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Brazil: Preliminary Results Show Conservative Fernando Collor De Mello Elected President

by John Neagle

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On Dec. 17, the Brazilian electorate voted in a presidential runoff election between conservative Fernando Collor de Mello of the National Reconstruction Party, and Luis Inacio (Lula) da Silva of the Workers Party (PT). Exit polls by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion (IBOPE) and DataFolha gave Collor de Mello a narrow lead over da Silva, or 4% and 3%, respectively. Unofficial reports from polling stations in several major cities showed turnout lower than anticipated, attributed in part to heavy rains in central, northeastern and far southern Brazil. Dec. 18: According to TV Globo, with 42% of the ballots counted, Collor de Mello led with 15.87 million votes to 15.47 million for Lula, or a difference of 1.4%. In Brasilia, Collor de Mello's principal economic adviser, Zelia Cardoso de Mello, said the new president will begin its state administrative reforms by cutting the number of separate ministries from 27 to only 12 or 13, and by pushing for greater privatization. The success of these initiatives, she said, will depend on the national congress. The National Reconstruction Party has only 22 seats in the 559-member bicameral legislature. Later, TV Globo reported a 5.3% edge for Collor de Mello, at 32,096,342 votes versus 29,019,120 for Lula. Dec. 18: TV Globo projected Collor de Mello would defeat da Silva by 6.27% of total votes cast. In the network's tally was based on 86.8% of returns announced by state election officials, the conservative candidate led by 3 million votes or 5.1% of valid ballots. News of Collor de Mello's lead stabilized financial markets Monday and triggered a plunge of the dollar on the illegal, but tolerated, black market. Dec. 19: The official tally on Tuesday had Collor de Mello leading da Silva by 2.46 million votes, with 90.36% of the ballots counted. Da Silva's Workers Party (PT) refused to concede defeat, and accused TV Globo and private bus companies of sabotaging their campaign. PT officials said they would sue the network, accusing it of giving Collor de Mello more television time in news broadcasts in the days leading up to the vote. Party spokespersons also accused the network of portraying the conservative candidate in a more favorable light than his adversary. Network owner Roberto Marinho supported Collor de Mello during the campaign. All TV time during Brazilian elections is strictly controlled by the Supreme Electoral Court. Federal Police chief Romeu Tuma said officials were investigating charges by the PT that voters could not reach polling stations in the states of Bahia and Ceara because private bus companies pulled their vehicles off the streets. The two states were described as bastions of PT support. (Basic data from Notimex, AFP, 12/17/89, 12/18/89; AP, 12/17-19/89)

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