

Lula's Second Act

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In a close 30 October 2022 runoff, Brazilian voters ousted far-right president Jair Bolsonaro after a single four-year term, replacing him with Workers' Party (PT) candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had been president from 2003 to 2011. With nearly every vote counted in under three hours, the final result—Lula over Bolsonaro, 50.9 to 49.1 percent—was certified by Brazil's independent electoral court and officially announced before 8 p.m. local time. The 77-year-old Lula's winning margin amounted to more than 2.1 million valid votes cast, but Brazil has 216 million people and this was the closest result (by percentage) ever in a Brazilian presidential race. Lula had scored 48.2 percent in the October 2 first round, leaving him short of the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff. Bolsonaro had secured 43.2 percent in that round, but in the tense weeks following it he had tightened the race.

When Lula prevailed, news coverage across the globe portrayed his victory as a shift to the left by Latin America's largest country, consistent with recent elections across the region from Mexico to the Southern Cone. The presidential outcome, however, is not the only story from Brazil in 2022. These were in fact general elections, and the returns in races for the 27 state governorships and the bicameral National Congress suggest a rather different narrative. Brazil's political right made striking gains in the concurrent contests.

A look at the 2022 elections as a whole reveals macropolitical developments that complicate any idea of Brazil as simply going with a leftward regional flow. Constitutionalism prevailed despite widespread worry about Bolsonaro's authoritarian inclinations. The principles of electoral integrity and military impartiality proved strong enough to effect a democratic alternation in power.

Moreover, excessive focus on the presidential race obscures one of the 2022 general elections' core realities: Conservative forces performed extremely well overall. Moreover, Brazil's party system has undergone far-reaching change. The political center has largely been abandoned, and with its emptying out has come the collapse of what had been something like a two-party system: The rivalry between the PT and the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) structured presidential competition and coalitional politics between 1994 and 2014, but it does so no more. Lastly, a number of conditions that bolstered Lula's successful governance during his first two terms in office will be absent during his third. Lula's considerable skills and charisma are still relevant, but Brazilian political life is more polarized now and he will find it harder to bring them to bear.

The backdrop to the 2022 campaign was a first for Brazil: Never had a former president faced an incumbent president in a democratic election. The confrontation of two towering figures with loyal bases sharply reduced the political oxygen available to other competitors. This came through most clearly via "spontaneous mentions" in polling (when survey respondents are asked for whom they plan to vote, but are given no list of candidates). As early as mid-2022, about three-quarters of those polled were willing and able to specify their intended candidate, and of these some 80 percent named either Lula or Bolsonaro.

A vast ideological space lay between these two, but with name recognition and voter intent at unprecedentedly high levels, no other candidate was able to frame a viable “third way” to fill any of this wide area. Lula and Bolsonaro combined to claim 92 percent of the first-round vote, whereas in the three previous presidential elections the average combined vote share of the two top finishers had been 77 percent. The distance between the second- and third-placed finishers in 2022—an astonishing 39 percentage points—was by far the highest ever recorded. Brazil has one of the world’s most fragmented party systems; for two presidential contenders in a multicandidate field to garner more than nine-tenths of the vote is extraordinary.

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The election was also marked by pronounced voter polarization. In surveys throughout 2021 and 2022, between 40 and 50 percent of respondents would say that they would never vote for Lula under any circumstances, while 45 to 55 percent would say the same of Bolsonaro. This was unsurprising given their starkly different visions for Brazil. Bolsonaro stood for hard-right nationalism, law and order, and a conservative discourse in “defense of the family,” which extended to vocal support for figures such as Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán. Lula promoted progressive social values, strong support for minoritized populations, and concern with restoring Brazil’s voice in the international community.

Bolsonaro was damaged by his reputation for erratic and extreme rhetoric and his incompetent handling of the covid-19 pandemic, while Lula was tarnished by the 580 days that he had spent in prison on corruption charges between April 2018 and November 2019.¹ Each candidate campaigned on the urgent need to defeat the other. As the first round ended with the presidency still undecided and the country headed into a runoff, polarization became extreme. In

¹ In April 2021, the Supreme Court voided Lula’s 2017 bribery conviction on the ground that the trial court had lacked proper jurisdiction in his case.

an October 17–19 Datafolha survey, 39 percent of respondents rated Bolsonaro’s government “bad or terrible” (*ruim/péssimo*) compared to 38 percent who saw his administration as “excellent or good” (*ótimo/bom*). Likewise, hard-line sentiments against Lula clashed with unshakeable support for him among PT activists and the poor of the nine states that form Brazil’s Northeast, who had benefited enormously from his previous turn in office.²

