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FORTALECEMOS
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STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

SEPTEMBER 2022

Brazil

Presidential and legislative elections Pre-election report



Executive Summary

This Sunday, October 2, Brazilian citizens go to the polls to elect the president and vice-president of the Republic, 513 federal deputies (the entire Chamber), 27 senators (one third), 27 governors and vice-governors, and 1059 state deputies. In the event that no candidate for president **receives 50% of the votes, a run-off election will be held on October 30.**

Although 11 candidates are vying for the presidency, **current president Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party) and former president Lula da Silva (Workers' Party) dominate the polls.** Thus, Brazilians are essentially choosing between four more years of Bolsonaro or the return of Lula, who was president for two terms.

All opinion polls put Lula ahead of the incumbent, by around 10% or more. However, to win outright in the first round he must get at least 50% of the votes. No poll indicates he can pull that off. However, this refers to “valid votes” meaning that when null and blank votes are taken into account, and deducted from the ballots for each, the scenario changes, with Lula standing a bigger chance of winning outright on Sunday. Either way, a tight race seems all but guaranteed.

What is at stake? One could say that there are two political and development models riding on Sunday's elections. On the one hand, **Bolsonaro [proposes](#) the continuity of his administration** which, economically, is geared to **strengthening the country's "entrepreneurial spirit"** as well as to tax reductions and generally doing away with red tape. Meanwhile, on the social level, he wants to "maintain traditional values...God, Homeland, Family, Life and Liberty".

For his part, **Lula** blames Bolsonaro for souring socioeconomic indicators and [promises](#) to "restore living conditions for the majority". In economic matters, he **advocates "producing and consuming in a sustainable way"** and he wants to return to the policy of increasing the minimum wage to “restore the purchasing power of workers”. In social matters, he promotes policies for the promotion of racial equality and the protection of the rights and territories of indigenous peoples.

This electoral contest is framed by **polarization and increased violence.** Bolsonaro has discredited the electoral system because, to his mind, the electronic voting devices cannot guarantee transparency. In response, and to allay concerns, **the Electoral Tribunal has empowered different institutions to supervise the elections.** However, doubts are rife as to how Bolsonaro would react and what he might do in the event of a defeat.

The outcome of the elections will have considerable regional fallout, Brazil being South America's most populous country and carrying its largest weight economically. In foreign policy, the candidates also diverge considerably. While Bolsonaro is stand-offish, Lula espouses engagement and integration, especially with other Latin American countries.

The winner will face the challenge of getting on-side what is expected to be a highly fragmented Congress, not to mention winning over a deeply divided population.

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The election in numbers

50%

The minimum percentage that the most voted candidate must obtain to be elected in the first round. Lula, who is the favorite, could reach it.

The voting intention of Ciro Gomes, third in dispute. A shift of his voters towards either of the two poles could be decisive to define the election in the first round or to send it to a runoff.

7 %

+10%

The estimated percentage of undecided voters, votes for other candidates and null votes. Their behavior will also be decisive on Sunday.

The deputies and senators to be elected. Neither of the two main candidates will be able to obtain a majority of their own in the next Congress, so alliances will be essential.

**513 and
27**

1998

The year of the last election where a presidential candidate won in the first round.

The percentage of Brazilians who say they felt intimidated or assaulted when expressing their political preferences during the campaign. The number shows the level of violence and polarization that is marking the electoral process.

67,5%

Key questions

When and what is voted on?

Sunday, October 2. The **President and Vice-President of the Republic**, governors and vice-governors will be elected. In addition, the **Chamber of Deputies** and **one third of the Senate** will be renewed and sub-national deputies will be elected.

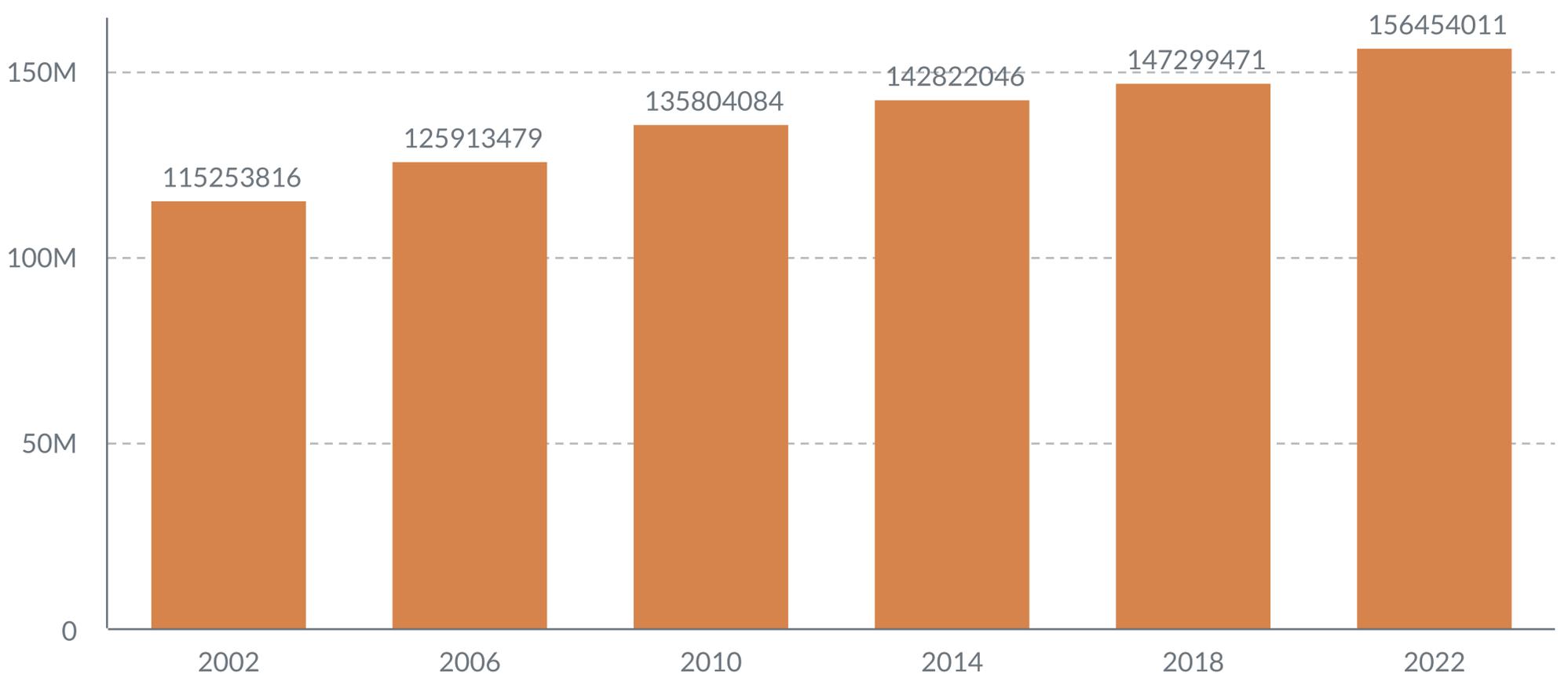
Who votes and how?

