



SPECIAL REPORT

Brazil: Disputing Narratives in Unpredictable Elections

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BRAZIL: DISPUTING NARRATIVES IN UNPREDICTABLE ELECTIONS

A television host, a former minister of Brazil's Supreme Federal Court, various entrepreneurs with different ideologies...

There had been much speculation regarding the “outsider” candidates of Brazil's traditional political arena who would make the upcoming presidential election the most unpredictable since 1989. However, the final list of candidates triggered a “reality check” moment; Brazilian voters were very much familiar with all those who have a chance of winning.

In Brazil's presidential elections, slated for October, voters have witnessed many discussions regarding legal uncertainties surrounding the candidacy of former President Lula, currently in jail and who has since announced he will not run and endorsed Haddad; political uncertainties arising from the controversial and conservative rightist candidacy of former military officer Jair Bolsonaro; and the lack of candidacy renewals of known politicians who have vied for the presidency in the past, among other topics.

Five candidates are deemed top contenders, considering poll data accrued since early 2017 and the party structures supporting them during the campaign:

- **Jair Bolsonaro** (Social Liberal Party), former military officer, currently in his seventh term as federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro.
- **Marina Silva** (Sustainability Network), former senator for Acre and former minister of the environment; third time running for president.
- **Geraldo Alckmin**, four-time Sao Paulo governor; in his second candidacy for president.
- **Ciro Gomes** (Democratic Labor Party), former governor of Ceara, former minister of finance and former minister of national integration, also a third-time presidential candidate.
- The fifth and strongest contender was former President Lula (Workers' Party), who might have won the presidency for a third term were he not in prison. Even so, Lula's replacement, former Mayor and former Minister of Education **Fernando Haddad** (Lula's previous running mate) will keep the Workers' Party a primary force in these elections.

Regarding the campaign issues and communication messages that are sure to mark the course of the elections, there are three main lines of reasoning that have less to do with party affinity than voter and party pragmatism:



“Lula maintained over 20% of voter intention, remaining a popular figure and leaving in the population a positive perception of his administration, a far cry from the perception left by his appointed successor”

I. THE LOVE/ HATE DICHOTOMY SURROUNDING LULAISM

Former President Lula was the only candidate to hold 30% of voter intention since the 2017 polls. Even at the height of the impeachment process and the widespread rejection of former President Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party), Lula maintained over 20% of voter intention, remaining a popular figure and leaving in the population a positive perception of his administration, a far cry from the perception left by his appointed successor. His personal image was stronger than that of his party.

With no campaign promotion, Haddad is less known than the other candidates and is the subject of less rejection among the voters who know of him. Additionally, he expects, backed by independent political experts and opinion polls, Lula will manage to transfer at least 50% of his own voter intention to the candidate of his choosing. Lula's communications power is not yet clear, although in 2010, the former president backed and ultimately succeeded in helping elect Dilma Rousseff, who, until then, was more closely associated with bureaucracy than Workers' Party voters.

Therefore, if Lula successfully transfers his support to the new Workers' Party candidate, it will be a result of voters' favorable perception of the Lula administration—and not only of the Northeast Region voters and social program beneficiaries, where support of Lula is very strong, but chiefly among the

former members of the so-called “new middle class” that emerged upon access to better lending and education. This scenario shows two trends in this party's candidacy:

- I. **Absorption of other candidacies considered to be to the left of the political image.** This is more critical for Ciro Gomes, who, after Lula, held the best position in polls in the same ideological area (still tending more toward center). Additionally, as he is from the country's Northeast Region, he also had to fight for the greater part of the region's 40 million voters. Other candidates that are even further to the left, such as the leader of the Homeless Workers' Movement Guilherme Boulos (Socialism and Liberty Party), appears as one of the political heirs of Lula, although with scant possibilities of victory in 2018.
- II. If a candidate surpasses 20% of voter intention, they **ensure the Workers' Party eligibility for the second round of voting**, which underscores the plebiscitary nature of the second round in all of the likely scenarios. In this case, all messages would converge into a debate on the approval or rejection of the Workers' Party, in a process that would be equally affected by voters' perception of conditions subsequent to the Lula administration and those existing in the wake of Rousseff.

