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Oppermann, Daniel

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Daniel Oppermann

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Lula da Silva is elected for a third term: what to expect from this government?

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*Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won Brazil's most recent presidential election with a very tight result. Lula will take office in January 2023, and there are many expectations for the upcoming period, including how well the Brazilian society and especially the security forces could react to it, as **Daniel Oppermann** (International Relations Research Center, University of São Paulo) explains.*

The adoption of the 1988 Constitution was a seminal moment for Brazilian politics and society and is therefore often used as a reference date. The presidential elections held since then have attracted varying degrees of attention depending on the candidates. However, none of

these elections is likely to have received as much attention both within the country and internationally as this year's, which ended on 30 October 2022 with a run-off between President Jair Bolsonaro and former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (who served two terms from 2003 to 2010).

This is not only due to the excessive use of social media, where polarising sensationalism and misinformation heated the debates but also to the basic starting positions of the two candidates. On the one side, the incumbent president and defender of extremely conservative and Christian values, presented himself as a champion of the private sector, especially of agribusiness. And on the other, the social-democratic former president represents workers and lower-income groups. One is sometimes called a "fascist" by his opponents, the other a "communist" by his.

With 50.9% of votes, the Workers' Party (PT) candidate has left the current incumbent behind. As expected, the result was very close, and both candidates were roughly tied in the polls until the end. The now-elected returning president will take office on 01 January 2023.

A ferocious election campaign

During the campaign, it was clear that just two of all 11 candidates had a serious chance of becoming president. Even though the majority of the polls showed Lula da Silva in the lead by a few percentage points, a Bolsonaro victory could never be completely ruled out.

Of the other candidates, it was mainly the bourgeois-liberal and no-nonsense candidate Simone Tebet (MDB) and the populist centre-left candidate Ciro Gomes (PDT) who were able to collect smaller percentages, which they indirectly attributed to the PT candidate in the second round of voting through their individual election recommendations for Lula da Silva. In addition to Tebet and Gomes, the

conservative candidate Soraya Thronicke (União), the economic liberal Luiz Felipe d'Avila (NOVO) and the controversial priest Kelmon, who stood in at short notice for the radical right-wing candidate Roberto Jefferson, all appeared in TV debates but received less than one percentage point in the first round. Other candidates like Péricles, Manzano, Vera and Eymael received little attention in the campaigns and correspondingly few votes.

Weeks before the election, Brazil could witness a lack of constructive arguments and an increase in controversies and personal attacks on the candidates. Sensationalist attacks happened in social media and official TV commercials, demonising candidates with emotionally charged topics such as violence, child abuse and the fear of an imaginary communist threat.

For Bolsonaro, the situation was aggravated by the fact that a few days before the second round of the elections, **one of his political supporters and advocates of a liberal gun policy fired 50 rounds of ammunition and threw three grenades at a group of federal police officers** from a private residence to evade a pending arrest. Roberto Jefferson, who also ran for the presidency, has since been imprisoned and is now facing charges of attempted manslaughter. Subsequently, Bolsonaro distanced himself from Jefferson, although the political closeness between the two was critically discussed in the media and the Workers' Party social media team managed to use the issue to its advantage.

The Jefferson case will keep the Brazilian judiciary busy for some time to come, especially since the surprisingly comradely behaviour of the federal police officer in charge towards the right-wing extremist shooter was captured on video and once again shed light on the questionable role of Brazilian security forces.

Another widespread incident involving armed supporters of Bolsonaro happened in São Paulo the day before the second run when **Member of**

Parliament Carla Zambelli and her team pulled out guns and fired at least one shot to threaten a Lula supporter in the Jardins neighbourhood near Av. Paulista.

What Brazil can expect from the new government

Jair Bolsonaro and Lula da Silva had two classically different approaches to tackling Brazil's challenges. **Jair Bolsonaro's programme** is professional and structured while **Lula da Silva's programme** resembles a poorly structured set of sentences without any visual elaboration.

According to his announcements, Lula is striving for a return to the political and economic approaches of his previous terms in office. Unlike his political opponent, he emphasises the central role of the lower income groups as well as historically disadvantaged population groups, indigenous people and other minorities, to whom he wants to give special attention during his term in office.

About 33 million people in Brazil are currently suffering from hunger, and 58,7% of the total population suffers from different levels of food insecurity.

The president-elect will need to think about the relaunch of an updated version of the Bolsa Família programme and reconsider new work policies while emphasising sustainability, new technologies and protecting the country's biodiversity. Climate change should also return to the political agenda, along with investments in public education in schools and universities.

For his projects, Lula will depend on a majority in parliament, **which continues to have a strong Bolsonaro-faction** and which will hardly

accept the new government proposals unless receiving anything in return.

Foreign policies of the new administration

Even if foreign policies hardly played any role in the election campaigns, it is clear that priorities will change. Talks on global efforts for climate protection and a more transparent approach to the role of the Amazon rainforest will be on the agenda as well as a more robust engagement at the United Nations level.

For Latin America, Lula's election victory means stronger cooperation, also or especially with the recently elected centre-left governments in **Chile** and **Colombia**, which Bolsonaro has shunned. Shortly after the election, Lula received a visit from Argentina's President Alberto Fernández and also Uruguay's former President José Alberto "Pepe" Mujica Cordano made a quick appearance in São Paulo. Furthermore, there will also be cooperation with partners in the global South.

In Europe, the positioning towards Russia is expected with interest. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Moscow turning away from the West, Brazil could take on the role of the outsider here and strive for good relations with Europe and North America as well as with Russia and China.

What happens now until Lula takes office?

In stable democratic conditions, Lula da Silva's victory would have been followed by a transitional phase lasting several weeks, which would have ended when the new president took office on the first of January 2023. However, the strengthening of radical right-wing forces has

already led to one other serious attack on democratic government institutions in the Americas recently. The attack on the U.S. Capitol in 2021 was also hovering over a regular transfer of power in Brazil, especially since outgoing President Bolsonaro and his supporters have made verbal attacks on the country's democratic institutions for several years.

The **Brazilian military forces' support of the election results** has to some extent taken the wind out of Bolsonaro's sails. A military takeover still feared by some in 2018 could thus be largely ruled out. Nevertheless, a few days before the second turn Bolsonaro met with heads of the military to complain once again about what he considered unequal treatment to his disadvantage during the election campaigns.

After the announcement of the official election results on Sunday, he refused to comment on any request and kept hiding in his office and the official residence for almost two days. Meanwhile, some of his more radical supporters and truck drivers started blocking major highways all over the country. After a quick reaction from the Federal Supreme Court, police forces all over the country were sent to remove highway blockades.

Bolsonaro, who will remain in office until the end of 2022, has a certain potential of radical and also armed supporters who want to take the frequently proclaimed protection of the "traditional family" or the "good citizen" into their own hands. **The alleged danger of imaginary communism as articulated in Brazil literally for a hundred years now has also taken possession of many of Bolsonaro's supporters.**

Having received 49,1% of the votes in 2022 might motivate him to rejoin the race in four years when no prominent left-wing candidate is in sight. **Lula has indicated more than once that he was not interested in another reelection in 2026.**

It cannot be ruled out that Bolsonaro's electoral defeat has awakened a desire for physical revenge against democratic institutions. The coming weeks will show how well Brazilian society and especially the security forces could react to this scenario.

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About the author



Daniel Oppermann

Daniel Oppermann is a research coordinator at the NUPRI Research Center for International Relations at the University of São Paulo (NUPRI-USP) and a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Strategic Studies at Fluminense Federal University (INEST-UFF) in Niterói, Brazil.

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