Voting is direct, secret and universal. It is also mandatory for all citizens between 18 and 70 years of age and voluntary for illiterate persons, young people between 16 and 17 years of age and those over 70 years of age. More than 156 million voters are entitled to vote in these elections.

How is the new Executive Branch elected?

The president and vice-president will be **elected for a period of 4 years** through a second round absolute majority system. This means that **the candidate who obtains 50% of the valid votes** (blank or null votes are not counted) **will be elected in the first round.**

In the event that **no candidate reaches that percentage, a second round of elections will be held** in which only the two candidates who obtain the most votes in the first round will participate. The same electoral system applies to governors and vice-governors. In this second round, whoever obtains the most votes will be elected.



Source: Own elaboration based on information from the Superior Electoral Court.

Key questions

When will the second round be held if necessary?

There will be a run-off election to be held on **October 30**. It is important to note that the last time a president was elected without the need for a runoff was in 1998 when Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazilian Social Democracy Party), obtained 53.06% of the votes.

What is elected at the legislative level?

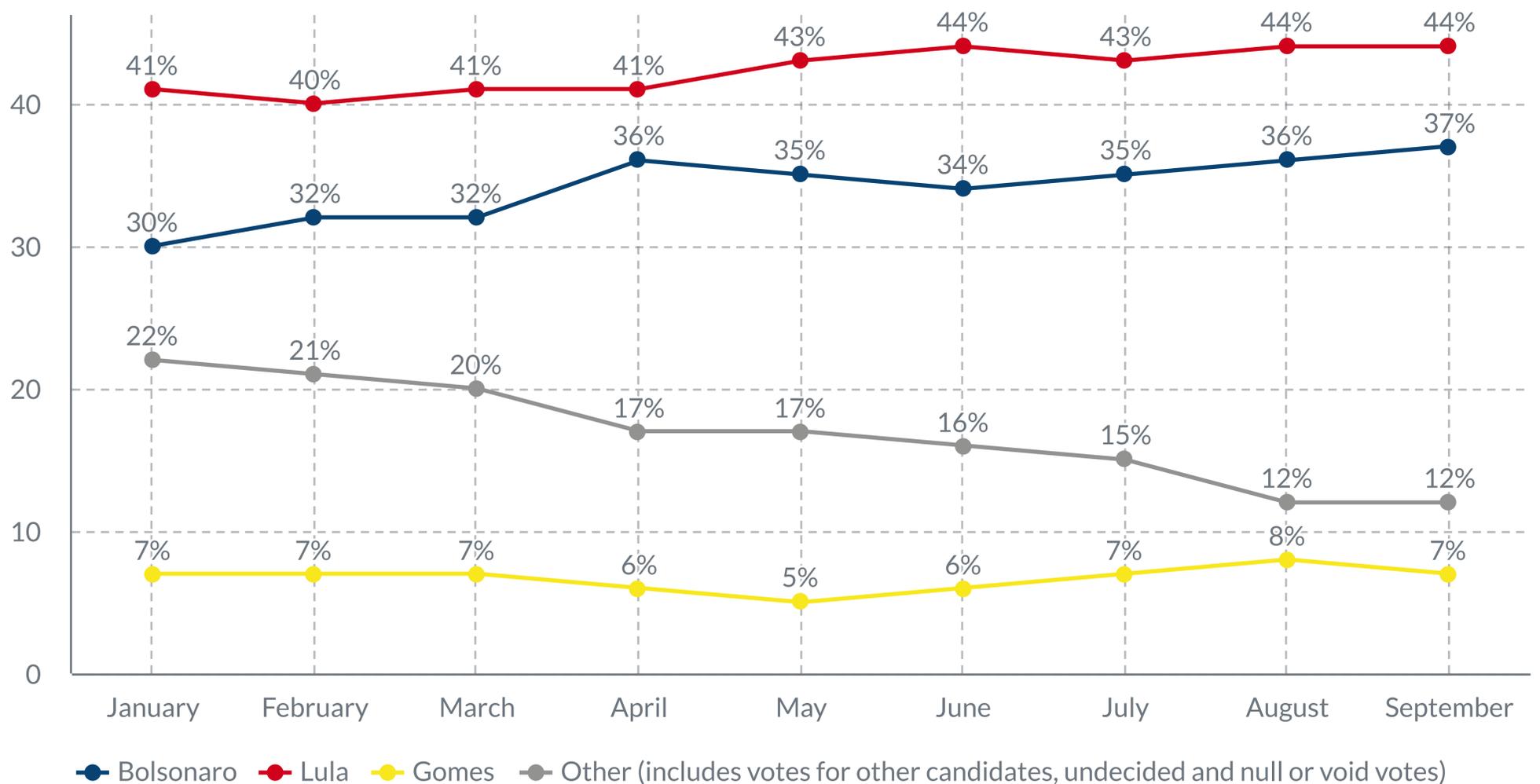
According to the Constitution, **the Senate**, which is composed of 81 members, is **partially renewed every four years** at the rate of one third and two thirds alternately. On this occasion, one third, which is equivalent to **27 seats, will be elected** by simple majority system. On the other hand, **the Chamber of Deputies will renew its 513 members**. Deputies are elected for a 4-year term based on a proportional election system.