The concurrent elections held for all 513 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Congress’s lower house) and a third of the 81-seat Federal Senate produced a divided Congress. When the freshly elected Congress convenes on 1 February 2023, the Chamber of Deputies will have 23 parties, few of which will be centrist. Measures that compute each party’s average ideological distance from one another, while weighting these distances by party size, suggest that the lower house will be marked by the highest levels of polarization witnessed since the transition from military rule to democracy in 1985.³

Bolsonaro’s Liberal Party (PL), which he joined formally only in November 2021 (it was his ninth political party going back to his first run for office in 1988) will be the single largest party in both the Chamber and Senate, having gone from 77 to 99 deputies and 9 to 15 senators. The PT, meanwhile, is the second-place party. It has gone from 56 to 68 deputies and from 7 to 9 senators. The PSDB, which held the presidency from 1995 to 2002 under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), did poorly in 2022, falling from 23 to 13 deputies. If one counts only the clearly leftist parties that openly opposed Bolsonaro, Lula will start his third term with a coalition that will include just under a quarter of the lower house (124 deputies) and under a

² Wendy Hunter and Timothy J. Power, “Rewarding Lula: Executive Power, Social Policy, and the Brazilian Elections of 2006,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 49 (Spring 2007): 1–30.

³ Based on unpublished data from the eighth wave of the Brazilian Legislative Survey (2021), co-directed by Timothy Power and Cesar Zucco. See <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/bls>.

seventh of the upper house (11 senators). Brazil has a tradition of broad, heterogeneous congressional coalitions, however, so after Lula won the 2022 runoff center-right parties began seeking to make deals with him.

Many high-profile Bolsonaro allies blazed to victory in lower-house races. These figures included two of the most controversial politicians from the outgoing administration: former army general Eduardo Pazuello (PL–Rio de Janeiro) and Ricardo Salles (PL–São Paulo). As health minister in 2020 and 2021, Pazuello had suggested that people take the unproven drug hydroxychloroquine to treat covid. As minister of the environment from early 2019 to mid-2021, Salles had overseen unprecedented levels of Amazonian deforestation before resigning amid allegations that he had obstructed a police probe into illegal logging. The president’s controversial son 38-year-old Eduardo Bolsonaro (PL–São Paulo), a favorite of Donald Trump’s advisor Steve Bannon, was easily reelected, as were a number of social-media provocateurs running on far-right “law-and-order” and “culture-war” issues.

Just as Lula will face a bloc of boisterous right-wing figures in the Congress, he will find only mixed support among the country’s newly elected governors. Of the twenty-seven, ten backed Lula, fourteen supported Bolsonaro, and three did not take a public stance. The PT held steady at four governorships. The União Brasil, a party formed in 2021 as a merger between the Democrats (DEM), a mainstream conservative party, and the Social Liberal Party (PSL), Bolsonaro’s far-right electoral vehicle in 2018, also elected four gubernatorial candidates. All four PT victors will assume governorships in the Northeast while the União Brasil winners will lead states in the Center-West and North. Of the remaining governors, nine are from the political right, six are from the center-right, and only one (Clécio Luís of small and far-northern Amapá) is from the moderate left.

Bolsonaro allies won high-profile races in several important states. Minas Gerais governor Romeu Zema (from the Novo party) was handily reelected with 56 percent of the vote, while the PL's Cláudio Castro won close to 60 percent in Rio de Janeiro. With close to 47 million people, São Paulo is Brazil's largest state and also its wealthiest, producing more than a third of all the nation's goods and services. Running there as a Republicano, Bolsonaro's former infrastructure minister Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas defeated PT stalwart Fernando Haddad (the party's 2018 presidential candidate) by 55.3 to 44.7 percent in a runoff.

Thus, while Lula managed to secure the presidency in what he called the hardest-fought race of his life, pro-Bolsonaro politicians won the "triple crown" of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro states. These three together are home to 86 million Brazilians, and form the powerhouse of the national economy. Taking this into account alongside the lopsided legislative results, the October 2022 elections arguably saw the strongest overall performance by the political right since the military regime ended almost forty years ago.⁴

Paradoxically, this may have worked against Bolsonaro's plans to hang onto the presidency at all costs: Having sailed easily into office via these elections may have made right-of-center politicians feel disinclined to back any challenge to the close presidential result (which many observers had feared a defeated Bolsonaro would refuse to accept). In such a strong year for political conservatives—with few apparent obstacles to the victory of far-right extremists at all levels of government—these elites would find it hard to credibly claim that the same electronic voting system that had elected them had somehow been rigged against Bolsonaro.

