

In Surprising Result, 64% of Brazilians Vote to Keep Their Guns

Contributed by Rodolfo Espinoza
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No Brazilian poll organization was able to detect how much Brazilians were against the idea of banning the commerce of weapons in Brazil. This Sunday, Brazilians had to participate in a mandatory referendum which asked the question: "Should the sale of firearms and ammunition be prohibited in Brazil?" Pressing number 1 in the electronic keyboard meant a vote for "no" and number 2, a vote for "yes".

With 99,57% of the votes counted, 63,89% of the voters had chosen "no" while only 36.11% were in favor of "yes." In states like Rio Grande do Sul, famous for its spirit of independence, almost 90% (86.82%) opposed the ban to the commerce of weapons.

The Brazilian vote was a clear repudiation of a law that had already been voted by the National Congress and that was defended by the Catholic Church, several other Christian groups, scores of NGOs and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva himself.

Representative Alberto Fraga, the main defender of the "no" vote as the president of the Parliamentary Front for the Right of Legitimate Defense credited the "no" victory to what he called "misleading information" given by those in favor of banning guns and to the society dissatisfaction with the policy of public safety of the current government.

"The "no" is not only a sign of protest, but also a reaction to the attempt of taking away a citizen's right. We have demystified several numbers presented by the Yes Front. If the prohibition had been approved, the bandits would be delighted with the State's incompetence," said Fraga.

Those opposed to the prohibition insistently repeated in their campaign that people should have the "freedom" to choose if they wanted or not to buy a gun.

The referendum results don't mean that Brazilians are now free to buy the weapon they wish in the corner store. Brazil's Disarmament Statute (Law 10.826), promulgated in 23 of December of 2003 is still in force. That legislation limits the ownership and use of firearms to the military corporations and policemen, security companies, sportsmen, hunters and people who get a special permit from the Federal Police.

The "no" was a shining illustration of the power of propaganda. In a little more than 20 campaign days on TV, the "no" group was able to turn around a society who was massively in favor of banning guns. As recently as August, numbers released by DataFolha had shown that 80% of the population were saying they would vote "yes."

Some analysts see the result as a serious defeat for President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who openly defended the prohibition. These experts say that the "no" vote is also a rejection of Lula and his policies. After voting, Lula told reporters: "I think a common person won't feel more secure for having a gun, so I have voted "yes." We have to consider, however, that the people's will is sovereign."

Brazil has one of the world's highest death rates by firearms. A study, earlier this year, by UNESCO about the situation of 57 countries, showed that about 100 people are killed by gun in Brazil, every day. Between 1979 and 2003 the number of victims killed by firearms in the country surpassed 550 thousand.

In defense of the "yes" vote, the Parliamentary Front Brazil Without Guns presented shocking statistics showing not only the UNESCO numbers, but also those from Brazil's Health Ministry.

According to these figures, 39,325 Brazilians were killed by gun in 2003 (an average of 108 a day). This rate is higher than those registered in Angola's civil war, the Gulf War, the Colombia conflicts and the war between Israelis and Palestinians.