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Elections in Brazil

2018 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Americas

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Brazilian elections authorities as of October 1, 2018, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

General elections in Brazil are held every four years. This year, Brazil's presidential, legislative, and local elections will be held on October 7. A possible run-off will be held on October 28, between the top two candidates for the presidency, if no candidate receives an absolute majority of the votes of 50 percent plus one in the first round.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

In the upcoming elections, Brazilians will be electing:

- A new president and vice president
- 54 senators (two-thirds of the Senate)
- All 513 members of the Chamber of Deputies
- All 27 state and federal district governors
- 1,059 state deputies

How is Brazil's political system structured?

Brazil is a presidential republic. The president and state governors are elected by an absolute majority with a run-off, if necessary. Three senators are elected per state and the federal district by a simple majority, serving alternating eight-year terms. Federal and state deputies are elected by proportional representation with a minimum of eight members and a maximum of 70 members per state.

What are Brazil's electoral authorities?

The body responsible for organizing and overseeing elections at the federal level is the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE). The TSE is composed of seven justices selected for two-year mandates and prohibited from serving more than two consecutive terms. The TSE works in collaboration with Regional Electoral Tribunals, which are responsible for managing the electoral process in states and municipalities.

Who is running in these elections?

Currently, there are:

- 13 candidate tickets competing for president and vice president
- 358 candidates competing for Senate seats
- 8,595 candidates competing for Chamber of Deputies seats
- 202 candidates competing for state and federal district governor seats
- 17,950 candidates competing for state deputy seats

Brazil's electoral landscape has changed recently due to the decision of the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to ban former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from running in the upcoming election. Da Silva, better known as Lula, had been the favorite to win the October elections before the TSE's ban was announced in accordance with Brazil's "Clean Slate" law, barring people with appeals court convictions

from running for office. Lula is currently serving a 12-year sentence for corruption and money laundering. Assuming Lula's ban is upheld, the following candidates will be presented on the October ballots:

- Geraldo Alckmin
 - Party: Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB)
 - Vice President: Ana Amélia

Brazil's Social Democratic Party has been going head-to-head in presidential elections with the Worker's Party for years. This year's candidate, former doctor Geraldo Alckmin, has been elected governor of São Paulo on three separate occasions (2002, 2010, and 2014). He led an unsuccessful bid for president in 2006.

- João Amoêdo
 - Party: New Party (Partido Novo)
 - Vice President: Christian Lohbauer

Amoêdo, a banker by trade, founded the New Party in 2010 and later led it from 2015-17. The party's platform centers on economic liberalism and political renewal.

- Jair Bolsonaro
 - Party: Social Liberal Party (PSL)
 - Vice President: Antonio Hamilton Mourão

Bolsonaro is a former army captain and seventh-term federal deputy in the state of Rio de Janeiro. He has gained popularity over the years while frequently being a part of controversial events with his brash style and views.

- Guilherme Boulos
 - Party: Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL)
 - Vice President: Sonia Guajajara

Boulos started his foray into politics at age 15 when he joined the Youth Communist Movement and later on the Landless Workers' Movement (MST). More recently, he was a columnist for the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo.

- Álvaro Dias
 - Party: We Can Party (Podemos)
 - Vice President: Paulo Rabello de Castro

Dias began in politics as a state deputy in 1970, followed by extended stints as a federal deputy (1975-83), governor (1987-91), and senator (1983-87, 1999-present). Since his failed 1989 presidential bid, Dias has been a member of several parties including the Social Labor Party, the Progressive Party, the Social Democracy Party, the Green Party and now Podemos.

- Cabo Daciolo
 - Party: Patriota
 - Vice President: Suelene Balduino

Elected a federal deputy for the Socialism and Liberty Party in 2014 with 49,000 votes, Benevenuto Daciolo Fonseca dos Santos, better known as Corporal Daciolo, is running for president for the first time. The former firefighter is running as a member of Patriota, formerly the National Ecological Party.

Before beginning his political career, he led a firefighters' strike in 2011 in his home state of Rio de Janeiro, for which he was arrested. In 2015, shortly after his election, Daciolo was expelled from PSOL for party infidelity - his positions contradicted the party's statute.

- José Maria Eymael
 - Party: Christian Democracy (PDC)
 - Vice President: Hélio Costa

This will be the fifth time that José Maria Eymael, a lawyer, runs for president. In the last election in 2014, Eymael only received 0.06 percent of the votes. He has had electoral success at lower levels, however, as he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1986 and 1990 representing São Paulo.

