

Support for Brazil's president reaches record high

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BRASILIA, March 27 (Reuters) - Support for Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's government jumped to its highest level as a strong economy boosted wages and jobs, a poll showed on Thursday.

In March, 58 percent of Brazilians thought the Lula government was doing a good or excellent job, up from 51 percent in December, a survey by Ibope polling firm showed.

It is the highest rating since the first Ibope poll of his administration in March 2003, three months after he began his first term.

"There's been a profound improvement in the sentiment of the people," said Marco Antonio Guarita, director of the National Industry Confederation, which published the poll.

"There's only one reason for that -- the economy," Guarita told a news conference.

Survey respondents said Lula performed better in all eight areas of government, from employment and inflation to health and education. Even in public security, a big problem in Brazil, his ratings improved.

Lula's strong support may help candidates from his governing coalition in October's municipal elections, analysts said.

"He could help shape some close races, but his votes don't transfer automatically," political consultant Carlos Lopes said.

"The economy matters, but local elections are usually not decided on national issues."

Brazilian newspapers have charged that Lula's intense promotion of public works projects was intended to pave the way for a successor in the 2010 presidential elections. But most experts agree it will likely be two years before any politicians emerge as viable presidential candidates.

By law, Lula cannot stand for a third consecutive term.

The survey polled 2002 people March 19-23 and has a margin of error of 2 percentage points.

(Reporting by Raymond Colitt)

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