

referenda; it would be a nightmare. In this sense, the Portuguese might be a bad example for some Spaniards who may think that constitutional reforms can be easily made whenever democracy is institutionalized.

Focus on Brazil

Electoral Trends and Governability in Brazil

—Wayne A. Selcher

One of the largest electorates in the world (eighty-two million) turned out to vote in the 15 November 1989 first ballot and the 17 December second ballot of Brazil's first direct presidential election since 1960. The winner of the final ballot was Fernando Collor de Mello, relatively little known a year earlier, who had suc-

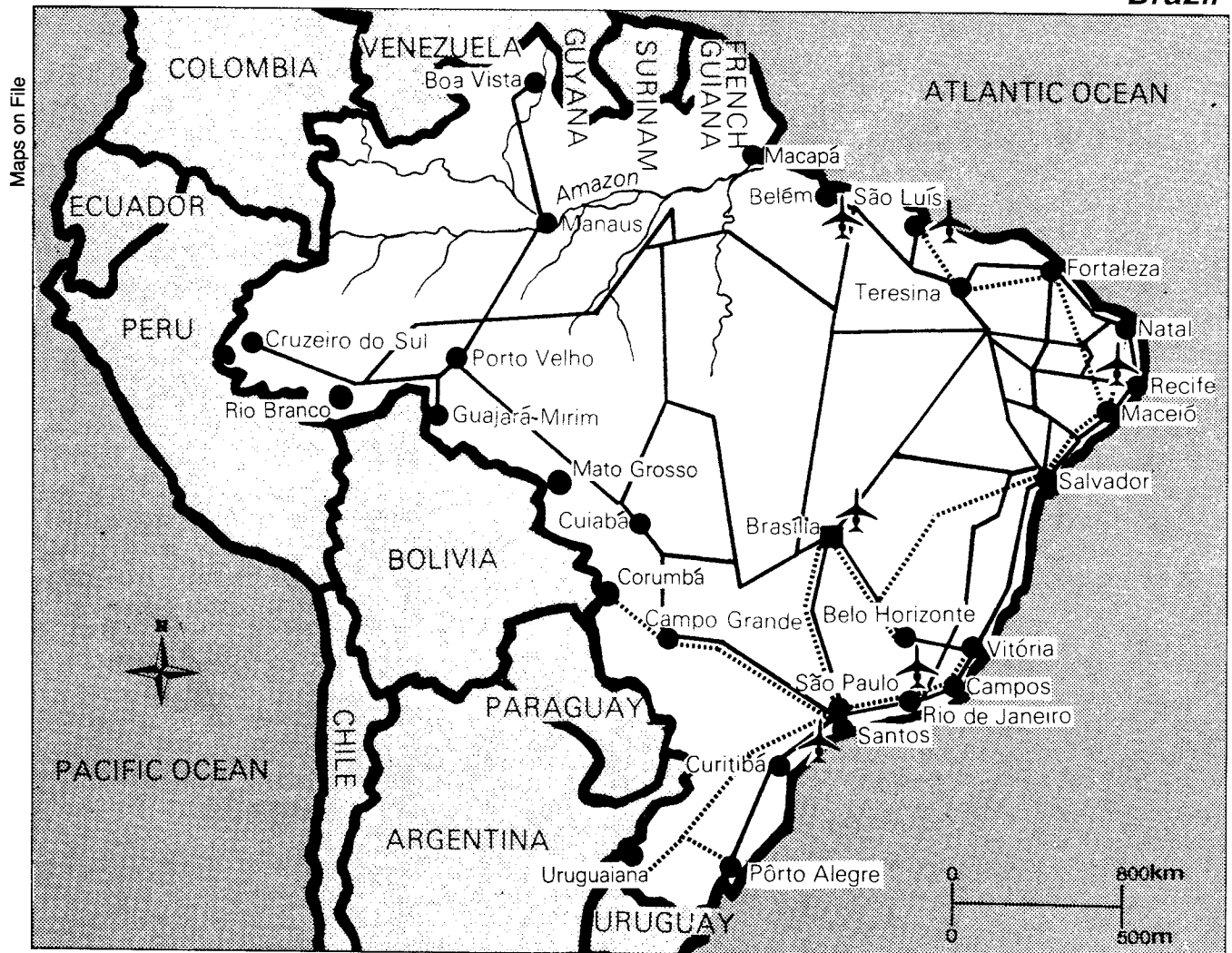
cessfully appealed to the population's deep dissatisfaction with the state of the nation and the dismal record of the José Sarney government.

The electorate comprised 58 percent of the population, and public opinion polls and the census showed it to be more literate, urban (70 percent), organized, independent, and politically aware than the electorate of 1960, which constituted only 23 percent of the population. The persistent "two Brazils" dilemma continues to be seen in the fact that the richest 20 percent of the population now receives 67 percent of the national yearly income, while the poorest 40 percent receives but 7 percent of that income.¹ Although its annual per-capita income of approximately \$2400 is relatively high for a developing country, Brazil has one of the sharpest income inequalities

in the world. The misery caused thereby is increasingly becoming a pressing social and electoral issue.

