

Canal Expansion Set to Pass in Panama

October 12, 2006



A proposal to enact further developments to the Panama Canal will be successful, according to three recent public opinion polls. In a survey by PSM SIGMA Dos published in *Crítica Libre*, 72 per cent of respondents would vote in favour of the expansion plan.

A study by CID-Gallup published in *El Panamá América* suggests that 73 per cent of respondents would support the proposal in this month's referendum. A poll by Dichter & Neira published in *La Prensa* shows that 79 per cent of decided respondents will vote "Yes."

In 1999, Panama regained full control of the all-important canal, the source of 10 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In April, the Panama Canal's board of directors presented an expansion plan, which seeks to add a parallel set of locks to allow giant cargo ships to pass through the waterway. The project will cost \$5.25 billion U.S. which will be paid entirely by users through a graduated toll system.

The expansion can only be enacted in a nationwide referendum, which has been scheduled for Oct. 22. If approved, the expansion project will take seven or eight years to be completed.

On Sept. 20, Panamanian president Martín Torrijos discussed the expansion plan during his address to the United Nations (UN) general assembly, saying, "Just as Panama has been internationally acknowledge for the way it has administered the Canal, we also appear before this world body to reiterate that the Panama Canal will remain efficient, neutral and safe for the vessels of every country in the world."

Polling Data

a) How would you vote on the referendum on the expansion of the Panama Canal?

Yes 72%

No 21%

Blank
vote 7%

Source: PSM SIGMA Dos / Crítica Libre

Methodology: Interviews with 1,214 Panamanian adults, conducted with a paper ballot from Sept. 29 to Oct. 3, 2006. Margin of error is 2.8 per cent.

b) How would you vote on the referendum on the expansion of the Panama Canal?

Yes 73%

No 13%

Undecided 6%

Source: CID-Gallup / El Panamá América

Methodology: Interviews with 1,210 Panamanian adults, conducted from Sept. 28 to Oct. 2, 2006. Margin of error is 2.7 per cent.

c) How would you vote on the referendum on the expansion of the Panama Canal?
(Decided likely voters)

Yes 79%

No 21%

Source: Dichter & Neira / La Prensa

Methodology: Interviews with 1,758 Panamanian adults, conducted with a paper ballot from Oct. 6 to Oct. 8, 2006. Margin of error is 2.4 per cent.