraldo Alckmin. Lula won about 48.6% of the vote and Alckmin won about 41.6%, while two former members of Lula's Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) who had split with his party took almost 10% of the remaining votes. Congressional elections cast out legislators implicated in one high-profile scandal, while legislators implicated in another corruption scheme generally were returned to office.

Other key outcomes from the federal election included: opponents to the PT will command the majority in the Congress, with the Partido da Frente Liberal (PFL) gaining the largest increase in the number of seats; and Jose Serra, along with Alckmin a member of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) and the ex-mayor of Sao Paulo, won the governor's race in the superpopulous state.

Lula's drive to win first round falls 1.4% short

After Sao Paulo state Gov. Alckmin won much more of the vote than early opinion polls had forecasted, press outlets portrayed the result as a big win for the PSDB candidate. But dissident ex-PT member Heloisa Helena may have been just as much a factor in keeping Lula from the majority he needed. Helena, a nurse, professor, and senator of Alagoas state, co-founded the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL) after the PT expelled her for failing to keep party discipline. The leftist senator has been an unyielding critic of Lula's embrace of fiscally conservative policies and was a prominent face during corruption investigations and impeachment proceedings against Congress members who were allegedly bribed to vote for PT legislation.

Regardless of whether it was Alckmin or Helena who, in the words of the Associated Press, "forced" a runoff election, the result disproved a number of opinion polls immediately prior to the vote that predicted a first-round win for Lula. Alckmin and Lula will face off Oct. 29. The two have begun courting smaller rival parties for support.

The Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE) reported that Lula had won 48.61% of the valid votes cast with 46,662,365 votes, Alckmin won 41.64% or 39,968,369 votes, and Heloisa Helena was in a distant third place with 6.85% (6,575,393 votes). The only other candidate in the race to win more than 1% of the vote was Cristovam Buarque of the Partido Democratico Trabalhista (PDT). Another former member of the PT who left during Lula's presidency, Buarque took 2.64%, or 2,538,844 votes. The TSE said that the electorate numbered 125,912,656 voters, but only 104,820,145 votes were cast, meaning an abstention rate of 16.75%. The TSE deemed 95,996,733, or 91.58%, of the votes cast to be valid. Another 2,866,205 (2.73%) votes were blank and 5,957,207 (5.68%) were nullified. Voters chose 513 lower house deputies, along with the president, 27 senators, 27 governors, and 1,059 state legislators on Oct. 1.

While editorialists like Gilberto Dimenstein of newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo characterized Alckmin as "the big winner" and Lula as "the big loser" in an article titled "Alckmin begins [to be] the favorite," Alckmin will have just one month in October to convince an electoral majority of Brazilians to turn in his favor. The 6.5 million voters who favored Helena will be very unlikely to favor the right-leaning Alckmin, and Lula still has a respectable level of popularity among Brazilians even after the past year and a half have brought PT scandals to the public. Helena has refused to endorse either candidate and announced that she would run again in 2010. Alckmin's results, however, took him well beyond what pollsters had been predicting.

A Datafolha survey, for example, had presaged a Lula victory with 53% of respondents saying they would vote for him, 35% for Alckmin, 9% for Helena, and 2% for Buarque. The survey talked to 7,528 voters in 368 cities on Sept. 26. Polls like that had newspapers and investors saying that voters had shrugged off emerging corruption scandals that continued to rock Lula's PT.

Lula, once the terror of international markets and the Brazilian business class when he first appeared close to winning the presidency in 2002 (see NotiSur, 2002-06-21, 2002-08-09 and 2002-11-08), became the new symbol of a desirable status quo for traders during the 2006 vote. The national currency, the real, fell prior to the vote as speculation grew that he lacked the approval necessary for a first-round win. His fiscal conservatism has pleased business sectors for four years. Lula did not participate in any of the televised candidate debates aired in the weeks and days prior to the vote.

Last minute smear-purchase scandal topples top PT figures

Analysts tended to regard Lula's failure to win as the impact from last-minute revelations that PT members had sought to purchase a dossier that would supposedly have discredited Alckmin, potentially a violation of electoral campaign-spending laws. On Sept. 21, Lula fired three key members of his team in response to arrest warrants alleging PT figures tried to pay US\$770,000 for political dirt on his opponents. Major newspapers ran front-page photos showing the piles of money and six party members who face arrest warrants. Lula had to fire his campaign manager Ricardo Berzoini, and an old friend who ran his personal security detail is among those wanted in the federal dirty-tricks probe. But the president has denied knowledge of any wrongdoing and insists his government has done more than any other to address corruption.

