

Brazil's NO Win Is a Vote of Non-Confidence in Lula

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A sweeping 64% of Brazilians said NO to a ban on the sale of fire arms and ammunition while 35% supported the referendum initiative which was voted Sunday, according to the latest report from the country's Superior Electoral Tribunal. Abstention was estimated in 20,9% of the 122 million electoral role.

The NO victory was extensive to the 27 states that make up the Brazilian union. In São Paulo, the country's main electoral circumscription (27 million) 59.9% voted NO and in Rio do Janeiro (19 million) 61.9%.

However political analysts have also interpreted Sunday's results as a protest vote against the government's inefficiency and lack of credibility in facing one of Brazil's main problems, insecurity.

If officials, politicians and police forces can't be trusted, there's no reason in the world to undertake an effective action to fight the black market of fire arms, which would have been the main consequence of a hypothetical YES (ban) victory.

Justice Minister Thomaz Bastos said the referendum results can't be interpreted as "a disapproval of the administration's performance" but rather "it's the presidential election of 2006 that will be judging Mr. Lula's performance".

Actually supporters of the ban seemed headed for an easy win until about three weeks ago, when opponents including weapons makers launched an aggressive media campaign.

Opponents of the ban argued average Brazilians need guns to protect themselves from drug gangs and thieves, while supporters said the ban was needed to bring down the death toll from firearms which claims the lives of more than 36.000 Brazilians every year.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations, UNESCO, says Brazil's murder rate of 21,7 per 100.000 people a year is the second highest in the world behind Venezuela.

More than 500 000 people were killed in Brazil between 1979 and 2003, according to UN figures, and many tourists now think twice about a walk along Rio de Janeiro's famous Copacabana beach for fear of being held up at gunpoint.

There are more than 17-million firearms in Brazil, of which nine million are not registered, according to the Higher Institute of Religious Studies, which carried out a study with the Rio Alive and Small Arms Survey non-governmental groups.

The government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, human rights groups and the Roman Catholic Church were actively backing the ban. However the public swung dramatically against the proposal in recent weeks.

A DataFolha poll of 2,086 people published last Saturday by the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper said 57% of the public would vote against the measure and only 43% would support it. An Ibope poll said 51% would vote against it and only 41% would back it.

Before the official campaign started on October 1st, other polls had shown up to 76% percent of the public in favor of the ban.

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