

Workers Party candidate fails to win first-round victory in Brazil

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Workers Party candidate Dilma Rousseff, incumbent President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's hand-picked successor, failed to win an outright majority in Sunday's Brazilian presidential election, forcing her into an October 31 runoff with José Serra, the candidate of the right.

Rousseff won just under 47 percent of the vote compared to nearly 33 percent for Serra, the candidate of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party. The biggest shift, however, was to a third candidate, Marina Silva, of the Green Party, who began the campaign polling barely 10 percent of the vote and received nearly 20 percent of the ballots cast.

The Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), a split-off from the PT that is backed by various "left" tendencies, failed to win 1 percent of the vote.

Some 82 percent of the 135 million-strong Brazilian electorate went to the polls. Voting is compulsory in Brazil, where those who fail to cast a ballot are subject to nominal fines, are barred from getting government jobs and face difficulty in obtaining passports or government loans.

While up until the last days of the presidential campaign polls had suggested Rousseff would wrap up the election in the first round by topping 50 percent of votes, the results Sunday showed a significant fall-off in support for the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), the bulk of it going to the Green Party.

According to the daily *Folha de São Paulo*, "In 10 days, the candidate of the PV [Green Party] increased by 5.5 percentage points...Dilma fell by 7. Serra rose 1.7 points."

Rousseff, a little-known government official, who before the election had served as energy minister and

then chief of staff in the PT government, campaigned largely as the candidate of Lula, with the aim of coasting to victory on the coattails of the still popular incumbent president, who is barred by law from running for a third term.

On the Friday before the election, Lula explicitly portrayed the election as a referendum on his eight years in office, declaring, "A vote for Dilma is a vote for me."

While the failure to win an outright victory in the first round was widely interpreted as a setback for Rousseff and the PT, Lula was also unable to gain an absolute majority in either of his two successful elections in 2002 and 2006.

Rousseff placed first in 18 Brazilian states, while Serra led the voting in 11. Marina Silva was the top vote getter only in the Federal District of Brasilia.

The PT enjoyed its biggest margins in the poorer states of Brazil's Northeast, where the social assistance program *bolsa familia*, which provides minimal cash outlays to families living in poverty, has won it a solid constituency. Serra, however, came in first in São Paulo, Brazil's most populous state and the industrial and financial center where Lula first came to prominence as a trade union leader.

Also up for election Sunday were the governors in 26 states and the Federal District, the entire lower house of Congress and two-thirds of the Senate, as well as local legislators. The 10-party coalition supporting Rousseff, which includes several right-wing capitalist parties, was expected to win a clear majority in the Brazilian Congress, including some gains in the Senate, according to early analyses of the vote. In the two most populous states—São Paulo and Minas Gerais—candidates of Serra's PSDB were victorious.

The last-minute falloff in support for Rousseff and

the PT was widely attributed to a pair of recent corruption scandals that served to highlight the long record of corruption that has characterized the party's eight years in control of the federal government. The first of these involved the leaking of confidential tax information on Serra's family and supporters, which the right blamed on the PT. The second centered on an influence-peddling racket allegedly involving Rousseff's former aid and successor as chief of staff, Erenice Guerra.

Given the lack of any substantive differences on economic policy, the corruption issue assumed outsized political prominence. Both Rousseff and Serra have vowed to continue economic policies that serve the interests of the banks and corporations (which Lula had in turn inherited from his predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso), while maintaining the Lula government's social assistance programs.

Significantly, however, the main beneficiary was not Serra and the right, but Marina Silva and the Green Party, whose vote largely represents a distorted expression of opposition to the Lula government from the left. Its nearly 20 percent showing on Sunday compares with just 3.6 percent of the vote in 2006.

The Green Party candidate was Lula's environmental minister from 2003 until 2008, when she resigned from the government. She left the PT a year later to join the Green Party and prepare her run for the presidency.

Marina Silva (no relation to the incumbent president) posed as an opponent to the government's disregard for the environment in its promotion of corporate interests. She and her supporters also highlighted her personal background, much in the way the PT had with Lula. She came from a family of rubber tappers in the poor western Amazonian state of Acre, learning to read only at the age of 16. She also was associated with the murdered environmental campaigner Chico Mendes.

This background, however, was exploited by the PT government as a cover for policies that were dictated largely by agribusiness, much in the same way as Lula's background as a militant trade union leader was utilized to facilitate policies serving the interests of transnational capital. While Marina Silva was minister, unprecedented portions of forest and grassland in the Amazonian region were cleared to make way for soybean cultivation and cattle raising. Ecological disaster was further deepened by the government's

policy of promoting the sugar-based ethanol industry.

The central slogan of Marina Silva's campaign has been that of "sustainable development," a concept that has been embraced by a collection of wealthy corporate figures who have backed the Green Party in the election.

Her running mate is Guilherme Leal, the billionaire owner of the Natura cosmetics firm. She counts among her supporters the paper baron Roberto Klabin, Fernando Garnero, the owner of Brasilinvest, the Brazilian merchant bank and several other top bankers and corporate executives.

Behind the environmental pretensions, these elements are promoting the Green Party to further their own profit interests and see the only "sustainable development" as the promotion of capitalism.

Marina Silva also appealed for votes during the election campaign by highlighting her membership in an evangelical church and criticizing Rousseff for previous statements criticizing Brazil's reactionary ban on abortions. Rousseff sought to counter this attack by organizing a meeting with Catholic and evangelical church leaders to proclaim herself "pro-life" and declare her opposition to any change in the law.

Claiming her stronger than expected showing as a victory, Marina Silva declined to say who she would support in the second round, affirming that the decision would be made by a meeting of the Green Party's membership. There is strong speculation, however, that the party will throw its support to Serra.

One of the Greens' principal leaders is Zequinha Sarney, a deputy from Maranhão, who was minister of the environment in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in which Serra served as minister of health. He is also the son of José Sarney, the former leader of Arena, the political party of the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from the CIA-backed coup of 1964 until 1985. In that year, the military regime transferred power to a civilian government headed by Sarney without holding direct elections.



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