Precisely during the dichotomy period brought about by the Workers' Party, in at least the last three years, Jair Bolsonaro has consolidated his support with



“Embracing the efforts in social media to impeach Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro became the loudest of the voices speaking against the Workers’ Party and is now considered the leader of this movement”

voter intentions that range from 15% to 20%. Embracing the efforts in social media to impeach Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro became the loudest of the voices speaking against the Workers’ Party and is now considered the leader of this movement. The assessment here is the same as the one brought forward by statesman Paulo Guimaraes, with 29 years of campaign experience, in an interview conducted by the newspaper [Valor Economico](#)¹ mid-July: “Federal Deputy Jair Bolsonaro’s candidacy is elevated by the mistakes of Lula’s adversaries. (...) If you’re a candidate and you start criticizing Lula, Dilma and the Workers’ Party, voters will start to think Bolsonaro is right.”

Therefore, the polarity in relation to Lula or the Workers’ Party only directly benefits the Workers’ Party candidate and Bolsonaro. The main risk Bolsonaro faces is precisely that of becoming trapped in this space. In view of the alliances formed between late July and early August, Bolsonaro is taking to the elections an all-or-nothing approach based on this line of reasoning.

He initially proposed for the vice presidency the attorney who put Rousseff’s impeachment process in motion, though he eventually reached an agreement with another former military officer known for his far right ideals.

Bolsonaro reinforced the same messages that helped him obtain 20% of voter intention. This is precisely the group of voters who will determine who will stay and who will move on to the second round of voting (in

2002, Jose Serra, of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, went on to the second round with nearly 18% of total votes, although Marina Silva in 2014, who ended up in third place, was ineligible for the second round with more than 19% of total votes).

Numbers have thus far shown the territory had been split between Lula and Bolsonaro, who together covered 40% to 50% of the electorate. It is a considerable amount yet only half of the whole. The other half may be comprised of voters who are tired of hearing the same story every election cycle and could be the deciding factor on who moves on to the first round.

2. OPPOSITION TO THE TEMER ADMINISTRATION

Paulo Guimaraes also pointed out another narrative voters should consider come October 7: opposition to the Temer administration. For various reasons (drama ensuing from impeachment and lack of communication from the government, corruption-related scandals, unpopular reform measures such as those of the Workers’ Party, etc.), Michel Temer is backed by only 6% of voters and has a 70% strong rejection of his presidency, [according to Instituto Datafolha](#).²

Guimaraes contrasts presidential-evaluation polls with those of voter intention and concludes only 40% of voters who are opposed to the Temer administration have already decided on a candidate (28% of

¹<https://www.valor.com.br/politica/5666723/bolsonaro-ja-esta-em-queda-diz-guru-do-dem>

²<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/04/temer-e-reprovado-por-70-dos-brasileiros-mesmo-com-esforco-por-popularidade.shtml>

“The group of voters exclusively associated with opposition to the Temer administration would be of considerable potential value”

the total). Therefore, the group of voters exclusively associated with opposition to the Temer administration would be of considerable potential value. Such sectors tend to be predominantly closer to the Workers' Party, which gave rise to this group, although this may ultimately not be a given, for two reasons:

- I. By relying on Lula's personal popularity, the Workers' Party focused its pre-campaign efforts on prisons, the defense of political rights and the former president's candidacy viability, rather than focusing on the critical state of the current government. It will have to **divide its narrative efforts with the passing of the torch (and votes) from Lula to the new political candidate.**
- II. Regardless of the position held in relation to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, it is obvious Temer became president only because, as vice president, he was a Workers' Party candidate. It should come as no surprise,

then, that Alckmin, after formalizing the backing of the party groups known as “Centrão” (consisting of members of the Temer administration, but also of the Lula and Rousseff administrations), openly stated he did not elect Temer, but rather the [Workers' Party did](#).³ This may become one of the campaign slogans of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, considering the many votes against Temer. The message was repeated by Alckmin in the debate with journalists conducted early August by GloboNews. The strategy? Distance himself from Temer and attempt to make Temer seem, to the greatest extent possible, like just another Workers' Party member.

