

# Flávio Bolsonaro's rise in polls exposes political debacle of PT and persistent fascist threat in Brazil

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On Saturday, as 8 million people marched across the United States and internationally in the “No Kings” protests against the Donald Trump administration, fascist operatives behind the US regime gathered in Dallas, Texas, for the CPAC 2026 (Conservative Political Action Conference). The event was addressed by Flávio Bolsonaro, who is running as the far-right's candidate in the Brazilian presidential elections in October. Flávio is standing as the political representative of his father, the former president Jair Bolsonaro, now serving a 27-year sentence for the coup attempt that culminated in the January 8, 2023 fascist insurrection in Brasília.

In his speech before CPAC, Flávio Bolsonaro eloquently presented the fascist strategy driving his campaign. Demanding direct US imperialist intervention in the Brazilian elections, he pledged to continue the coup conspiracy for which his father was convicted.

“They called him the Trump of the Tropics,” Flávio said referring to his father. Addressing Bolsonaro's imprisonment, the Brazilian junior fascist continued: “The formal charge is similar to what President Donald Trump faced: insurrection. Sound familiar? But the real reason is the same. ... My father fought against COVID tyranny. He fought against drug cartels. He fought against global elite interests.”

Promising to follow the example of the frenzied dictatorial drive taken by the US fascist president upon returning to office, he added: “Trump 2.0 is being much better than Trump 1.0. Right? Well, Bolsonaro 2.0 will also be much better.”

Flávio also laid bare the deep connection between the Brazilian fascists' domestic agenda and collaboration with US imperialism's ruthless neocolonial and military aims in Latin America, particularly in the escalation of war against China. He declared:

Here's what should really get your attention. Brazil is going to be the battleground where the future of the hemisphere will be fought, because Brazil is America's solution to break dependence on China for critical minerals, especially rare earth elements. ...

[Brazilian President Luiz Inácio] Lula [da Silva] and his party are openly anti-American. He speaks publicly about undermining the dollar as the global currency. He has aligned Brazil with China on a massive scale. He has opposed America's interests on every single issue of foreign policy, publicly criticizing President Trump's actions on Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and the fight against drug trafficking. ...

Opinion polls published in recent weeks have shown a rise in the number of Brazilians indicating their intention to vote for Flávio

Bolsonaro, whose standing has risen continuously since his jailed father named him in December as his proxy presidential candidate.

Concluding his remarks at CPAC with the categorical claim that “we will win” the presidential elections—setting the foundation for the same “electoral fraud” narrative at the core of the coup conspiracies by Trump in 2020-21 and by Bolsonaro in 2022-23—Flávio declared:

My appeal here, not only to the United States but to the entire free world, is this: Watch Brazil's elections with enormous attention. ... Monitor our people's freedom of expression and apply diplomatic pressure so that our institutions function properly. Instead of the Biden administration interfering in our elections to install a socialist who hates America, applying diplomatic pressure for free and fair elections based on values of American origin...

Flávio Bolsonaro's rise in the polls has provoked despair within the Workers Party (PT) which is seeking Lula's reelection through a rerun of the “broad front” with right-wing parties with which he was elected in 2022. The catastrophic outcome of this political perspective is revealed by the fact that, six months before the elections, Flávio already appears in a technical tie with Lula.

The PT and the pseudo-left's argument that the trial of Bolsonaro and his military coup cabal “buried” the fascist threat in Brazil has proven to be not only false, but politically complicit in its resurgence.

In an opinion poll published on March 7 by the Datafolha Institute, Lula scored 38 percent of those indicating their voting intentions against 32 percent for Flávio in the first round. Since December, when the previous Datafolha opinion poll was conducted, Bolsonaro's son has doubled his first-round voting intentions. In the second round, Lula (46 percent) and Flávio (43 percent) appear in a technical tie. In December, Lula held a 15-percentage-point lead in second-round voting intentions over Flávio.

