

A BATTLE OF TWO PRESIDENTS: LULA VS. BOLSONARO IN THE BRAZILIAN ELECTIONS OF 2022*

Una Batalla de dos Presidentes: Lula vs. Bolsonaro en las Elecciones Brasileñas de 2022

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ABSTRACT

The Brazilian elections of 2022 were characterized by strong political polarization at the national level. The presidential race was structured around two candidacies: on the right, the then-president running for reelection, Jair Bolsonaro from the Liberal Party (PL), and on the left, the former president in office from 2003 and 2010, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from the Workers' Party (PT). This article aims to analyze the 2022 Brazilian elections in light of Bolsonaro's and Lula's strategies during the presidential campaign. Contrary to the influential claim of the economic voting account, voters' short-term retrospective assessment did not determine the 2022 election results. We argue that the candidacy of Lula, the most popular former president in Brazil's history, introduced a distinct dynamic into the electoral race, challenging the incumbent with the legacy of his governments (2003-2010). In this case, Lula's win was related to his ability to reactivate voters' memories of his government, particularly evoking the significant improvements in social welfare achieved during that period.

Keywords: Lula; Bolsonaro; Brazilian elections; far-right; voting behavior.

RESUMEN

Las elecciones brasileñas de 2022 se caracterizaron por una fuerte polarización política a nivel nacional. La carrera presidencial se estructuró en torno a dos candidaturas: por la derecha, el entonces presidente candidato a la reelección Jair Bolsonaro, del Partido Liberal (PL), y por la izquierda, el expresidente entre 2003 y 2010 Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, del Partido de los Trabajadores (PT). Este artículo pretende analizar las elecciones brasileñas de

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2022 a la luz de las estrategias de Bolsonaro y Lula durante la campaña presidencial. Contrariamente a la influyente afirmación de la teoría del voto económico, la evaluación retrospectiva a corto plazo de los votantes no determinó los resultados de las elecciones de 2022. Argumentamos que la candidatura de Lula, el ex presidente más popular en la historia del país, introdujo una dinámica distinta en la carrera electoral, desafiando al incumbente con el legado de sus gobiernos (2003-2010). En este caso, la victoria de Lula está relacionada con su capacidad para reactivar los recuerdos de los votantes de su gobierno, en particular evocando las importantes mejoras en el bienestar social logradas durante ese período.

Palabras clave: Lula; Bolsonaro; elecciones brasileñas; extrema derecha; comportamiento electoral.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian elections of 2022 were characterized by strong political polarization at the national level. The presidential race was structured around two candidacies: on the right, the then-president running for reelection, Jair Bolsonaro from the Liberal Party (PL), and on the left, the former president between 2003 and 2010, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from the Workers' Party (PT). The results are well known: Lula was elected in the second round with 50.9 percent of the votes versus Bolsonaro's 49.1 percent, the latter defeated by a small margin of 2.1 million verified votes.

The aforementioned political polarization can be observed from both affective and ideological perspectives. The first is defined by an increase in disaffection between rival political groups. The second is defined by an increasing ideological distance between rival political groups and the concomitant emptying of the center. In Brazil, political polarization is associated with the reorganization and radicalization of the right and appears in an asymmetric format (Fuks & Marques 2022).

In recent years, the political field of the right has been ramifying along two variants: the mainstream right and the far-right. The mainstream right corresponds to leaders and parties that tend to adopt moderate programmatic positions and are loyal to the democratic political system. In contrast, the far-right corresponds to leaders and parties that tend to adopt radical programmatic positions and have little commitment to the formal and informal rules intrinsic to (liberal) democracies and are, therefore, semi-loyal or disloyal to the democratic political system (Bale & Rovira Kaltwasser 2021). In Brazil between 1994 and 2018 the right was led by the mainstream variant, notably the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). However, starting in 2018 the mainstream right was replaced by the far-right in the figure of its main leader, Bolsonaro, who has no party organization to give the far-right cohesion.

The same cannot be said for the left in Brazil, which has not gone through recent ramifications and has been led since the transition to democracy by the PT. This center-left party went through a process of transformation and mod-

eration, maintaining a relative macroeconomic orthodoxy and loyalty to the democratic political system during its governments (Levitsky & Roberts 2011). It is worth noting that the PT has been able to hold its own even during several recent setbacks, including the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the imprisonment of Lula in 2018 (Santos & Tanscheit 2019, Nicolau 2020).

Thus, while the right moved more to the right, the left remained in the center; hence, the asymmetry. In the first round of the 2022 elections, Lula received 48.4 percent and Bolsonaro 43.20 percent of the votes. The two candidacies together accounted for about 92 percent of total votes, and therefore there was no room for a challenger candidacy, such as Simone Tebet from the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), or Ciro Gomes from the Democratic Labor Party (PDT). The two received 4.16 percent and 3.04 percent of the votes, respectively, and the other seven presidential candidacies received at most 1 percent of the total.

To some extent, these elections repeated the 2018 presidential race, in which the political and electoral competition revolved around Bolsonaro and the PT. Their trending context, however, was distinct and produced different outcomes. First, the 2018 elections were characterized by the absence of a contest between government and opposition, since the incumbent president Michel Temer did not run for reelection or clearly present a succession candidate. Thus, socio-economic issues did not enter the picture, once voters could not punish or reward the incumbent for good or bad performance (Campello 2022). Consequently, Bolsonaro ran a campaign centered on socio-cultural issues, articulating radical programmatic positions and illiberal attitudes toward the negative political identities that were latent in the period, i.e., *antipetismo*¹ and antipartisanship (Rennó 2020; Fuks, Ribeiro & Borba 2021).

In the 2022 elections, the contest between the government and the opposition returned to the scene and both Bolsonaro and Lula were compelled to focus on socio-economic issues. In this battle of two presidents, the incumbent focused on improving economic performance and implementing a package of measures aimed at a constituency made up of the most vulnerable groups in order to ensure his reelection. His opponent, on the contrary, relied on mobilizing themes related to social welfare and reactivating voters' memories of his positive record on these issues in the period he was president.

This article aims to analyze the 2022 Brazilian elections in light of Bolsonaro's and Lula's strategies during the presidential campaign. Contrary to the usual claim of the economic voting approach, which emphasizes voters' short-term retrospective assessment (Campello & Zucco 2020), the economic recovery in Bolsonaro's last year in office - driven by the rise in commodity prices on the international market - was not enough to re-elect the incumbent. We argue that Lula's candidacy introduced a different dynamic into the electoral race,

¹ A negative political identity in relation to the PT. For a detailed analysis of *petismo* and *antipetismo*, see Samuels & Zucco 2018.

prompting voters to reassess how they perceived the government of ten years ago (a long-term retrospective evaluation) versus the incumbent government (a short-term retrospective evaluation).