Regarding this group of voters (and in Alckmin's favor), it seems odd that such a candidate could be the sixth top contender, but, despite having resources and support and being allotted the same amount of televised campaign-advertising time⁴ as the Brazilian Democratic Movement (Temer's party, which holds the second-greatest number of seats in Congress), he seems doomed to fail. Conversely, with less than 2% of voter intention, the presidential candidacy of Henrique Meirelles (who, in the past has been finance minister, president of Central Bank of Brazil and president and COO of BankBoston) was confirmed in spite of unimpressive poll data and without the express backing of many of his party's leaders.



³<https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/eleicoes,para-alkmin-problema-da-baixa-popularidade-de-temer-foi-o-impeachment,70002424339>

⁴Brazilian election law establishes that daily radio and free-to-air television broadcasts include two blocks of campaign advertising, in addition to the advertising slots scheduled throughout the day. Of this time, 90% is allotted to political parties on the basis of the number of parliamentary seats held by each party (the more seats held, the more time is allotted).



“73% of voters believe they may change their opinion. This is not a new trend. In 2014, just two weeks before the first round, nearly 34% of Brazilian voters had not yet chosen a candidate”

Born in Goiás, Meirelles might have had an easier time getting elected to Congress or the Senate. He will now have the third most televised presidential campaign while dealing with the difficult position of either defending or rejecting the legacy of the most unpopular government in Brazil’s history. His commitment to doing so was a requirement party heads insisted upon in exchange for their support of his candidacy.

3. LAST-MINUTE VOTING AND CONVERGENCE OF CHANNELS

The third group of voters left to convince opposes Temer. A CNI/Ibope poll, conducted prior to party meetings and disclosed in early August, indicated 59% of voters were undecided or intended to cast spoilt votes or vote for “none of the above.” It also shows 73% of voters believe they may change their opinion.

This is not a new trend. In 2014, just two weeks before the first round, nearly 34% of Brazilian voters had not yet chosen a candidate. Of these voters, 15% remained undecided on the eve of election day. In other words, 21 million votes were decided 48 hours before the elections. Another recent case of this uncertainty: the election of Joao Doria (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) as mayor of Sao Paulo in the first round with 44% of total votes (53% of valid votes) despite the fact that six weeks earlier he had ranked fifth, with only 9% of voting intention. To capitalize on the trend and gain control of

this group, several candidates who were less familiar to voters emerged in 2018.

Regarding televised campaign-advertising time, Alckmin, the Workers’ Party candidate and Meirelles are at an advantage, as the others will have little time—mere seconds, actually—to appeal to voters. As Meirelles is associated with the legacy of Temer and the Workers’ Party is busy trying to transfer Lula’s popularity, Alckmin will probably be in a better position to appeal to tactical voters against the Workers’ Party, and he has more experience (rightist leaning toward center) than Bolsonaro.

In fact, Alckmin’s campaign is betting everything on this. His experience includes a presidential election and over 13 years at the helm of the country’s biggest electoral college⁵, and his results in polls so far reflect discreet pre-campaign efforts more focused on the inner workings of party structure than on voters and, among the five contenders, has the most lackluster social media presence. This shows Alckmin does not exclusively trust social media to influence and mobilize voters in the home stretch.

This begs the question: how much media will ultimately mobilize voters? Looking back on recent developments in Brazilian politics, the popular opinion of impeaching Rousseff was the result of a convergence of networks, TV, press and personal experiences (such as protests against tax increases).

⁵The state of Sao Paulo has just over 33 million registered voters, which amounts to 22.4% of the nationwide total.