Even greater burden has been placed on the population by an economy that averaged very little per-capita growth over the 1980s, but produced a cumulative rate of inflation of 36.9 million percent in that decade.² All levels of government have been running large deficits, interest payments are going unmet in internal and foreign official debts, and the quality of public services is deteriorating badly. The Sarney government found very few defenders or apologists, because the economic measures it implemented produced much personal sacrifice resulting in little hope of long-term betterment. A May 1989 IBOPE poll showed that 80 percent of the public did not trust politicians, and that 76 percent did not approve of President

Brazil





President Fernando Collor de Mello

Samuel, a drastic difference from very high levels of public approval he enjoyed during the apparent success of the Cruzado anti-inflation plan from March to November 1986.³

The predominant mood of the electorate, then, was to continue the oppositionist tendency of the recent elections to "throw the rascals out" in search of new leadership and new approaches. Many familiar figures among the twenty-one candidates in the November 15 first ballot went to a resounding defeat, as the lion's share of the vote (71 percent) was given to the top four candidates, who all adopted a rhetoric of change and represented minority parties. The two candidates from the parties generally identified with the Sarney government (Ulysses Guimarães, PMDB, and Aureliano Chaves, PFL) won only 5 percent of the vote between them. (The PMDB had swept the 1986 elections for the current governors, the entire Chamber of Deputies, and two-thirds of the Senate.) Leonel Brizola, of the PDT, missed qualifying for the runoff ballot by less than half a million votes, thus unsuccessfully ending a decade of presidential ambitions since his return from political exile in Europe.

The second ballot, held to form a

majority coalition around the winner, was contested by conservative populist Fernando Collor de Mello, former governor of poverty-stricken Alagoas (with 30.5 percent of the valid vote) and socialist Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva, a labor leader and founder of the Workers' party, or PT (with 17.2 percent of the valid vote). Both candidates tried to present a charismatic style and a promise of change, came from the younger ranks, had limited previous national experience, and ran on mystiques about their performances. Collor chose the Gaullist image of being above party and factions, in direct touch with the nation, and intransigent and "modern" in his principles. He appealed to a popular desire for a determined well-meaning, competent man at the top to sweep away corruption, incompetence, and disregard for public opinion. Lula projected the image of a tireless party organizer, union leader, and spokesman for the downtrodden, a man of the people offering a Brazil in which people would "not be afraid to be happy."

Both tried to expand their appeal toward the center; the PT modified some of the Marxist and statist aspects of its program, and Collor tried to appear a social democrat to downplay his conservative past. Lula's greatest organizational assets were heavy public support from the progressive Church and a national network of enthusiastic volunteers. Collor drew upon the image-making ability of the national TV Globo network that backed him, and upon the skills of a modern public relations and campaign management team.

Many Brazilians felt that the second ballot option was less than a fully desirable one. Concerns were raised by moderates about Collor's relatively brief political experience as governor of a minor and very conservative state and about his temperamental personality. Others questioned Lula's capacity to lead Brazil as a union leader with less than a middle-school education and surrounded by socialist and Marxist partisans divided by ideological factionalism. Public reaction to the two

televised debates was mixed, but seemed to favor Lula marginally in the first and Collor marginally in the second.

Brazilian voters are non-ideological, have very weak party loyalties, are open to new appeals, and are increasingly less amenable to voting according to manipulation by traditional political bosses. This volatility of preference makes the nation more difficult to govern, but at least during the campaign the mood of the electorate was notably moderate in spite of the negative economic situation and the sense of moment that prevailed. Major concerns included inflation (56 percent in December), unemployment, seriously declining living standards for many Brazilians, crime, and government corruption and ineffectiveness, all themes to be pressed upon the incoming administration scheduled to take office on March 15.

Both candidates drew significant levels of support from all social sectors, sufficiently so that easy generalizations are not possible. In the coalition-building between ballots, Lula's additional support came largely from intellectuals and the ranks of leftist and progressive first ballot opponents, while Collor's adherents came mainly from the center and right, including supporters of the former military dictatorship. Between ballots, Lula gained and Collor declined in preference among the poorer classes (those termed C, D, and E according to the income and education classification system used in Brazilian polls). Among those with a primary education, Collor was the clear favorite, both candidates were about equal among those with secondary schooling, while Lula was the strong favorite of those with higher education. Lula was far ahead in preference among voters 18-29 years in age and among men, while Collor appealed much more to those over fifty and to women.⁴

In regional terms, pre-election polls showed Lula's greatest public following to be in the developed and modern Brazil of the South and

Southeast (especially Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul states) and particularly in the large state capitals and medium-size cities of Brazil. Collor's strongest public opinion support came clearly from the more conservative interior and smaller cities, from the frontier Amazon and Center-West regions and the poor Northeast, as well as the large states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais.⁵

On December 17, Collor (forty) became the youngest president ever elected in Brazil, with 35.1 million votes to Lula's 31.1 million. His personalistic vehicle, the new and untried National Reconstruction Party (PRN), has very few seats in the National Congress, which under the 1988 constitution has gained considerable power relative to the executive. A coalition in search of government favors will form quickly around the winner, perhaps in the form of a new party, but may well weaken by the major gubernatorial and congressional elections of October 1990, if the new government does not make dramatic headway in attacking the entrenched structural problems of the economy and society.

