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FEATURED Q&A

Which Presidential Candidates Have the Edge in Brazil?



Former São Paulo State Governor Geraldo Alckmin is seen as an establishment candidate, which could hurt him in Brazil's presidential race, Christopher Garman and Filipe Gruppelli Carvalho say below. // File Photo: Alckmin Campaign.

Q An Ipspe poll released July 31 shows far-right Brazilian presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro and conservative Geraldo Alckmin in the lead in São Paulo State when imprisoned former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is excluded from the survey. Why didn't Alckmin garner more support in São Paulo State, where he previously served as governor? What is driving support for Bolsonaro? With millions of people using social media in Brazil, how big of a handicap is it for Bolsonaro that he is allotted just a tiny amount of free television advertising time? Other than a final ruling on Lula's eligibility, what factors between now and the Oct. 7 election will most influence the race's outcome?

A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: "Aside from Lula, whose criminal conviction will almost surely bar his candidacy, Alckmin is today the only candidate that is both competitive and qualified for the job of president of Brazil. Although elected governor of São Paulo with 57 percent of the vote, recent polls suggest few Brazilians, even in his home state, make him their first choice to lead the country. With his support now in single digits, Alckmin faces a formidable challenge to attract, in just two months, sufficient first round votes to put himself into the runoff. Although not particularly inspiring or charismatic, he still has a fair chance of securing the 20 to 25 percent of the vote needed to pull it off. He is a skilled political operator, and is the only contender who managed to assemble a large multi-party coalition to support his candidacy. The coalition gives him nearly half of the television

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The country's high court gave lawmakers 18 months to legislate legalization of same-sex marriage.

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The Chinese airline sold the stake in the Brazilian carrier for \$306 million.

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POLITICAL

Venezuela Paves Way to Try Lawmakers After Drone Blasts

Venezuela's pro-government Constituent Assembly stripped the immunity of two opposition lawmakers whom President Nicolás Maduro has accused of involvement in a pair of drone blasts that his government has characterized as an assassination attempt.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela Paves Way for Lawmakers' Trial After Drone Blasts

Venezuela's pro-government Constituent Assembly on Wednesday revoked the immunity of two opposition lawmakers, paving the way for them to be put on trial following an incident last weekend in which explosives detonated at a Caracas military parade that President Nicolás Maduro was attending, Agence France-Presse reported. Maduro has said he was targeted by two drones that were carrying C4 explosives. The Constituent Assembly, which Maduro's government created last year and which declared itself superior to all other government institutions, including the elected National Assembly, revoked the immunity of Julio Borges and Juan Requesens. Maduro has accused the opposition of being behind the attack and has singled out Borges and Requesens. Borges is a former speaker of the National Assembly and now lives in exile, and Requesens was seized by intelligence officers. Venezuela's Supreme Court ordered Borges' arrest on Wednesday. Borges, who attended Tuesday's inauguration of new Colombian President Iván Duque in Bogotá, called Maduro's allegations against him a "farce." "Everyone knows that it's a set-up to persecute and convict anybody that opposes your dictatorship," Borges wrote on Twitter in a message directed at Maduro. "I feel safe in Colombia, I feel thankful. The move has no political or legal grounds," Borges told AFP in relation to the move to strip his immunity. Security video from Requesens' apartment building showed intelligence officers tackling him in a hallway and taking him away, The Wall Street Journal reported. Venezuela's attorney general, Tarek William Saab, has said preparations are being made to put Requesens on trial and that Maduro's government is pressing Colombia and the United States to extradite opposition members, including Borges, that he claims are trying to topple his government, AFP reported. On Wednesday, Saab said three of the seven

suspects connected to the drone incident had appeared in court. In all, Maduro's government has said at least 19 people were connected to the drone explosions, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Costa Rican Supreme Court: Gay Marriage Ban Unconstitutional

Costa Rica's Supreme Court on Wednesday declared the country's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional and discriminatory after the court's longest session in 29 years, La Nación reported. The court ruling orders the Legislative Assembly to adjust the current law within a period of 18 months, after which the ban would be automatically repealed. Fernando Castillo, the president of the constitutional tribunal in the Supreme Court, on Wednesday said the 18-month period is meant to keep



Carlos Alvarado // File Photo: Inter-American Dialogue.

