
Lula wins third presidential term in a divided Brazil

77-year-old Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, also referred to as 'Lulinha paz e amor', made a comeback to Brazil's presidency for a third presidential mandate - he served two terms as president from 2003 through 2010 - having narrowly defeated outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro (50.9 per cent versus 49.1 per cent) in the runoff vote. He received two million votes more than his opponent, down from the six million votes that divided both contenders after the first round, in what has been the most unpredictable and "nastiest" election campaign ever, with further controversy and violent incidents until yesterday. Tons of 'peace and love' will be needed to restore some semblance of peace in a divided Brazil, where the political right (not always and not necessarily 'Bolsonarist') has planted more roots than expected, also reflected in the outcome of the governorship vote. Even this time, Bolsonaro was underestimated by pollsters in the runoff election. The outgoing president failed to win a resounding comeback by a whisker. Lula will now lead his country at the helm of a mixed coalition, with a right-wing majority parliament and a majority of governors as his opponents. It will be tough even for a 'charmer' like himself. In his first speech, Lula sent out a message of unity, of '*paz e amor*'. "There are not two Brazils," he declared. By contrast, Bolsonaro remained silent, neither did he congratulate his rival, preferring to "go to sleep." There is a certain uneasiness as to what could happen today, in the wake of recent incidents (such as footage of congresswoman Carla Zambelli filmed chasing a supporter of rival candidate Lula da Silva with a gun).

The strategy of dividing the Church. Religious affiliation and the Catholic Church itself have also been affected by divisiveness in a profound way. Mons. Francisco Lima Soares, Bishop of Carolina (Maranhão), did not deny his concerns for what happened during the election campaign. For the past few months the bishop has been devoting in-depth reflections to the political situation as coordinator of the crisis analysis group of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil. The group, comprising professors and experts from various disciplines, drafted two in-depth Reports on the elections, one during the election campaign and one immediately after the first round. The report openly referred to "necropolitics" - a form of politics that "exploits" death. The Bishop told SIR: "We saw two interrelated phenomena in these elections - unprecedented in terms of prominence and magnitude: the use of social media to propagate fake-news and the instrumental use of religion. The Far Right in particular has attempted to divide the Church and bend the people's devotion to their party's politics. The Bishop recalled scores of attacks, threats, open protests, against priests and against several bishops and cardinals throughout the country, including Cardinal Odilo Scherer of São Paulo and Cardinal Leonardo Steiner of Manaus. On many occasions, in the case of less severe incidents, "some of the parishioners stood up and openly challenged the priest who was speaking." It is not a matter of passing judgment on one of the candidates, Msgr. Lima explained, but rather of disseminating biased propaganda, aimed at making an instrumental use of religion in the framework of an overall strategy to divide the country, even geographically." New political vocations are needed. Confronted with this situation, "the Church highlights the need for unity, as our president, Archbishop Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo, emphasized in a statement ahead of the vote. Should Lula's victory be confirmed, we are hopeful that we will be able to proceed along this path." The Church "still faces a huge challenge: we are facing an ethical crisis, an atmosphere reminiscent of a holy war, and for this reason it is vital to inspire new political vocations among Catholics. We need new political leaders."

Francisco Borba, Sociologist and Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, where he directs the Faith and Culture Centre in co-ordination with the archdiocese, shared the same concerns: "In the last few weeks Bolsonaro raised the stakes of the election campaign, and almost seemed to be able to make a comeback. A key element of this strategy was his campaign against Church unity, entailing a serious risk of dividing the Church internally. Today, for militant citizens, first comes the party leader, then the Pope, the bishops, the priests, in a highly divisive context. Even Lula's Worker's Party (PT) has a strong ideological connotation. Let us recall its failure to condemn the Nicaraguan regime. Now, the question is: who is going to provide political formation in the Church? How can this be done?"

Borba's second point concerns political stability: "The country is divided, and there are also many confused citizens. Lobbyists risk being the actual winners." **A recovered international role.** However, Lula's return would appear significant in terms of geopolitical and continental balances. **Alfredo Luis Somoza**, journalist and international politics analyst, a professor at the Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), holds this view. Contacted by SIR, he said: "In these past few years, Bolsonaro has merely been flirting with Trump and cultivating relations with Putin's Russia. In the past decades, with the first Lula, Brazil had become the pillar of the Continent's integration, with bodies such as Mercosur and UNASUR. But it virtually vanished out of sight in the last four years. Yet Latin America needs Brazil! Let us not forget that the country had played a leading role in global politics, with the creation of the BRICS States. It also promoted politics in Africa, especially in Portuguese-speaking countries, and with the Middle East." In contrast to the opinion of other analysts, for Somoza "Bolsonaro failed to make a significant impact in the country, except for certain aspects that can be described as criminal, ranging from the handling of the pandemic to the management of the Amazon fires." Therefore, there are the right conditions for Brazil to resume the role it deserves." Another significant element at the continental level is that, with Lula's victory, almost the whole of South America is again headed by leftist leaders, as it was a decade ago. "Lula's comeback could bring stability to the leadership of recently-elected Boric in Chile and Petro in Colombia. However, it should also be said that situations vary greatly between countries. This was the case even ten years ago, yet at the time there were some elements of commonality that we don't see today, such as the common aspiration to integrate South American politics, following a process similar to the one carried out in Europe. There is no common agenda today, and the left is no longer confronted by a liberal right but rather by a more radical political right." (*) *journalist at "La vita del popolo"*

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