In this sense, the 2022 Brazilian elections were an assessment of the legacies of the Lula (2003-2010) and Bolsonaro (2019-2022) administrations with respect to Brazil's socio-economic performance during their presidential terms. In this context, Lula's victory is explained by his ability to reactivate retrospective voting, primarily evoking the noteworthy improvements in the aggregate social welfare that occurred during his previous administration. By doing so, Lula retained the electoral support of a large social sector composed of the poorest part of the population and led a broad coalition, despite antipetismo, the rejection of his leadership, and the voluminous spending on a package of social benefits launched by Bolsonaro to ensure his re-election.

The article is structured as follows. The second section will provide brief context for the 2022 Brazilian elections, focusing on the four years of Bolsonaro as president and the return of Lula. The third section will analyze the impact of social welfare on voting behavior in Brazil, particularly on Lula's victory and Bolsonaro's defeat. The fourth section will present the electoral results, showing their relation to Lula's victory and Bolsonaro's defeat. The final remarks will summarize the main findings of this article and future steps for further analysis of the 2022 Brazilian elections.

II. FOUR YEARS OF BOLSONARO AS PRESIDENT

Jair Bolsonaro was elected president in 2018, his candidacy grounded in a broad social and political coalition whose main actors were the evangelical church, the army and police, the agribusiness sector, and pro-market agents.² Despite the many internal conflicts that took place during Bolsonaro's presidential term, this coalition remained cohesive in its support for his reelection in 2022.

These actors gained power between 2019 and 2022. The evangelical church has grown in the number of adherents and parliamentary representation,³ while the army and police have risen to the highest levels of public administration and obtained the largest average salary increase among federal government employees.⁴ The agribusiness sector, in turn, has become the main driver of the Brazilian economy.⁵ During the 2022 elections, these actors radicalized their po-

² Stott, Michael and Harris, Brian. "How Bolsonaro built a right-wing movement bigger than his presidency". *Financial Times*, 26 Oct 2022.

³ Mello, Bernardo and Portinari, Natália. "Salto evangélico: 21 igrejas são abertas por dia no Brasil; segmento é alvo de Lula e Bolsonaro". *O Globo*, 19 Sep. 2022.

⁴ Fernandes, Adriana. "Forças Armadas lideram ganho salarial na década entre servidores do governo federal". *Estadão*, 29 May. 2022.

⁵ Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária. "Exportações do agronegócio fecham 2022 com US\$159 bilhões em vendas". *Governo Federal*, 17 Jan. 2023.

litical positions even more than they had in the past. Evangelical leaders explicitly used churches as committees for Bolsonaro, while the military employed similar methods in its barracks. The agribusiness sector heavily financed his campaign.⁶

The main dissidents of the Bolsonaro coalition were the center and the mainstream right, as well as a few pro-market agents who recognized his reelection as a risk to Brazilian democracy and the sustainability of the economy. Mass media were also against Bolsonaro, both because of their loss of influence with the spread of the internet and because of his very aggressive attitude towards journalists. Like Donald Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro mobilized counter-narratives through a parallel communication system in social networks, making him almost impervious to negative news within his electoral base (Ruediger 2021).

Nationally, Bolsonaro was one of the weakest presidents since the country return to democracy. Concerning party politics, he disagreed with the leadership of the Social Liberal Party (PSL), to which he was elected President in 2018, and resigned from the party in 2019. During this period, he failed in an attempt to form his own political party, Alliance for Brazil, remaining politically non-affiliated for half of his presidential term. Finally, he entered his eleventh party - the PL - in 2021, with a view toward the presidential elections.

Regarding legislative politics, Bolsonaro engaged in constant conflicts with the National Congress, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Pandemic, which was held in 2021 and which investigated possible omissions and irregularities by the federal government in combating the pandemic in Brazil, attributed nine crimes to the then-president: seven common crimes, one of responsibility and one crime against humanity.⁷ Later, faced with investigations involving he and his family, Bolsonaro backed down and allied with the so-called *Centrão*⁸ to halt the advance of demands for impeachment. In return, Bolsonaro assigned some of the prerogatives for the execution of the public budget that the executive branch previously managed to the legislative branch through the rapporteur's amendments. Also known as the 'secret budget', the rapporteur's amendments allow parliamentarians to allocate funds from the public budget without any defined criterion for its distribution or destination, thus preventing control over the execution of the budget. This resource was a crucial bargaining chip in mobilizing the *Centrão* to campaign for Bolsonaro in their electoral districts.

⁶ Figueiredo, Naiara. "Agro responde por 33 dos 50 maiores doadores de Bolsonaro e avança finanças da campanha". Reuters, 26 Oct. 2022.

⁷ Final Report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Pandemic. Available at: <https://legis.senado.leg.br/comissoes/mnas?codcol=2441&tp=4>. Access in 8 Mar. 2023.

⁸ A heterogeneous group of pragmatic parties that do not have a specific or consistent programmatic political position and hold a large share of seats in the National Congress.

With respect to the relationship with the Judiciary, Bolsonaro has repeatedly attacked the Supreme Court (STF), its ministers and the separation of powers in Brazil. In 2021, Bolsonaro accused the STF of participating in an alleged electoral fraud, claiming that if there was no verifiable vote, the holding of the elections would be at risk. In return, the ministries included Bolsonaro in an investigation of fake news, using as justification “abuse of economic and political power, misuse of the media, corruption, fraud, conduct prohibited to public agents and extemporaneous propaganda” to produce attacks on the electoral system and electronic ballot boxes.⁹ The conflict between the STF and Bolsonaro reached its peak in 2022, when the then-president, in addition to maintaining the attacks, accused several ministers of acting to benefit the election of Lula.¹⁰

Internationally, Bolsonaro lacked prestige and his government became increasingly isolated, especially after Trump’s defeat in 2020. Moreover, the then-president had conflicts with several countries, such as France, where he insulted President Emmanuel Macron’s wife¹¹, and the United States, where he delayed recognition of Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 elections.¹² At the same time, Bolsonaro’s environmental and climate policy was heavily criticized globally. During his government, there was a considerable increase in the deforestation of Brazilian biomes, most notably the Amazon. At the same time, the president weakened environmental protection, allowing large mining and agricultural companies to operate in the region without restrictions¹³. In this context, the absence of international support was crucial for the rapid recognition of Lula’s victory in the 2022 elections and one of the key obstacles to Bolsonaro’s coup attempt.

Although Bolsonaro’s government created conflicts both nationally and internationally, his approval rating has hovered around 30 percent throughout his mandate, a factor largely attributed to the cohesion of his non-partisan coalition mentioned earlier, the famous Beef, Bible and Bullets coalition. Furthermore, as seen in Figure 1, after a constant reduction in Bolsonaro’s popularity throughout 2021, it recovered significantly during the election year in tandem with the improvement in the economy.

⁹ Peixoto, Sinara. “Linha do tempo: a escalada da tensão entre STF e Bolsonaro em um mês”. CNN, 5 Aug. 2021.