When do the winners take over?

The new president **will take office on January 1, 2023**, the same day on which the elected governors also take office. Meanwhile, the legislative inauguration ceremony will take place on February 1, 2023.

Polls and projections

To recap, there are two presidential candidates: Lula da Silva (Brazil of Hope-opposition) and Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party-ruling party). Between them, they account for over 80% of the voting intention, with Ciro Gomes (Democratic Labor Party-opposition) in third place with 7%. **Polls clearly have Lula as favorite**; to find one showing otherwise - putting Bolsonaro as the frontrunner - it is necessary to go back to June 2021, prior to Lula consolidating his lead.

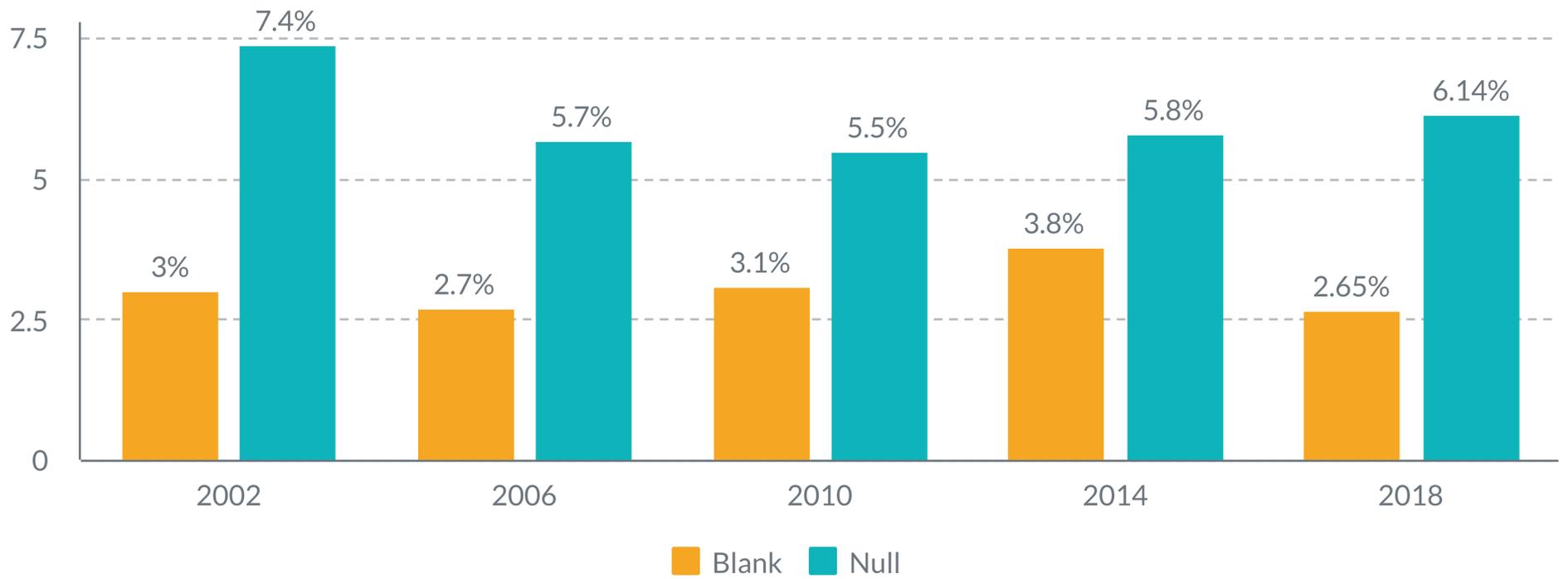


Source: Own elaboration based on private opinion polls.

However, this does make Sunday's election a *fait accompli*. Bolsonaro has clawed back support in recent months, reducing the difference from 10% to 7%. Given the fact that Lula has seemed unable to shift upward from a level of 44% support in the polls, it is clear that **a second round could be on the cards**.