- Ciro Gomes
 - Party: Democratic Labor Party (PDT)
 - Vice President: Kátia Abreu

Gomes is a lawyer and politician whose career as an elected official started as a state deputy at the age of 24. He later became a mayor and then governor in the state of Ceará in 1991. More recently, he also served terms as minister of economy and minister of the Department of National Integration. He has also run twice unsuccessfully for president in 1998 and 2002.

- João Vicente Goulart
 - Party: Free Homeland Party (PPL)
 - Vice President: Léo Alves

Goulart Filho was nominated for president in an event in São Paulo in the beginning of August. The Free Homeland Party candidate is the son of former President João Goulart (Jango), whose term was interrupted by the military coup of April 1964. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Goulart Filho is a writer. He spent his childhood and adolescence in Uruguay, where his family was in exile after the military coup. Back in Brazil, Goulart Filho helped found the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), together with his uncle Leonel Brizola, and was a state representative for the party in Rio Grande do Sul in the 1980s.

- Fernando Haddad
 - Party: Worker's Party (PT)
 - Vice President: Manuela d'Ávila

Haddad had been tapped as the Worker's Party vice presidential candidate until Lula was barred from running, making Haddad the natural choice for nominee. Haddad has an extensive political career in his own right, having served as minister of education from 2005 to 2012, and mayor of São Paulo from 2013 to 2017. He was also just charged with corruption by state prosecutors for payments received during his mayoral campaign but the charges are unlikely to prevent him from running for office.

- Vera Lúcia Salgado
 - Party: Unified Workers' Socialist Party (PSTU)
 - Vice President: Hertz Dias

Salgado is a trade union activist in the state of Sergipe, a former Worker's Party (PT) militant, and former footwear industry worker. After she was expelled in 1992 from the Worker's Party, along with other ex-affiliates, she participated in the founding of the Unified Workers' Socialist Party.

- Henrique Meirelles
 - Party: Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB)
 - Vice President: Germano Rigotto

Meirelles is a former banking executive turned politician with experience as a federal deputy, governor of the Brazilian Central Bank and most recently, minister of finance in the current administration of President Michel Temer. The party, formerly known as the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party), changed its name back to MDB, its original name, in 2017.

- Marina Silva
 - Party: Sustainability Network
 - Vice President: Eduardo Jorge

Silva is an environmental activist and leader with a long political background. She was first elected as a councilwoman in Rio Branco in 1988, after which she became a federal deputy and later a senator. In 2003, she was named minister of the environment under the Lula administration but resigned from the ministry in 2008, and the Worker's Party shortly thereafter, due to disagreements over environmental policies. She ran for president in 2010 and again in 2014, both times finishing in third place.

Who can vote in these elections?

All registered Brazilian citizens, by birth or naturalization, 16 years or older on Election Day, are eligible to vote. Additionally, voting in Brazil is compulsory between the ages of 18 and 69. If citizens do not vote or justify their absence to their respective Regional Electoral Tribunals, they may be subject to a minor fine, roughly \$3.50 BRL or \$0.85 USD, as well as cancellation of voting registration and other civil penalties, including being forbidden from working in the government, obtaining a passport, enrolling in a public university, or obtaining loans from state banks.

There are approximately 147.3 million registered voters in Brazil. Among those, 500,727 live out of country, an increase of 41 percent in comparison to the 2014 elections. Of the 147.3 million registered voters, approximately 53 percent are women (77,339,897) and 47 percent are men (69,902,977).

Additionally, 36 percent of registered voters are under the age of 35 (53,370,427) including 6 percent under the age of 21 (9,569,074).

How will voters cast their ballots?

Brazil uses electronic ballot boxes that were first implemented in the 1990s and have been used exclusively in every election since 2000. The voting machines are small, lightweight microcomputers designed to be easy to transport, easy to use, and effective at protecting the security and secrecy of the vote. At 7:30 a.m. on Election Day, the president of the precinct turns on the voting machine in front of observers, party members, and poll workers and prints out a report certifying that no votes have been cast so far. Voters arrive at their polling stations and cast their ballots by entering the number that represents their candidates in the machine, checking if the picture and name that show up match their candidate of choice, and hitting the “confirm” key.