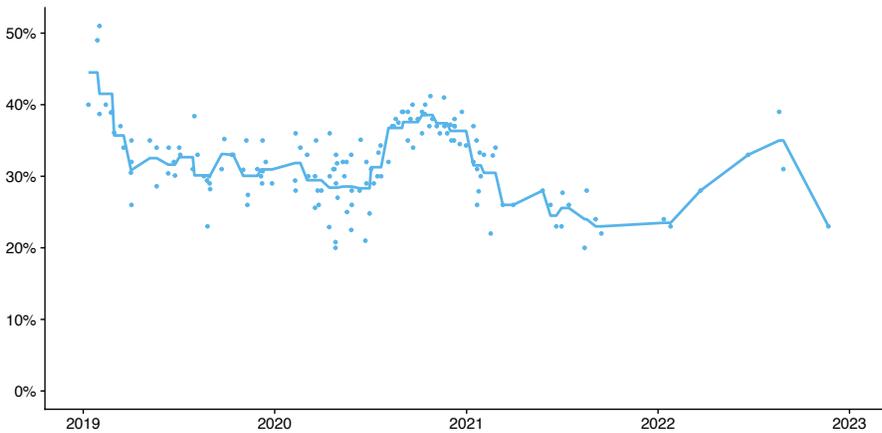
¹⁰ Soares, Ingrid. “Bolsonaro repete que não cumprirá decisão do STF e volta a atacar ministros”. Correio Braziliense, 8 Jun. 2022.

¹¹ Phillips, Tom. “Jair Bolsonaro demands Macron withdraw ‘insults’ over Amazon fires”. The Guardian, 27 Aug. 2019.

¹² Walsh, Joe. “Mexico and Brazil’s presidents finally acknowledge Biden’s win”. Forbes, 15 Dec. 2020.

¹³ Ferris, Nick. “What four years of ‘non-existent’ climate action has done to Brazil”. Energy Monitor, 29 Sep. 2022.

Figure 1. Bolsonaro's Approval Ratings (2019-2022)



Source: Aggregate of public opinion surveys conducted between 2019 and 2022.

The cohesion of Bolsonaro's coalition on both the supply and demand sides is attributed to socio-cultural issues and the authoritarian agenda widely explored discursively by the then-president. This authoritarianism was expressed in the defense of law and order based on the use of force and punitive actions and the promotion of moral conservatism as the basis for an interference of religion in the state and society in general (Tanscheit 2023). At the same time, Bolsonaro used antipetismo to activate affective polarization and to broaden his political and electoral support. Nevertheless, the challenge became greater when the then-president had to deal with an unexpected event: Lula's return.

Lula's Return

Following three unsuccessful presidential races, Lula was elected in 2002 as the first leftist president since Brazil's return to democracy. He was one of the most moderate leaders among Latin American leftist governments elected during the pink tide and represented a 'previously institutionalized left party' which passed through a long process of adaptation. While promoting social policies, his government retained orthodox fiscal and macroeconomic policy and did not attempt to reverse market-led reforms enacted by his predecessors (Levitsky & Roberts 2011). By the end of his second term, Lula left office with an approval rating of 87 percent, a record for a Brazilian president, allowing his successor – the previous Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff - to be elected to the presidency in 2010 with no great difficulty.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bonin, Robson. "Popularidade de Lula bate recorde e chega a 87%, diz IBOPE". G1, 16 Dec. 2010.

Rousseff was reelected in 2014 and struggled with a severe political crisis at the beginning of her second term. Against the backdrop of the Car Wash Operation, of particular note is the PSDB's request for an audit from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) in order to verify the "smoothness" of the electoral process following Rousseff's victory in 2014; the impeachment of the elected president and her replacement by the then vice-president Michel Temer in 2016; the conviction, imprisonment and rejection of Lula's candidacy in 2018; and, finally, the victory of Jair Bolsonaro in the same year (Santos & Tanscheit 2019).

However, beyond the growing criticism of the Car Wash Operation's illegal actions, suspicions of political bias in Lula's trial grew stronger. In November 2018, Judge Sergio Moro accepted Bolsonaro's offer to be Minister of Justice. In June 2019, the *Vaza-Jato* scandal came to light, and a series of news reports revealed conversations between Moro and federal prosecutors, including the head of Operation Deltan Dallagnol.¹⁵ The transcripts indicated that Moro gave inside information, helped prosecutors build cases, directed the prosecution, and accelerated new operations. At the same time, Moro also gave strategic advice, informal tips and resource proposals to ensure Lula's conviction on corruption charges.

Lula's unexpected return is associated with the growing discrediting of the Car Wash Operation and the consequent intervention of the STF concerning his case. In November 2019, Lula was released after the STF banned imprisonment after a conviction by a court of second instance. In April 2021, the STF annulled all convictions against the former president due to procedural issues, making him not only free but also eligible to run for public office.¹⁶ In May 2022 and before the start of the official electoral calendar, Lula made his presidential candidacy official.¹⁷ This resulted in consolidating an electoral battle between two presidents and their respective legacies.

III. WHY WAS LULA ELECTED?

Lula and Bolsonaro's candidacies used different political and electoral mobilization strategies during the 2022 presidential elections. Lula focused on party strategy and included ten parties in his electoral coalition.¹⁸ It is important to first highlight the relevance of the PT in Lula's election, a solid and durable party brand (Lupu 2017). *Petismo*, as relevant as *antipetismo*, represents around 30 per cent of Brazilian voters. Among the poorest, earning up to two minimum wages

¹⁵ Greenwald, Glen, Reed, Betsy and Demori, Leandro. "Como e por que o Intercept está publicando chats privados sobre a Lava Jato e Sergio Moro". The Intercept, 9 Jun. 2019.

¹⁶ Brandino, Gêssica. "Lula da prisão ao 1º turno: veja linha do tempo recente do ex-presidente". Uol, 1 Oct. 2022.

¹⁷ Barreto Filho, Herculano, Borges, Lucas and Lopes, Nathan. "Lula pede união e fala em defesa da soberania ao lançar chapa com Alckmin". UOL, 7 May 2022.

¹⁸ These are, in addition to the PT: PCdoB, PV, Solidarity, PSOL, Rede, PSB, Agir, Avante and Pros.

and representing 70 percent of the labor force, this rises to 40 percent.¹⁹ Second, Lula dedicated himself to building a broad front, gathering around himself old adversaries from the right and the left. Noteworthy is the nomination of Geraldo Alckmin as vice-presidential candidate, a historical opponent of the PT who was the opposition candidate to Lula's presidential reelection, in 2006, and the support in the first round of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), a dissident PT party founded in 2005 due to moderation in Lula's government.

Bolsonaro, in turn, counted on three parties in his electoral coalition²⁰. Before the elections officially started, the then-president attracted parliamentarians and competitive candidates to his coalition's parties and secured the support of the *Centrão* through the rapporteur's amendments. In addition to joining the PL, Bolsonaro brought another 40 deputies to the party during the party window, taking it from 33 to 72.²¹ Of the other two parties in his coalition, the PP went from 38 to 50 and the Republicans from 30 to 45.²² However, Bolsonaro's political and electoral mobilization strategy focused on the Beef, Bible and Bullets coalition. These 3 Bs combined represent the around 25 percent of Brazilians who are *bolsonaristas*. This figure reaches 40 percent only among the richest, those earning more than ten times the minimum wage and representing less than 10 percent of the population. In order to mobilize the mass vote, Bolsonaro prioritized the evangelical vote, a religion of the poor representing more than 30 percent of the population.²³

Both strategies aimed to activate, in the electorate, the memory of their previous governments— Lula, from 2003 to 2010 and Bolsonaro from 2019 to 2022. Both campaigns addressed in different ways socio-cultural issues to protect and broaden their electorates. However, if Lula's strategy was the more successful one, we argue that this occurred because of socio-economic issues, particularly the impact of a social welfare agenda on voting behavior in Brazil.