⁴ For the evolution of the political right in this period, see Timothy J. Power and Rodrigo Rodrigues-Silveira, "The Political Right and Party Politics," in Barry Ames, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 251–68.

At any rate, once Chamber of Deputies president Arthur Lira (Progressista–Alagoas), a staunch Bolsonaro ally, went on national television to accept the results shortly after the election was called, the incumbent’s fate was sealed. Other right-wing politicians followed Lira’s lead as a wide range of international leaders swiftly congratulated Lula on his victory. The stage for all this had been set by the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) and its speed in tabulating the electronic votes. Bolsonaro had scarcely had time to try anything as events outran him.

Navigating Upheaval: The Bolsonaro Years

The raucous 2022 elections were held after nearly four years of chaotic governance, during which Bolsonaro’s incendiary rhetoric and combative political style had filled the headlines. The president’s autocratic leanings had surfaced via repeated clashes with leading Brazilian institutions including Congress, the Federal Supreme Court (STF), and the TSE. The TSE became a favorite 2022 target as Bolsonaro worked to sow doubt about Brazil’s widely admired electronic voting system. Bolsonaro’s relations with many governors had also been tense, especially when covid demanded coordinated responses across multiple states. The politicization of executive decisionmaking was reflected in the president’s tendency to sack any top officials who produced data or initiatives that he disliked. These included the head of Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research for revealing the extent of Amazonian burning, a well-respected physician who as health minister defended social distancing, and the chief of the Federal Police for closing in on the wrongdoings of Bolsonaro’s sons.

Bolsonaro’s tenure was notable for his irresponsible handling of the covid pandemic,⁵ erratic management of the economy, destructive deregulation that allowed for a record rise in

⁵ Amy Erica Smith, “Covid vs. Democracy: Brazil’s Populist Playbook,” *Journal of Democracy* 31 (October 2020): 76–90.

Amazonian deforestation, loosening of limits on guns, and reckless isolation of Brazil from the international community. He also made his mark by dramatically increasing the presence of military officers in the civilian bureaucracy.⁶ The massive policy failures of his government extended to a deteriorating situation in health and education, which included serious budget cuts made to Brazil's universities and research infrastructure.

Yet for all Bolsonaro's bluster against the institutions of Brazilian democracy, he did not dismantle them. His management of executive-legislative relations was dismal: Although presenting bills at rates comparable to previous presidents, he was much less successful at getting his proposals approved, and Congress overrode his vetoes at record rates.⁷ The STF ruled against his government on several key occasions and if anything became more autonomous over time.⁸ The armed forces, though Bolsonaro courted them, did not leave their barracks to extend his rule. Media scrutiny of the administration was robust and mercilessly exposed misconduct. The electoral calendar remained in force and the election's most prominent winner took the presidential oath as scheduled on the first day of 2023. In the end, Brazil's congressional leadership, courts, business groups, civil society, and military stood firmly behind the integrity of the vote. This picture challenges the doomsday predictions that Bolsonaro would undermine Brazilian democracy during his term or perhaps engineer its demise in the face of defeat. It also

⁶ Octavio Amorim Neto and Igor Acácio, "De Volta ao Centro da Arena: Causas e Consequências do Papel Político dos Militares sob Bolsonaro," *Journal of Democracy em Português* 9 (November 2020): 1–29; Wendy Hunter and Diego Vega, "Populism and the Military: Symbiosis and Tension in Bolsonaro's Brazil," *Democratization* 29, issue 2 (2022): 337–59.

⁷ Bolsonaro was able to sustain only 57 percent of his vetoes, a far lower share than any previous president. See <https://bahia.ba/politica/governo-atual-tem-recorde-de-mps-e-vetos-derrubados>.

⁸ Diego Werneck Arguelles, "Public Opinion, Criminal Procedures, and Legislative Shields: How Supreme Court Judges Have Checked President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 25 April 2022, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2022/04/25/public-opinion-criminal-procedures-and-legislative-shields-how-supreme-court-judges-have-checked-president-jair-bolsonaro-in-brazil>.

backs Kurt Weyland's recent observation that many if not most populists, while illiberal in their inclinations, have not actually derailed democracy.⁹

In short, due to his failure to enlist allies in the other branches of government, Bolsonaro was ultimately unable to mount an antisystem challenge. When he lost the runoff he was isolated and had little choice but to exit.