"Brazil can do better; it can have an ethical honest government like the Brazilian people. It can have an efficient government and make Brazil grow," Alckmin said after that. But Alckmin also may be vulnerable to scandal. He quashed 16 ethics investigations in the Sao Paulo state assembly, and his wife was accused of accepting 400 free dresses from a luxury boutique.

Members of Alckmin's party, like Lula's, have also been linked to illegal campaign-financing schemes. Some Lula supporters suspected the latest allegations were the work of Lula's opponents to prevent the re-election of the first president who made them believe Brazil's government could address their woes. "Poor people trust in the democratic way to overcome misery. Lula made it possible," said Lula's former interior minister, Ciro Gomes. "If people think that he was stopped [from re-election] because of dirty tricks, they will revolt."

Both candidates now must decide whether to use free television time during the runoff campaign to lay out their programs or "go for each other's throats," said Alexandre Barros, a political analyst with Early Warning consultants in Brasilia. "My feeling is they will go for each other's throats, and it's going to be very bad. The question is which one of them will start the attacks." Alckmin was the youngest mayor of his small city of Pindamonhangaba at 23. He rose through state and federal legislatures, helped found the PSDB, and took over Sao Paulo's governorship when the sitting governor died. Elected governor in 2002, he stepped down to run for president.

Jose Serra, who early on had been one of the likely candidates that the PSDB considered running against Lula but who ultimately lost the party's nomination to Alckmin (see NotiSur, 2006-03-24), won Alckmin's old job the governorship of Sao Paulo. Lula has been weakened, but he has overcome corruption allegations before. And scandals no longer shock many Brazilians, especially the poor who represent his core supporters.

"I've supported Lula since I was small and I figure he's already there, let him stay there. Why are we going to put in someone else who won't be any different?" said Joao Otavio da Costa, a Rio de Janeiro cook who earns about US\$162 a month. "Lula still remains a clear favorite to win re-election," said Christopher Garman, Latin America analyst with the Eurasia Group. "Given that Lula received close to 49% of valid votes in the first round, for him to lose the election, voters who supported him in the first round would have to switch over to Alckmin in the second."

Lula's PT faces opposition majority in Congress

There was voter discontent regarding "dossiegate," apparently, although Lula's continued support even after the scandals of 2005 showed some willingness to accept a corrupted PT. The "mensalao" or monthly-payments scandal, where legislators allegedly took monthly bribes to pass PT legislation (see NotiSur, 2006-01-07), did not topple many deputies who had not already been impeached. Voters did deny re-election to 61 of 67 legislators suspected of involvement in a wide-ranging scheme in which legislators allegedly accepted bribes to buy overpriced ambulances with public money, known as the "sanguessa" or blood-sucker scheme.

In the northeastern state of Bahia, voters rejected the re-election bid of heavily favored Gov. Paulo Souto, whose mentor is a longtime political boss who's been the target of numerous ethics investigations. Voters in the state of Pernambuco shot down a bid by Severino Cavalcanti to regain a seat in Congress. Cavalcanti resigned last year as president of the Chamber of Deputies after being accused of bribing a restaurant concessionaire (see NotiSur, 2005-09-09 and 2005-12-09).

The Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB) has 89 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the PT has 83, an increase of two seats. Communist, socialist, liberal, and progressive parties that support the PT, together with the PT, have 223 seats, well short of the 257 seats the official-party bloc would need to count on a simple majority in the house. For a two-thirds majority, 308 votes would be necessary, meaning fundamental economic reforms are out of Lula's immediate reach. The PFL won the biggest bloc in the 81-seat Senate with 18 victories. There will be 16 senators from the PSDB. The PMDB dropped from 20 seats to 15, while the PT lost a seat and will have 12. Brazil's ex-president

Collor de Mello wins Senate seat Former President Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), forced from office in a corruption scandal (see NotiSur, 1992-12-08 and 1993-01-05) and barred from politics for eight years, won a Senate seat, electoral officials announced Oct. 2. Collor de Mello won 44% of the votes in the senate race in Alagoas, a poor sugarcane-producing state in northeastern Brazil notorious for political violence. His closest rival, Ronaldo Lessa, got 40%.

In 1989, Collor galvanized Brazilians with promises to fight corruption and became Brazil's first democratically elected president after a 1964-1985 military regime and an appointed transition government. He defeated Lula in that election. Collor was later implicated in a scheme of kickbacks and commissions from public-works contracts, and he resigned in 1992 as the Senate was deliberating whether to remove him from office. Despite his resignation, the Senate voted to strip him of his political rights for eight years.

In 1994, a court acquitted him of criminal-corruption charges, and no effort was ever made to recover the millions of dollars he allegedly pocketed (see NotiSur, 1994-12-16). He won the October senate race running with the Partido Renovador Trabalhista Brasileiro (PRTB).

-- End --