Social welfare and voting behavior in Brazil, from Lula (2002) to Bolsonaro (2022)

The economic voting theory is widely influential in political science literature and argues that macroeconomic variables – primarily Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, unemployment and inflation – are the most important factors for reelecting incumbents (Kramer 1975; Powell & Whitten 1993). Indeed, the argument has different versions, such as that of Latin America, which links

¹⁹ Gielow, Igor. "Datafolha: 32% se veem como petistas, e 25%, como bolsonaristas". Folha de S. Paulo, 28 Dec. 2022.

²⁰ These are, in addition to the PL: the PP and the Republicans.

²¹ The period for parliamentarians to change parties without losing their mandate and that occurs six months before the election.

²² Felício, Cesar. "Os ganhadores e os perdedores da janela da Câmara". Valor, 9 Mar. 2022.

²³ Balloussier, Anna Virginia. "Cara típica do evangélico brasileiro é feminina e negra, aponta Datafolha". Folha de S. Paulo, 13 Jan. 2020.

incumbents' reelections to a favorable international economic environment (Campello & Zucco 2020). At the same time, scholars' debate what level of economic outcome, perceived at the aggregate or individual level, is decisive for voting behavior (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2018).

Broadly based on large N quantitative analysis, economic voting theory has consistently captured short-term effects of the macroeconomic variables on election outcomes.²⁴ However, when considering the 2022 Brazilian elections, even though Bolsonaro benefited from an economic recovery in his last year in office, he was not re-elected. This does not necessarily disprove the theory of economic voting, whose probabilistic postulate on electoral outcomes is grounded on the assumption of regular electorally competitive circumstances. In fact, the candidacy of Lula, the most popular president since the country return to democracy, added a singular feature to the electoral race. In this sense, understanding the Brazilian elections of 2022 requires taking into account long-term processes, especially concerning how Lula built a strong electoral base of support.

Regarding the Brazilian constituency, a key feature refers to high inequality. As mentioned above, the proportion of workers earning up to two times the minimum wage represented about 70 percent of the labor force²⁵ and households earning 2.5 times the minimum wage represented about 55 percent of the population in 2022.²⁶ This is a very relevant constituency group, especially in the context of compulsory voting, which incentivizes their turnout. In addition, the combination of high inequality and compulsory voting alludes to the classical and influential Meltzer and Richard (1981) model according to which inequality raises the demand for redistribution, once the median voter is below the mean income and seeks to maximize her or his current income.

While the core constituency of the PT was traditionally biased toward those with higher levels of education, the first presidential term of Lula marked an electoral realignment, in which the electoral support base of the party shifted to the low-education voter, i.e., the poorest (Singer 2012; Limongi & Guarneri 2015). Many analysts have attributed Lula's success to the *Bolsa Família* conditional cash transfer program targeted at these low-income groups, given the high correlation between Lula's voter share and municipal *Bolsa Família* coverage (Zucco 2008, 2013; Lício, Rennó & Castro 2009). However, as Limongi and Guarneri (2015) point out, it is important to pose this assumption from a counterfactual premise: In the absence of *Bolsa Família*, would Lula have lost votes in these municipalities? The authors showed that the PT had good electoral outcomes, particularly among cities in the northeast of Brazil, even in the absence of this program. This suggests that Lula's electoral support in these

²⁴ For a literature review, see Lewis Beck and Stegmaier (2018).

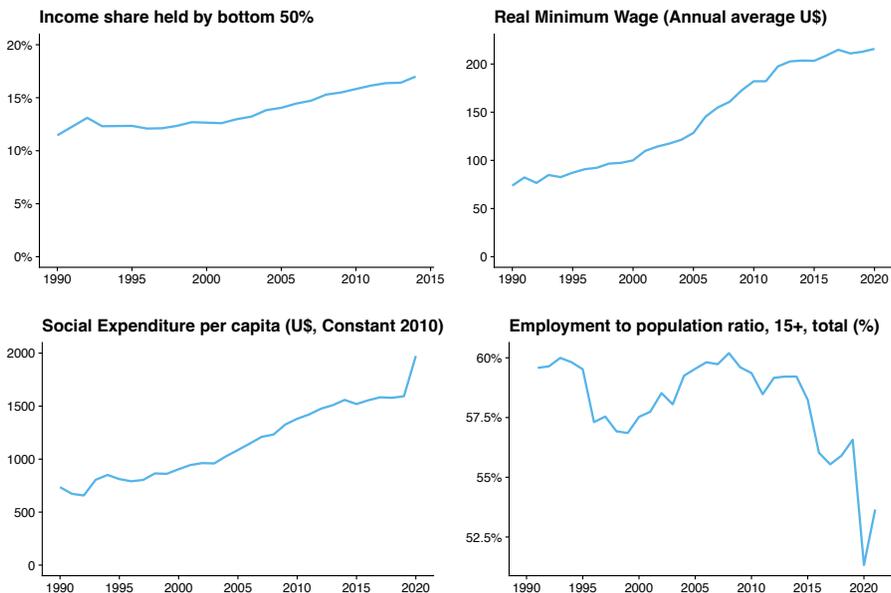
²⁵ IBGE Historical Series. See: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/trabalho/9221-sintese-de-indicadores-sociais.html>. Access in 10 Mar. 2023.

²⁶ See: https://tendencias.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/globo_classes.pdf. Access in 10 Mar. 2023.

areas is associated with an overall improvement in social welfare outcomes, rather than the provision of a single benefit.

Figure 2 presents four data figures regarding social welfare outcomes during the Lula governments: i) the share of the national income going to the bottom 50 percent of households steadily increased, revealing how economic growth benefited these groups; ii) the minimum wage had the greatest real gain since the 1990s; iii) total public social expenditure per capita increased by 43 percent; and iv) the employment rate reached an upward trend in Brazil, also revealing the absorption of informal labor into the formal sector, which entails labor-market protections and better rewards and access to social security entitlements. Furthermore, according to CEPALSTAT Databases,²⁷ the social security coverage of the lowest-income groups expanded in this period, implying a greater access to social rights. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that during Lula's first two terms, one of the most significant social welfare improvements the Brazilian poorest have ever witnessed took place. No wonder this constituency played a pivotal role in the next two presidential elections won by Lula's successor, Rousseff.