What Made the Difference

The runoff vote separated Lula and Bolsonaro by only 1.8 percentage points. Lula proved more popular among women, the poor, the less educated, Afro-Brazilians, and Catholics. The less-developed Northeast region was his geographic stronghold. Bolsonaro edged him out among men, more affluent and better educated Brazilians, whites, and evangelical Christians. He dominated in Brazil's South and Southeast, with significant middle-class populations, and in the Center-West, a region with large-scale agribusiness operations.¹⁰ The closely balanced result invites two different questions: Why did Bolsonaro lose, or why did he do so well? We begin with the former.

It is noteworthy that Bolsonaro, the incumbent, lost at all. In recent decades, very few Latin American presidents have failed to achieve reelection,¹¹ and incumbency has been particularly valuable in Brazil. Since consecutive reelection became possible via a 1997

⁹ Kurt Weyland, "How Populism Dies: Political Weaknesses of Personalistic Plebiscitarian Leadership," *Political Science Quarterly* 137 (Spring 2022): 9–42.

¹⁰ Lula carried thirteen states: all nine in the Northeast plus three Northern (Amazonian) states and Minas Gerais. Winning in fourteen, Bolsonaro carried four Northern states plus the Southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Espírito Santo as well as the entire South and Center-West.

¹¹ Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold, "Manipulating Term Limits in Latin America," *Journal of Democracy* 25 (October 2014): 157–68.

constitutional amendment, 65 percent of mayors and 70 percent of governors have been successfully reelected. Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1998), Lula (2006), and Dilma Rousseff (2014) all sought and won second terms. Several other presidents in the region have stayed in power not only by gaining more control over financial resources, but also by undermining the courts, congress, media, or other institutions. So why did Bolsonaro not replicate the success of so many others before him?

[FIGURE ABOUT HERE]

Bolsonaro entered 2022 with languishing approval ratings. Like many other populists, he had managed the covid pandemic disastrously and was slow to recover from the damage that this did to his reputation.¹² How voters judged his performance regarding the covid crisis closely tracked how they rated him overall. As the Figure shows, Bolsonaro's popularity declined in the first three to four months of the pandemic in 2020, but then recovered in the second half of the year as the government rolled out a cash benefit (Auxílio Emergencial) for lower-income voters affected by the economic slowdown. Initially intended to run for three months, the benefit proved extremely popular and was extended until December 2020. The expiration of this policy laid bare the mounting tragedy of the public-health crisis, however: According to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center (*coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality*), Brazil to date has suffered about 700,000 covid deaths, with a deaths-per-million rate that is the world's fifth worst.

Brazil's poor results from Bolsonaro's approach to the pandemic sent his approval ratings tanking once again. In October 2021, an eleven-member Senate committee that included seven

¹² Roberto S. Foa et al., "The Great Reset: Public Opinion, Populism, and the Pandemic," Centre for the Future of Democracy, Cambridge University, January 2022, www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset.pdf.

Bolsonaro opponents voted to approve a report recommending criminal charges against him for, among other things, downplaying the danger of the pandemic and delaying vaccine acquisitions.¹³ Although infection and death rates had dropped sharply by election time, Bolsonaro's opponents used lingering questions about his judgment to great effect in three presidential debates televised between late August and late September.

The economy did not help Bolsonaro either. As the election approached, year-on-year GDP growth had improved to just under 3 percent while inflation had fallen to about 8 percent, Bolsonaro's cumulative performance was weak. During the three years leading up to October 2022—in other words, from before the pandemic hit Brazil in early 2020—average income fell. Starting in 2020, the share of Brazilians living in poverty increased.¹⁴ Bolsonaro had run in 2018 on a vow to pass liberalizing economic reforms including administrative and tax changes and the privatization of large state-owned enterprises, but he failed to follow through. For most of the president's term Finance Minister Paulo Guedes had discouraged politically driven spending, but he could not restrain Bolsonaro from an election-year spending spree in 2022. For three months prior to the election, the administration disbursed close to US\$4 billion in unbudgeted expenditures, mostly by increasing the Auxílio Brasil cash transfer while making it easier for three-million more people to qualify for the payments.¹⁵

¹³ Philip Reeves, "Brazil Senate Recommends Bolsonaro Be Charged with Crimes Against Humanity," National Public Radio, 27 October 2021, www.npr.org/2021/10/27/1049797081/brazil-senate-recommends-bolsonaro-be-charged-with-crimes-against-humanity.

¹⁴ Bruno Lupion, "A trajetória de sete indicadores econômicos sob Bolsonaro," Deutsche Welle, 30 September 2022, www.dw.com/pt-br/a-trajetoria-de-sete-indicadores-economicos-sob-bolsonaro/a-63302330.