“As a result of the outcry against fake news, there is growing mistrust toward information appearing in the virtual world”

Perhaps as a result of the outcry against fake news, there is growing mistrust toward information appearing in the virtual world. CNI/Ibopé's study shows 71% of voters intend to reference traditional media to make a voting decision while 26% intend to obtain most of their information via social media.

Bolsonaro is at an advantage here. He has a large part of the country's youngest voters on his side, and he benefits from Facebook pages and Twitter profiles that effectively engage voters online and consolidate his narrative through messages across different platforms. He had already invested in controlled debates easily transmittable through WhatsApp groups. At the same time, Marina Silva, who benefits from the unconditional support of Fernando Meirelles (director of “Ciudad de Dios,” among other films), also stated she intends to adapt her platform to a virtual context. The strategy is fundamental to make full use of the nine seconds she will have in each block of televised campaign-advertising during the election period, which may allow her to gain support among younger voters (from 16 to 24 years of age, among whom she is the second most popular candidate). Nonetheless, the great challenge she is facing will be to reach, in terms of channel and content, voters with less formal education, which is the only group in which she maintains leadership. Even so, these voters are among the most likely to

change their voting intention right up to election day.⁶

A fourth narrative line is associated with opposition to the political establishment, though it has lost the most ground given the current candidate lineup. Within this, Marina Silva is still at an advantage (she is neither leftist, nor rightist, nor Brazilian Social Democracy Party member, nor Workers' Party member, nor from the opposition, nor from the government), while Bolsonaro leads the “outsider” narrative. Meanwhile, the campaign should question how many of these messages are valid for a former minister who is running for president for a third time and for a former military officer who was a federal deputy 27 years ago.

These narrative lines have been clearly laid out since the start of the election campaign. It must be observed that the three main lines were broadened by the Workers' Party candidacy. Whether or not one agrees with the 13 years of presidency, Lulaism is still the defining factor in the Brazilian political arena, within a personalized and populist model of government that has prevailed in the country since Getulio Vargas' terms.⁷ Political science and communication studies must determine the extent to which Lula has become omnipresent, to the point of substituting Vargas (and, to a certain degree, Juscelino Kubistchek⁸) in the minds of Brazilian voters.

⁶Telephone survey conducted by Datapoder.

⁷President from 1930 to 1945 and afterward from 1951 to 1954. 4

⁸ President from 1956 to 1961.



In a way, even the narrative of opposition to the Temer administration is in line with the movement for/against Lula. For this reason, to find common ground between the two extremes of voters (those who are ruled by that positioning in relation to Lulaism and, therefore, tend to vote for the Workers' Party or for Bolsonaro) or the discursive approach they use to seek an opportunity to position

Alckmin, Marina and Ciro. With subtle differences defined in the **tables found on the following page**, these three contenders, organized by probability of success, must make use of highly characteristic secondary narratives to gain support.





CANDIDATES



**FERNANDO HADDAD /
LUIZ INACIO LULA DA SILVA**
Workers' Party

PRESENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Lula

- 95,200 followers
- 3.6 million followers
- 367,000 followers
- Fernando Haddad**
- 617,000 followers
- 366,000 followers
- 109,000 followers

TELEVISED CAMPAIGN - ADVERTISING TIME

2 minutes and 22 seconds

HISTORY

Since 1989, the Workers' Party candidate has held the first or second position as contender for the presidency. The Workers' Party has the greatest party identification, although it seems to have been eroded by the years the Rousseff administration was in power.

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

Left

Antithetically positioned against the rise of the Bolsonaro candidacy from the right, he assumes a leftist economic position.

DISCURSIVE POSITIONING (SECTORS)

Main: Lulaism and opposition to the Temer administration.

Secondary: Tactical voting (by transfer and convergence of channels).

