

# Analysis of the Brazil elections and Bolsonaro's reaction

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Bolsonaro supporters raised a Nazi salute after their defeat at the polls. Photo:

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The elections in Brazil were without a doubt among the most important and anticipated events of the year in Latin America. The largest economy in the regional economy's political definition is a core element in the current political context ever since the scope of the new Latin America progressive wave depends to a large extent on its political and economic trajectory. Domestically, it was vital, as Brazil had over 6 years of right-wing governments combined with the pandemic, which plunged millions of Brazilians into poverty.

Fortunately, the winning candidate was the Workers' Party (PT) representative Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who won by a narrow margin of 2 million votes, or 0.8% of the vote. Despite the narrowness, the victory is still resounding.

The ultra-right-wing politician, Jair Bolsonaro, had the government machinery on his side. On top of it, he counted on the oligarchy and the Brazilian upper middle class' support, meaning an economic and influential power able to define any electoral process.

The main component of Lula's victory was his collective leadership strategy and alliances with the most diverse political forces, ranging from the center-right to the most progressive and left-wing organizations in the country. However, once the elections are won, this type of coalition turns into a challenge. Given the fact that Bolsonaro will be out of power in two months, differences could emerge, putting Lula's government strategy at risk and leaving him exposed in front of right-wing forces, whose main objective is to destroy him politically. Therefore, a lot of work and conscientious strategy will be needed to avoid such a scenario.

## **The elections result**

An interesting fact about the election result is that young adults voted for Lula. This

is peculiar since ultra-right politicians are often popular in this sector. However, in Brazil, it seems to be different. Today's young adults were born before Lula's first term and saw how the country improved after 13 years of PT governments. These same people have witnessed the disastrous management of Bolsonaro and are willing to recover what they consider normal living standards. At the same time, Bolsonaro's neoliberal approach to social and economic issues is not preferable to Lula's fair and modern treatment of key topics like LGBTQ+, women, Black people's rights, and environmental policies.

The elections showed a country divided economically and politically. It is no coincidence that Bolsonaro won in the states with the highest Human Development Index (HDI), the lowest illiteracy rate, and the richest Amazonian states. His agreement to cut down millions of hectares of forests, ignoring the environmental consequences, earned him the logging and cattle sector's support. Many of these businessmen not only funded Bolsonaro but campaigned by threatening their workers with consequences, claiming Lula's government will shut down their businesses.

Bolsonaro clearly won in the two states with the largest urban population, while Lula won in those with the largest rural population. This distribution of the vote shows the abysmal chasm that exists between the countryside and the city in Brazil, one of the problems that both Lula and his PT successor Dilma Rousseff tried to alleviate through the implementation of social policies.

According to the vote by states, Lula won in 13 of the 23 states. Those with less population, low incomes, and hit hardest by COVID-19 due to their health systems' weakness and governmental neglect.

However, the power distribution in state-level elections was different, although balanced. The PT won only 4 out of the 23 governorships, featured with another 3 from the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), whose presidential candidate was

Simone Tebet, one from the Solidaridade Party, and 3 from the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). The rest of the governorships are in Bolsonaro's and his fellows' hands. In the Senate and the House of Representatives, the correlation between forces is equally unfavorable for Brazilian progressivism, which makes government management even more complex.

The overseas vote also reveals the transnationalization of the right-wing agenda in the region. Although Lula won the overseas vote in general, in the United States, for example, Bolsonaro won overwhelmingly. Something similar happened in Latin America, except for Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina, and Cuba. Lula won all across Europe, where Brazilians are less exposed to the media might of Latin America's right-wing and the frenetic smear campaigns organized against Lula.

Lula is aware of the current political and social situation, which explains his conciliatory stance. During the victory speech, he said he will work for all Brazilians regardless if they voted for him or not. Then, uniting the country is one of his priorities and, at the same time, his biggest challenge, given the right-wing parties' political strength and capacity to mobilize their supporters.

Regarding domestic policy, Lula had a strong environmental and social justice agenda. These remain two neuralgic topics, ever since they were totally neglected by the previous administration. However, moving forward with concrete proposals may be complicated due to the opposition of agribusiness and economic elites who are reluctant to improve the country's wealth distribution.

On the other hand, Congress' composition will be Damocles' Sword on Lula's neck. The lawfare impeachment of Dilma is still fresh in many lawmen's minds. Moreover, the polarization, the division of political forces, and the constant alliances changes in Brazil are all elements that weaken democracy and pave the way for the lawfare to act.

## **The response of the international community**

Lula's victory was a cause for joy not only for Brazil, where millions celebrated in the streets but for the region in general. Dozens of presidents and Prime Ministers immediately congratulated Lula, most of them regional leaders such as Colombia's Gustavo Petro, Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, Cuba's Miguel Díaz-Canel, and Argentina's Alberto Fernandez. After this victory, integration mechanisms such as the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) will get momentum. Brazil played a leading role in both projects, and the arrival of right-wing presidents like Bolsonaro marked the stagnation of both. Today, the obstacles are fewer, and the opportunities to work together and move forward now that many countries in the region are more inclined to challenge neo-liberalism.

The President of the United States did not miss a chance to make public his relief with Lula's victory. His congratulations were among the first. This reaction was influenced by Biden's deep differences with Bolsonaro, who is a faithful follower of former President Donald Trump. This reality led to a rift between the two nations, something Biden is eager to change due to Brazil's geopolitical and diplomatic importance in multilateral forums and organizations.

## **Bolsonaro's response**

While the whole world was celebrating, Bolsonaro went to sleep and took over 24 hours to make a statement. In his first words after the elections, he did not acknowledge the results or congratulate Lula, as is the tradition. He rather questioned the results, which was interpreted by his supporters as a call to maintain federal highways blocked. However, hours later, when chaos had taken over the highways, Bolsonaro made a call to withdraw the blockades, but to maintain the protests.

He intends to keep Brazilian democracy in check, as Trump did in the United States. Once again, the right wing's modus operandi remains the same: not recognizing the election results and betting on social disorder and instability to hinder the new government's work, many calling for the military to step in to fulfill their fantasies.

In this context, the presidential transition will be very complicated due to Bolsonaro's uncooperative attitude and the perennial threat of a coup d'état lingering around.

Source: [Resumen Latinoamericano - US](#)

