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**Brazil**

# State of affairs in Brazil

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV573 - October 2022 -

Publication date: Friday 14 October 2022

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**Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva presents the second round as a choice between democracy and the abyss. He has won the support of two of the most important candidates from the first round and a number of traditional political leaders. Now he seeks to mobilise the support from below that he needs to defeat the incumbent president.**

Sunday, October 2, left a strange aftertaste: the 48.4% of votes obtained by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the ten-party coalition *Federação Brasil da Esperança* [Brazil of Hope alliance] was not enough for him to win the Presidency as had previously been expected. With 43.2% of votes in the electronic polls in his favour, President Jair Bolsonaro revealed the real project of the plans designed in 2018 by his mentor, then as now, Steve Bannon. Another fact, arising from the elections, activated alarms: the composition of the National Congress, where Bolsonarism will have a strong presence.

Not only will the new Senate house several former ministers of the current government; the candidate of the extreme right will also be able to count on the Chamber of Deputies to sanction laws in accordance with his own group interests and the faction of the owners of economic power that supports him.

But, at the same time, Bolsonaro's resurrection had a strong impact on sectors of society that reject the current head of state's strident figure. "We consider it essential to avoid that re-election, due to the [president's] authoritarian temperament and his aversion to dialogue with all segments of society," according to the just-published manifesto from the "Breaking Down Walls" group. They also argue that it is this principle that leads them to declare their "unconditional vote" for Lula da Silva in the October 30 ballot. The association, created two months ago, includes among its members prominent personalities from the economic and financial establishment, who have been joined by several intellectuals.

Lula has thus become the only democratic alternative in the face of an eventual radicalisation of his adversary, a scenario that keeps important segments of the middle and upper class awake at night. These estates maintain influence over the citizenry as a whole; despite this, the massive vote for Lula comes from the most vulnerable social majorities (more than 50% suffer from food insecurity or hunger), aware of how many sacrifices, deaths and suffering they have suffered in the last four years on account of Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right upstart who showed his management difficulties during the pandemic.

In this context, Lula da Silva understood that the period until the end of October had become "a different election from the first round." To win, the PT leader said, "we have to define a new strategy that adds all possible forces to our side."

The dilemma in these elections is thus presented as "democracy or the abyss", an expression that has in fact become the new election slogan. This is how Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former president (1996-2002) and former enemy of Lula, put it: he said publicly that the leader of the Workers' Party is the only candidate capable of preserving democracy and inclusion against an adversary who would represent the risk of an authoritarian drift. For the same reasons, presidential candidate Simone Tebet, who came third in the first round, expressed her categorical support for Lula.

In the turn of this senator from the pragmatic Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) towards the PT leader, the negotiating capacity demonstrated by the one-time metallurgical worker weighed heavily. "Lula has experience and knows how to deal with the political class. He identifies very well with those to whom talks and with whom he deals. I

recognise him as a democrat and the other [Bolsonaro], no.” For her, “at this moment in Brazilian history neutrality is not possible.” The same causes induced the only center-left party that had been left out of the Coalition of Hope, the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), to join the new Lulista campaign “unconditionally”. And in this environment, the presidential candidate that the PDT had carried for the first round, Ciro Gomes, was forced to express his support, under penalty of marching towards isolation and political death.

By gaining the support of these two former candidates, alleged owners of 8.5 million votes, Lula brings together a more than significant portion of these votes. Without a doubt, the chances are high that a majority of these voters will prefer the PT candidate against Bolsonaro; according to some analysts, those who were favourably disposed towards the president had already migrated to his side in the first round. A survey by PoderData on October 6 revealed that 92% of Tebet supporters prefer Lula.

It is precisely this conviction, that the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva-Geraldo Alckmin team can come to power, that explains the wave of endorsements from the historical leadership of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB, center-right): the former Minister of Justice Nelson Jobim, the former president of the Central Bank Armínio Fraga, the famous political scientist Ilona Szabó, the former Minister of Finance Pedro Malan, the creator of the Real Plan André Lara Resende, the former Minister José Serra and the former Foreign Minister Aloysio Nunes Ferrera.