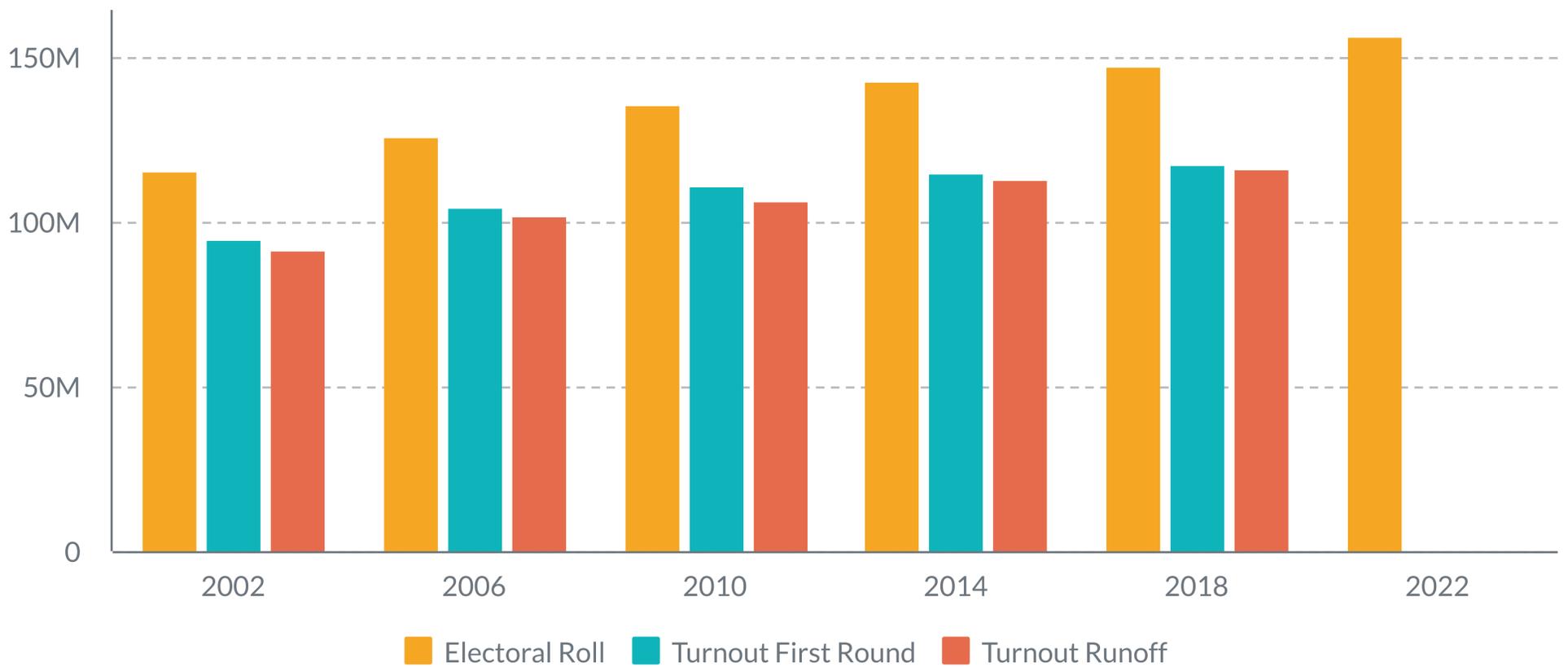
This is where the **undecideds have a key role to play**, who could conceivably swing it for Lula in the first round if accompanied by others currently indicating **they will back smaller fringe candidates**. **Invalid votes** will also come into this. Those ballots do not count toward the percentages of each candidate. This favors the most voted-for candidate, since it effectively reduces the total base of votes from which a first-round winner must receive 50% of the share to win in the first round. In recent elections in the country, the combination of blank and null votes has remained relatively stable, at between 9 and 10% of all votes cast.

Blank and null votes 2002-2018



Another factor that will be decisive in this process is the **level of electoral participation**. As with blank and null votes, this trend has stabilized in recent years. From 2002 to date, approximately 80 percent of the eligible citizens voted in the first round. In the runoffs, the percentage of voters decreased between one and three percent.

Turnout 2002-2018



What do the regions say?

The **more than 155 million voters** on Sunday **will be distributed in five regions of the country.**

Each of them has a specific socioeconomic and productive profile, as well as a different relative weight in terms of electoral relevance.

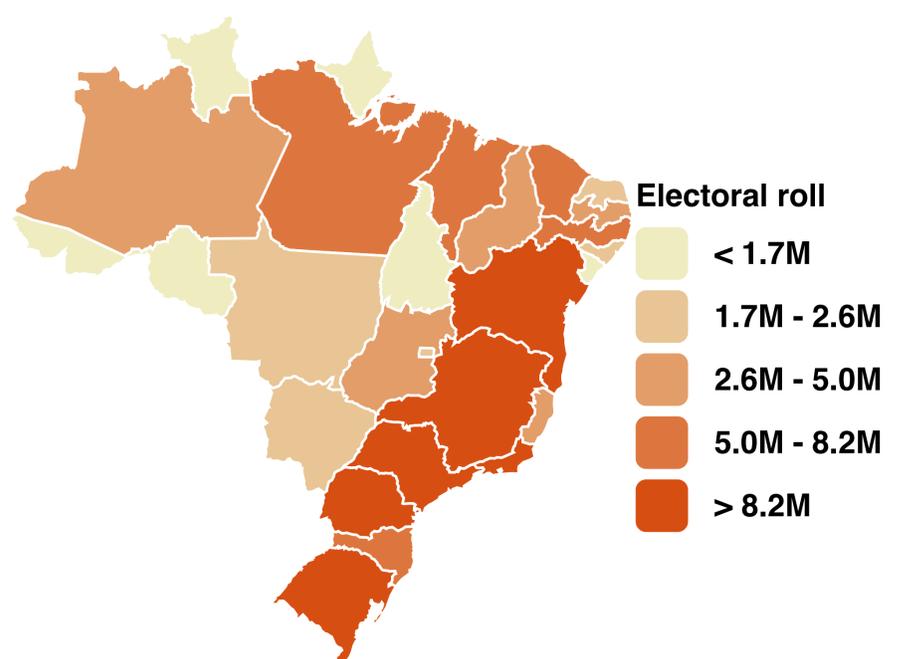
The first region is the **North** (Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins), which is characterized by an economy centered on the **production of primary goods** and is one of the poorest in the country, a characteristic it shares with the **Centralwest** region (Goiás, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul and the Federal District).

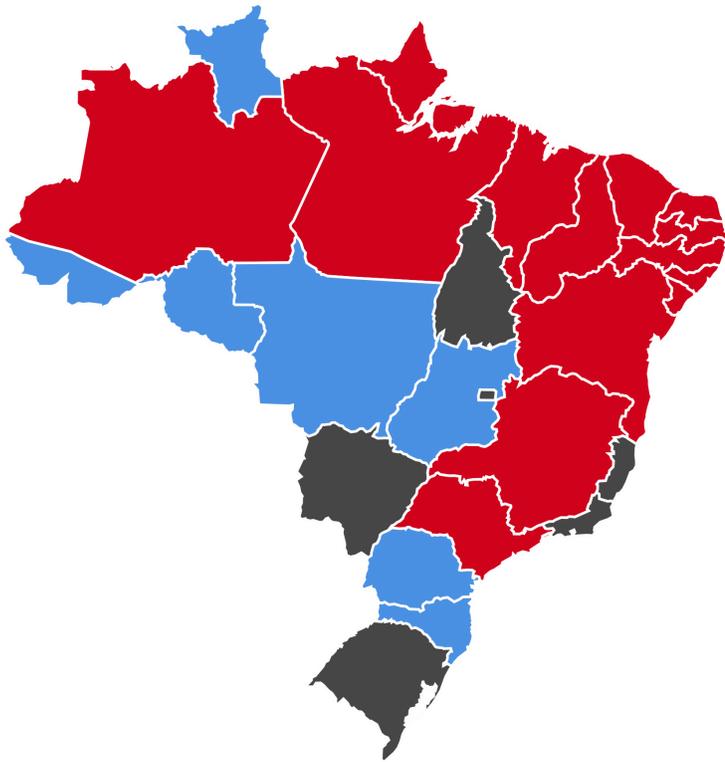
The **Northeast** (Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe) is characterized by a medium level of economic development, where the primary economy is complemented by **industrial pockets and important tourist centers.** Finally, both the **southeast** (Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and the **south** (Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina) are the most booming industrial regions, the latter having the highest human development index (HDI).