VOTER BASE (COMMUNITIES)

Polls and electoral history show a supporting base of resistance for the party in the North and Northeast Regions (especially Bahia and around capitals). The party also benefits from favorable perception from voters who rose to the so-called new middle class and with a historical base linked to trade unions and civil servants.



JAIR BOLSONARO
Social Liberal Party

PRESENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

- 1,26 million followers
- 5,5 million followers
- 1,5 million followers

TELEVISED CAMPAIGN - ADVERTISING TIME

8 seconds

HISTORY

The most voted federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro in 2014. Since then, he has shared his intention of running for president, gaining support on social media among young voters who have matured exclusively under the governments of the Workers' Party. He has no demonstrated domestic potential among voters.

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

Right

He has taken on an ambiguous narrative, defending liberal tendencies while moving toward a national development-based model (state intervention to promote

domestic industry) between lines and plans of government.

DISCURSIVE POSITIONING (SECTORS)

Main: opposition to Lulaism.

Secondary: antiestablishment and anticorruption.

VOTER BASE (COMMUNITIES)

Positioned as representative of young voters and large and mid-sized urban centers that grew under governments led by the Workers' Party (from 2003 to 2016). Subsequently, he gained support from voters with a more conservative profile in regions associated with agriculture.



GERALDO ALCKMIN
Brazilian Social Democracy Party

PRESENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

- 791,000 followers
- 911,000 followers
- 118,000 followers

TELEVISED CAMPAIGN - ADVERTISING TIME

5 minutes and 32 seconds

HISTORY

Since 1994, his party has either won elections or gone on to the second round against the Workers' Party. Alckmin lost against Lula in 2006 with a 21-million-vote difference. He has a strong voter base in the state of Sao Paulo, the country's biggest electoral college (nearly 23% of total), but perhaps not as robust as it once was.

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

Center / center-right

He holds liberal tendencies in economic matters, defends Fernando Henrique Cardoso's legacy: privatization (especially in the electric sector, ruling out Petrobras) and maintaining budget control, while approving the conservation of Workers' Party social policies.

DISCURSIVE POSITIONING (SECTORS)

Main: Tactical voting driven by convergence of channels and pigeon-holing as an anti-dichotomy alternative (central way).

Secondary: opposition to Lulaism, solid administrative experience.

VOTER BASE (COMMUNITIES)

He depends on the loyalty of "paulist" voters, more in the interior of the state than in the capital, to achieve a minimal base that might lead him to the second round. At the same time, he implemented a growth strategy on the voter bases of Alvaro Dias and Bolsonaro in southern Brazil through a campaign led by Ana Amelia, vice-presidential running mate and senator for Rio Grande do Sul.



MARINA SILVA
Sustainability Network

PRESENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

- 1.88 million followers
- 2.2 million followers
- 108,000 followers

TELEVISED CAMPAIGN - ADVERTISING TIME

26 seconds

HISTORY

In her third presidential candidacy, her voter base grew from 19.6 million (in 2010) to 22.2 million in 2014. In both cases, she had more televised campaign-advertising time than she currently does.

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

Center-left

She has liberal tendencies in economic matters and defends budget control and floating exchange rate, while approving the conservation of inclusive social policies that flourished under Workers' Party governments. Her ecological tendencies usually oppose the interests of agribusinesses.

DISCURSIVE POSITIONING (SECTORS)

Main: opposition to the Temer administration, as an anti-dichotomy alternative (center-left way).

Secondary: presenting as "third way," personal narrative (heroic track record of surpassing poverty/adversities).

VOTER BASE (COMMUNITIES)

Analyses of votes and HDI by electoral region show support from two extremes: that of the most adversity-stricken voters (and perhaps of Evangelical voters like her) and of upper-class voters in Southeast Region, especially Rio de Janeiro.



CIRO GOMES
Democratic Labor Party

PRESENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

-  198,000 followers
-  333,000 followers
-  179,000 followers

TELEVISED CAMPAIGN - ADVERTISING TIME

26 seconds

HISTORY

He was a presidential candidate in 1998 and 2002, receiving 7.4 million and 10.2 million votes, respectively. In said elections, he benefitted from voters' greater perception of his political career as former governor of Ceara and former minister of finance.

