

Brazil: Heloísa Helena Becomes Serious Contender for Presidency

Contributed by Émerson Luiz
Wednesday, 19 July 2006

The big news from the latest DataFolha poll on Brazil's October presidential election is not that President Lula's advantage in the race fell 1%, not even that a second round now seems likely.

The big news is that a firebrand politician from the Left, a woman who was expelled from the PT (Workers Party), the President's party, for speaking her mind, has almost doubled the number of voters willing to put her in office.

Senator Heloísa Helena, who in DataFolha's May poll of voting intention, had been chosen by 6% of the voters, has now grown to 10%. This before the woman, who is called a "warrior" by friends and detractors alike, has had a chance to start exposing her ideas on TV. The so-called free television airtime will not start until August 15.

Despite being known for her sharp tongue, Helena who runs for the PSOL, the party she created after being banned from the PT, seems intent on taking the high road on this campaign.

Talking about Lula, she said recently, "I don't accept the preconceived and sickening notion that Lula is not prepared. This is not the case. He is competent. The problem is he changed sides, he betrayed."

DataFolha shows President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva still leading the race in a first round with 44% of the votes, followed by former São Paulo Governor Geraldo Alckmin with 28%. Even when only the valid votes are taken into consideration this is not enough for Lula to secure victory.

In May, the same poll, which interviewed 6,264 people in 272 municipalities, showed President Lula winning 45% of the votes against 22% for his main rival. In June, Alckmin had grown to 29% while Lula had stayed stable with 46% of the votes. The polls have a 2% margin of error.

In a simulated second round with Lula and Alckmin, the president would come ahead with 51% of the votes, while the former governor would win 40% of the votes. For Lula this represents a 1% fall when compared to DataFolha's June results.

The other candidates are not registering more than 1% of the voters preference. Former Education Minister and Senator Cristovam Buarque from the PDT is getting a mere 1% of the votes, the same as José Maria Eymael from the PSDC.