"social peace" in the country, where a large part of the population still does not favor same-sex unions, La Nación reported. The issue of same-sex marriage took center stage during Costa Rica's presidential election earlier this year, after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a binding opinion in January that said gay couples had the right to marry, Time Magazine reported. "We continue to deploy actions that guarantee no person will face discrimination for their sexual orientation or gender identity," said President Carlos Alvarado on Twitter after the court's decision was made public. Alvarado won the run-off election in April against the evangelical party's candidate, Fabricio Alvarado, who campaigned against same-sex marriage. Enrique Sánchez, a con-

NEWS BRIEFS

More Than 1,400 Likely Died in Hurricane's Aftermath: Puerto Rico

More than 1,400 people are likely to have died in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico last year, the U.S. territory's government said in a report, according to The New York Times. The number is more than 20 times the official death toll. The storm ravaged the island last September, toppling power lines and initially killed about a dozen people. The territory's official death toll grew to 64, but its government now says many more died from suicide, diseases and other factors.

López Obrador's Security Detail to Consist of Unarmed Civilians

Mexican President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador said on Thursday that his security detail will consist of 20 unarmed men and women who are doctors, lawyers and engineers, among others, Reuters reported. His decision is a sharp change from the secret service-style security that President Enrique Peña Nieto enjoys. It has sparked concern across Mexico, where the most recent election campaign had the highest number of fatal attacks on candidates and politicians in recent history and where political and drug-related violence is commonplace.

Hainan Airlines Sells Stake in Brazil's Azul for \$306 Million

China's Hainan Airlines said Friday it had sold its stake in Brazil's Azul airlines for \$306.25 million after discounting underwriting fees, in a move to optimize Hainan's asset structure and maintain liquidity, Reuters reported. The buyers were mostly institutional investors from the United States who are unaffiliated with Hainan, the Chinese airline said, adding that it no longer holds any shares in the Brazilian carrier.

gressman for the ruling party and Costa Rica's first openly gay lawmaker, said it's unlikely the Legislative Assembly will work out a law. "What I see happening is that the norm will simply be declared unconstitutional in 18 months' time," he said, AFP reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

U.S. Federal Judge Authorizes Seizure of Venezuela's Citgo

A U.S. federal judge in Delaware on Thursday issued a ruling that authorizes the seizure of Citgo Petroleum Corp., Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA's Houston-based refining subsidiary, The Wall Street Journal reported. Judge Leonard P. Stark sided with Crystallex International, a defunct Canadian gold miner, which filed the legal action against Citgo to collect a \$1.4 billion compensation award to

Crystallex International had filed the legal action against Citgo.

satisfy a Venezuelan government debt, Reuters reported. Crystallex argued that Citgo, as the South American country's largest U.S. asset, is liable for Venezuela's debt. Following the judge's decision, Crystallex will be able to control shares of Citgo's U.S.-based parent company. The ruling could prompt Venezuela's many unpaid creditors to fight for control of Citgo, the country's only obviously sizable U.S. asset, The Wall Street Journal reported. Analysts estimate that the Venezuelan government owes approximately \$150 billion in debt to creditors around the world, as the cash-strapped country struggles with a five-year economic recession, stalling oil production and a hyperinflation crisis. Attorneys for PDVSA were not available and Citgo declined to comment, The Wall Street Journal reported. The decision could still be appealed to a higher court.

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time allotted to all candidates and on-the-ground support across Brazil's vast territory. He should certainly be able to pick up a chunk of votes in São Paulo (whose voting power equals that of California, Texas and New York in U.S. presidential elections). If he gets to the runoff (and, as likely, Lula cannot compete or generate much support for a stand-in candidate), his opponent will likely be Bolsonaro, whose nationalist, extreme right and often racist views appeal today to a large segment of Brazil's population, which is fed up with corruption and insecurity, disgusted with politicians of all stripes and despairing of the economy. But Bolsonaro has spawned at least as much hostility as he has support, and his political base remains extremely narrow. While a weakness in the initial round, Alckmin's centrist views in a highly polarized election may become a source of strength in the final stage. All told, it is hard to imagine how Bolsonaro could win over a majority. Still, worsening economic conditions, escalating crime and violence, and new revelations of political corruption could enhance the appeal of his radical, hardline rhetoric. It has happened elsewhere."

