

OCTOBER 2026

POLICY BRIEF

THE BRAZILIAN ELECTORAL CYCLE OF 2026 AND ITS NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACTS

NIZAR MESSARI



In October 2026, Brazil will elect its president. It will also renew the entire lower legislative chamber and two-thirds of the upper chamber, elect governors in all states, and renew state legislatures. What will be the impact of these elections nationally, regionally, and internationally? Who are the main presidential candidates, and what are their agendas? What are the main challenges facing Brazil over the coming years? These are the questions that this Policy Brief seeks to answer, taking into account the results of the first round of elections, held on October 4, and looking ahead to the second round, scheduled for October 25.

NIZAR MESSARI

INTRODUCTION

On October 4, 2026, Brazil held presidential, legislative (renewing the entire lower chamber and two-thirds of the Senate), gubernatorial, and state legislative elections. With a limit of two consecutive terms for all heads of the national and state executives, these elections represented a major opportunity to renew political leadership, determine the path the country would take over the following four years, interrupt some political careers, and launch new ones. Since 1994, this exercise has been regular and constant, although its results have not always been predictable months in advance. The 2026 elections were no exception: while during the first half of 2025 President Lula faced a challenging political environment, his outlook began to improve around the middle of the year, and he spent roughly the following year with positive polling and a comfortable lead across a wide range of opinion polls, while his potential adversaries faced serious challenges. Until June 2026, President Lula could therefore be fairly optimistic about his chances of winning re-election, even if he could expect a few bumps along the way.

However, gradually but steadily, the political landscape soured for the president, owing to a mix of political missteps by the president and his government, events beyond his control—such as the war in Iran and the oil price hike it caused or the mounting crisis of Brazil's highest court—as well as other factors (discussed later in this Policy Brief). As a result, the first round of elections saw the president qualify for the runoff but finish only in second place, while receiving fewer votes than in the first round of the 2022 presidential election.

These results and their implications will be discussed later in this paper, but what was at stake in the Brazilian elections, both nationally and internationally? What are the main challenges confronting the country? What could these elections mean for Morocco? In order to answer these questions, I will start by introducing the main candidates, their respective profiles, backgrounds and agendas, before focusing on the crisis surrounding the judiciary and its impact on the country as a whole, and on this election cycle in particular. I will also discuss the regional and international implications of the Brazilian elections before analyzing their potential consequences for Morocco.

Who are the candidates?

The Brazilian presidential elections of October 4, 2026 seemed almost like a repetition of the presidential elections of 2022, although with reversed positions: Mr. Lula da Silva was confronting Mr. Bolsonaro. However, the Bolsonaro running in 2026 carries the same last name but is not the same candidate. In 2022, the candidate—then running for re-election—was Jair Bolsonaro, whereas in 2026, the candidate is Flavio Bolsonaro, the son of the former president and a Senator for the state of Rio de Janeiro, who is running to unseat President Lula. But with the exception of the identity of one of the candidates and the reversed positions of the candidates, everything else—or almost everything—seems like a re-run of 2022: the polarization of the election and of Brazilian society, the high level of rejection of both leading candidates, the lack of a credible and viable third option, not to mention the closeness and inconclusiveness of the opinion polls. The main differences between the two cycles relate to the age of the sitting president, who used to be an energetic and intense campaigner but has increasingly faced questions about his age and stamina, as well as to the less charismatic and less warm public style of the younger Bolsonaro when compared with his father. Despite these challenges, supporters on both sides have aligned behind their standard bearer, and the campaign has been intense for months.

Each one of these candidates comes with a substantial political legacy: Mr. Lula holds the record in terms of popularity of a sitting Brazilian president (83%), which he reached in December 2010, at the end of his second term. But as he is running for his fourth term, his popularity has taken a hit as it averages 47% at the end of this third term, as has his prestige. Mr. Lula also brings with him his past as a union leader as well as the aura of his achievements in his first two presidential terms, which enabled him to build a wide network of relationships and worldwide recognition, not to mention influence.

At the same time, his candidacy brought an air of *déjà-vu*, while also highlighting the inability of the Left to renew itself. Consequently, Mr. Lula's messages and performance very often appeared to belong to another era and, at times, seemed disconnected from the world in which Brazilian voters live in 2026 and from the issues they face on a daily basis. In sum, poll after poll, followed by the results of the first round, suggested that Brazilians were less interested in hearing about the past than in hearing about the present and its challenges.

