

Elections in Brazil: Time for Wheeling and Dealing

Contributed by Guy Burton
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Twenty-one states had completed their vote counts by 1.30 yesterday afternoon, but that didn't include São Paulo. But it could have been worse. In Rio no-one seemed to know whether there were 42 councillors or 50. Before ruling one way or the other the state's electoral court decided it would announce the full 50 and reduce their number if necessary.

Even if the mayoral contest is as yet undecided, it looks like the PT can be sure of a majority whoever gets elected. Of the 55 councillors who will take their seats, 20 were petistas and their allies, the PTB (PT with 14 and the PTB with six).

The PSDB won 13 seats while the Luiza Erundina (PSB) PSB/PMDB alliance gained five (four of which were peemedebistas) and Paulo Maluf's PP won four.

Assuming the PMDB join the PT as they did during the previous administration, this will mean a coalition of 25; support from the PDT (two seats) of the Greens (three) would give them a majority.

We're watching you...

Foreign coverage of the election isn't limited to English language sources it seems. A roundup appeared in yesterday's Folha and Estadão, which included analysis of Argentine, Spanish, American and British press.

The Clarin in Buenos Aires reported that 'Lula's party has consolidated its national base', but reckons that the second round in São Paulo could be 'rather difficult' especially after Marta Suplicy's (PT) failure get level with José Serra (PSDB).

Another Argentine paper, La Nacion, was reported as saying that the results showed 'clear support for Lula in the polls.' It also reckons that despite Serra's first round win, 'the situation could be changed in the second round'.

El Pais in Spain noted that Serra's win was a surprise and that the second round could have 'dramatic undertones'. It also stated that the results showed general success for Lula's government, which could be achieved to the country's economic performance while the Los Angeles Times said that the PT victories around the country ensured that the party maintained its support in urban areas and would help Lula in his re-election bid in 2006.

Bizarrely British domestic politics managed to sneak into the Folha's coverage, in particular an opinion poll which showed that the Conservatives were struggling to convince the public on the eve of their conference.

According to The Times Labour would poll 35% of the votes against 28% for the Tories and 25% for the Liberal Democrats. Despite the heading 'Blair's Reaction', none was offered.

What odds a sub-editor was caught napping?

More talking heads

Besides the media, the media are also reporting other forms of foreign analysis. In the Estadão, Neil Dougall, the head of research at the Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein bank, said that he thought it would be difficult for the PT to win the second round.

However, he noted that the party had increased its share of the vote across Brazil from 14% in 2000 to 17.2% this time. He also believed that 'If the PT loses Sao Paulo, there will be a fight within the party'.

Meanwhile, over at the Folha, an interview takes place with Wendy Hunter of the Kellogg Institute at Notre Dame University. Hunter, who has written on the PT, said that the result was 'more than symbolic' because it gives Lula 'a little space to make reforms and govern... He'll have more freedom to govern.'

However, Hunter still thinks the PT needs to win Sao Paulo. 'The government has invested a lot in its image when it comes to financial matters. Losing Sao Paulo would not put it in a good position for the gubernatorial or presidential races in 2006.'

Asked to comment on the 'polarisation' between the PT and PSDB, Hunter said she found the situation ironic: 'They should be friends in terms of political ideology. They are already close.' On the matter of electoral alliances, this will 'compromise the agenda, because the PT is going to have to move to the centre even more to win more than 50% of the vote in the cities where there is a second round.' But it would be an exaggeration to think that this means the PT is no longer a left-wing party.

Of the PFL, which once played king-maker and was hugely influential during the 1990s, Hunter said that 'the PT isn't in power nationally and this influences greatly the prospect of winning smaller cities. Basically the PFL doesn't have the machinery it had in the past.'

Horse trading

Already the wheeling and dealing has begun. The PMDB president, Michel Temer, met with PT senator, Aloizio Mercadante, and all but gave his party's support to Marta for the second round.

But at a price: the PT will have to support their man in Ribeirão Preto, a city in the interior which was once run by the PT's finance minister in the national government, Antonio Palocci.

Next on the agenda will be meetings between the PMDB and the PSB, to get the latter on board as well.

But while the PMDB and the PSB would be early scalps for the PT, petistas are now being coy about their relationship with Maluf and the PP. The party president, Jose Genoio, refused to respond to a direct question over whether the PT was interested in Maluf's support.

You can understand why. How would left-wing supporters feel if the opposition was to mount a campaign saying 'Vote Marta, get Maluf'? Yup, you guessed it: sick to the stomach.

Instead Genoio is trying not to spell it out too clearly: 'We want the votes of all those who voted for Maluf... We want the votes of all those who voted for Maluf, Erundina, Paulinho, Francisco Rossi and Dr Havanir.'

Maluf then did his bit to keep the crowd guessing. Really, all this reticence won't do. It's got more in common with blushing brides than hard-nosed, battle-scarred politicians. Maluf cancelled a press conference yesterday afternoon, saying he was going to meet with his party leadership to discuss the matter of second round support.

Does he really have to do that? It's already an open secret that some kind of agreement was reached between Maluf and the PT earlier in the campaign.

But at least there's none of this silliness when it comes to the micro-party, the PHS ('nanico' to use the Portuguese parlance). Their candidate in the first round, Francisco Rossi, has thrown his support behind Marta. OK, so he only garnered 78,000 votes, or 1.26% of the vote. But it's the thought that counts, I suppose.

Making excuses

There's a bit of an inquest going into the opinion polls and why they didn't get the first round result right. Ibope's director, Marcia Cavallari, was explaining to the Estadão why they had got the result wrong.

Having predicted a tie of 40% between Marta and Serra, the excuse given for the right-point difference was that they 'overestimated Marta and underestimated Serra'.

The Estadão's guru-in-chief, Fatima Pacheco Jordão, was wheeled out for an explanation. According to her, 'Anticipating the second round, many voters transferred their votes from minor candidates to the big ones.' This was done, she suspects, to avoid wasting votes and thereby giving Serra the larger margin of victory than anticipated.

That logic would mean many of Maluf's would-be voters decided to vote for Serra when they got to the polls. But like Ibope, Fatima doesn't think that votes will naturally 'migrate' from one defeated candidate to another.

In other words Serra can't expect to just pick up Maluf voters. The second round, then, will be a completely different election, which will make it essential that 'Serra now presents a consistent programme...'

Youth and (in)experience?

It definitely makes me feel old when I read this. Following the elections, Brazil's youngest councillor is just 17 years old (the voting age in Brazil is 16 and councillors need to be at least 18). A tucano, Orlando Dantas de Souza, was elected in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, with 167 votes. However, he will be turning 18 in December.

The country's youngest mayor isn't much older. In another northeast state, Ceará, Arline Veras dos Santos, was elected in Barroquinha. She's just 20.

Puts my own election campaign in London as the party's youngest candidate (I'm 28) earlier this year into some perspective.

What is it about both being in the Northeast? Maybe it's something in the water...

For more information and analysis of the São Paulo and other local Brazilian results, visit the election blog being run by Guy Burton and Andrew Stevens at www.saopaulo2004.blogspot.com.