

Brazil's October 2022 Presidential Election

September 28, 2022

Brazil, the world's sixth-most populous country and 12th largest economy, is to hold presidential, legislative, and state elections on October 2, 2022. In the lead-up to the vote, some Members of Congress have expressed concerns that Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro may be attempting to undermine the legitimacy of the elections and have introduced legislative measures to support Brazilian democracy. In addition to considering potential legislation, Congress may monitor the Biden Administration's approach to the elections and may assess the potential implications of the elections for [U.S.-Brazilian relations](#).

Domestic Context and Campaign

Bolsonaro, a former right-wing legislator and retired army captain, was elected in 2018 in the aftermath of a deep recession and corruption scandals that [discredited](#) much of Brazil's political leadership. Since taking office in January 2019, Bolsonaro has governed in a [populist manner](#), using social media to communicate directly with supporters; take polarizing stands on cultural issues; and criticize perceived enemies, such as the press, civil society organizations, and other branches of government. This approach has kept his base politically engaged but has alienated potential allies within the conservative-leaning congress and placed additional [stress](#) on the country's already strained democratic institutions. It also appears to [have hindered](#) Brazil's ability to implement a coordinated response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has killed more than [685,000](#) Brazilians.

In an attempt to expand his support base prior to the election, Bolsonaro joined the center-right Liberal Party and forged a coalition with two other large patronage-based parties. Working with the Brazilian congress, he also [increased](#) cash transfers to low-income households, reduced fuel taxes, and implemented other measures intended to help Brazilians contend with high [inflation](#). Bolsonaro's approval rating has improved over the past year; as of September 21, 2022, 34% of Brazilians rated his performance in office "good" or "great," 20% rated it "regular," and 44% rated as "bad" or "terrible," according to an average of recent [polls](#).

The political opposition, which had been fragmented for much of Bolsonaro's term, has coalesced behind former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula, 2003-2010) of the center-left Workers' Party. The presidential campaign represents a political comeback for Lula, who was convicted on corruption charges in 2017 and imprisoned for nearly two years. He was cleared to run for office again in 2021, after the Brazilian supreme court [annulled](#) those convictions and [ruled](#) that the judge presiding over the case for which he had been imprisoned had acted with bias. Lula has campaigned on his economic record,

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reminding voters of the [improvements](#) in living standards that occurred during his eight years in office. He also has sought to broaden his coalition by selecting a center-right running mate and [reaching out](#) to former Bolsonaro supporters.

According to an average of recent [polls](#), as of September 27, 2022, Lula was leading Bolsonaro 44% to 37%, with other candidates registering minimal support. If no candidate wins more than 50% of valid votes on October 2, a runoff between the top two candidates is to be held on October 30. Polls suggest Lula would be favored in a second-round matchup, leading Bolsonaro 51% to 40%.

Election Concerns

As Bolsonaro's prospects for reelection have diminished, he has [repeatedly questioned](#) the integrity of the electoral system. Brazil's armed forces, who are more [involved](#) in governance than they have been at any time since the end of the country's 1964-1985 dictatorship, have [echoed](#) some of Bolsonaro's claims. Bolsonaro has stated that he will recognize the election results as long as the voting is "[clean and transparent](#)," but some [analysts](#) are concerned that he could seek security force support to overturn a loss. To date, Brazil's other branches of government and significant sectors of civil society have remained [united](#) in defense of the electoral system. [Many analysts](#) also expect Brazil's military leadership to respect the results, though some [remain concerned](#) that Bolsonaro supporters, inside and outside the security forces, could resort to violence. Observers documented more than [200](#) incidents of political violence in the first half of the year, and multiple [murders](#) have occurred during the lead up to the election.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Some Members of Congress have expressed [concerns](#) about Bolsonaro's pre-election actions and have introduced resolutions (S.Res. 753/H.Res. 1335) that would urge the Brazilian government to ensure the elections are "free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful." The resolutions also would call on the U.S. government to speak out against efforts to undermine the electoral process, immediately recognize the outcome of elections determined by international [observers](#) to be free and fair, and make clear that undemocratic actions would jeopardize U.S.-Brazilian relations. A withdrawn amendment to the National Defense Authorization for FY2023, H.Amdt. 282 to H.R. 7900, would have [required](#) the Secretary of State to report on the Brazilian armed forces' actions regarding the elections and consider whether such actions require the termination of U.S. assistance in accordance with [Section 7008](#) the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103). Other Members of Congress have expressed concerns that measures such as H.Amdt. 282 could harm U.S.-Brazilian security cooperation and [denigrate](#) the reputation of a U.S. ally. The Biden Administration has [expressed confidence](#) in Brazil's electoral institutions and reportedly has [urged](#) Brazilian officials not to cast doubts on the system.

The election outcome also could affect [U.S.-Brazilian relations](#). Under Bolsonaro, bilateral security and commercial ties have expanded and Brazil has aligned with the United States on regional challenges, like the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. Bolsonaro's environmental policies have generated tensions with the Biden Administration, however, as deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has climbed to a [15-year high](#), jeopardizing global efforts to mitigate climate change. If elected, Lula would likely pursue more [autonomous](#) foreign and defense policies, including restoring relations with the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela and increasing coordination with fellow Latin American governments and members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group. At the same time, bilateral environmental cooperation may increase, as Lula has [pledged](#) to combat illegal deforestation and meet Brazil's Paris Agreement commitments on climate change.

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