Figure 2. Income share held by the bottom 50 percent (household level), real minimum wage, social public expenditure per capita (Constant 2010, U\$), and employment rate, Brazil (1990-2021)



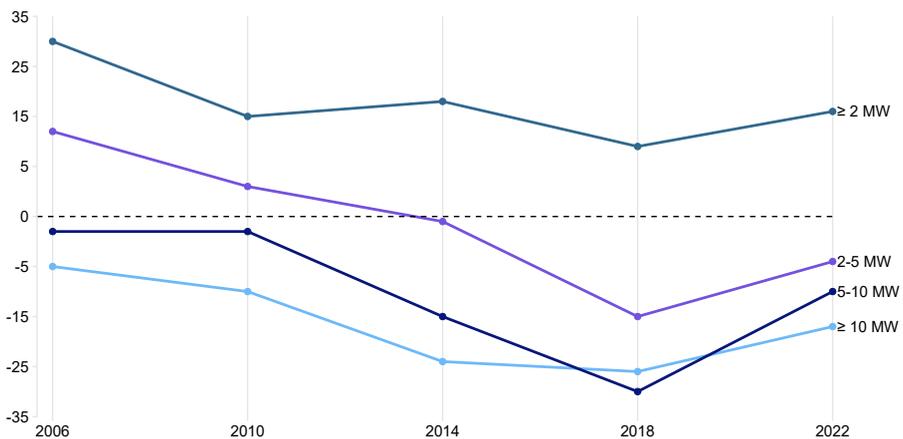
Source: IPEADData, CEPALStat and ILOstat .

²⁷ See: <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=es>. Access in 9 Mar. 2023.

During Rousseff’s first term, improvements in social welfare outcomes persisted, but after her second term, a backlash began. In addition to a political crisis, a severe economic crisis began in 2014, causing a 10 percent fall in GDP per capita and rising unemployment. In contrast to her previous term, Rousseff adopted an austerity plan for macroeconomic management, which was deepened after her impeachment by Temer. Some analyses have described it as a context of retrenchment in the Brazilian social safety net, which was followed by a rise in poverty and inequality (Rossi & Dweck, 2016; Sátyro 2020). As Figure 2 above also shows, after this period the real minimum wage value flattened, the total social expenditure per capita stagnated (except during the pandemic shock), and the rate of employment dropped. Consequently, Rousseff and Temer had among the lowest approval ratings in Brazilian democratic history.

Figure 3 depicts how the PT lost votes across all segments in the 2018 elections. Although the PT retained its lead among the nation’s lowest income group, the party also lost a sizeable number of its voters. In particular, the PT lost a significant amount of votes among the second lowest income group, households earning between two and five times the minimum wage. This complex and multifaceted electoral path involves an economic, political and corruption crisis (see Santos & Tanscheit 2019; Hunter & Power 2019). However, crises that occurred in previous elections were insufficient to hinder the PT’s victory. The PT’s first electoral defeat since 2002 was imposed on it after a substantial social welfare loss. The responsibility for this loss, despite controversies about Dilma’s impeachment and Lula’s imprisonment, was attributed to the PT and the government of Temer.

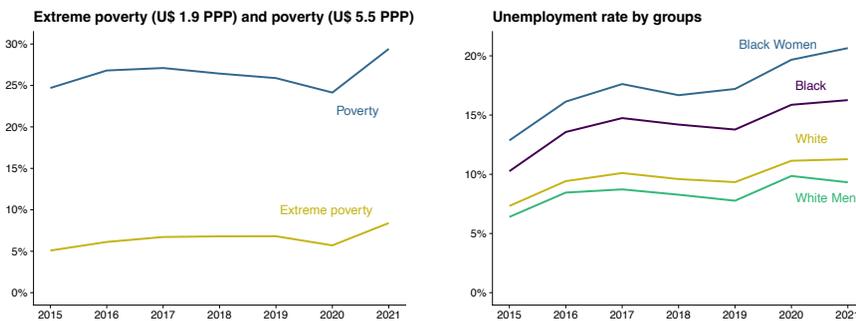
Figure 3. Difference in the share of total votes between the PT and its opponent in the second round of the presidential elections, in percentage points and by household income range in minimum wages (2006-2022)



Source: Latest Datafolha polls before election results.

Social welfare decline was intensified during Bolsonaro's government. The then-president maintained a strong austerity policy despite a growing demand for social protection in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, GDP dropped by 3.3 percent, and inflation climbed by 10 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively; unemployed, discouraged (workers who have given up looking for a job), and underutilized workers amounted to around 50 million people; and informal employment was recorded as 48 percent.²⁸ This decline was worse for lower-income groups. The unemployment rate in the bottom 50 percent of income level was 36 percent in 2021, while in the top 10 percent it was 2.9 (Neri 2022). Inflation for households earning up to two wages rose to 3 percent higher than the national average (Lameiras 2022). Furthermore, Bolsonaro ended the policy of raising minimum wages above inflation, which had been applied since 2004, causing the minimum wage to lose real value, especially in 2020 (DIEESE 2023). As Figure 4 shows, in 2021 poverty and extreme poverty rates were recorded at 29 percent (65 million people) and 8 percent (17.9 million), respectively.²⁹ In addition, the unemployment rate for black people was 5 percent higher than for white people, and the unemployment rate for black women was almost double that of white men. Different studies also indicated the spread of hunger and food insecurity between 2019 and 2021 (Neri 2022; FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO 2022).

Figure 4. Extreme poverty and poverty rates and unemployment rate by race and gender among the population (2015-2020)



Source: IBGE, social indicators.

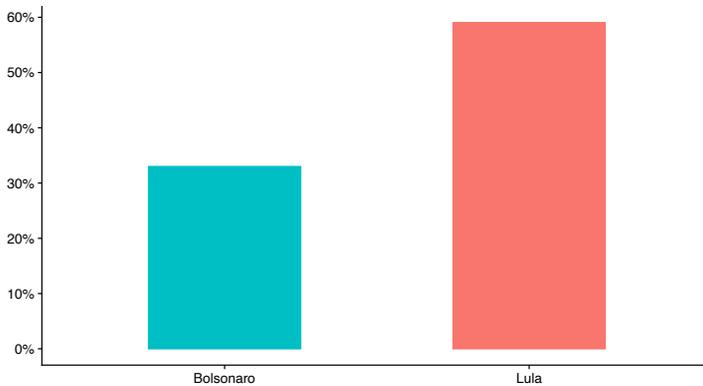
One of Bolsonaro's main assets used to boost his popularity, which had fallen to its lowest level by mid-2021, was the launch of *Auxílio Brasil*. This conditional cash transfer program was implemented on 20 October 2021 and was a re-branding of *Bolsa Família*, created during the Lula government, providing

²⁸ IBGE Historical Series. See: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/trabalho/9221-sintese-de-indicadores-sociais.html>. Access in 10 Mar. 2023.

