

Brazil's October 2022 Presidential Election

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Brazil, the world's 7th most populous country and 12th largest economy, held a presidential runoff election on October 30, 2022. Former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula, 2003-2010) of the center-left Workers' Party (PT) defeated incumbent President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) of the center-right Liberal Party, **50.9% to 49.1%**. Bolsonaro, who repeatedly **questioned** the electoral system's integrity in the lead-up to the vote, has not contested the results, and his administration is cooperating with the transition.

In September 2022, the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution (S.Res. 753) urging the Brazilian government to ensure "free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful" elections. As President-elect Lula prepares to take office on January 1, 2023, Congress may continue to monitor the Biden Administration's policy toward Brazil and assess the potential implications of the change in government for **U.S-Brazilian relations**.

Electoral Context

Bolsonaro's defeat was the first for an incumbent Brazilian president since the restoration of democracy in 1985. However, it was the 16th consecutive loss for incumbent political parties in democratic presidential elections in Latin America since 2018. Like leaders throughout the region, Bolsonaro faced voter discontent over weak economic growth and income losses resulting from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. His **polarizing approach** to governance and **widely criticized** public health response to the pandemic further weakened his appeal. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro nearly secured reelection by rallying his conservative base and recovering some popular support in the final months of the campaign as the Brazilian government **increased** cash transfers to low-income Brazilians, unemployment **fell** to a seven-year low, and real wages began to rise.

The election marks a political comeback for Lula, who was convicted on corruption charges in 2017 and imprisoned for 19 months. 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 had acted with bias. Anti-PT sentiment remains **widespread** in Brazil, particularly among **evangelical Christians** and those whose living standards **stagnated or declined** during the PT-led administration of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016). Lula won over a majority of voters, however, by pledging to restore the **upward social mobility** that characterized his first two terms and by assembling a **broad coalition** of Brazilians from across the ideological spectrum who viewed Bolsonaro as a threat to democracy.

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Prior to the election, [many analysts](#) expressed concerns that Bolsonaro could contest a loss, potentially with the support of Brazil's security forces. To deter such an action, officials from other branches of government, business and civil society leaders, and foreign governments—including the [United States](#)—expressed [confidence](#) in Brazil's electoral system and quickly [recognized](#) Lula's victory. Some Bolsonaro supporters took to the streets after the runoff, setting up roadblocks and calling for [military intervention](#). Although Bolsonaro expressed sympathy with the protesters, he [urged](#) them to lift their blockades and [authorized](#) his administration to cooperate with Lula's transition team.

Policy Implications

Brazil's change in government is likely to result in several policy shifts with implications for [U.S.-Brazilian relations](#). Under Bolsonaro, bilateral security ties have expanded and Brazil has aligned with the United States on certain regional challenges, such as the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. To build on this rapprochement, the Trump Administration [designated](#) Brazil as a major non-NATO ally for the purposes of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended ([22 U.S.C. §§2151 et seq.](#)), and the Arms Export Control Act ([22 U.S.C. §§2751 et seq.](#)), and the Biden Administration [expressed support](#) for Brazil's participation as a NATO global partner. Bolsonaro has diverged from U.S. policy on some international security issues, however, adopting a [neutral](#) stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and [resisting U.S. pressure](#) to ban equipment from Huawei and other Chinese companies in Brazil's fifth-generation (5G) telecommunications infrastructure.

Similar to his previous terms, Lula is likely to pursue an active role in international affairs, seeking to increase Brazil's influence while maintaining autonomy and cordial relations with all countries. Within the Western Hemisphere, this approach is likely to include [increased cooperation](#) with other Latin American governments, potentially through the resuscitation of various regional organizations. Lula is also likely to restore relations with the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela and oppose broader U.S. efforts to isolate authoritarian regimes in the region. At the same time, Lula has called for [free elections](#) in Venezuela and could help facilitate negotiations between Maduro and the political opposition.

Globally, Lula is likely to maintain close ties with fellow members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group and work with other developing countries to advance their interests in multilateral organizations. He is unlikely to shift Brazil's stance regarding the [Russia-Ukraine war](#) and is likely to avoid direct involvement in [competition](#) between the United States and China—Brazil's two largest trade partners. Nevertheless, in the view of one [former U.S. Ambassador](#), the United States and Brazil are well-positioned to work together on related challenges, such as increasing global food and energy security and demonstrating that democracies can deliver for their citizens. The United States and Brazil also could collaborate on international [peacekeeping](#), as Lula [reportedly](#) intends to roll back the Brazilian military's [involvement](#) in domestic affairs and may seek alternative missions for the armed forces.

Brazil's change in government may have particularly far-reaching effects on the country's environmental policies. Under Bolsonaro, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon climbed to a [15-year high](#), jeopardizing global efforts to mitigate climate change and generating tensions with the Biden Administration. At the November 2022 U.N. climate summit, Lula [pledged](#) to strengthen environmental enforcement and called for increased international cooperation on conservation efforts. U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry has acknowledged Lula's commitment to environmental protection and has [expressed](#) interest in revising existing [bilateral initiatives](#) and mobilizing additional international financial support for Brazil.

Lula is likely to face several constraints in advancing his domestic and international agendas, including [slowing economic growth](#) and a [conservative-leaning congress](#) that may oppose some of his objectives and/or seek to allocate scarce resources to other priorities.

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