A **Gilberto M. A. Rodrigues, professor of international relations at the Federal University of ABC in Brazil:** "Creating the perception of being the 'newest' in politics is the most important factor for any candidate in Brazil's next election. In fact, few candidates are new. Those best positioned in the polls—Lula, despite being imprisoned, Bolsonaro, Ciro, Marina and Alckmin—all have been in politics for more than two decades. And those who are relatively new—Manuela and Boulos—are not as well known. The way parties form their alliances is still based on old politics, and it's far from people's desires for something new. However, almost all candidates are trying to pass themselves off as newcomers, while still being capable of governing the country and freeing it from

a legacy of corruption. In this scenario, Alckmin is by far the less 'new.' He made electoral deals with the 'oldest' in Brazil's politics, the Centrão, a set of political parties hosting a large group of politicians that guarantee TV advertising and governability,

“ Creating the perception of being the 'newest' in politics is the most important factor for any candidate in Brazil's next election.”

— Gilberto M. A. Rodrigues

but who are well known for huge corruption charges. This explains why Alckmin risks losing the elections in his own state of São Paulo, where he has dominated for decades. If Lula is not allowed to run, Haddad—a new generation of the Workers' Party—will replace him, with a real chance to run in the second round with Lula's support. Social media may play a role and help candidates with less advertising time, but it still won't be a turning point in Brazilian politics. Finally, there are more undecided women than men. Attracting them—or not frightening them away—could be key for defining who will survive the first round."

A **Monica Arruda de Almeida, adjunct professor at the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University:** "I often ask my friends and colleagues from São Paulo how they feel about Alckmin as a governor, and most people seem to dislike him, which is a sentiment that the electoral polls corroborate. Perhaps part of the problem is that after four terms as a governor, there is a natural electoral apathy for somebody who has been in power for so long. Another problem is that Brazil as a whole is doing very poorly economically. The country is just

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bouncing back from one of its worst economic recessions in history, and its anemic recovery has not been enough to improve people's sentiments about the country's politicians. Unemployment in the state of São Paulo is about 13 percent, which is on par with the national average. That makes it very hard for constituents to be enthusiastic about their governor, particularly when they see, for example, more and more people living on the streets and urban violence out of control. The irony is that São Paulo is by far the safest state in the country, with a homicide rate of 8.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, as compared to the national average of 28.5 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Brazilian voters are tired of corruption, extreme violence, lack of economic opportunities and the state's unnerving inability to address those issues. The Bolsonaro voter in particular is hungry for law and order. Not surprisingly, Bolsonaro regularly comments that he is a Trump admirer. But whether a Bolsonaro presidency would be the right answer for those problems is a completely different story."

A Christopher Garman, managing director for the Americas, and Filipe Gruppelli Carvalho, Brazil associate, both at Eurasia

Group: "The election will be dominated by anti-establishment feelings and anger toward the political class. Alckmin is seen as an establishment candidate who does not meet the profile that the voters want, and hence will struggle to grow. His alliance with large centrist parties gives him a big campaign advantage, but these groups are also close to the Temer administration, and many have associations with previous corruption scandals, so Alckmin does run the risk of being seen as a continuity of this administration. Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, however, is capitalizing on much of

the population's anger at a corrupt political class, given his nationalist views and strong stance on fighting corruption and violence. Voters are desperate for solutions to these issues, and Bolsonaro's hardline position against them, such as a carte blanche for police officers to kill criminals and allowing

Bolsonaro's base is very loyal."

— Christopher Garman & Filipe Gruppelli Carvalho

the sale of personal handguns, appeals to a large part of the electorate. While Bolsonaro lacks television time, he and his supporters dominate the conversation on social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which have become more important tools in the political debate. Television time remains important, but a shorter 35-day ad campaign will decrease its effect on the vote, since candidates will have less time to steer voters their way. Alckmin's chances thus depend less on selling himself, and more on deconstructing Bolsonaro in order to gain back traditional PSDB voters in the south, south-east and center-west of the country. While possible, we don't bet on it. Bolsonaro's base is very loyal. Additionally, new accusations of corruption against Alckmin can come out, making the former governor's campaign for the presidency challenging. But his pathway to the second round depends on an effective negative campaign against Bolsonaro. The race has all the ingredients to become a classic mudslinging election."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2018

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

ISSN 2163-7962

Subscription inquiries are welcomed at freetrial@thedialogue.org

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