The younger Bolsonaro also brings a substantial political legacy to the election cycle. Although he defends the same ideas his father defended, he does so with moderation, which was supposed to attract the few—but crucial—undecided voters.¹ With that, his hope was to carry his father's legacy and defend it, while taking advantage of the prestige that name recognition usually provides. However, his name was also marred by several corruption scandals, some old but others more recent. The fact that he was imposed by his father at the expense of other potential candidates also represented a significant challenge for him. The Governor of the state of São Paulo—who ended up running for re-election and winning comfortably—was considered by many, including within the business sector, a far more credible candidate, whereas Jair Bolsonaro's wife and Flavio Bolsonaro's stepmother was favored by many others due to her charisma. She would also have benefited from strong name recognition, as she carries the Bolsonaro name. The lukewarm—to say the least—support he received from his stepmother, as well as from the São Paulo Governor, combined with corruption scandals that came to light in the first half of 2026, weighed on Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro's candidacy for a long time.

With this, the campaign saw the confrontation of two very distinct strategies: on the one hand, Mr. Lula sought to improve the approval ratings of his government by advertising its achievements and launching new initiatives aimed at benefiting lower-income Brazilians. Some of those initiatives were very popular, such as the banning of betting platforms, which had been legalized in 2017 but had contributed to financial distress among many Brazilian families, the increase in Bolsa Familia benefits for low-income families, and the extension of the deadline to negotiate and reduce household debts under favorable conditions, among many other initiatives. These measures have significant budgetary implications, with the potential to increase the national debt and reduce economic growth, at least in the short term.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bolsonaro has mainly adopted a low profile, with a very limited electoral platform and few live campaign events, while focusing on social media and on the challenges average Brazilians were facing, as well as on a discourse building on anti-Lula sentiments that run deep among parts of Brazilian society. He has also focused on the victimization of the older Mr. Bolsonaro and his supporters, and on blaming "the system" for their fate. This polarization has had serious consequences for the country: both top candidates face very high rejection rates (most opinion polls show them with very similar rejection rates, significantly north of 50%), and campaigning has been mainly negative, with very little debate about the pressing challenges facing the country (which will be discussed later in this Policy Brief). It is notable, for instance, that neither of the two top candidates has participated in any televised electoral debate before the first round of elections.

Another negative aspect of the campaign is that it has been marked by significant corruption accusations on both sides. One difference in this regard is that although Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro is directly and personally involved in some of those serious accusations, Mr. Lula is not, although his son and his former personal chief of staff (who resigned because of those accusations) are. The accusations against Mr. Bolsonaro included—although they were not limited to—his very close links with the disgraced financier Daniel Vercaro, former president of the Brazilian bank Banco Master, now in jail and accused of buying influence in powerful sectors of Brazilian society.

The accusations against the younger Mr. Bolsonaro and presidential candidate ranged from receiving large amounts of money to produce a movie about the older Bolsonaro to having enjoyed free rides on the private jets of the disgraced financier. Those serious accusations did not reduce the support Mr. Bolsonaro received from his hardcore supporters, and only temporarily affected his reputation among the wider Brazilian population. As for Mr. Lula, he tried to distance himself from the accusations against his closest circle and affirmed that whoever had done something wrong should pay for it.

With this polarization dominating the political landscape, a few candidates tried to explore the possibility of a third way between Lula and Bolsonaro. Two former governors (Romeu Zema, from the state of Minas, the second most populous state in the country, and Ronaldo Caiado, from the state of Goiás), both from the right, tried to seize on the anti-Lula and anti-PT (Workers' Party, Lula's political party) sentiments and represent them without—they hoped—the negative weight of the Bolsonaros, while reinforcing their appeal with their positive performance as state governors, which they hoped would help them make the case that they had what it took, in terms of experience and background, to lead the country. Another candidate, Augusto Cury, tried to capitalize on the frustration of large sectors of the Brazilian population with politicians and introduced himself as a political outsider. He also relied on name recognition, as he is a reputed psychiatrist with a constant and positive presence in the media. These were the main candidates, but there were others who barely scored in opinion polls and who had a scant presence in the media or in the campaign.