¹⁵ Amanda Rossi and Graciliano Rocha, "Governo despejou R\$ 21 bilhões extras na mão de eleitores durante campanha...Veja mais em," *Noticias*, 21 October 2022, <https://noticias.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2022/10/21/governo-bolsonaro-concedeu-r-21-bilhoes-extras-a-eleitores-na-campanha.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>.

Bolsonaro's biggest electioneering mistake arguably lay in his failure to leverage his executive power to expand his base. The following of "true believers" that he had gathered via cultural issues and social media was impressive, but it failed to yield an electoral majority. His eleventh-hour spending did raise his support among Auxílio Brasil recipients in October, but it was not enough. Introducing debt-forgiveness programs and credit lines for Auxílio recipients while giving truckers a fuel subsidy came off as obvious ploys to poach Lula voters. None of these steps was consistent with Bolsonaro's longstanding criticism of pork-barrel politics in Brazil.

Lula had overtaken Bolsonaro in the opinion polls by March 2020, and a review of nearly a hundred major surveys conducted after that date shows Lula holding his edge (typically by a commanding nine points or so) in every one of them. There was tightening in August and September 2022, but never a reversal.¹⁶ Given the obvious danger facing his reelection bid, why did Bolsonaro not soften his edges even in terms of style? There is his seemingly innate combativeness, but the 67-year-old president may also have seen moderation as incompatible with the base-rallying strategy that he had used so successfully in 2018. Polarization had helped Bolsonaro to win that year.¹⁷ Four years later, he chose to redouble this approach. Instead of choosing a ticketmate who might broaden his appeal or cement his congressional coalition (as Lula did), Bolsonaro insisted on choosing yet another military officer to take the vice-presidential slot.¹⁸

¹⁶ Numerous poll aggregators have been created in recent years, and most are collected here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2022_Brazilian_presidential_election.

¹⁷ Wendy Hunter and Timothy J. Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash," *Journal of Democracy* 30 (January 2019): 68–82.

¹⁸ Bolsonaro's first vice-president was retired general Hamilton Mourão, with whom he frequently clashed. In 2022, Mourão ran for and won a Senate seat from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Considering Bolsonaro's poor governance record and the masses of voters and allies whom he offended, the remarkable thing about his reelection bid may be less that it failed than that it came so close to succeeding. Why, in other words, was the race so tight? One reason is a loyal base of true believers that weathered Bolsonaro's four years in office without shrinking. The core of this base consists of so-called *anti-petista* voters (determined to prevent the PT's return to power at all costs), overt nationalists and authoritarians, and evangelical Christians, now estimated to form about a third of the electorate. Encapsulating this coalition were placards with the slogan "Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos" (Brazil above everything, God above all), a common sight at pro-Bolsonaro events.

Although some evangelicals who voted for Bolsonaro in 2018 were dismayed by his performance as president, most remained fiercely loyal, due increasingly to the intermediating role played by his wife and apologist Michelle. The president's team deftly deployed the devout First Lady to appeal to women and megachurches on behalf of her husband. The network of pastors and social-media outlets associated with this group of voters is powerful indeed. Bolsonaristas on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp relentlessly tarred Lula as a godless communist intent on shuttering all Christian churches in the country. That Lula had governed for eight years and never closed a single church was unpersuasive to them. This message was amplified by Padre Kelmon of the Brazilian Labor Party, a fringe self-styled cleric of what he calls the "Orthodox Catholic" religion who served as a "planted" candidate echoing Bolsonaro during televised debates. Unsurprisingly, a Datafolha poll taken just before the election estimated that 66 percent of those who identified as evangelical would cast their vote for Bolsonaro. When it became clear that Bolsonaro had lost, evangelicals were prominent among those who attended

rallies and called for the armed forces to save their “Mito” (Legend), which is what some of Bolsonaro’s supporters call him.

Bolsonaro also benefited from Lula’s vulnerabilities as a candidate. Chief among them was his lingering image of corruption, given both the 2005 *mensalão* (monthly payoff) scandal and the Car Wash (Lava Jato) scandal that broke in March 2014 under his chosen successor Dilma Rousseff.¹⁹ Lula was indirectly held responsible on another charge: that Dilma (in office from January 2011 to August 2016) had pushed the country into the worst recession in memory. Between 2014 and 2016, Brazil saw GDP contract by nearly 8 percent, while unemployment climbed close to 13 percent in 2017. If the electorate had forgotten either of these vulnerabilities of the PT, Bolsonaro made sure voters were reminded of Lula’s past during the presidential debates of September and October, in which he played the corruption card effectively on live television.