Around two million citizens will serve as poll workers. Citizens can volunteer to serve as poll workers or be randomly selected by the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE), as long as they are at least 18 years old and are not running for the elections or are relatives of candidates. The TSE offers both in-person and online training for these volunteers.

When will the newly-elected government take office?

According to the law, the new elected government will take office on January 1, 2019.

How will votes be counted?

Votes are counted electronically in a highly secure manner. Once voting is over, the voting data are decrypted and uploaded into what is called a “guiding program.” From there, for presidential elections, the votes are tabulated by the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE), while for other elections the data are read at the local precinct before being sent to the Regional Electoral Tribunals and then to the TSE.

Are there any quotas?

A 1997 law established a gender-based quota system requiring political parties to submit candidate lists with a minimum of 30 percent women. In 2009, an electoral reform reiterated the gender quota and added that at least 5 percent of the party’s public resources should be allocated to activities to incentivize the participation of women in politics. This law also established that at least 10 percent of the airtime allocated to political parties should be used by women candidates. Women, however, still make up only 11 percent of the Brazilian Parliament, placing the country in the 152nd position out of 190 countries in the [Interparliamentary Union’s rank](#) of women’s participation in Parliament.

How are electoral authorities guaranteeing equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?

On August 1, 2018, Brazil ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which promotes and protects the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. Article 29 of the CRPD states that:

1. “States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:
 - a. To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:
 - i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand use;
 - ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;
 - iii. Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice”

Additionally, concrete steps have been taken to ensure access for persons with disabilities. One example is that all voting machines’ keyboards have written font as well as braille.

Can Brazilians who reside abroad vote in these elections?

Brazilians who reside abroad, between the ages of 18 and 69, are required to vote just like in-country citizens. The polling places will be installed at Brazilian embassies, consular offices, or in locations where Brazilian government services are provided. Exceptionally, the Superior Electoral Tribunal may authorize the installation of a polling place in a different location. The largest numbers of out-of-country Brazilian voters are in the United States, Japan, Portugal, Italy, and Germany. In the 2010 general elections, voting took place in 252 locations across 113 different countries and those numbers were expected to increase in 2014.

For complete out-of-country voting information, contact a Brazilian embassy or consular office.

Is electoral violence a problem in Brazil?

Electoral violence is a major problem in many places around the world including Brazil, where this issue came to the forefront on September 6, 2018, when the Social Liberal Party nominee Jair Bolsonaro was stabbed in the stomach while campaigning in the streets. The wound was serious but not fatal, and Bolsonaro is still expected to run. This was not an isolated incident in Brazil. As recently as March 2018, another major political attack took place, as Councilwoman Marielle Franco, a popular gay, black, female local official in one of Rio de Janeiro’s slums, was shot dead in a targeted assassination. Her murder set off protests across the country as well as international cries for justice. And only a couple weeks after that, shots were fired at former President Lula’s campaign bus in southern Brazil.

Is electoral observation allowed?

Yes. The Organization of American States (OAS) will deploy an international observation mission led by former Costa Rican President Laura Chichilla. The OAS went to Brazil for preparatory visits in August to learn about the Brazilian electoral processes and electronic voting system, meet Superior Electoral Tribunal staff, and cast a mock ballot. The team will return with a mission of 50 to 60 observers to monitor the elections in various locations around the country.

Other interesting facts about the Brazilian elections

Brazil is considered an international pioneer in electronic voting, as it remains one of the only countries in the world to use that voting system nationwide. When Brazil made the switch to electronic voting in the 1990s, the goal was to reduce fraud and increase voter accessibility to the ballot. Given Brazil's expansive and complex electoral context, paper ballots were causing problems, including long delays in vote tabulation, large percentages of incomplete ballots, and increased risk of fraud. In the 1994 national elections, for example, vote counting alone required approximately 170,000 people, and nearly 40 percent of ballots in the legislative elections were blank or invalid. Electronic voting has significantly improved the speed of the process.

Another interesting fact is that, in these elections, for the first time, transgender individuals will be able to have their chosen names printed on their voter cards. This measure, approved by the Superior Electoral Tribunal in March 2018, has already enabled 6,280 people to update their documents.

Resources

- [Superior Electoral Tribunal \(Portuguese\)](#)
- [Superior Electoral Tribunal \(English\)](#)
- [Implementing and Overseeing Electronic Voting and Counting Technologies](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Press Release - Organization of American States Observation Mission to Brazil](#)
- [Brazilian Constitution](#)