As mentioned earlier, there were other elections taking place in Brazil on October 4, and some contextualization is necessary at this stage. Although the Brazilian political system is a textbook presidential system with traditional checks and balances, it was for a long time dominated by the executive branch. Sérgio Abranches, an influential Brazilian political scientist, called it "coalition presidentialism" in the late 1980s. By that, he referred to the fact that, because Brazilian presidents could not rely on governing majorities of the kind that a two-party system—similar to that of the U.S.—allows in that country's legislature, they were forced to form coalitions that ensured them the ability to govern. Those coalitions required constant negotiation and occasional friction, but they allowed presidents to govern and pass their reforms.

That concept was validated by many presidents under the democratic regime until the previous decade (the 2010s), when, slowly but steadily, power shifted from the executive to the legislative, to the point that Presidents Dilma Rousseff, Jair Bolsonaro, and Lula da Silva, all suffered significant defeats in the legislature. One of the most blatant defeats of presidents by the legislature was the impeachment of Ms. Rousseff, while more recently, President Lula suffered the affront, for the first time since 1894, of seeing his nominee for the Supreme Court rejected by the Senate. In parallel with the growth in the influence of the legislature, the role of the judiciary has also evolved, as the courts have increasingly been called upon to resolve disputes between the legislative and the executive. This judicialization of the Brazilian political system has also included episodes in which the judiciary established legal precedents that have the force of law. For instance, in 2011, the

STF (which stands for Supremo Tribunal Federal, or Federal Supreme Court, the highest court in Brazil) recognized same-sex unions as having the same legal status as opposite-sex unions. In 2019, the STF criminalized homophobia and transphobia. In those episodes—and a few others—the judiciary, and the highest court in particular, has been accused of overstepping the prerogatives of the legislature (more on the judiciary and the STF in the next part of this Policy Brief).

For these reasons, the legislative elections, for both chambers, are highly significant. Indeed, Brazilians were called to renew the entire Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber) and two-thirds of the Senate (the upper chamber). The results of the elections indicated a clear pivot to the right, as the Liberal Party of Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro received the largest number of seats (121), far ahead of the Workers' Party of Mr. Lula (70). In fact, the whole left barely elected more representatives than the Liberal Party alone, as the Workers' Party and its left-wing allies won 125 seats. The right wing, combining the Liberal Party with its allies, elected 303 representatives, equivalent to 59.1% of the lower chamber (Folha de São Paulo). The same pattern was repeated in the Senate, as the Liberal Party will have 28 senators, by far the largest representation in the upper chamber. Adding its senators to those of its allies, it reaches 39 senators, which would allow it to claim the presidency of the chamber, as well as put it in a position to try to impeach ministers of the highest court (STF), for which 54 votes—i.e., two-thirds of the Senate—are necessary. This pivot was also observed in the elections for governor, as Mr. Bolsonaro's allies were elected in the first round in 10 states, among them the most populous ones (São Paulo and Minas Gerais), whereas Mr. Lula's allies were elected governors in the first round in five states, mainly in his stronghold in the Northeast of Brazil.

As for the presidential elections, Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro ranked first in the first round with 47.03% of the votes, ahead of Mr. Lula, who came second with 45.16% of the votes. Although not entirely surprising, these results were not fully expected, as opinion polls indicated a tight race, with Mr. Lula consistently in the lead. The results underlined the right-wing shift that swept Brazil in the elections of October 4, 2026, and highlighted the difficult political environment facing Mr. Lula in the second round of elections. Indeed, in Brazil, all candidates who came first in the first round of presidential elections have subsequently gone on to win the second round. Moreover, three out of the four most competitive candidates who did not qualify for the second round of the elections have since indicated their support for Mr. Bolsonaro. Taken together, these factors make Mr. Lula's path to re-election on October 25 considerably more difficult, although the outcome remains open. Even if Mr. Lula is elected, he will face a tough political environment, as Mr. Bolsonaro's party and its allies will dominate both chambers of Congress, making governance significantly more difficult for Mr. Lula over the next four years.