Lula ran as “not Bolsonaro”—the most feasible alternative to a president whom many Brazilians had come to see as odious and unacceptable. The Lula campaign was high on nostalgia and low on policy plans. He mentioned repeatedly how strong the economy had been when he governed, and reminded Brazilians of the 83 percent approval rating that he had enjoyed as he left office at the end of 2010. Unlike Bolsonaro, Lula reached beyond his ideological base. In 2006, Geraldo Alckmin of the center-right PSDB had run against Lula for president. In 2022, to allay the worries of the business community and the middle class, Lula made Alckmin his running mate.²⁰

¹⁹ Luciano Da Ros and Matthew M. Taylor, *Brazilian Politics on Trial: Corruption and Reform Under Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2022).

²⁰ Signs are that the surprising vice-presidential choice was more than merely symbolic. In November 2022, Alckmin was named the powerful coordinator of the presidential transition. He has brought in many non-PT figures to help with strategic planning and is positioned for a leading role in the next administration.

Lula's signature social program as president, the Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer, had solidified his low-income support going back to his reelection in 2006. That year, the PT gained a prominence in the poverty-stricken Northeast that the party has yet to relinquish. In 2022, the PT again carried each of the nine states that together make up this region (whose total population is about 57 million, or roughly a quarter of Brazil). Yet in six of those states, Lula ran behind the performance that Fernando Haddad, the PT's 2018 candidate, had notched while vying against Bolsonaro in that year's runoff (which Bolsonaro had won by ten points).

If the Northeast was not the key to Lula's victory, what was? He won in 2022 by vastly improving the PT's performance in larger and more developed states such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (both of which he still lost) and in Minas Gerais (where he finished slightly ahead of Bolsonaro). Together, these three states are home to more than two-fifths of the national electorate, and small vote swings in them can be enormously significant. The PT's improved showing in São Paulo, for instance, was by itself enough to shift nearly five-million votes into the party's column. Lula also did better in smaller and richer bastions of anti-PT sentiment such as Paraná, Santa Catarina, and the Federal District (Brasília). The bottom line is that rerunning the 2018 election with Lula instead of Haddad carrying the PT flag made a noticeable difference only in the wealthier regions of Brazil.

On runoff day (voting is compulsory in Brazil, and general elections are held on Sunday), Lula barely outran a last-minute upswing in support for Bolsonaro driven by well-timed federal largesse. Lula could not defuse lingering anti-PT sentiments originating from past corruption scandals and economic mismanagement. The former president danced awkwardly around these topics when they arose in televised debates, preferring instead to reminisce about the halcyon days of the commodities boom and social inclusion in the 2000s. As Bolsonaro turned on the

federal spigot and threw his superior social-media machine into overdrive, Lula was left to hope that nostalgia for the nobler aspects of his party's past would combine with fresher memories of Brazil's disastrous pandemic to get him over the line. They did, but just barely.

A Shifting Political Landscape

Brazil's long cycle of economic stability and social inclusion from 1994 to approximately 2014 was based on a duopoly in presidential competition. The PSDB under Cardoso and the PT under Lula and Dilma jointly won between 70 and 90 percent of the vote throughout five consecutive elections, combining low electoral volatility with a high commitment to economic stability and social inclusion. With the swift rise of the far-right Bolsonaro in 2018, the centrist-leaning PSDB was crowded out and saw its electoral fortunes decline at all levels. The PSDB governor of São Paulo elected in 2018, João Doria, was an early Bolsonaro supporter but moved into opposition over covid policies in 2020. A 2022 dispute between Doria and Alckmin led to the latter's leaving the party, which ended up fielding no presidential candidate. The PSDB lost control of the state of São Paulo, which it had governed for two-dozen years, and was reduced to just thirteen seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

With the old duopoly gone, competition in several states as well as for the presidency became a matter of Bolsonaristas versus the PT in 2018 and 2022. Bolsonaro has two other sons aside from Eduardo, and their dynastic pretensions could someday lead to conflict within the far-right and evangelical bloc, but any politician able to preserve the apparent natural "floor" of Bolsonaro's support (roughly 25 to 30 percent of the electorate) will be well positioned to challenge the PT in 2026.