The Brazilian political situation is so fluid and the party system so unstable that even a strong electoral majority is difficult to translate into a workable national legislative majority for very long. There are as yet few indications that Congress, with many parties represented, will be cohesive or disciplined enough to carry out its increased attributions either efficiently or effectively. Presidential-congressional relations promise to be turbulent during 1990, as the Congress has its attention on re-election hopes and on the gubernatorial races back home. The possibility does exist for a "Jimmy Carter effect" in which an energetic and determined outsider is elected after a lackluster administration, but then faces an established bureaucracy and Congress with their own momentum and agendas, soon bringing public disillusionment and, in the Brazilian case, social disruption.

The Workers' party, with over ten

years of activity, is the only organized grassroots party of substantial size in the nation. Its success in pulling together a left coalition under a labor leader who missed taking the presidency by only 6 percent of the valid votes seriously establishes it as a principal contender in those key elections during Collor's first year. Lula's candidacy has called unmistakable and lasting attention to what Brazilians call the "social debt." Historically, however, Brazil's left has been very difficult to unite in practical terms. The Workers' party itself is plagued by ideological schisms and sectarian radicalism that contributed to a negative public image conducive to Lula's defeat. The progressive Church will continue to be a major force behind the Workers' party. Yet Lula's inability to win either São Paulo or São Paulo state, Brazil's industrial heartland and his home base, in the final balloting shows that the appeal to labor of the Workers' party cannot be taken for granted. Nor did the PT candidate do well, on balance, in the cities that have had PT administrations since January 1989.

Political divisions within the nation have not caused radical polarization, nor has democracy itself been discredited because of public pessimism and disillusionment with the five-year balance sheet of the first civilian government after twenty-one years of military rule. During 1990, however, the national resiliency will in all probability be further tested by the stringency of the necessarily rigorous adjustment measures enacted very early on by the new government, which will require further sacrifices on the part of most political actors.

From the start Collor is promising no easy solutions, no national salvation. His program includes a priority attack on inflation; cutting of government size, cost, and corruption; privatization of state companies; deregulation of business; and encouragement of more foreign investment. The economy must be brought under control, from the edge of hyperinflation, before any plans for

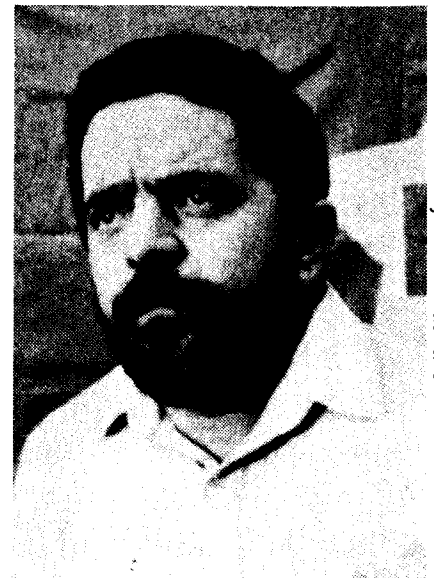


Photo: Courtesy of The Brazilians

Luís Inácio "Lula" da Silva

growth or social welfare can be viable.

During the 1980s Brazil fell badly behind the pace of economic and political change in much of the world, even while its political liberalization process brought a spirit of "openness," more vigorous debate of public issues, and some steps toward democratization. Brazil, nominally capitalist, is still tied down by a cumbersome, bankrupt, and inefficient statism with little social conscience. The country is now very much due for a "perestroika," to restructure the state for both social justice and international economic competitiveness. Yet the intractability of the statist system and the old habits may be just as great as that of East European states and may require just as much public pressure and hard work to overcome.

Endnotes

1. "Os dois Brasis," *Veja*, November 1, 1989, p.39.
2. "A enlouquecida inflação dos anos 80," *O Estado de São Paulo*, December 10, 1989, Economia, p.4.
3. "A popularidade em baixa e as ilusões em alta," *Jornal do Brasil*, June 18, 1989, p.24.
4. "Collor perde pontos e Lula cresce," *O Estado de São Paulo*, December 10, 1989, p.4, and "Empatados," *Isto é Senhor*, December 20, 1989, pp.40-44.
5. "Gallup da 44,9% a Collor e 44,4% a Lula," *O Estado de São Paulo*, December 17, 1989, p.4.