The crisis of the STF

The Brazilian Federal Supreme Court (STF) has played an important role at different moments in Brazilian political and social life. During the military dictatorship, supporting habeas corpus and the protection of individual liberties became central to the Court's role. After the return of democracy, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) became a guarantor of the electoral process, ensuring transparency, authenticity, and legitimacy throughout a process that it supervises from the initial stages of voter registration to the confirmation of the electoral results. This does not mean that the post-democratization era has not had its share of controversies and debates regarding the role of the judiciary. At times, a strict interpretation of procedural requirements has benefited prominent politicians, as was the case with former President Fernando Collor, who resigned during impeachment proceedings but was subsequently acquitted by the STF in the criminal case against him.

On other occasions, the judiciary's reputation was at stake, as with the sentencing of Mr. Lula in 2017 to a prison term, the confirmation of the sentence in 2018, and then his release from jail in 2019. But at other times, it played a crucial role in preserving republican institutions, as in the case of the Mensalão, when influential politicians were sentenced to jail and served their sentences. This is the background against which the current crisis of the judiciary should be analyzed.

Another, more immediate element of context should be added. Ahead of the 2022 elections, former President Jair Bolsonaro openly questioned the reliability of the Brazilian electoral system and its transparency, and called for different measures to remedy what he considered to be its shortcomings. Among those measures, he suggested an oversight role for the Armed Forces in the electoral process, as well as the return of paper ballots, which, according to him, would have provided traceability and a greater opportunity for ballot recounts whenever needed. But the TSE, and its president at that time, STF member Alexandre de Moraes, stood firm against those demands and defended the integrity of the Brazilian electoral system and the reliability of the voting machines.² He made limited concessions to Mr. Bolsonaro, including inviting military leaders to visit the TSE headquarters, where the system's safeguards were presented to them. However, he did not allow any external interference in its functioning and continued to defend it firmly. Following the elections and the confirmation of the results, right-wing activists camped outside military barracks throughout the country and contested the results of the elections, but to no avail. The judiciary in general, and Mr. Moraes in particular, stood firm and upheld the electoral results.

However, on June 8, 2023, one week after the inauguration of Mr. Lula, hundreds of individuals gathered in Brasília, where the presidential palace, the headquarters of STF, and the two houses of parliament are located, and stormed the three official buildings. Although no one was physically injured, the institutions were damaged as much as, if not more than, the buildings in which they are located, and the sense that a coup d'état had been attempted remained. Mr. Moraes played a central role in the investigations and judicial proceedings that followed, which resulted in substantial prison sentences for numerous individuals involved in the attacks, as well as proceedings against figures accused of supporting them or encouraging efforts to overturn the electoral result, including former President Jair Bolsonaro.

If those decisions earned him a reputation as a staunch defender of democracy among some Brazilians, they also made him, in the eyes of others, an adversary of Mr. Bolsonaro and his followers. His highly assertive and personalized judicial style added to the controversy, as he took several monocratic decisions (decisions taken by a single minister of the Court on behalf of the Court),³ some of which were controversial, even among individuals and observers who were not supporters of Mr. Bolsonaro and his allies. Some of those decisions also made Mr. Moraes a target of retaliatory measures by the U.S. under the presidency of Mr. Trump.

The current crisis of the STF must therefore be placed within that context. Two members of the court were appointed by former President Jair Bolsonaro, two other members were appointed by Mr. Lula, the current president who is running for re-election, and a nominee of Mr. Lula was rejected earlier this year by the Senate, leaving the STF temporarily with 10 members rather than its full complement of 11.⁴ In addition, the Bolsonaro family and its allies consider Mr. Moraes an enemy and portray his decisions as biased. It is within this politically charged environment that the STF continues to play a central role in Brazil's electoral order.

Besides this crisis related to its composition, the STF has recently found itself embroiled in the corruption scandal that has affected large parts of the Brazilian political system, centered on Mr. Vorcaro and the now-collapsed Banco Master. Indeed, since he was imprisoned and his computers and cellphones were seized by the judiciary and the Federal Police, Mr. Vorcaro's secret dealings with prominent figures in Brazilian public life have become public, revealing a network that was extensive and deeply controversial. His network of contacts extended to politicians (including Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro and others from his inner circle, the presidents of the lower and higher legislative chambers, as well as former Lula government ministers and current prominent members of the legislature), the judiciary (including Mr. Moraes himself, but also several other members of the STF, and in particular one of the ministers nominated by the older Mr. Bolsonaro), not to mention prominent local politicians.