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

Center-left

He is for state intervention in the economy, hinting at cancellation of concessions and of recent or ongoing privatization programs. He appeals to voters/consumers via changes in systems of assessment and extension of loans and price-freeze policies.

DISCURSIVE POSITIONING (SECTORS)

Main: Lulaism and opposition to the Temer administration, as an anti-dichotomy alternative (center-left way).
Secondary: regional representation and presentation as "third way."

VOTER BASE (COMMUNITIES)

Although born in the interior of São Paulo, his creation and political actions for Ceara guarantee him voter support in the Northeast Region (except in Bahia) in the dispute of the space of the Workers' Party movement and of its opposing forces.



OTHER CANDIDATES



ÁLVARO DIAS
Podemos

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Center-right, with liberal tendencies in economic matters.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Although polls suggest he has up to 4% of voter intention, the senator for Parana benefits from an unbranched structure to achieve growth outside of the region. As the campaign progresses, his voters tend to shift to other center-right candidates (especially Alckmin) as tactical votes.



HENRIQUE MEIRELLES
Brazilian Democratic Movement

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Center-right, leader of liberal reforms in economic matters, labor relations and Social Security

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

He began the campaign with up to 2% of voting intention and the third longest allotted televised campaign advertising. However, he will have to deal with a lack of support from his own party and with the responsibility of being the candidate who officially represents the Temer administration and the consequent opposition.



GUILHERME BOULOS
Socialism and Liberty Party

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Left, with a nationalist and interventionist profile in economic matters. He defends state action in social matters.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Although he leads a popular movement (homeless workers) and tries to mimic the communication techniques of Lula prior to the presidency, Boulos is unknown to the public, will have little time for televised campaign advertising and has scant structural party support. Insofar as Lulaist discourse, he tends to be engulfed by the Workers' Party candidate.



CABO DACIOLO
Patriota

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Extreme right, defends nationalist model that protects state intervention.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Elected federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro after leading a firefighters' strike, he was unknown to the public until his first televised debate. As his party meets requirements to take part in debates, he must continue making noise as an anti-candidate, offering worldwide conspiracy theories and a discourse that targets Evangelical voters, with no other apparent goals.



JOÃO AMOÊDO
New Party

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Center, liberal in economic matters and in customs.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Former banker perceived as exponent of a corporate-based model of management of the country's politics, which appeals to only a small part of the electorate. In addition, his party is so small that it will not ensure his participation in debates, nor will he have significant time for televised campaign advertising.



JOÃO GOULART FILHO
Free Homeland Party

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Center-left, with nationalist tendencies.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Son of former president deposed by the 1964 coup d'état, he has no other important credentials nor has he run for any other office. His party is so small that it will not ensure his participation in debates, nor will he have significant time for televised campaign advertising.



JOSÉ MARIA EYMAEL
Christian Democracy

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Right, with no clear tendencies insofar as economic matters.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

This is his fifth presidential campaign, but in 2014 he received no more than 61,000 votes, in a downward spiral that will likely become worse due to his party's lack of televised campaign advertising.



VERA LÚCIA
United Socialist Workers' Party

POSITION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS:
Extreme left, with interventionist and nationalist profile.

WHY MIGHT THEY GO ON TO THE SECOND ROUND?

Her party is so small that it will not ensure her participation in debates, nor will she have significant time for televised campaign advertising. Corresponds to niche voters that would have their tactical voting in the Workers' Party.

ELECTORAL CALENDAR



August 16 to October 4:

Period established for campaign activities. Television and radio campaign advertising began August 31.



October 7:

First round, with all executive and legislative offices in dispute.



October 28:

Second round for executive offices when no presidential or state-government candidates obtain 50% of the valid votes (excluding “none-of-the-above” and spoilt votes) in the first round.

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