Datafolha also presented a historical record of Brazilian presidents' approval ratings at the start of their third year in office since the end of the US-backed military dictatorship (1964–1985). Lula ran for president with the PT in every election between 1989 and 2006, when he ran for reelection after winning the presidential election for the first time in 2002. In 2006, Lula had a 38 percent “excellent/good” approval rating. By the end of his second term (2007–2010), that figure had risen to 76 percent, coinciding with the commodity boom driven by Chinese growth, the implementation of limited social programs, and before the devastating impacts of the 2008 economic crisis. In the latest Datafolha poll, President Lula's “excellent/good” rating stands at 32 percent, his lowest ever.

The opinion poll released on March 11 by Quæst confirmed the

Datafolha results. In the second round of the presidential election, the poll showed that Lula and Flávio are tied at 41 percent. Last August, Lula was ahead with 48 percent against 32 percent for Flávio. In an even greater indictment of the current Lula government, 59 percent of respondents said that Lula “does not deserve to continue for another four years as president,” and 43 percent answered that Lula continuing in power “is scarier” than the “Bolsonaro family returning” to power (42 percent).

The PT’s political reaction to the poll results has oscillated between attempts to downplay their significance and expressions of panic at the possibility of an electoral defeat. Federal Deputy Lindbergh Farias, until February the PT’s leader in the Chamber of Deputies, wrote on X that the Datafolha results reflected a “new offensive of fake news by the extreme right,” arguing that the election should focus “on the lives of the Brazilian people: lowest unemployment in recorded history, real increase in the minimum wage, highest average income in history, inflation under control.” Similarly, PT President Edinho Silva declared that Lula “has much to show” and that “Brazil has never experienced such a favorable moment in the last decade.”

This rosy picture is directly contradicted by the economic and social reality experienced by the majority of the population. Although the unemployment rate reached 5.1 percent in the quarter ending in December 2025—the lowest level on record—the quality of formal employment is extremely precarious and the informality rate remains around 40 percent, exceeding 50 percent in states in the North and Northeast regions. As a result, household indebtedness reached 80.2 percent of Brazilian families in February, the highest level since these figures were first recorded in 2010. Around 29 percent of Brazilians’ monthly income is committed to debt payments—the highest level in at least two decades. Datafolha recorded that the share of the population that considers the country’s economic situation to have worsened jumped from 35 percent in the first year of the Lula government to 46 percent in March 2026.

### **People have no “social or economic reason to vote for Lula”**

Internally, party leaders described the poll results as a “tragedy,” as reported by *Estado de São Paulo*. Even more devastating was a statement by PT federal deputy Dionilso Marcon, a member of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), delivered at a meeting with Lula government ministers: “Healthcare is worse than in Bolsonaro’s time. I am talking about my state [Rio Grande do Sul].” Marcon stated even more bluntly: “Do you think that *quilombola* communities [traditional Afro-Brazilian communities established by escaped enslaved people], fishermen, or indigenous people have any social or economic reason to vote for Lula? The people of Rio Grande do Sul don’t. It’s hard to campaign for Lula in family farming areas. People are angry with us. We get booed when we go to speak. I was booed at the Family Farming Fair, in Sarandi.”

The PT’s political response to the polls was not to retreat from austerity, but to signal to big capital that the direction of the next term would be even more “fiscally responsible.” Virtually all party leaders, including those considered further to the left, publicly defended keeping Vice President Geraldo Alckmin as Lula’s running mate.

As governor of São Paulo for 14 years (2001–2006 and 2011–2018) under the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), Alckmin promoted brutal cuts to social services, privatization programs, and fierce repression of protests. In the 2022 election, he was recruited for the PT’s “broad front” ticket due to his close ties with industrial and financial capital centered in São Paulo.

In the context of this year’s presidential elections, Edinho Silva declared: “It is not Alckmin who is asking to be our vice. We want

Alckmin as vice because he is a respected vice [presidential candidate] recognized by President Lula, and he broadens our capacity for dialogue in society.”