The president of the STF decided to take the accusations against prominent members of his court seriously and called a session of the court to discuss, initially, the allegations concerning Mr. Moraes. That session went down in history as a moment when the reputation of the STF reached rock bottom, as accusations of lying and dishonesty were traded openly among members of the court, sometimes in highly confrontational language. In the plenary of the STF, two groups confronted each other: Mr. Moraes and his supporters on the one hand—who are generally considered favorable to President Lula—and Mr. Mendonça, Mr. Moraes's accuser, and those who support him, who are generally considered favorable to former President Bolsonaro and his followers. While the current president of the STF and one of his predecessors—although not the immediate one—occupy a balancing position, the others are very often strongly aligned with one group or another, even though several are explicitly mentioned in the corruption allegations involving Mr. Vorcaro and his defunct bank.

This has plunged the STF into what most observers agree is its biggest credibility crisis: the highest judicial institution in the country appears willing to protect its members instead of applying the law to them as it would with any other citizen. It also appears vulnerable to corruption and cooptation, perhaps as much and as deeply as any other institution in the country, despite being expected to uphold the law. Finally, it seems to care very little about the image it projects, and the impact that image has on its credibility with the population at large. This crisis has affected not only the credibility but also the trustworthiness of the institution, as opinion polls show that a solid majority of Brazilians do not trust it (56% according to Qaest, whereas only 9% of those polled trust it), or say that it has lost credibility over the last few years (77% according to Datafolha). It is relevant to note that, although Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro is accused of corruption just like certain ministers from the STF, the crisis of the STF seems to damage Mr. Lula politically far more than Mr. Bolsonaro.

What are the big challenges that Brazil will confront over the next few years?

In a country like Brazil, there are many challenges that await any leader. However, under the current circumstances, there are three that are particularly acute and cast a long shadow over the country's future: the fiscal challenge, the institutional challenge and the hemispheric challenge.

The fiscal challenge is straightforward: the whole world experienced rising energy prices after the start of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran in February 2026. The Brazilian government has reacted in a similar manner to many other governments around the world, subsidizing oil prices and absorbing part of the oil price increase. In the Brazilian case, however, the new

budgetary expenses came in a context in which the Brazilian budget deficit was already large and required urgent attention. And as if this was not enough, the Lula administration engaged in new budgetary spending due to the increased tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Brazilian products, which forced the Brazilian government to provide badly needed support to several economic sectors severely affected by these newly imposed tariffs.

As the presidential campaign heated up and the poll numbers tightened, President Lula announced the above-mentioned spending measures, with the objective of reinforcing his popularity—and eventually influencing voting intentions—among the neediest, who are among his staunchest supporters. All of this resulted in a scenario in which the budget deficit became considerable, with many consequences for the economy: higher borrowing costs, higher debt and higher inflation risks. Consequently, one of the most urgent tasks facing the next president will be to tackle the deficit, either by increasing revenue, slashing expenses, or a combination of both. This effort will take time and will impact all sectors of Brazilian society.

The second major crisis is the institutional one. Whoever becomes president for the next four years will have to work towards establishing a new balance of power between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. But will the legislative give up its newly established prerogatives? Or will the judiciary temper its confrontational stance toward the legislative? As noted above, the newly elected Senate might be close to the two-thirds majority necessary to impeach a minister of the STF, so how are these two powers going to deal with each other? These scenarios will vary depending on who is elected president. If Mr. Bolsonaro is elected, the Senate will likely engage in a clash with the STF and try to impeach at least Minister Moraes. Mr. Bolsonaro will also have an easier life with both chambers of the legislature, given the large number of representatives elected by his party. If Mr. Lula is elected, a more nuanced balance will have to be established, requiring intensive and continuous negotiations and bargaining. This would not necessarily mean that impeachment proceedings against STF ministers would not be launched, but their outcome would be less predictable.

Finally, the hemispheric relationship is a euphemism for the impact of the U.S. on Brazil. Indeed, as mentioned above, the Trump administration has imposed high tariffs on Brazilian products imported into the U.S. It has also aimed at guaranteeing access, and an almost exclusive one, to Brazil's rare earth minerals. It has sought access to the Brazilian financial market, and in particular to its payment system, called Pix in Brazil, which is very popular and widely used but which the Trump administration considers unfair to U.S. financial institutions. Against this background, Brazil, as the largest and most populous country in South America as well as its largest economy, will have to make important decisions regarding the path it wants to follow in its relations with the U.S. over the next few years.