Along these lines, another former head of the Central Bank, Pérsio Arida, made public who he will vote for at the end of the month: “I decided to opt for Lula da Silva not only because of the mistakes that Bolsonaro made, but also because of the fear of what could happen to Brazilian democracy. I don’t want it to die and what we have today is a setback for civilisation.” Arida commanded the Central Bank during Cardoso’s first term (1995-1998). He did not hesitate to underline the “ordeal” that part two of a Bolsonarist government would represent: “It will be a worse threat to human rights, the environment and democracy itself,” he said.

The proclamations of these representatives of traditional politics largely reflect the uneasiness of a significant part of Brazilian economic-financial power. Those fractions of the upper classes do not lack reasons for rejecting the current president, who fits the political prototype of the planetary extreme right. They see this alignment with former occupant of the White House, Donald Trump and with the god of the right-wing movement, Steve Bannon, as a potential risk because it is a global network that they do not command. Somewhat paradoxically, considering the rejection that the PT has aroused in recent times among these groups, they fear that this affinity will allow the current Brazilian head of state a certain unwanted independence, with a relative capacity to put into play himself the very class supremacy which is claimed by the owners of economic and financial power, something which does not admit discussion.

There is another factor that contributes to feeding this perception, and it is the president’s indisputable alliance with the top echelons of the Armed Forces: the active and passive military command, who, together with admirals and brigadiers, had put together the Bolsonarist government project. All of them, occupying the highest ministerial positions, have exercised and still exercise their command.

## A firmer Lula

Lula da Silva, who governed Brazil between 2003 and 2010 and left the Planalto Palace with a popularity of more than 80%, had a lukewarm style in the months preceding these last elections. As defined by Flávio Dino, senator-elect for the state of Maranhao, the Lulista campaign lacked “emotion, seduction and magic.” The electoral campaign headquarters, led by the PT, opted at that stage for a candidate without much presence and less exposed to probable attacks.

But these days the figure of Lula has changed radically. He was able to recover the charismatic style that has distinguished him as a leader. His will has made the magical politician resurface, after burying that very unattractive image of someone who is mired in moderation. As the founder of the PT, Lula has now decided to abandon his initial timidity and take the leadership of the campaign into his own hands. As he himself announced: "From this moment on the alternative stops being ideological. I'm not going to talk alone with some guy because he likes me. We are going to dialogue with all the political forces that have a vote, representation, a political significance in the country."

But the actions are far from being limited to the superstructure. There is also a lot of interest in street demonstrations since, according to Dino, who is mentioned as the future Minister of Justice, these protests have a "strong psychological influence."

For now, a march by the National Union of Students (UNE) is already on the agenda for Tuesday, October 18. Bolsonaro decided to cut the budget for the Ministry of Education, especially those funds destined for federal universities. For the head of state, university education is not a priority; his objectives pass almost exclusively through his re-election.

And it is for this reason that he decided to spend large sums of money from the treasury on subsidies to parliamentarians and state governors: these are nothing less than 9,000 million dollars from the national budget destined to finance works and services of deputies and senators in their electoral districts. Even when this "praxis" is legalised, on this occasion the president, with the help of Parliament, decreed the secrecy of how that disproportionate amount was implemented. It is not known who received items, nor the amounts and their final destinations. And worse yet, to compensate for these excesses he had to cut spending on welfare policies: education, health and housing plans. These "excesses" can play against the ruler, who will have to face youth protests in which unions and social movements can participate.

## A story that began in 2014

The scandal of this "secret budget" should be investigated by the press with the same intensity that it dedicated to the case known as "Petrolao", of 2006. Similarly, it should require the data from police actions to follow the route of the cash (suspected to be irregular) used by the Bolsonaro family to buy 51 properties. The truth is that the complaints about these acquisitions lasted just a couple of weeks in local press headlines. In its place we had the Lava Jato/Car Wash story, which presented Lula da Silva as allegedly corrupt for a purchase of an apartment on Guarujá beach, on the São Paulo coast, a purchase as would later be proven, never occurred.

Throughout these four years, there were 26 crimes carried out by officials from different Bolsonaro ministries: in Health, it was the case of the overcharged purchase of AstraZeneca vaccines; in Education, a group led by a former minister together with two evangelical pastors, who received money from governors and mayors in exchange for speeding up the transfer of budget items for different purposes.

