



The Latest Poll Results are In... Lula Remains the Front-Runner in the Presidential Race

Ricardo Guedes

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As campaigning was beginning to intensify in early August in the run-up to the 2006 general elections, NewsBulletin sat down with Ricardo Guedes, President and Director of the Sensus Institute, a leading market and opinion research firm in Brazil that has conducted over 2,500 research projects and polls. The objective – to get his expert take on the forthcoming election season and learn the results of the latest Sensus poll conducted in early August. Prior to joining Sensus, Guedes held a variety of positions in the private and public sectors, including teaching posts in Research Methodology at both the Federal University of Belo Horizonte and Candido Mendes University in Rio de Janeiro. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

BACC – Who is going to win the Brazilian presidential elections this year?

Guedes – I think that Lula will probably win the election in the first round on October 1st or in the second round on October 29th. Lula's political support is based on four pillars: economic stability, rising employment, real wage growth and social welfare. According to the latest Sensus poll conducted in early August, Lula is now supported by 59% of the electorate.

BACC – And what about Geraldo Alckmin, isn't he competitive?

Guedes – Alckmin's initial campaign platform focused on fiscal responsibility and efficient management of the federal government. However, the electorate already believes the federal government – under the reigns of Lula – is playing the appropriate role on the fiscal responsibility front. Also, Alckmin's call for more efficient and transparent management of the state has been weakened by the increasingly intense activities of organized crime in São Paulo where he served as governor. The electorate does not perceive Alckmin to be a strong alternative to Lula at present.

BACC – And Helo'sa Helena, any chance that she could emerge as a spoiler in the presidential race?

Guedes - Actually, votes for Helo'sa Helena are essentially protest votes from

constituents who oppose Lula and do not think that Alckmin is a viable alternative either. Keep in mind that one of the most important indicators in Brazilian elections is a candidate's rejection rate. If your rejection rate is under 35%, you are in the game. If it is over 40%, you don't stand a chance. Let me explain. The total electorate is the whole, or 100%. Twenty percent of the eligible population doesn't vote. If you take the remaining 80% and divide by two, you get 40%. So, if more than 40% of the electorate rejects your candidacy, you'll never have a majority and therefore you won't get elected. According to this logic, Helo'sa Helena doesn't stand a chance, given that her rejection rate is 42%. Lula, on the other hand, has a rejection rate of just 27% and Alckmin is right on the cusp with a rejection rate of 38%. So, from this perspective, Lula remains the most competitive candidate.

In terms of voter intent, 48% of the poll respondents expressed their support for Lula, 20% for Alckmin and 9% for Helo'sa Helena. In a hypothetical first round, Lula would win with 61% of the valid votes. Should the race go to a second round, the poll results show that Lula would win with 53% of the total votes. Alckmin would be a distant second with 30%.

BACC – What about the “mensalão” votes for cash scandal in which the Workers Party allegedly made illegal payments for political support in the House of Representatives? What role is the scandal going to play in the Brazilian elections?

Guedes – The electorate has already decided to base these elections on economic criteria rather than ethics. This is a rational and pragmatic position based on whether or not voters believe they are better off today than they were four years ago. Actually, in spite of the recent corruption scandals involving the PT, we are witnessing a more centrist political pact between the left and right quite similar to what happened in Europe with the formation of social democratic movements. Extreme left and right are continuously excluded from the political process. In fact, most of the gubernatorial elections in Brazil – and perhaps even the presidential race – will be decided in the first round.

BACC – Could the official campaign period beginning on August 15 with electoral programming on radio and TV change the course of the elections?

Guedes - Not likely. Candidates and their policy platforms are well known at this point in the game. And pragmatism will likely prevail over moral questions. It is important to note that only 18% of the electorate believes Lula was actually involved in any type of corruption. Candidates will have very little to say during the electoral programs, and personal attacks on TV are not likely to change the outcome of the elections.

BACC – Do you foresee any major changes to Brazil's foreign policy following the elections?

Brazil's foreign policy is not likely to change in 2007. The different social segments in Brazil and the political parties understand the importance of ongoing globalization and economic integration efforts. I would say that Brazil will become an increasingly market-oriented economy with social stability and reduced political risks for business and investment.