

Lula da Silva and the Halt of the Reactionary Wave in Brazil

SE/

São Paulo — Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the runoff presidential election in Brazil last Sunday with **51.79%** of the vote against **48.21%** for Flávio Bolsonaro, according to official results from the Superior Electoral Court . The victory, which marks his fourth presidential term, is not only an unprecedented event in the country's democratic history—it is the first time since the end of the military dictatorship that a candidate who finished second in the first round has won the runoff—but also represents a significant halt to the expansion of the far right in Latin America and a setback for attempts at U.S. interference in the region .

The Comeback and the Context of Interference

Lula went into the runoff as the underdog. In the first round, Flávio Bolsonaro, son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, had beaten him by more than two million votes . Polls before the runoff also gave the far-right candidate a slight lead. Yet the Brazilian president turned the situation around with a strategy that combined street mobilization with an intense presence on social media, reducing abstention and achieving a final margin of more than four million votes in his favor .

Lula was explicit about this in his victory speech: *"Brazil does not accept being anyone's backyard"* . The Brazilian president also denounced the "interference from outside in" by digital platforms and demanded their regulation .

Lula's triumph took place in a climate of open hostility from Washington. The Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Abin) had warned weeks before the election that the risk of U.S. interference was "critical" . Donald Trump publicly stated that he was following the elections "closely" and, according to press reports, his government planned to allocate funds to groups opposed to Brazil's Supreme Federal Court . Lula was explicit about this in his victory speech: *"Brazil does not accept being anyone's backyard"* . The Brazilian president also denounced the "interference from outside in" by digital platforms and demanded their regulation .

The Shadow of Meta and Algorithmic Manipulation

One of the darkest episodes of this campaign was the behavior of Meta's platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), led by Mark Zuckerberg. Lula's campaign brought the case before the Superior Electoral Court after finding that the company's algorithm restricted the spread of its content while favoring that of Flávio Bolsonaro .

The evidence was overwhelming. Meta's artificial intelligence refused to generate images with the name "Lula" and the number 13, but did create content for "Flávio" and the number 22 . Internal messages from company employees, leaked to the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, acknowledged restrictions that harmed Lula's Instagram account, including an incident in which his profile was unable to promote posts for nearly 24 hours, which according to the campaign prevented 1.3 million people from seeing his ads . A survey by the NGO Ctrl+Z documented more than a thousand cases of restrictions on Meta platforms during the first half of October, of which **90% affected content in favor of Lula or of a progressive nature** . The TSE finally ordered Meta to guarantee equal treatment under threat of daily fines . Lula described the result as a "defeat of lies" and of platform interference .



Foto, Gemini.

The Hope of the Latin American Left

Lula's victory was received with relief and enthusiasm by the region's progressive bloc, which is going through a moment of setback. In recent years, the right and far right have come to power in Argentina (Javier Milei), Chile (José Antonio Kast), Colombia (Abelardo de la Espriella), and Peru (Keiko Fujimori) . Brazil was, alongside Mexico, the last bastion of the left in the two giants of the region.

Former Colombian President Gustavo Petro was one of the first to react: *"Fascism has been stopped in Latin America in Brazil"*, he wrote on X, adding that *"the free Brazilian people managed to stop the avalanche of fake bots"* . Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum celebrated with a terse *"Long live democracy, the people of Brazil won!"* . From Chile, Gabriel Boric was more effusive: *"Thank you, old handsome man, for never stopping fighting, for sustaining the hope of a different world"* . Former President Ernesto Samper summed up the bloc's feeling: Lula established himself as *"the Pelé of Latin American progressivism"* .

From Chile, Gabriel Boric was more effusive: "Thank you, old handsome man, for never stopping fighting, for sustaining the hope of a different world" .

The contrast with the situation of the Shield of the Americas—the military alliance promoted by Trump and made up of a dozen countries in the region—is notable. Although that structure continues to operate and several of its members congratulated Lula, the Brazilian victory shows that the architecture of continental pressure has cracks when a large country exercises its electoral sovereignty .

"A Plate of Food and So Many Enemies"

The phrase Lula uttered years ago, and which today resonates with particular force, condenses the paradox of his political trajectory. The most accurate version, verified by fact-checking agencies, is the one Lula himself published in June 2018: *"I never thought that giving a plate of food to a poor person would cause so much outrage in those who eat more than three times a day"* . In 2019, upon leaving prison, he reformulated it with the image of the elite throwing food in the trash: *"I never thought that putting a plate of food on a poor person's table would generate so much hatred from an elite that is tired of throwing food in the garbage every day"* .

That outrage was not rhetoric. Lula's social programs—Bolsa Família, Fome Zero—lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty and earned him a visceral hatred from the privileged sectors that led him to prison and to a judicial persecution that was later dismantled. The same logic is now repeating itself: a man who won four presidential elections, who was imprisoned and acquitted, who wins again despite the disinformation machine and foreign interference, remains the object of a hostility that transcends politics and settles in the realm of class contempt.

A Mandate with Obstacles

Lula will assume his fourth term on January 5, at the age of 81, with a Congress more tilted to the right than in his previous term . Flávio Bolsonaro, for his part, refused to recognize the defeat and announced that he will challenge the elections in court, alleging irregularities in the extension of voting hours in some cities . Bolsonarism, however, has been momentarily left without institutional leadership: Jair Bolsonaro is serving house arrest for his attempted coup in 2022, and his son will face judicial investigations starting in February, when he loses his parliamentary immunity .

Lula's victory does not solve Brazil's structural problems nor does it stop the reactionary tide on the continent. But it proves that this tide can be contained. And that, as Lula himself said in his victory speech, *"this election was a defeat of negationism, a defeat of lies"* .