²⁹ Ibidem.

higher levels of benefit and coverage, with a budget of R\$100bi and individual transfers of R\$400. According to Campello (2022), the ups and downs of Bolsonaro's popularity are more related to targeted programs than the rate of deaths caused by Covid-19.³⁰ While it is clear that Covid-19 deaths did not play a decisive role in Bolsonaro's popularity, the explanatory weight attributed to *Auxílio Brasil* is controversial. Consistently, surveys showed that Bolsonaro had a high rejection rate among the lowest-income voters, on which the program was focused. According to the last Genial/Quaest poll conducted before the elections, 60 percent of the aid recipients intended to vote for Lula, while only 33 percent intended to vote for Bolsonaro.³¹ This implies that the economic relief provided by *Auxílio Brasil* did not shift the support of low-income constituency from Lula to Bolsonaro (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Voting intentions among *Auxílio Brasil* beneficiaries



Source: Last Genial/Quaest survey before the elections.

This situation brings up once again the counterfactual claimed by Limongi and Guarnieri (2015), mentioned earlier, regarding the electoral strength of conditional cash transfer programs, in general, and *Bolsa Família*, in particular. From this point of view, one hypothesis is that the promotion of these programs is not sufficient for the re-election of incumbents, but that an overall scenario of improving social welfare affects their electoral potential. In fact, once polls began showing Lula's significant advantage among low-income voters' intentions, Bolsonaro unveiled a range of measures in an attempt to appeal to this electoral group. Besides transferring resources to his coalition, Bolsonaro announced many measures to target this constituency. The government cut taxes in order

³⁰ There has been a theoretical debate about the reasons why deaths attributed to Covid-19 was not pivotal to Bolsonaro's popularity. There is no definitive answer, even though it is clear that there is no correlation between them.

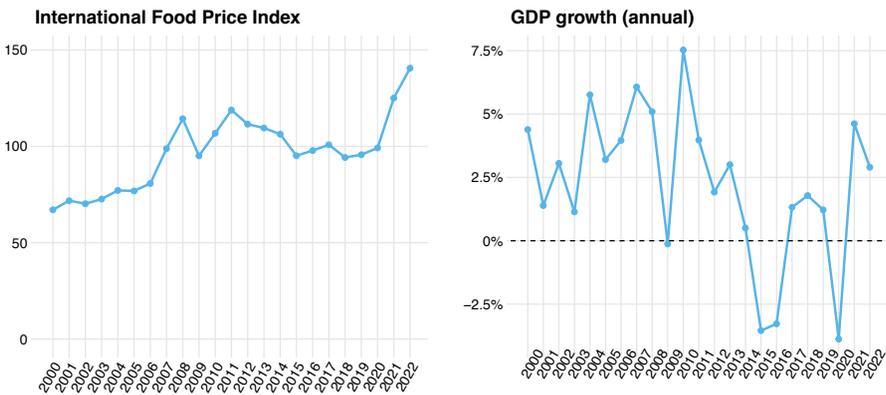
³¹ See: <https://lp.genialinvestimentos.com.br/nas-eleicoes2022/>. Access in 10 Mar. 2023.

to lower fuel prices, increased the value of *Auxílio Brasil* to R\$600, created the gas allowance *Vale Gás* and introduced benefits for truck and taxi drivers. The then-president also established payroll loans for *Auxílio Brasil*, debt renegotiations, and withdrawal of the Length-of-Service Guarantee Fund (FGTS) for housing financing.

In light of this, another hypothesis is that the boost in social benefits did not change the structure of electoral support in favor of Bolsonaro, given that low-income groups had seen an overall social welfare improvement under previous Lula administrations. In other words, past experiences constrained the electoral effect of those programs among the most vulnerable groups.

Nor was the economic recovery in the last year of the Bolsonaro administration sufficient to guarantee his reelection, as shown in Figure 6. In the aftermath of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Bolsonaro benefited from record commodity prices in 2022, which rose even higher than the so-called commodity boom of the 2000s in terms of food and energy products (World Bank 2022; Bastos 2022),³² which in turn produced the highest annual GDP growth in 10 years (Figure 6).³³

Figure 6. International Food Price Index and GDP growth (annual)



Source: FAO – United Nations (Food Price Index) and Ipea (GDP growth).

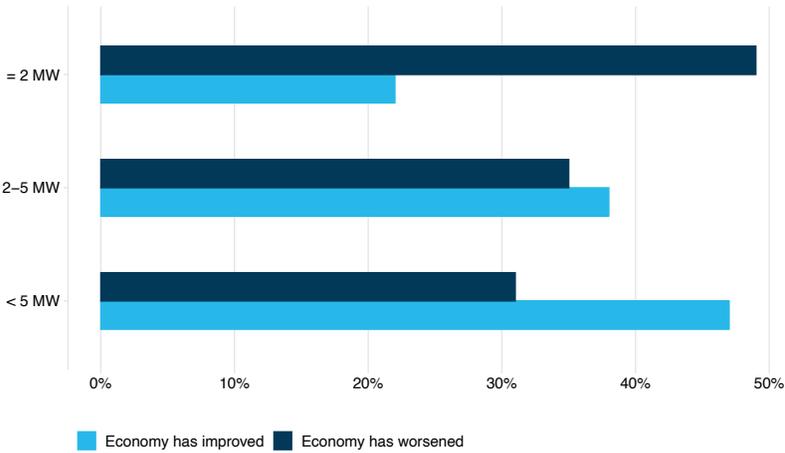
Once again, this was not enough to persuade the poorer electorate to support Bolsonaro. Moreover, contrary to the economic voting account assumption, the aggregate improvement in economic performance did not result in the incum-

³² The production and trade of commodities—for which Russia and Ukraine are important exporters—have been significantly disrupted by the war (World Bank, 2022).

³³ IBGE Historical Series. See: Available at: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/economicas>. Access in 10 Mar. 2023.

bent's electoral triumph. The disaggregated picture drawn by Genial/Quaest poll suggests a sharp difference in opinion regarding economic outcome by income bracket group. The sense of improvement is clearly circumscribed toward the top, while most of the bottom expresses a sense of deterioration (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Perception of economic performance in 2022 by income bracket group



Source: Last Genial/Quaest survey before the elections.

Compared with the 2018 elections, Lula narrowed the gap between households earning between 2 to 5, 5 to 10 and more than 10 times the minimum wage, even while still losing these groups (see Figure 3). Above all, even with Bolsonaro's efforts in attracting the votes of households earning up to 2 times the minimum wage – the largest share of the electorate – Lula recovered his advantage among them. As widely stressed among scholars (Rennó & Cabello 2010; Samuels & Zucco 2018), Lula is more popular than the PT. Whenever he ran as a candidate, he led virtually almost all polls, including in the 2018 elections. In a battle of two presidents, once Lula's government was the last reminder of improved living standards for a considerable segment of the population, he was the one rewarded the presidency.

In sum, even with the improvement in economic performance due to a highly favorable international economic environment and the boost of targeted programs, Bolsonaro was defeated in the presidential elections. Context matters, and in this case, the dispute between former presidents introduced a clash of political legacies, especially regarding the social welfare agenda. On the one hand, the first three years of Bolsonaro's government were responsible for a relevant social welfare loss, and the economic recovery of his last year was insufficient to provide real social welfare gains for the population, especially for

the most vulnerable groups. On the other hand, Lula's previous governments represent, for a relevant part of the electorate, a period of strong improvements in social welfare. In the end, voters retrospectively evaluated the two most competitive candidates who had previously governed the country. The following section looks at the presidential and congressional election results and their implications for the future of Bolsonaro and the PT.