None of these episodes involved labelling Jair Messias Bolsonaro as "corrupt" and a "thief"; neither did they affect the Liberal Party (PL) which he joined to make his re-election viable. The PL was not the target of accusations of "looting" public resources, as was the case with the PT. The truth is that this campaign of disqualification, deployed between 2014 and 2018, was the one that gave birth to the Brazilian extreme right movement, and largely explains the current polarisation, a new phenomenon in Brazilian society.

## All Support Has Value

Advised, without a doubt, by national and foreign experts, Bolsonaro has not hesitated to decree last-minute economic measures to subsidise the poorest. The same strategy is deployed these days, with the hope of closing the gap and surpassing the PT leader. At the beginning of the post-electoral week, in meetings with his cabinet, the president gave orders to look for actions “profitable” in these circumstances. He placed his Economy Minister Paulo Guedes at the head of the team. All these decisions represent additional expenses, offset, as noted, by budget cuts in key sectors. Not to mention the consequences that “waste” may have in 2023; whether it is his turn to govern or Lula’s, whoever’s legacy it may be.

Bolsonaro fully entered the competition to show that he has as many or more new political backers than his adversary. Thus, he obtained the endorsement of the Agricultural Parliamentary Front [\[1\]](#), after meeting with the president of the bloc, Sergio Souza. This representative of large Brazilian landowners praised Bolsonaro at the meeting held at the Palacio de la Alvorada, the president’s official residence. “The result of what has happened in recent years is very clear. Agriculture did not stop even during the pandemic. Agricultural activity is the great pillar on which this country is based and is responsible for development, generating employment and income, with legal certainty and, mainly, with the right to property.” He later mentioned that the agricultural bloc in Congress “chose its place and it is the road to the right, with faith in God. Those are the paths of freedom.”

Both candidates are, from a certain point of view, obliged to follow the demands of those actors newly joined to their respective campaigns. In fact, Bolsonaro has already been forced to promise a ministerial position to the governor of São Paulo, Rodrigo García, who is still active in social democracy but has just sworn allegiance to the president. Exotic commitments are also seen on the PT’s side, which has established close relationships with renowned economists who were participants in the “Tucana [toucan]” era (a word that designates the PSDB. [\[2\]](#)) Now, the PT is seeking the support of this party of the traditional center-right in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and are willing to endorse PSDB candidate Eduardo Leite, who is running for re-election in a race against Bolsonarist Onyx Lorenzoni, who is several lengths ahead of him.

There are 12 states (out of a total of 27) where the candidates for governor will compete in the second round. Half show a preference for Lula and the other half show a willingness to vote for Bolsonaro and campaign for him. And the former president has also hurled himself into a campaign to gain the support of evangelical pastors.

## Give and Take

Lastly, there are not a few who speculate about the room for manoeuvre that the PT leader will have if, as is likely, he governs his country for a third term. These days, polls after the first round suggest that Lula has the upper hand (in the first round they were right in Lula’s vote but wrong regarding Bolsonaro’s). To avoid pressure before the ballot, the former union leader refuses to give the names of those who could be part of his future government, especially in the economic area. Still, he made a promise: put “outsiders” in the cabinet. “Whoever wants to know my Cabinet is going to have to wait for me to win the elections,” he answered a question from journalists. He immediately praised the decision of a group of economists from the PSDB to give him their full backing.

Speaking of them in a press conference he said that “these people know that I am the guarantee of the exercise of democracy, in a country in which my adversary demonstrates the opposite.” On the demands that point to the fiscal surplus, he commented: “For me, fiscal responsibility does not have to be a law; it has to be in the leader’s head.”

He also celebrated the union with the historic leadership of the PSDB, of which he said: “We were together in the

re-democratisation process that defeated the military dictatorship. And now we are together again and we are going to defeat Bolsonaro's authoritarianism, obscurantism and denialism. Together we are going to improve the country's economy and eradicate inflation."

*Translated and annotated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from [Nueva Sociedad](#), October 2022.*

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[1] FPA a lobby whose members account for more than a third of the lower house and a quarter of Senate seats,

[2] Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira or PSDB is the Brazilian Social Democracy Party is a right social democratic party and a traditional rival to the PT. Its mascot is a blue and yellow coloured toucan hence the reference to the Toucan era.