Meanwhile, and in terms of the **specific electoral weight of each region**, it is important to mention that the Southeast with 66,707,465 and the Northeast with 42,390,976 citizens eligible to vote are the two most important. It is worth pointing out that the **Southeast has the three most populous districts:** São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro. The third most important region is the South with more than 22 million voters followed by the North with 12 and the Center-West with more than 11 million.



Regions





Favorites

- Lula Da Silva
- Jair Bolsonaro
- Toss-up

According to the latest polls available, **Lula is particularly strong** in the two main regions of the country: **southeast and northeast**. There, the high concentration of middle class population and industrial workers seem to give him a solid advantage that could be decisive on Sunday. If the polls are correct, only two states of these regions would be open to dispute: Espírito Santo and Rio de Janeiro.

On the other hand, **the current president is strong in the south of the country**, a thriving industrial region but also with the highest level of human development in the country. He is also doing well in the center-west, a region characterized by a primary economy and low levels of development. Regarding the north, another poor and primarized region, at the moment, it would be a fight in terms of victories per state between both candidates.

The relevance of Minas Gerais

Lula leads in 14 of the 27 Brazilian states and Bolsonaro in 7 others. **The former president also leads in the state of Minas Gerais**, with 46% of voting intention, which remained stable compared to the previous poll. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, increased one point since the last survey and is in second place with 31% of voting intention.

Minas Gerais has always been in the spotlight when analyzing possible electoral results. The last time a president won the presidency without winning this estate was Getulio Vargas in 1950. On the one hand, it has a large number of voters, second only to São Paulo. But it is also a heterogeneous state. Different socioeconomic sectors, political ideologies and regional differences of all kinds coexist here.

Ciro Gomes' voters, the undecided and blank votes

The big question on Sunday is **whether or not Lula will win in the first round**. Depending on the poll, this seems more or less likely but, for sure, everything seems to indicate that what will actually happen will depend to a great extent on the final definitions of the voters of the third candidate with the highest intention to vote, **Ciro Gomes**, as well as the rest of the voters of other spaces and, also, on the number of blank votes.

Ciro Gomes, with his 7% of intention, becomes a central candidate, since **a slippage of his preferences towards Lula could be the necessary** touchstone for the Labor candidate to win the Presidency. Or, on the contrary, to prevent him from reaching the seat of government, the Planalto Palace. Here the idea of the useful vote, that is, to change the electoral preference oriented to the result and not so much to the voter's preference according to his ideological profile, will play a central role.

According to opinion polls, **54% of those who say they support Gomes say they could still change their choice**. Among them, Lula appears as the most likely option (38%) while 18% would prefer Bolsonaro. The rest of the candidates that will participate on Sunday gather an average of 6%, which added to the undecided 5% could also twist Sunday's election.

Finally, it is important to point out that Lula does not necessarily need these spaces to vote for him: if these voters decide to void their votes or vote blank, it will be enough for him, since in Brazil the final calculation of the percentage of each candidate is structured on the basis of the affirmative votes and not on the total votes. Thus, this "shrinks the cake" allowing that with an equal number of votes a higher percentage of votes can be obtained.

Lula's alliance building

The **first major alliance Lula** sought when launching his candidacy was with **Geraldo Alckim**, until then his historical political adversary. In 2006 he competed in the race for the Presidency and reached the second round together with Lula, who finally won. In 2021 he disaffiliated from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) to join the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and become Da Silva's running mate.

This political strategy, which would have been unthinkable at any other time, is a true reflection of the political situation in which Lula is seeking his third presidential victory. Although he has his own support, he stated that the alliance will serve to reach sectors of the center or center-right, which are more difficult to be challenged by the PT (Laboral Party) and which today are more radicalized than in previous periods. On the other hand, Lula expressed that Alckim is a politician with experience and trajectory and that after having served as governor of Sao Paulo for four consecutive mandates, he is in a good position to work with him for a new mandate.

With this formula, the support of the Brazilian Socialist Party becomes official. On the other hand, the Workers' Party registered as a federation "Brazil of Hope" together with the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) and the Green Party. Marina Silva, of the Rede Sustentabilidade party in the final stretch of the campaign declared her party's support to Lula in the first round, having made a programmatic agreement especially in environmental terms. Marina Silva was part of Lula's government as Minister of Environment but left due to differences in that area; today she considers it a priority that Bolsonaro does not get re-elected.

Presidential Elections

Who is running?

Although there will be eleven candidates in total, only two have a chance of winning in next Sunday's elections. Below are their profiles and government proposals:



LULA DA SILVA

**Brasil of
Hope** | *Opposition*



JAIR BOLSONARO

Liberal Party | *Ruling
party*

The following candidates will also participate in the election: Ciro Gomes (Democratic Labor Party), Simone Tebet (Brazilian Democratic Movement), Vera Lucia Salgado (Unified Socialist Workers Party), Felipe D'Avila (New), Soraya Thronicke (Union Brazil), Jose Maria Eymael (Christian Democracy), Leonardo Péricles (Popular Unity), Sofia Manzano (Brazilian Communist Party), Kelmon Luis da Silva Souza (Brazilian Labor Party).

Brasil of Hope | *Opposition*

Lula Da Silva

Candidate for vice-president:
Geraldo Alckim

Born in Pernambuco, in northeastern Brazil, in his youth he was a metal worker and trade unionist. He began his political involvement by opposing the dictatorship in the 1980s and was the leader of one of the most important strikes during this period.