The significance of the Brazilian elections in the current international and regional contexts

The Brazilian elections attracted wide global interest for several different reasons. From a global perspective, the rise of the alternative right in the U.S., Europe and Central and South America has been increasingly visible. One of the earliest signs of this rise was likely the Brexit vote in 2016, when voters in the United Kingdom voted decisively to leave the European Union, a position strongly supported by Nigel Farage, one of the country's main right-wing populist leaders. A few months later, Mr. Donald Trump was elected president of the U.S., and launched major initiatives against migrants, global warming policies and

diversity and inclusion agendas. From that moment on, alternative right parties started gaining ground across Europe, including France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden.

In the third decade of the century, this wave reached Central and South America, with elections such as those of Mr. Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Javier Milei in Argentina, and more recently, José Antonio Kast in Chile. From this global perspective, the defeat of the former prime minister of Hungary, Mr. Victor Orban, in the second half of 2026, made the upcoming elections in France, Spain and Brazil particularly important for the global alternative-right movement, since winning in these three contexts had the potential to either allow the alternative right to govern one of the most influential countries in the world (France), or unseat established left-leaning leaders (Mr. Pedro Sanchez in Spain and Mr. Lula in Brazil). In this sense, the expansion and success of the alternative right worldwide would be reinforced by a Bolsonaro victory and, ipso facto, a Lula defeat.

In the Western Hemisphere, there is an additional aspect to this larger global narrative: since his re-election, Mr. Trump has been talking about the necessity of revamping the Monroe Doctrine, which reflected the view of early nineteenth-century President Monroe that the Western Hemisphere was under exclusive U.S. influence and that external powers could not interfere in that region. In Mr. Trump's version, Chinese interference in the region has become a major source of concern. This has led to open support from the Trump administration for candidates in electoral processes across several Central and South American states, including Mr. "Tito" Asfura in Honduras and Mr. Javier Milei in Argentina. Less direct but still significant support was provided to Mr. Abelardo de la Espriella in Colombia and Ms. Keiko Fujimori in Peru.

Of course, significant as these initiatives may be, they cannot compare to the kidnapping of a sitting president, Mr. Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, who was seized at night by American forces and taken to a jail in the U.S. All of this has meant that the Western Hemisphere acquired greater significance on the U.S. agenda and became even more central to its strategic interests. In this sense, unseating Mr. Lula and having an ally like Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro as president of Brazil would be very important for the Trump administration's ambitions in the Western Hemisphere.

Indeed, if Mr. Bolsonaro wins the second round of elections, almost the entire Western Hemisphere, with the notable exceptions of Canada and Uruguay, and, to a lesser extent, Mexico, will be ruled by allies of President Trump who share his vision and priorities. During Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, the relationship between the two leaders had significant political consequences: Mr. Bolsonaro's government decided not to host a COP meeting that had been scheduled to be held in Brazil. It was lukewarm towards BRICS and distanced itself from China, and announced the transfer of the Brazilian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁵ A similar alignment is likely if the younger Mr. Bolsonaro wins the second round of the presidential elections.

More than that, like-minded governments rooted in the hard right will inevitably collaborate in weakening the United Nations and its agencies and associated institutions, such as the International Court of Justice. The common interests that have served as key reference points for world politics since the end of the Cold War, which were embodied in U.N. conferences and agendas (such as the fight against global warming, amongst other issues), will be gradually replaced by the primacy of the national interest, while self-help will be strengthened and international solidarity will be increasingly marginalized.

These dynamics remain fluid. The U.S. midterm elections and their results, followed by the Spanish elections later that same month and the French elections in the first half of 2027,

have the potential to change this dynamic. But a victory for Mr. Bolsonaro is likely to give further momentum to the alternative right movement in the West.

