

Brazil's October 2022 Presidential Election

Updated October 25, 2022

Brazil, the world's sixth-most-populous country and 12th-largest economy, is to hold a presidential runoff election on October 30, 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 election's legitimacy 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 election and assess the potential implications of the election for [U.S.-Brazilian relations](#).

First-Round Results and Context

In the first-round presidential election, held on October 2, 2022, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula, 2003-2010) of the center-left Workers' Party (PT) [won 48.4%](#) of the vote but fell short of the absolute majority needed to avoid a runoff against President Bolsonaro, who obtained 43.2% of the vote. Two other candidates from center-right and center-left parties, who received a combined 7.2% of the vote, have endorsed Lula for the second round. According to an [average of polls](#) conducted through October 24, 2022, Lula is leading Bolsonaro 47.5% to 45.0%.

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 Lula had been imprisoned acted with bias. Lula has campaigned on his economic record, 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 reaching out to [centrist](#) and [conservative](#) voters. Nevertheless, [anti-PT sentiment](#) remains widespread in Brazil, particularly among [evangelicals](#) and those who associate Lula's party with corruption scandals and Brazil's deep 2014-2016 recession.

Bolsonaro, a former right-wing legislator and retired army captain, was elected in 2018 after a period of economic and political turmoil that [discredited](#) much of Brazil's political leadership. Bolsonaro has governed in a [populist manner](#) that has kept his base politically engaged but alienated potential allies within the conservative-leaning congress. Bolsonaro's approach also has [stressed](#) Brazil's democratic institutions and appears to [have hindered](#) the country's response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has killed more than [687,000](#) 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. He also worked with the

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IN12022

Brazilian congress to [increase](#) cash transfers to low-income households, reduce fuel taxes, and implement other social assistance measures. In recent months, unemployment has fallen to a [seven-year low](#) and real wages have begun to increase as consumer prices have [declined](#) in certain sectors. As of October 21, 2022, 38% of Brazilians rated Bolsonaro's performance in office "good" or "great," 19% rated it "regular," and 41% rated it "bad" or "terrible," according to an [average of recent polls](#).

Election Concerns

Throughout the campaign, Bolsonaro has [repeatedly questioned](#) the electoral system's integrity. Brazil's armed forces, which are more [involved](#) in governance than at any time since the end of the country's 1964-1985 dictatorship, have [echoed](#) some of Bolsonaro's claims. Bolsonaro has stated he will recognize the election results as long as "[nothing abnormal](#)" occurs, but some [analysts](#) are concerned he could seek security force support to overturn a loss. To date, Brazil's other branches of government and a broad cross-section 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 engage in violence. Multiple politically motivated [murders](#) occurred during the lead-up to the first-round election.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Some Members of Congress have expressed [concerns](#) about Bolsonaro's preelection actions and have introduced legislative responses. On September 28, 2022, the Senate adopted a resolution (S.Res. 753) that urges the Brazilian government to ensure the election is conducted in a "free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful manner." The resolution also calls on the U.S. government to speak out against efforts to undermine the electoral process; to immediately recognize the outcome if [international observers](#) determine the election to be free and fair; and to make clear that undemocratic actions would jeopardize U.S.-Brazilian relations, including security assistance. A companion resolution (H.Res. 1335) has been introduced in the House. 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 election and to consider whether such actions required 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, [condemned](#) political violence, and reportedly [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, such as 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 likely would 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. Nevertheless, such efforts could be constrained by Brazil's incoming congress, in which legislators affiliated with [agricultural interests](#) are expected to play an influential role.

Author Information

Peter J. Meyer
Specialist in Latin American and Canadian Affairs

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