He ran for president three times until he finally won in 2002 and was re-elected in 2006 after defeating his running mate, Geraldo Alckim. During his administrations, he achieved solid economic and social results, on which he relies today to promote his candidacy.

He was sentenced in 2017 to prison, having spent 580 days in detention for the corruption case known as Lava Jato. However, his sentence was overturned in 2021 by the Supreme Court. Thanks to that sentence, he was able to run in this year's elections.

For these elections, his leftist prose is complemented by a moderate discourse due to the type of alliances he has built, especially with his vice-presidential candidate. It also incorporates environmental demands underpinned by the incorporation of the Green Party to the coalition.



Proposals

- Repeal the labor reform passed during Temer's administration and propose a new one that "strengthens collective negotiation and union representation with special attention to informal and app workers."
- Turn Brazil into a world ecological power, with emphasis on the protection of the Amazon
- Make the digital, energetic and ecological transition to achieve a new productive structure of greater technological density and low carbon
- Build an environment of greater diversity and plurality in the media with legal and institutional frameworks in favor of democracy, human rights and national sovereignty.
- Propose a pension reform with an eye to the expansion of the system, as well as its coverage and financing.

[> Click here](#) to see his full Government Plan.

Liberal Party | *Ruling Party*

Jair Bolsonaro

Candidate for vice-president:
Walter Braga Netto

He was born in São Paulo and served in the Army, reaching the position of captain. In 1988 he began his political career, having obtained the position of councilman of Rio de Janeiro with the Christian Democratic Party. Later, he served seven terms as national deputy, also for Rio de Janeiro, where he began to outline his political profile, although without a strong party affiliation, since he changed parties several times.

His distinctive speech became tougher as a result of the Lava Jato case and the subsequent impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, where he voted in favor. He ran for president in 2018 with the Social Liberal Party and won in the second round against the Partido de los Trabajadores candidate, Fernando Haddad, with 55.13% of the votes.

As in those elections, his space is defined by embodying a pro-market liberal option with conservative characteristics in social terms. In this sense, his proposals are focused on reducing the state apparatus and promoting the freedom of productive factors in the market. Its power base is complemented by the support of a good part of the country's armed forces, demonstrated in the election of its vice presidential candidate, a recently retired general.



Proposals

- Deepen the work for Brazil to join the OECD in order to ease international business.
- Continue with the privatization of state-owned companies as was the case with Eletrobras
- **Reduce and simplify taxes**
- Stimulate the creation of micro-enterprises.
- Promote sustainable food production systems and implementation of agricultural practices that increase productivity and production
- Increase domestic fertilizer production

[> Click here](#) to see his full Government plan.

Legislative Elections

What kind of legislative branch will greet the winning candidate?

The **Brazilian Congress** is traditionally composed of a **high number of parties, with local weight** and imprint and **relative independence from** the guidelines of the **Executive Branch**. However, in the 2018 elections a large number of right-wing and extreme right candidates won seats, in line with the presidential election. The political climate then was marked by the Lava Jato case and a perception of high state corruption that favored a scenario of electoral renewal in both executive and legislative positions.

Looking ahead to Sunday, everything would seem to indicate that **both chambers would maintain a similar profile to that of 2018**. Lula's election at the presidential level could bring with it an increased number of members of the legislative bench that would accompany him, but it would not be enough to obtain majorities of its own and the traditional fragmentation of the Congress would be maintained. If Bolsonaro were to surprise, he would not be able to obtain his own majorities either, which in both cases will force the new president to promote his agenda by building consensus with other forces.

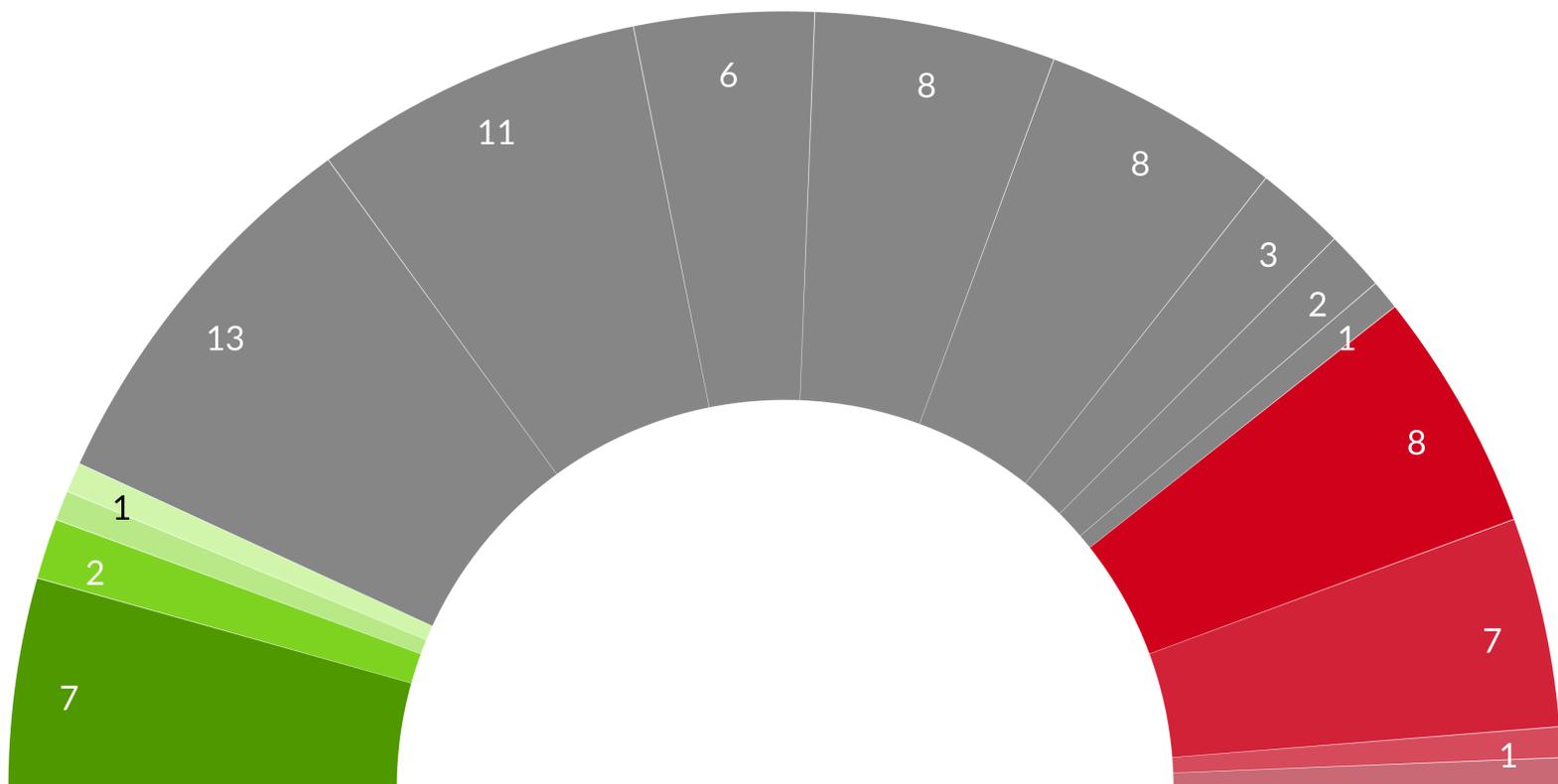
In this year's elections, for the first time, coalitions will be presented as "Party Federations". These federations must act together during the term of office for which they were elected, unlike the coalition that acts only during the electoral period. In the event of a breakup before the end of the term, they may be penalized with the prohibition of forming federations again for two elections and the restriction of access to the party fund. The most prominent will be the one promoting Lula's candidacy, known as Brazil of Hope, which includes the Workers' Party, the Green Party and the Communist Party of Brazil.

