

In Dramatic Shift, Brazil's 80% in Favor of a Gun Ban Shrinks to 41%

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With two final polls showing voters' decisive tendency to vote against the ban of gun sales, 122 million Brazilians are voting today in the first referendum of its history and in the world's first referendum to decide on the trade of guns. The electronic voting should go from 8 am to 5 pm and final results are expected around midnight today.

Brazil's electoral Justice wasn't anticipating big lines. According to the Federal Election Board's Information Technology secretary, Paulo Camarão, the votes tally should start at 8 pm when the state of Acre, the last one to vote due to the time zone differences, closes its ballot boxes. According to Camarão, 95% of the votes should be counted by midnight.

An Ibope survey released on Friday showed that 51% of the voters are against the prohibition of gun sales in Brazil while 41% are in favor of it. When only the valid votes are considered 55% said that they would vote against the prohibition while 45% declared they would vote "yes."

Another polling organization, the DataFolha, also showed a large margin of victory for the no vote. According to DataFolha, 57% of voters oppose the ban while 43% are in favor of it. In both surveys the error margin is 2 percentage points in either direction.

Those who are voting no (option 1) argue that the veto to gun sales would be an infringement on individual rights. On the other hand, people defending the yes (option 2) maintain that the measure will lead to a reduction of deaths in the country.

One month ago, the yes vote seemed to have the edge. It took the gun lobby and its defenders only 20 days of radio and TV campaign to revert this scenario. It was a dramatic turnabout. Only three months ago, 80% of the voters were saying they would favor the idea of banning the trade of firearms.

The gun referendum result will also be seen as a referendum on the Lula government itself. Polls have revealed that most of those who approve of the Lula's administration intended to vote yes on the ban while those who disapprove were planning to vote no.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva tried to distance himself from the yes campaign in the final days leading to today's referendum, apparently to avoid such a connection.