Although the PT has finished in first or second place in all nine presidential elections since the transition to democracy in the 1980s, the party cannot rest on the laurels of Lula's 2022 victory. Much of the vote for Lula was personalistic and not partisan in nature: *Lulismo* outstrips *petismo*.²¹ The party risks decline if it does not evolve. Structural shifts in the Brazilian economy tilt increasingly away from the PT's former industrial base in the Southeast, leaving the party without an obvious anchor in organized labor outside public-sector unions. With industries leaving Brazil (manufacturing now accounts for just 10 percent of GDP, down from 26 percent in 1993) and agribusiness becoming an increasingly important economic sector (now 28 percent of revenues), the party will need to find a stable counterweight to what is giving conservative forces key political and economic resources. It cannot rely solely on its stronghold in the Northeast, with the informal-sector poor providing a reservoir of votes. Most urgently, the party needs to develop new leaders to succeed Lula, its standard-bearer for the past 43 years.

Lula's career began in opposition to military rule, and in 1980 the armed forces jailed him for a month. Yet in a very different Brazil in 2022, Brazil's active-duty military was the "dog that did not bark." Its leaders did not take extraconstitutional steps to support former army captain Bolsonaro when it became clear that he had lost. In fact, they fell quickly in line with the TSE's decision and showed no signs of even considering the "SOS armed forces" appeals of pro-Bolsonaro protesters across the country. Although alarmists speculated that the military might intervene to save the incumbent president, the idea that the military was on Bolsonaro's side had always come from Bolsonaro, not the high command. Consistent with their professionalism, officers saw only downsides in the idea of trying to overturn constitutional

²¹ On a possible split dividing *lulismo* from *petismo*, see David Samuels and Cesar Zucco, "Lulismo, Petismo, and the Future of Brazilian Politics," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 6, issue 3 (2014): 129–58.

procedures. Anticipating a Lula victory, they prepared to position the military institution for the best possible start under his presidency.

Lula's Third Tour

Just as Bolsonaro's messianic populism tested the fabric of Brazilian democracy, so too may the inauguration of a leftist former president elected by a razor-thin margin. More than thirty years ago, in the pages of the first issue of this journal, the late Juan Linz argued that the winner-takes-all nature of presidentialism places inordinate stress on the political system, relegating losers to the sidelines for long periods of time.²² Seeing Lula win the presidency for a third time, and with only 51 percent of the vote, will be a hard pill for many Bolsonaristas to swallow. The question now becomes how to govern in this environment of intense polarization.

Executive power alone will allow Lula to act unilaterally on a number of fronts: slowing Amazonian deforestation, controlling judicial nominations, bringing progressive social movements directly into the administration, and reorienting Brazil's foreign policy. These are presidential prerogatives. Yet to undertake broader initiatives, Lula will need legislative support, and for that he will need to build a broad multiparty coalition in Congress. Presidents who have done this well, for example Cardoso and Lula himself, have secured major policy victories and lasting reforms; presidents who have managed coalitions poorly have either been impeached (Fernando Collor and Dilma Rousseff) or have squandered the electoral advantages of incumbency (Bolsonaro).

While campaigning, Lula often brought up his past as a consensus-builder, someone who as president was able to use dialogue and negotiation to put together a governing coalition using

²² Juan J. Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Winter 1990): 51–69.

heterogeneous parts. These nostalgic references to a “big tent” are valid, but Lula will not find it easy to re-create his coalition-building magic. There are three main reasons for this. First, the mathematics of congressional support are narrow. Not only is the PT a smaller legislative party than it was when Lula first took office in 2003, but the entire party system is far more polarized, and the political center is nearly abandoned. The once-pivotal Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), for example, is now less than half the size it was in 2004 when Lula successfully recruited the party into his first administration. Simply put, the center is a much smaller prize than before. Second, many new federal legislators were elected from populous states that Bolsonaro won and which have right-wing governors. These legislators will find it politically difficult, if not impossible, to move into a pro-Lula coalition.