Senate

Each Brazilian state is represented by three senators serving for a term of eight years. The election is split in such a way that this time only one out of three seats will be renewed, leaving the rest to be renewed in 2026. They will be elected by the majority vote system, which means that whoever receives the most votes will obtain the seat regardless of the percentage obtained and without the need for a run-off election.

Due to the low number of seats at stake in these elections, **it is expected that this chamber will keep its representation relatively stable** and that there will be no substantial changes in the balance of power. In any case, and following the available polls, it can be intuited that Lula could shore up his support in this chamber more than Bolsonaro, although neither of them will reach majorities of their own.

Current composition of the Senate



Note: In green are listed the senators of spaces that belong to or are aligned with Lula. In red are the senators who support or support Bolsonaro, while in gray are the senators who are not fully aligned to one or the other.

That is why the **dynamics of lawmaking in the Senate** will be marked, whoever wins the Presidency, by the **need to build broad consensus with many parties**. This is clearly shown in the following chart. In green are the senators who would currently respond to Lula. They are 11 in total, far from the 41 needed for a majority. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, currently has 17 senators.

Whoever wins, the approach to the non-aligned spaces, represented in gray, will be necessary. The Brazilian Democratic Movement, the Social Democratic Party or the Brazilian Social Democracy Party will play key roles, since even if they may lose some senators on Sunday, they will maintain an important presence. Likewise, the high fragmentation and the need to build majorities that the new president will have will also give much relevance to each small party not aligned to one or another pole.