The content of that “dialogue” was exposed by the executive secretary of the Finance Ministry, Rogério Ceron, who declared in early March that “the main challenge, for 2027, is a ‘strong’ agenda for reducing mandatory spending,” adding that “it is necessary to normalize Social Security adjustments.” Among the mechanisms under consideration is modifying the cap on real growth of mandatory spending, with a direct impact on the minimum wage. Big financial capital received these signals with explicit satisfaction. André Esteves, owner of BTG Pactual, the largest investment bank in Latin America—whose personal fortune grew nearly 200 percent in the last 12 months—publicly praised Finance Minister Fernando Haddad in early February: “[There is] a feeling of much greater balance since your tenure. The minister [Haddad] has a very clear side, which is the side of this country... of an institutional Brazil.”

### **PT promotes sharp increase in military spending**

Alongside the deepening of social austerity, the PT government is preparing a historic expansion of military spending. The military presented a plan envisaging investments of R\$ 800 billion (US\$153 billion) over 15 years, which would amount to R\$ 53.3 billion (US\$10.2 billion) per year, 3.6 times the budget allocated for next year. Defense Minister José Múcio Monteiro argues that Brazil should invest at least 2 percent of GDP in the Armed Forces.

This rearmament policy is presented as a defense of “national sovereignty,” in response to the crisis of global imperialism and, in particular, the escalation of US imperialist interventions under Donald Trump against Brazil and all of Latin America.

During a reception in Brasília for South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on March 9, Lula declared: “I don’t know if Comrade Ramaphosa notices that if we don’t prepare ourselves on the question of defense, one day someone will invade us.” Lula’s remarks were a clear response to the recent launching of the war against Iran and the US invasion of Venezuela. During Ramaphosa’s visit, the presidents formalized a defense cooperation agreement between Brazil and South Africa focused on the development of their arms industries.

The military investments announced by Lula represent, at the same time, a determined appeal to the forces within the Brazilian state that supported the coup attempt led by Bolsonaro and his fascist clique. The attempt to buy the loyalty of the military and to compete with Bolsonaro within the political terrain of the extreme right has marked the entire PT “broad front” government.

The most recent step in this rightward trajectory was taken last Tuesday, March 24, when Lula signed the so-called Anti-Gang Bill into law. Seeking to ride the wave of the “anti-crime” demagoguery of the fascist forces linked to Bolsonaro and the same fraudulent rhetoric used by the Trump government to launch its criminal imperialist incursions, the PT has institutionalized an escalation of state repression and drastic punishments against “criminal factions.”

Lula’s collapse in the polls represents a historic indictment, not only of this current term, but of the entire experience of PT governance. Selling itself as a better manager of capitalism in Brazil, with the idea that all social classes would benefit from the growth of national capital, PT administrations have proven incapable of significantly altering the economic and social reality of the country, which remains one of the most unequal societies in the world.

During the last municipal elections in Brazil in 2024, the Socialist

Equality Group (SEG) wrote: “After occupying power for more than a decade, nurturing the most promiscuous relations with bourgeois companies and parties, and applying capitalist adjustments against the working class, the PT and the pseudo-left want to present the rejection they face from workers as the product of confusion, stupidity, and vulnerability to the demagogic appeals of the right.” What the recent electoral polls reveal, far from the mass appeal of Bolsonaro and his brutish son, is the genuine repudiation by the working class of the PT and its false promises.

This pattern is repeated on a regional scale: the demagogic and pro-capitalist policies of the Pink Tide paved the way for the recent rise of Milei in Argentina, Kast in Chile, Paz in Bolivia and a host of other fascist-type figures across Latin America. As the WSWS noted regarding the analogous phenomenon in Europe, “the fact that the right is strengthening has less to do with its intrinsic power than with the complete bankruptcy of what passes for the left.” The necessary political response to the rise of fascism, war, and the capitalist offensive is the construction of a revolutionary political alternative in the working class.



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