Significance for Morocco

Morocco has maintained very good relations with Brazil, and changes of government in Brazil have not affected those relations. Both under the first Bolsonaro government and during Lula's three mandates, the bilateral relations have continued to strengthen. Brazil is one of Morocco's leading trading partners, and for a number of years ranked second only to Spain, whereas Morocco is Brazil's second-largest trading partner in Africa. Cooperation between both countries takes place in different sectors, while new sectors are constantly being added to the existing ones, ranging from weaponry and the arms industry to fertilizers and green energy.

These common interests do not seem to be affected by who leads Brazil. The fact that under Mr. Lula Morocco and Brazil share a focus on renewable energies, while under an eventual Bolsonaro government they share a degree of alignment with Mr. Trump and his agenda, suggests that bilateral relations are largely immune from Brazil's election cycle.

However, specific aspects may be emphasized differently depending on the leader in power: while King Mohammed VI and President Lula share a common understanding of the need to reinforce multilateral organizations, as shown for instance by Morocco's candidacy for the UN Security Council and its rejoining of the African Union in 2017, with Mr. Bolsonaro the common agenda would consist of closer alignment between Moroccan and Brazilian diplomacy and Mr. Trump's agenda. For instance, Morocco is one of the few countries that has enthusiastically participated in Mr. Trump's Board of Peace project and, after the results of the first round of the elections became known, President Trump clearly indicated his preference for the candidacy of Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro.⁶ Overall, this suggests that Morocco's relations with Brazil are bound to remain solid in the foreseeable future, regardless of who becomes president.

CONCLUSION

The Brazilian electoral cycle of 2026 will have long-lasting consequences for Brazil and the region. If Mr. Lula wins, despite the difficult electoral environment, it will almost certainly be his last run at the presidency, and he will have to prepare the next generation of leaders from the left, something he has struggled to do consistently over the last two decades. The lack of credible and solid leadership on the left might weaken its chances of winning future elections over the medium term. If Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro wins, significant changes could follow internally, regionally, and internationally, as discussed above. The next week will therefore be crucial for Brazil's political trajectory and for its role in the region and the wider international system.

ENDNOTES

- 1-** Mr. Jair Bolsonaro is serving a jail sentence, which, for health reasons, he is serving at home. He had hoped to be able to run for a second term, but after the judiciary ruled that he could not do so, he appointed his son to run in the election.
- 2-** It should be noted that, under the Brazilian Constitution, three of the seven members of the TSE are also ministers of the STF, and the president of the TSE is always a member of the STF.
- 3-** These decisions can eventually be reversed by the full court. However, doing so requires the court to overrule one of its own members, which constitutes a significant hurdle and tends to ensure that such the decisions remain in force, including the most controversial ones.
- 4-** Appointments to the STF require the approval of the full Senate. Judges (known as ministers in Brazil) are appointed without a fixed terms and remain in office until the mandatory retirement age of 75, unless they resign earlier.
- 5-** The transfer never materialized.
- 6-** A clarification is necessary at this stage: as Mr. Trump had established a positive working relationship with Mr. Lula, he refrained throughout the first round of the electoral campaign from publicly expressing a preference for either candidate. This changed after Mr. Flavio Bolsonaro finished ahead of Mr. Lula in the first round. In other words, Mr. Trump's preference for Mr. Bolsonaro became clearly articulated only after the first-round results.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



NIZAR MESSARI

Nizar Messari is Associate Professor at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI), Morocco. He served as Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and then as Vice President for Academic Affairs at the same university. He was Rice Scholar at Yale University's MacMillan Center during the academic year 2021-22. Before returning to Morocco in January 2010, he was Assistant Professor at PUC-Rio, Brazil. He has published in journals such as Security Dialogue, International Studies Perspective, Refugee Survey Quarterly, The Journal of North African Studies, Cultures & Conflits (in French), Contexto Internacional and Política Externa (both in Portuguese) as well as in edited volumes in English, Portuguese and French. He is the co-author with João Pontes Nogueira of Teoria das Relações Internacionais – Correntes e Debates (Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier/Campus, 2005). He is finalizing a book on security studies from a southern and critical perspective, with a focus on the so-called Arab world.

ABOUT THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South...[Read More](#)

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author.

Policy Center for the New South

Rabat Campus of Mohammed VI Polytechnic University,
Rocade Rabat Salé - 11103
Email : contact@policycenter.ma
Phone : +212 (0) 537 54 04 04
Fax : +212 (0) 537 71 31 54

www.policycenter.ma

