

Lula stages astonishing comeback to beat far-right Bolsonaro in Brazil election

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the former leftist president, has reclaimed the leadership and vowed to reunify his country



'I'm going to cry': euphoria on Brazil's streets as Lula wins – video

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Brazil's former leftist president, **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**, has sealed an astonishing political comeback, beating the far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in one of the most significant and bruising elections in the country's history.

With 99.97% of votes counted, Silva, **a former factory worker who became Brazil's first working-class president exactly 20 years ago**, had secured 50.9% of the vote. Bolsonaro, a firebrand who was elected in 2018, received 49.10%.

Addressing journalists at a hotel in São Paulo, Lula vowed to reunify his country after a toxic race for power which has profoundly divided one of the world's largest democracies.

“We are going to live new times of peace, love and hope,” said the 77-year-old, who was sidelined from the 2018 election that saw Bolsonaro claim power after being jailed on corruption charges that were later annulled.

“I will govern for 215m Brazilians ... and not just for those who voted for me. There are not two Brazils. We are one country, one people – a great nation,” he said to applause. “It is in nobody’s interests to live in a country that is divided and in a constant state of war.”

A few streets away on Paulista Avenue, one of the city’s main arteries, ecstatic Lula supporters gathered to celebrate his victory and the downfall of a radical rightwing president whose presidency produced an environmental tragedy and saw nearly 700,000 Brazilians die of Covid.

“Our dream is coming true. We need to be free,” beamed Joe Kallif, a 62-year-old social activist who was among the elated throng. “Brazil was in a very dangerous place and now we are getting back our freedom. The last four years have been horrible.”

Gabrielly Soares, a 19-year-old student, jumped in joy as she commemorated the imminent victory of a leader whose social policies helped her achieve a university education.

“I feel so happy ... During four years of Bolsonaro I saw my family slip backwards and under Lula they flourished,” she said, a rainbow banner draped over her shoulders.

Ecstatic and tearful supporters of Lula – who secured more than 59m votes to Bolsonaro’s 57m – hugged and threw cans of beer in the air.

“This means we are going to have someone in power who cares about those at the bottom. Right now we have a person who doesn’t care about the majority, about us, about LGBT people,” Soares said. “Bolsonaro ... is a bad person. He doesn’t show a drop of empathy or solidarity for others. There is no way he can continue as president.”

There was celebration around the region too as leftist allies tweeted their congratulations. “Viva Lula,” said Colombia’s leader, Gustavo Petro.

Argentina’s president, Alberto Fernández, celebrated “a new era in Latin American history”. “An era of hope and of a future that starts right now,” he said.

Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, commemorated what he called a victory for "equality and humanism".

Joe Biden issued a statement congratulating Lula on his election "following free, fair and credible elections".

"I look forward to working together to continue the cooperation between our two countries in the months and years ahead," the US president said.

Justin Trudeau said: "The people of Brazil have spoken. I'm looking forward to working with [@LulaOfficial](#) to strengthen the partnership between our countries, to deliver results for Canadians and Brazilians, and to advance shared priorities – like protecting the environment. Congratulations, Lula!"

Brazil's former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who governed before Lula's historic election 20 years ago, tweeted: "Democracy has won, Brazil has won!"

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, said Lula's election "kick starts a new chapter in Brazil's history" while Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, called Lula's triumph a move towards "progress and hope".

The speed of the international reaction reflected widespread fears that Bolsonaro, a former army captain who has spent years attacking Brazil's democratic institutions, might refuse to accept defeat. In the lead up to the election he indicated he would contest a result he considered "abnormal". He is yet to concede to his rival.

Outside Bolsonaro's home in west Rio there was dejection and anger as the news sunk in. "I'm angry," said Monique Almeida, a 36-year-old beautician. "I don't even know what to say."

João Reis, a 50-year-old electrician, said he was convinced the vote had been rigged.

"It's fraud without a doubt, they manipulated the count. The armed forces must intervene," he demanded.

And if they didn't? "The population must take to the streets to demand military intervention so that we don't hand power over to the communists."

At Lula's celebrations the mood was very different as the veteran leftist vowed to wage war on hunger, racism and to combat environmental destruction which has soared under Bolsonaro. "We will fight for zero deforestation in the Amazon ... Brazil and the planet need the Amazon alive."

"We are going to restart the monitoring and surveillance of the Amazon and combat any kind of illegal activity," he vowed. "We are not interested in a war over the environment but we are ready to defend it from any threat."