

Brazilian presidential run-off dominated by religious and law-and-order reaction

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The campaign for the October 30 Brazilian presidential run-off elections is unfolding in the wake of a crushing defeat of the Workers Party (PT)-led opposition to Brazil's fascist President Jair Bolsonaro in Congressional and state elections. This, despite the PT's lead in the presidential vote, in which former PT president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva placed first with 48 percent of the vote against Bolsonaro's 43 percent.

As a result, Bolsonaro's Liberal Party (PL) became the largest party in the Brazilian House in over 25 years, taking 99, or 20 percent, of the seats. The entire coalition now supporting the PT in the second round took only 108 seats. The PL will also be the largest party in the Senate, after taking the lead from candidates supporting Lula in key states such as São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul and in recent PT strongholds such as Rio Grande do Norte.

Two key allies of Bolsonaro crushed Lula allies in the first round of gubernatorial elections in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, the second- and third-largest states in terms of number of voters, gaining far more than the necessary 50-percent-plus-one votes to avoid a run-off. In Brazil's most populated and industrialized state, São Paulo, the PT candidate, Fernando Haddad, who lost the presidential race to Bolsonaro in 2018, came in a distant second to the Bolsonaro ally Tarcísio de Freitas.

The results are a clear expression of the PT's inability and unwillingness to make any appeal to workers, centering its campaign instead on promising better diplomatic relations with the imperialist powers and "stability" for corporate profit-making. Such promises are nothing but a rephrasing of despised and fraudulent Thatcherite "trickle-down" economics, with promises that benefits to large corporations can create welfare at the bottom.

As expected, the PT reacted to its political defeat by moving not to the left, but to the right. Days after the first round of the election, it set the tone of the run-off campaign with an ad in which Lula declared he was "in favor of life" and "not only himself, but every woman he had married" was opposed to abortion, adopting Bolsonaro's own far-right rhetoric. A few days later, the PT started reproducing on social media a video of Bolsonaro speaking at a Freemason Lodge, with a key Lula ally, Deputy André Janones, going so far as declaring it proved

Bolsonaro is serving "the Antichrist."

Meanwhile, Lula and the PT have struck an alliance with Senator Simone Tebet, who came in third in the first round of the presidential race with almost 5 million votes, and was until recent days denounced by the PT as the "candidate of the bankers." Tebet declared on the evening of the October 2 vote that she would give her coalition two days to state their position on the second round before she declared hers, eventually backing Lula as her coalition, which gained 60 seats in the House, declared its "neutrality."

On Monday, Tebet and her senior economic adviser, former central banker during the hated neoliberal Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration, Armínio Fraga, met 650 CEOs and business leaders to appeal for a vote for Lula. They presented Lula as the last line of defense of the putrid Brazilian political system, and especially of the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF), against a Bolsonaro majority in Congress that could impeach justices and help him cling to power. At the same time, they reassured the audience that the ultra-right configuration in both houses would render whatever populist rhetoric the PT employed toothless, if not stillborn, repeating Lula's mantra that "agribusiness and financial markets have nothing to fear" from him.

In São Paulo, where the PT was caught completely off guard by the weakness of its candidate Fernando Haddad, the party promised to crush social opposition with an iron fist. In an interview with the Roda Viva program on Cultura public television, Haddad declared his government "would not allow the invasion" of lands, referring to the PT-linked Landless Workers Movement (MST), a key element of the party's left posturing which Lula himself sought to disown previously in the campaign.

Toeing the same line, Lula attacked Bolsonaro in the first TV debate of the second round by asking him "how many maximum security prisons" he had built, and proudly claiming he had built five. He also boasted of his record military spending, appealing to Bolsonaro's own base in the military, telling Bolsonaro that "as deputy you were very proud of having me as president ... you know I took care of the Armed Forces, the army didn't have boots, the navy didn't have ships."