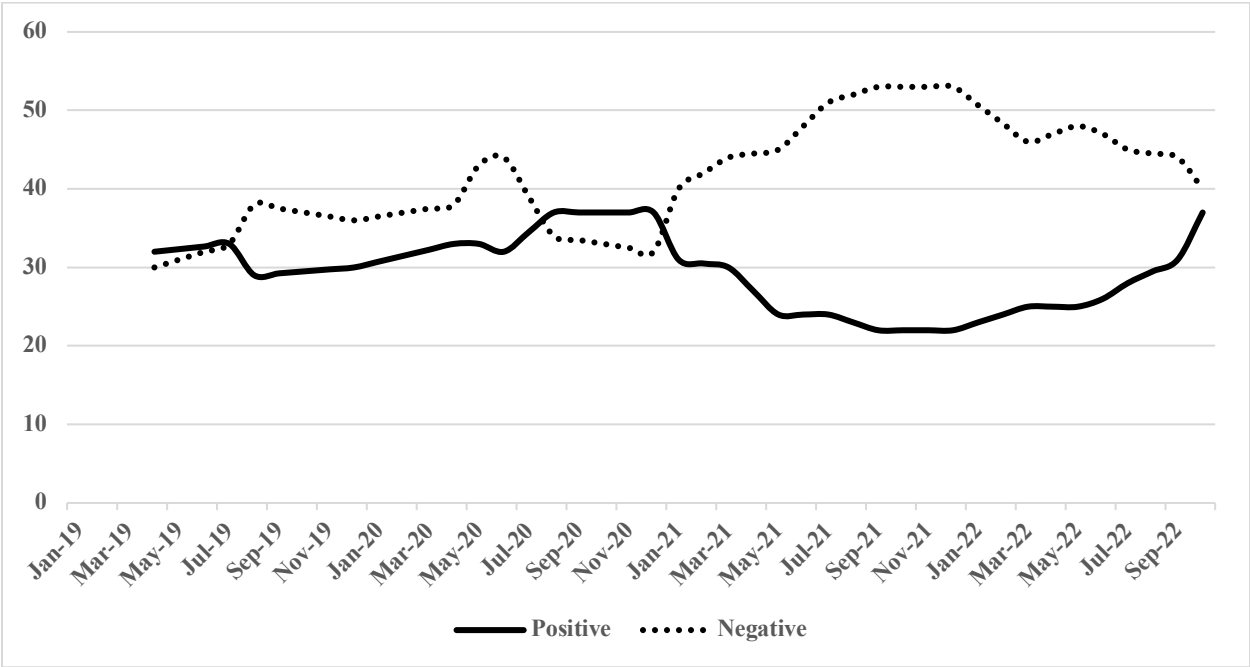
Third, coalition-building is easier for popular presidents, and presidential popularity often comes down to external factors over which politicians have little or no control, such as interest rates and the prices of various commodities in world markets.²³ Poor economic performance has hampered the popularity of Brazilian presidents for the past decade, and the external environment will be far more unfavorable for Lula than it was when he first won the presidency. At the outset, economic conditions are unlikely to generate the support that pulled a dozen parties to his side twenty years ago.

Lula could surprise observers by making political headway despite the unfavorable circumstances facing him. He has done Brazilian democracy a service by ending the tenure of Jair Bolsonaro. But Lula’s heavy reliance on nostalgia during the 2022 campaign may yet come

²³ Daniela Campello and Cesar Zucco. 2020. *The Volatility Curse: Exogenous Shocks and Representation in Resource-Rich Democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

to haunt him. As Heraclitus warned millennia ago, “No man can step into the same river twice, for the river has changed and so has the man.”

Figure: Public Evaluations of Bolsonaro’s Government, 2019-2022



Notes: positive evaluations are sum of *ótimo/bom* (excellent/good) and negative evaluations are sum of *ruim/péssimo* (bad/terrible), with neutral ratings (*regular*) excluded. Data drawn from 21 Datafolha polls between April 2019 and October 2022, with linear interpolation for missing months. Source: Instituto Datafolha (<https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br>).

Table: Results of Presidential Elections on October 2 and October 30, 2022

Candidate	Round 1 votes	Round 1 % valid votes	Runoff votes	Runoff % valid votes
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT)	57,259,504	48.43	60,345,999	50.90
Jair Bolsonaro (PL)	51,072,345	43.20	58,206,354	49.10
Simone Tebet (MDB)	4,915,423	4.16		
Ciro Gomes (PDT)	3,599,287	3.04		
Soraya Thronicke (União Brasil)	600,955	0.51		
Luiz Felipe d'Avila (Novo)	559,708	0.47		
Padre Kelmon (PTB)	81,129	0.07		
Leonardo Péricles (UP)	53,519	0.05		
Sofia Manzano (PCB)	45,620	0.04		
Vera Lúcia Salgado (PSTU)	25,625	0.02		
José Maria Eymael (PCO)	16,604	0.01		
Total valid votes	118,229,719	95.59	118,552,353	95.41
Spoiled ballots	3,487,874	2.82	3,930,765	3.16
Blank ballots	1,964,779	1.59	1,769,678	1.42
Total ballots cast	123,682,372	100.00	124,252,796	100.00
Registered voters and actual turnout	156,453,354	79.05	156,453,354	79.42

Source: Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.