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José Pedro Martins

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Brazil's Election Points to a New Country on the Horizon

by José Pedro Martins

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Results of the Oct. 3 first-round presidential elections in Brazil revealed the emergence of a new country in the distance. Voters also elected governors in all 26 states and the federal district, members of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives—the two bodies of Congress—and members of the state legislatures (Asambléias Legislativas).

Of the 135 million eligible voters, 101 million went to the polls. Dilma Rousseff, candidate for the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), received the largest number of votes, 47.6 million (46.9%). In second place was José Serra of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) with 33.1 million (32.6%).

Rousseff was a former chief of staff for President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who, along with a coalition that includes the powerful Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), backed her. Polls conducted just prior to the elections showed Rousseff as the favorite and indicated she might obtain the 50% plus one valid votes to win in the first round. Her advantage largely resulted from the health of the Brazilian economy, which has also brought Lula unprecedented popularity.

Rousseff unable to avoid runoff

Political analysts point to two factors that contributed to Dilma's failure to win a first-round victory. The first was a number of accusations, described in detail by the media in the weeks before the elections, involving Erenice Guerra, Rousseff's successor as chief of staff (NotiSur, Sept. 24, 2010). Guerra was fired just days before the elections, but her departure did not erase the negative public-opinion reaction and ended up influencing the final election result.

The second factor was the strong showing of the third-place candidate, Sen. Marina Silva of the Partido Verde (PV), who received an impressive 19.6 million votes (19.3%). Silva did that well despite waging a very austere campaign with a platform centered on the defense of ethics in politics and a well-founded defense of sustainable development.

The PV candidate was environment minister for five years during Lula's administration and resigned after a series of disagreements with other administration members, including then minister Rousseff. Silva opposed allowing the planting of transgenic crops, planting sugarcane and soy in new areas of the Amazon, and constructing huge hydroelectric dams in the Amazon region (NotiSur, May 28, 2010) Some sectors of the Lula administration have always supported those policies.

Analysts concluded that many sectors of the public who had previously voted for Lula and the PT were unhappy with the direction of some aspects of the administration and voted for Silva, eliminating Rousseff's chance to be elected in the first round. The big question for the Oct. 31 runoff becomes, then, who will get Silva's votes?

The first polls taken after the election indicate that Rousseff continues to be the favorite. A victory would make her the first woman president of Brazil and would be another historic event, following the election of the first laborer and union leader, Lula, as president in 2002 and again in 2006.
An Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística (IBOPE) poll published Oct. 13 gave Dilma 49% support compared with 43% for Serra. Considering only valid votes, Dilma would have 53% compared with 47% for Serra, who, before running for president, was governor of São Paulo, the most populous and richest state in Brazil.

The same day, the Instituto Vox Populi published its poll giving Dilma 48% against 40% for Serra.

**Runoff time to clarify positions**

Analysts predict a fierce runoff campaign. It should be the time for Dilma and Serra to clarify their positions on various issues, social and labor rights undoubtedly being among them.

"Now is the time to clear up doubts," said Antônio Augusto de Queiroz, journalist and political analyst and documentation director for the Departamento Intersindical de Assessoria Parlamentar (DIAP). Queiroz asked whether José Serra supports, as do Lula and Rousseff, "a policy to permanently recover the minimum wage and replace losses for retirees, and to oppose proposals of the PSDB and its allies to decouple the minimum wage from social security benefits."

Queiroz reminded readers that Serra was planning minister in the administration of former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), when administrative and welfare reforms eliminated 50 civil-service benefits. The DIAP director added that, when Serra was a deputy and later as a senator, he supported liberalizing the labor law (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho, CLT) and favored direct negotiations between employers and employees without unions as intermediaries.

Philosophy professor Roberto Romano of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), one of the leading Brazilian experts on ethical issues, believes that the runoff campaign is the moment to clarify positions how the government that will emerge after the elections should handle issues such as freedom of the press and speech.

Romano says that the Plano Nacional de Dereitos Humanos, signed by the Lula administration, calls for "social control of the media," advocated by the left in the general-election campaign. Romano fears that "social control of the media will later turn into state control of the media."

"We cannot have a controlled media because then we would not know about the scandals involving members of the federal government," said Romano.

As the charismatic Lula's successor is not known, commentators and the media have focused on speculating about the new country that will emerge. The large vote for Marina Silva could be a clear sign that sustainable development is increasingly important to significant sectors of Brazilian society. No longer can environmental problems be ignored. In the same way, political ethics, as preached by Marina, will also be ever more present in the life of Brazilian political parties. And the fact that two of the three leading presidential candidates were women points to a new moment, to a growing feminization of party politics in Brazil.

**PT picks up seats in Congress**

In the votes for senators and deputies who will write federal laws in the next four years, the trend also points toward the emergence of a new country. Voters chose 54 of the 81 seats in the Senate and all 513 federal deputies.
The elections saw a strong showing by the PT and the PMDB, the major parties and the base of support for the Lula administration. The PT increased its number of Senate seats from eight to 13 and its lower-house seats from 79 to 88, making it the party with the largest number of deputies. In the Senate, the PT is the second-largest party after the PMDB and went from 17 to 19 seats. The PMDB will have 79 deputies, 11 fewer than its current 90.

Overall, the parties that support the Lula administration won 47 Senate seats compared with 26 by parties backing Serra. In the lower house, pro-Lula parties won 350 seats compared with 163 for pro-Serra parties. Consequently, if Dilma is elected, her administration will have a significant congressional base of support.

Other figures also point toward a "new Brazil." A study by DIAP, which exercises permanent and rigid oversight of congressional activities, indicates that 67 newly elected senators and deputies are sympathetic to labor demands, six more than in the current legislature. This is a clear reflection of the PT's performance in the Oct. 3 balloting. DIAP also found that 169 pro-business deputies were elected, signaling in theory that approval for union demands such as the 40-hour work week will find staunch opposition in Congress.

Abortion becomes runoff-campaign issue

Another DIAP-study finding was that the evangelical caucus in Congress will have more influence because of the rapid increase in the number of Brazilians who identify as evangelical compared with a reduced number who identify as Catholic. Sixty-three evangelical deputies and three senators were elected.

The strong vote for Marina was another sign of the growing evangelical presence in Brazilian society. The PV candidate is a member of the Assemblies of God church, one of the largest evangelical denominations in Brazil. Opposition to abortion and to gay and lesbian civil unions is a longstanding cause of the evangelical caucus in Congress.

Many observers are concerned that abortion, defended by many Catholics and Protestants, will become the central issue in the runoff campaign. Professor Romano fears that "we are experiencing a very serious political, anthropological, and social decline and a return to the patronage system," which was characterized by the influence of religion in state matters during the Empire.

Romano, whose doctoral thesis was about church-state relations, said, "When these dimensions become confused, it is bad for politics and bad for religion." He is concerned that the abortion issue "is causing even greater divisions among the churches, and, with the strengthening of the most conservative sectors, leaves the future government with its hands tied."

"Religion cannot be a political weapon, the state must be secular," concludes Romano, who has a serious concern about the dimension that this debate has taken in the runoff campaign. A heated campaign, without a doubt.

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