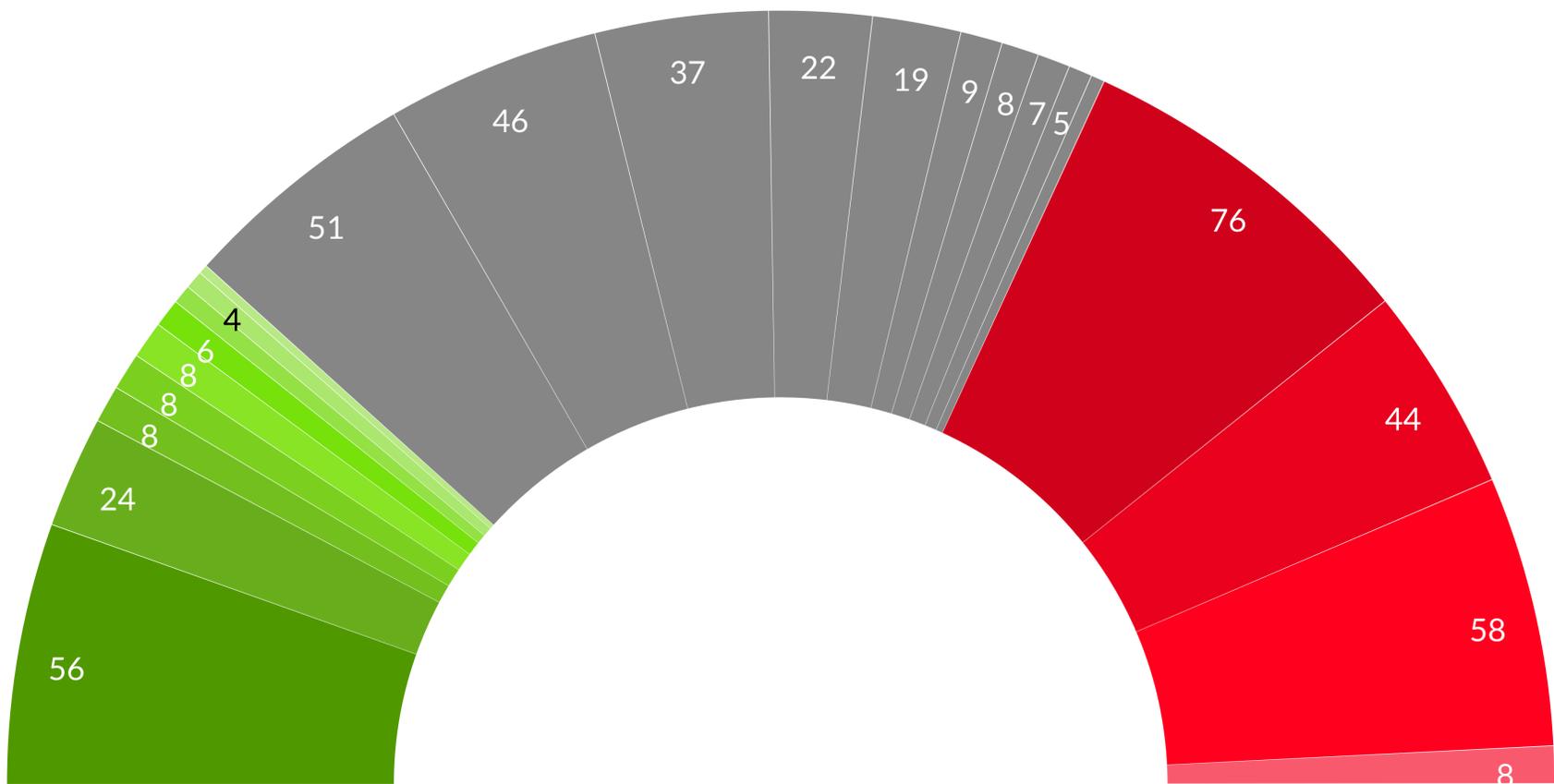
Chamber of Deputies

Brazilian deputies have a four-year term and each state has a number of representatives proportional to the size of its population. This year there is a record number of candidates seeking reelection, with **449 out of 513 seeking to renew their place in the Chamber**. According to the latest polls, it is likely that 72% of them will effectively do so.

Thus, the election in the Chamber of Deputies will have certain similarities to that of the Senate: there will be **relative stability in terms of balance of power** thanks to the high rate of reelection mentioned above. However, here there would be more room for a more important growth of the winning candidate at the Executive level. In fact, several polls predict a growth of Lula's Workers' Party and other allied parties, while Bolsonaro's Liberal Party is expected to fall.

In spite of this, the dynamics in the Chamber of Deputies will remain similar to what happened in the last four years and to what we mentioned above in the Senate. Both Lula and Bolsonaro will have their own benches which, added to pure allies, will force them to build consensus with other spaces without clear alignments. Here **the fragmentation is expected to be even greater** than in the Senate, which will force the new ruling party to dialogue with a larger number of spaces to effectively achieve those majorities.

Current composition of the Chamber of Deputies



Note: In green are listed the senators of spaces that belong to or are aligned with Lula. In red are the senators who support or support Bolsonaro, while in gray are the senators who are not fully aligned to one or the other.

Electoral context

The **period prior to the elections** in Brazil was marked by **speeches of delegitimization of the electoral system, led by the current president**, which created a climate of strong tension both within the country and with international actors. Several supporters of Lula were assassinated, a PT deputy was attacked and some official acts were disturbed because of stink bombs. In August, surveys were carried out on the perception of Brazilians of the electoral campaign situation and **67.5% of those interviewed said they were afraid of being physically attacked because of their political or party choice.**

Bolsonaro's relationship with the Supreme Federal Court and the Supreme Electoral Court grew increasingly hostile over the last few months, with frequent cross statements between the President and some ministers. The **discourse of distrust regarding the Court and the electoral process** by the current president varied in intensity throughout the campaign but at no time did they cease completely.

The São Paulo Law School referred in an open letter that collected more than half a million signatures in a few days to the "unfounded attacks, without evidence, that question the electoral process" and catalogued as "intolerable the threats to the other powers and sectors of society, the incitement to violence and the rupture of the constitutional order". Also, **the Brazilian Court decided to restrict the sale of firearms**, limiting several decrees enacted by Bolsonaro in which the purchase and possession of firearms is made more flexible.

This reflects the serious political situation in the run-up to the elections and raises questions about what may happen in Brazil if Lula is elected. At the same time, this situation is observed by the world and the rest of the Latin American countries and is part of a more general trend where discourses are intensifying and seeking to strengthen one's own position by creating enemies.



Conclusions

- The electoral dispute in Brazil is between **two ideologically and programmatically opposed candidates**, while the other eleven candidates do not reach 10% of the voting intention, and a "third option" proposal is practically non-existent.
- The **rejection levels of both candidates are also high**. In the case of the current president, polls show nearly 51%, a factor that would complicate his future administration.
- Although Lula has significant popular support, the political situation after four years of the Bolsonaro administration is significantly different from the country Lula governed between 2003 and 2010. If elected, it is possible to affirm that his presidency will not be a simple continuation of his previous mandates and it is to be expected that he will have to create political alliances of a pragmatic nature with other political groups in order to push forward his government agenda.
- **Whoever wins, the dynamics in Congress will continue to be similar to what has happened during these years: a fragmented legislative branch** where the Executive will have to build alliances with a wide range of sectors in order to achieve the necessary majorities to approve its government agenda. Thus, the Congress will maintain its traditional fragmentation and everything points to the fact that the conservative and right-leaning profile that was established in 2018 will remain relatively stable.
- At the **regional level, with Lula as president**, the expectations would be that he will **strengthen and give specific weight to the Mercosur**, but it is possible that he will put internal political and economic issues first. He will also have to interact with agribusiness and industry sectors that are more closely linked to transnational capital and do not want to maintain the Mercosur's protectionist structure. Lula and Alckim's international advisor, Celso Amorim, assured that if he returns to office, he will resume the trade cooperation and good relations with China.
- As for **Bolsonaro**, he is **more likely to strengthen ties with the most industrialized countries in Europe**. He is in favor of reducing the common external tariff and making the Mercosur bloc more flexible to enable free trade agreements with other countries, regardless of the southern common market. His victory would also give him time to achieve his goal of having the country join the Organization for European Cooperation and Development (OECD) in order to attract investments.
- The **delegitimization discourse of the electronic vote** and the election raises serious questions regarding the normal performance of the elections and the results' acceptance by Jair Bolsonaro and his party in case they are defeated on Sunday. In the event of a close victory in the first round for Lula, it is possible that the current president may not recognize the result.

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