This reactionary praise of a massive increase in security spending had already been made by Lula's senior adviser and former Foreign Relations and Defense minister, Celso Amorim, in an interview with *Estado de S. Paulo* a day before the first round vote. Amorim declared Lula intended to raise defense spending from 1.2 to 2 percent of the GDP, and create nothing less than four new security agencies—a National Guard, a Border Patrol, a Forest Patrol and a Coast Guard—while making maximum use of defense loopholes in trade deals to advance a protectionist industrial policy. In other words, Lula would align Brazil with the international turn towards a war economy.

Outside of churches and meetings with billionaires, the main arena for the campaign has been the Electoral Court (TSE), where the PT is fully engaged in relentless petitioning for orders of removal of “false information” from the internet and social media, which elevate the TSE president Alexandre de Moraes to the arbiter of what is true or false in public discourse in the country. In terms of its own narrow political outlook, the party obtained a major victory when last week Moraes ordered the removal of content spread by Bolsonaro linking Lula to the well-known corruption scandals the PT oversaw in its 14-year rule. Meanwhile, the party also took a hit when Moraes ordered the removal of material spread by the PT linking Bolsonaro to cannibalism and pedophilia.

Predictably, none of these reactionary maneuvers to attract ultra-right religious leaders and promises to arm soldiers to the teeth has diminished one iota the extent of the political crisis engulfing Brazil, or Bolsonaro's authoritarian threats, that derive from it. The PT's choice of fighting Bolsonaro by posing as anti-abortion zealots and making other backward appeals has only emboldened the fascist president to double down on his “God, Fatherland, Family” slogan, derived from Brazil's historic home-grown fascist movement, the Integralistas. Proponents of such appeals to the most backward elements in society will now have an unprecedented presence in Congress with the election of representatives such as Senator Damares Alves, Bolsonaro's former minister for Women, Family and Human Rights, who dedicated her time in office to the persecution of medical staff performing legal abortions on minors pregnant through rape.

But most significantly, Bolsonaro obtained a major triumph in the silence of the Armed Forces regarding its “parallel vote count” on October 2. Announced with great bombast before the elections, the results of the “audit” have been retained by the Defense Ministry, reportedly on Bolsonaro's orders and against an order of the Court of Auditors.

The “silence” of the military has been celebrated in the press as a major democratic achievement, in which the military supposedly “stepped down” from the electoral process and a golden path to democracy had finally opened up.

Contrary to such a wishful thinking, the non-disclosure of the report amounts to a full-fledged constitutional crisis, in which the military either remains silent and thus aligns itself with a

lying and coup-mongering president attempting to counter defeat with claims of electoral fraud, or decides to defy him, upending the chain of command. Bolsonaro is leaning on the ambiguity of the military's silence to claim Lula's advantage in the first round already pointed to fraud. He has called upon his fascist supporters to occupy polling sites during the second round vote in preparation precisely for a show of force in his challenge to the results, knowing the outcome will be ultimately decided in the barracks, whatever the result of the October 30 ballot.

While the PT seeks to conceal the extent of the crisis and negotiates with business leaders, it is also leaning on the pseudo-left, which elected the federal representative winning the second most votes in the country and the most votes in the state of São Paulo, Guilherme Boulos of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL). Boulos made his career as a leader of the urban counterpart of the famed MST, the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST).

Finishing second in the São Paulo 2020 mayoral race, Boulos provided the PT's right-wing 2022 campaign with a left veneer, saying his presence in Congress would help push a new Lula administration to the left. Boulos took the opportunity of a CNN interview on October 12 to shrug off the growth of the far-right, declaring “half of the PL,” Bolsonaro's party, “are not Bolsonaro loyalists or flat-earthers, but people that have always been around.” In other words, despite the PT and PSOL's claims Lula should be elected to fight “fascism,” once elections end they will resume horse-trading with the far-right, hoping corruption can keep a new Lula government afloat in face of an increasingly volatile and dangerous domestic and international situation.

These declarations are politically criminal and vindicate the Brazilian Socialist Equality Group (GSI)'s assessment before the first round that a vote for Lula's coalition would do nothing to stop the advance of the far-right in Brazil, let alone ameliorate the dire conditions faced by Brazilian workers. What is needed is a complete break with the PT and its apologists, and a socialist and internationalist strategy.



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