IV. ELECTORAL RESULTS

On October 2, 2022, the first round of elections was held in Brazil, aimed at defining the president of the republic and the representatives to the National Congress, as well as the state governments and their respective legislative assemblies for the period 2022-2025. The results indicate polarization toward the Executive and fragmentation with regards to the Legislative.

With respect to the Executive, of the 11 candidacies, the two most competitive leaders, Bolsonaro (PL) and Lula (PT), and the two challengers, Tebet (MDB) and Gomes (PDT) stand out. On the one hand, Tebet was a senator for the state of Mato Grosso do Sul at the time of the election, and her campaign was an attempt to recompose the mainstream right that had recently collapsed (Santos & Tanscheit 2019). On the other side, Gomes has held several political positions and his campaign was an attempt to be a center-left alternative to the PT.

Neither of the two candidates exceeded 5 percent of the vote. Regarding the political field on the right, it is possible to affirm that the mainstream right was definitively replaced by the far-right, decreasing the number of legislators and even losing the government of its bastion state, São Paulo. Concerning the political field on the left, the attempt to consolidate a center-left alternative to the PT of greater fluidity and less cohesion failed, and the PT remained the leader of this political field. PDT lost two-thirds of its presidential votes compared to 2018, maintaining a pre-existing trend of shrinking deputies, and lost the election in its home state of Gomes, Ceará.

In the second round, Lula received support from both Tebet and Gomes, the former playing an active role and the latter playing no role in the electoral campaign. In contrast, Bolsonaro only received support from Padre Kelmon, from the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) who came in sixth in the presidential race, with 0.07 percent of the vote. Lula intensified the partisan strategy, broadening support in his strongest electoral base, the northeast region, and seeking support from regional dissidents among party leaders and sections. It is also important to highlight that the theme of the defense of democracy was a factor that unified the support of political and economic elites for Lula. The main examples of this are the Letter of Democracy organized by the Faculty of Law of the University of São Paulo and the manifesto in defense of democracy articulated by the Fed-

eration of Industries of the State of São Paulo (Fiesp).³⁴ Conversely, Bolsonaro maintained his non-partisan strategy, broadening support among his strongest electoral base, the evangelicals, and using the state machine to mobilize the economic vote. On October 30, 2022, Lula proved capable of winning the elections even in a context of being extreme disadvantaged against his opponent.

Table 1. Result of the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections

Candidate	Round 1 (Votes)	Round 1 (% of vote)	Round 2 (Votes)	Round 2 (% of vote)
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT)	57,259,504	48.43	60,345,999	50.9
Jair Bolsonaro (PL)	51,072,345	43.20	58,206,354	49.1
Simone Tebet (MDB)	4,915,423	4.16		
Ciro Gomes (PDT)	3,599,287	3.04		
Soraya Thronicke (União Brasil)	600,955	0.51		
Luiz Felipe D'Avila (Novo)	559,708	0.47		
Padre Kelmon (PTB)	81,129	0.07		
Leonardo Péricles (UP)	53,519	0.05		
Sofia Manzano (PCB)	45,620	0.04		
Vera Lucia Salgado (PSTU)	25,625	0.02		
José Maria Eymael (DC)	16,604	0.01		
TOTAL	118,229,719	100.00	118,552,353	100
Registered Voters / Actual Turnout	156,453,354	79.05	156,453,354	79.42

Source: Author's elaboration based on data of the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.

Returning to the impact of social welfare on voting behavior in Brazil, the results of the presidential elections support our argument that these elections were conditioned by the political legacy of Lula (2003-2010) and Bolsonaro (2018-2022). A first approximation of the first round of the presidential elections indicates that Lula won in 97 percent of the thousand cities with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI). According to these results, Bolsonaro's strategy of extending *Auxílio Brasil* and other social benefits to attract low-income votes did not work. Conversely, Bolsonaro won in 86 percent of the cities with the highest HDI.³⁵

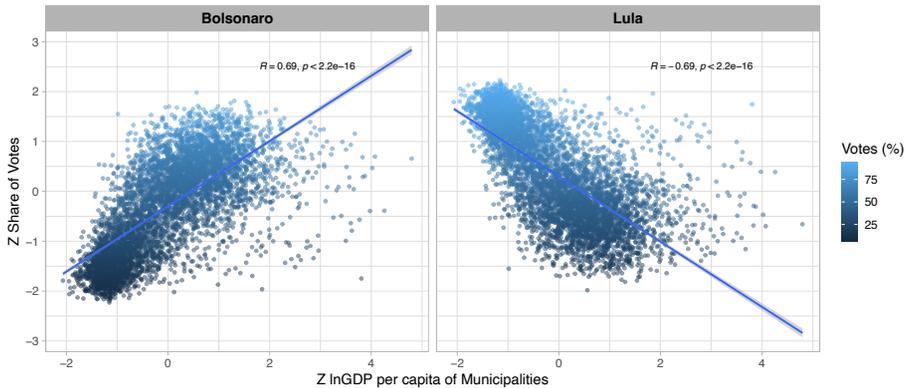
Regarding the second round, Figure 8 shows a high correlation with statistical significance between the share of votes for Lula and Bolsonaro and the GDP per capita income by municipality as a percentage of the vote. In the case of Lula, the lower the GDP per capita income, the higher the number of votes. In the case of Bolsonaro, the higher the GDP per capita income, the higher the number of votes. In the city of São Paulo, for example, where Lula won, his victory

³⁴ UOL. "Leia a íntegra da carta pela democracia organizada pelo Direito da USP". UOL, 10 Ago. 2022.

³⁵ Lago, Cecília, Santos, Natália and Brembatti, Katia. "Lula vence em 97% das mil cidades mais pobres; Bolsonaro é vitorioso nas mais desenvolvidas". Estadão, 4 Nov. 2022.

was based mainly on the votes of the periphery, while Bolsonaro managed to win the votes of practically all voters within the elite districts.³⁶ This correlation endorses the crucial role of the low-income voters in Lula's victory and reveals a clear division within the electorate by socio-economic groups.

Figure 8. Vote and per capita income by municipality in the second round of the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections



Source: Author's elaboration based on TSE.

Concerning the Legislative, there is an interruption in the trend of increasing fragmentation that was present in the previous five elections. The number of parties decreased from 30 to 23 and the Effective Number of Parties (ENP)³⁷ from 16.46 to 9.93, as seen in Table 2. This means a return to the fragmentation that existed until 2006 and is the first drop in this indicator since 1998. These results should be observed with caution and are not associated with political polarization at the national level, but rather with a change in electoral rules. The main changes were the creation of the performance clause, which established a minimum percentage of votes and elected deputies to maintain access to party advertising and electoral funds, and the elimination of coalitions for proportional elections, which forced each party to elect its own deputies without the help of the votes obtained by the other coalition parties.³⁸

³⁶ Garcia, Rafael. "Lula venceu na cidade de SP com votos da periferia; Bolsonaro foi bem em bairros ricos do centro expandido". *O Globo*, 10 Mar. 2022.

