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Brazil: Presidential Election Countdown

by John Neagle

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For the first time since 1960, Brazilians will cast direct votes for president on Nov. 15. Since no one of the 21 candidates is expected to capture a simple majority, the two top candidates will participate in a runoff on Dec. 17. Brazil's last elected president was Janio Quadros who took power in 1960 but resigned a year later. He was succeeded by vice-president Joao Goulart until the military seized power on April 1, 1964. Since 1964, presidents have been selected by military regimes or electoral colleges. Under a transition agreement with the military, an electoral college selected Tancredo Neves, a veteran politician from Minas Gerais state, to take power in 1985. Neves died before the inauguration. Jose Sarney, chosen by the electoral college to serve as vice president, was installed as president. In 1989, the Brazilian electorate of 82 million is nearly five times the number of voters in 1960. Under the new constitution which went into effect last year, two new categories of citizens were added to the electorate: illiterate persons, and Brazilians between the ages of 16 and 18. Fernando Collor de Mello of the center-right, 40, social democrat Leonel Brizola, 67, and socialist Luiz Inacio da Silva, 44, are considered most likely to reach the second round. Nov. 9: Brazil's Superior Electoral Tribunal rejected in a unanimous vote the presidential candidacy of TV host and entrepreneur Silvio Santos who announced his intent to run on Oct. 31. First, the seven judges of the tribunal reached a decision stating that the Brazilian Municipal Party (PMB) had not met legal requirements to participate in the November election. Santos had declared himself the PMB's candidate. Next, because Santos had not resigned three months prior to the election from his position as director of the Brazilian Television System (SBI), a company he controls. Nov. 12: The presidential campaign officially ended on Sunday. In downtown Sao Paulo, the Workers Party (PT) organized a huge demonstration marking the end of the campaign, attended by an estimated 350,000 people. A similar demonstration took place in Rio de Janeiro on Nov. 11. PT candidate Luiz Inacio ("Lula") da Silva reiterated his campaign pledges at both events: suspension of foreign debt payments, agrarian reform, and a revolution in education, health and transportation. In Sao Paulo, he was handed a document containing the names of 600 intellectuals, artists and entertainers who have declared endorsement of his candidacy. Da Silva asserted that while there are only one each of Collor de Mello, Brizola, and Mario Covas (candidate of the Social Democrat Party) in Brazil, there are millions of Lulas, a reference to his humble origins. The candidate has a primary school education. A mechanic by trade, Lula became a leader in Brazil's metalworker union. Founder of the PT, he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies from his district in Sao Paulo. On Sunday night in a televised debate, Brizola lambasted da Silva for supporting violence by advocating invasions of unproductive agricultural estates. Brizola described the three rightist candidates as "creatures of the dictatorship." Seven candidates participated in the debate. Collor de Mello declined the invitation to debate for the fifth time. (Basic data from AFP, 11/10/89; Notimex, 11/09/89, 11/10/89, 11/12/89, 11/13/89; DPA, 11/13/89)