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Datafolha Survey

What Brazilians think about the 'new' Forest Law proposal.

Main results:

1. The survey set out to assess Brazilian public opinion and depth of knowledge in regard to the issues addressed in the legislative proposal known as the 'new Forest law' and approved by the Brazilian House of Representatives at the end of May. The questionnaire was administered by the Datafolha organisation at the request of Amigos da Terra - Amazônia Brasileira (Friends of the Earth - Brazilian Amazon), Imaflora, Imazon, Instituto Socioambiental (the Socio-environmental Institute), SOS Atlantic Forest and WWF-Brazil.
2. A quantitative research survey was run that consisted of an individual approach to the interviewed persons, making use of a structured questionnaire that required around 10 minutes to administer. Checking was carried out parallel to the data gathering process itself and sampled around 20% of the material produced by each survey interviewer. The survey has a national outreach and includes urban and rural areas. The profile of survey interviewees was determined as: being in the over-16 age group and having a fixed telephone. The survey was administered in the period from June 3 to 7 and 1,286 interviews were successfully completed. The margin of error for the entire survey sample was calculated as 3 percentage points above or below the result obtained within a reliability level of 95%.
3. The results show relative homogeneity by regions and income brackets (the differences registered were inexpressive) and they are even more homogeneous in the comparison of urban and rural area responses. In the case of the latter comparison the differences detected always lay within the margin of error which indicates considerable consistency between the opinions of rural and urban dwellers.
4. The considerable media coverage dedicated to the recent voting process in the House of Representatives has meant that two thirds of the population declare that they knew about the voting although out of those, the portion that declared they were well informed on the issue was very modest, reflecting the considerable complexity of the issues involved.
5. Generally speaking the results reveal considerable concern with the conservation of forests on the part of public opinion even in questions where it was presented as eventually being a factor limiting agricultural and livestock production; depending on the form of the questions, the proportion of Brazilians that disagree with the proposal in the form that was voted in the House of Representatives varies from 77% (in favour of postponing the debate in order to give time for the voice of science to be heard) and 95% (who do not accept the proposal to forgive illegal deforestation without recuperation of the forest on the part of producers).



6. In the case of the introductory question, basic to the questionnaire, which presented the alternatives of either giving priority to protecting the forests (even if that eventually limits agricultural and livestock production) or giving priority to production (even if that means limiting the protection of the forests), the first option was selected by 85% of interviewees and the second by 10%. 5% declared that they did not know.

7. Several different questions approached the issue of amnesties for illegal deforestation. When three qualified options are offered, one intermediate between the other two, it can be seen that the population's first choice is in favour of the more rigorous option offered, that is, to punish deforestation in every case in order to set an example, and 48% of interviewees selected it; the next option was an intermediate position (to punish only those that refuse to recuperate the forest) chosen by 45% while the option of pardoning even those that refuse to recuperate the forest they destroyed was only selected by a mere 5% of all those interviewed. When the options were restricted to two, 79% declared that in general they were against pardoning the sanctions and fines (19% accepted that possibility) and 77% declared they were against the idea of lifting the obligation to restore the forest (while 21% found that possibility acceptable).

8. In the case of the illegal occupation of Permanent Protection areas (steep slopes, hilltops, várzea flood lands etc.) the intermediate option prevails, that is, to maintain only those crops or activities that are capable of anchoring the soil and that offer no risk of accident, to which 66% agreed. Then comes the option proposing that all crops should be removed from such areas – which was selected by 25% of interviewees and lastly the proposal to maintain all crops already in such areas as they currently stand which is the proposal embodied in the draft approved by the House of Representative- was only supported by 7% of the population.

9. The general public opinion is further confirmed when considering the positions on the political implications: 79% favour an eventual veto on the part of the president should the Senate decide to validate the version proposed by the house. That percentage is considerably higher than the percentage detected in other polls approving the president's performance which was only 47% in the Datafolha poll carried out last March. An even higher proportion, 84%, confirmed that they would not vote for representatives or senators that had voted in favour of pardoning illegal deforestation.

10. A slightly smaller proportion, 77%, supports the proposal put forward by the scientific community to put off the voting in the Senate to allow time to establish a more technical-scientific basis for the new legislation, while 20% feel that it would be better to vote the proposal right away, regardless.