³⁷ Formula used to calculate how many parties are effectively relevant in the Legislative.

³⁸ Machado, Uirá. "Fragmentação partidária cai quase pela metade no Legislativo". *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5 out 2022.

Table 2. Parties with representation and ENP in the Chamber of Deputies

N°	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Parties	15	16	21	19	28	30	23
ENP	7.13	8.47	9.29	10.43	13.42	16.46	9.93

Source: Cepesdata.

In 2022, the political composition of the National Congress confirmed a trend that began in 2018. Regarding the Chamber of Deputies, the PL elected the largest bench, with 99 deputies, followed by the PT (68), União Brasil³⁹ (59), PP (47), and MDB (42). The scenario repeated the political polarization of 2018, when the PT elected the largest bench, with 54 deputies, and Bolsonaro's then-party, the PSL, elected the second largest bench, with 42 deputies. In this sense, there has been a concentration of votes in the coalitions of the PL and allies and in the PT, in addition to the emergence of União Brasil. This new party will be crucial for Lula's governability and tends to behave similarly to what had been the MDB between 1994 and 2018.

Table 3. Deputies elected in 2022

Political Party	N° Of Deputies	% of Deputies
PL	99	19.30
PT	69	13.45
UNIAO	59	11.50
PP	47	9.16
MDB	42	8.19
PSD	42	8.19
REPUBLICANOS	40	7.80
PDT	17	3.31
PSB	14	2.73
PSDB	13	2.53
PODE	12	2.34
PSOL	12	2.34
AVANTE	7	1.36
PC do B	6	1.17
PSC	6	1.17
PV	6	1.17
CIDADANIA	5	0.97
PATRIOTA	4	0.78
SOLIDARIEDADE	4	0.78
NOVO	3	0.58
PROS	3	0.58
REDE	2	0.39
PTB	1	0.19

Source: Author's elaboration based on data of the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.

³⁹ Fusion of the PSL with the Democratas (DEM).

Regarding the Federal Senate, whose dynamics are different from those of the election for the Chamber of Deputies, the PL again elected the largest number of senators, with 8, followed by the União Brasil (5), PT (4), PP (3), PSD (2) and MDB (1). Both Bolsonaro and Lula elected senators with allies of national importance. Bolsonaro elected the former vice president Hamilton Mourão, the former Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights Damares Alves, the former Minister of Agriculture Teresa Cristina Dias, and the former Minister of Justice Sergio Moro. Lula elected the former governor of Maranhão and current Minister of Justice Flávio Dino, the former governor of Ceará and current Minister of Education Camilo Santana, and the former governor of Piauí and current Minister of Social Development Wellington Dias.

Table 4. Senators elected in 2022

Political Party	Senators Elected in 2022	Total
PL	8	13
União Brasil	5	11
PT	4	9
PP	3	7
PSD	2	10
Republicanos	2	3
MDB	1	10
PSB	1	2
PSC	1	1
PSDB	0	4
PDT	0	2
PROS	0	1
Cidadania	0	1
Rede	0	1
Podemos	0	6

Source: Author's elaboration based on data of the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.

Both in the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate, the replacement of the mainstream right by the far-right was confirmed at the national level. Despite having elected governors in the states of Mato Grosso do Sul, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Sul, the party elected only 13 deputies to the Chamber of Deputies, becoming the tenth bench, and did not elect any senator to the Federal Senate, continuing with the 4 senators elected in 2018 and becoming the eighth bench.

Table 5. Parliamentary representation of the mainstream right (PSDB)

	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Chamber of Deputies	63	99	70	65	53	54	29	13
Federal Senate	9	4	7	5	5	4	4	0

Source: Author's elaboration based on data of the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.

In summary, if Lula won the presidential elections, he will have to deal with a legislature in which the government does not (yet) have a majority, as well as a consolidated far-right. These parliamentarians, as well as their political and electoral base, have a high degree of convergence with Bolsonaro's programmatic positions, both on socio-economic and socio-cultural issues. After Bolsonaro's defeat, the future of this political field is still uncertain. However, it is the Legislative that the new president will have to deal with in his third term, in a context of precarious labor and living conditions amongst the population. Obtaining a majority of votes relevant to Lula's program will be fundamental to responding to and reassuring the electorate that elected and gave the PT another chance.

V. FINAL REMARKS

The Brazilian elections of 2022 were marked by a high degree of uncertainty regarding the results. More than a referendum on the economic performance of the current government, these elections were a retrospective evaluation of Lula's and Bolsonaro's mandates. Contrary to some approaches to economic voting theory, the abuse of political and economic power by Bolsonaro and the expressive improvement in economic performance due to record commodity prices throughout 2022 were not enough to secure his reelection. Thus—and this was a concept widely evoked in his electoral campaign—Lula won as the last memory of a president who significantly improved the living standards of a considerable segment of the population.

Economic factors are conditioned by contextual features and, in this case, by long-term retrospective assessment: not of the last four years, but of the previous twenty years. Therefore, two considerations deserve attention. First, the evaluation of the political legacies of the two most competitive candidates in this election: By reactivating in the electorate the memory of his previous governments, Lula recomposed an electoral and political base that did not vote for the PT in 2018 and represents a significant part of the Brazilian electorate. Second, the relevance of socio-economic outcomes in this presidential election: The widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups, who were already inclined to vote for Lula. The improvement in economic performance was almost imperceptible among this electorate, which would have been fundamental to reelecting Bolsonaro.

It is important to emphasize that this article is a first analysis of the Brazilian elections and does not exhaust the debate on the relevant factors of Bolsonaro's defeat and Lula's victory in 2022. However, it is crucial to understand the relationship between the economic vote and the evangelical vote, as well as the extent to which socio-economic and socio-cultural issues overlap in the country's political and electoral competition (Araújo 2022). Throughout Bolsonaro's time in office, evangelical voters have been instrumental in keeping his approval ratings above 30 percent, and they were equally instrumental in the then-president's electoral results. This phenomenon is not unique to Brazil, but part of the challenges of contemporary democracies, particularly after the irruption of the far-right (Mudde 2019).

Finally, it is essential to emphasize that Bolsonaro's defeat interrupted a process of democratic erosion that has been ongoing in recent years. In line with Bolsonaro's various challenges to the integrity of the electoral process, an important part of his electorate did not comply with the legitimate results of the ballot box. On January 8, 2023, at the beginning of Lula's mandate, a portion of his supporters carried out attacks in Brasilia in order to execute a coup d'état. In this sense, the current government faces a double challenge: to restore the stability of the democratic-political system and, simultaneously, reduce the socio-economic inequalities that today affect most of the Brazilian population. As indicated by Hunter and Power (2023) the current political and economic conditions are much more adverse than those that ensured the success of previous Lula administrations. Neutralizing the far-right and its non-existent democratic commitment will be fundamental to prevent tragedies like those of the last four years from recurring.

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