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Brazil

Bolsonaro defeated, the left remains alive

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The biggest losers in Brazil's municipal elections on Sunday, 15 November 2020 were President Jair Bolsonaro and the far right. The traditional right is growing and the left remains alive, providing the biggest surprise in São Paulo, with the PSOL going through to the second round.

Although traditionally fast and efficient, the electronic vote counting for these elections was delayed for more than three and a half hours. The scare did not prevent the general trends of the electorate from becoming clear before midnight. We are witnessing the most important thermometer of the popular mood since the tragic 2018 election, which brought Bolsonaro to power.

The biggest loser of the day, with no doubts even among his followers, was President Bolsonaro and the far right; something that could already be foreseen by the growth of the rejection of his government by the population of the big cities. Seven mayors of capital cities were elected in the first round: in Florianópolis and Curitiba, in the South; Belo Horizonte, in the Southeast; Salvador and Natal, in the Northeast; Campo Grande and Palmas, in the Centre-West. All came from parties and had personal profiles quite to the right, but none of them were supported directly by the president and his children.

Out of 27 capital cities (25, leaving out Brasília, Federal District, which does not have a mayor; and the Amazonian Macapá, subject to an energy supply crisis for the past 20 days), only 18 capitals are going to have a second ballot. And in them, there are only three with a similar profile or directly identified with the political ambit of the neo-fascist president: in Fortaleza (Ceará, Northeast: Capitão Wagner), in Vitória (Espírito Santo, Southeast: Delegado Pazolini) and in Rio de Janeiro, where the current mayor Marcelo Crivella, who is a bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, is trying to get re-elected. The betting, based on the performance of the candidates in yesterday's election, indicates that the only one with a chance is Pazolini.

As soon as the final numbers emerged from the Higher Electoral Court computers, journalists, scientists, and politicians were already debating the main messages from the polls. The most reasonable observation is that in the conflict which opened in March between Bolsonaro and governors and mayors regarding the treatment of the pandemic - which has already killed 165,000 Brazilians and infected more than five million - the federal government has been beaten. It can be said that Brazil realigned itself from the extreme right to a more traditional right, and that the left, although divided, showed that it is very much alive and with a future.

The right-wing figures who were re-elected or went through to the second round had a pro-science policy, with some measures to close activities, such as schools and gymnasiums (Brazil was not locked down at anytime, anywhere), masks and social distancing; measures against which the president fought hard, with threats of prosecution, fake news, resignation of ministers and much low-level discourse.

The opposition and the left

If the political-institutional scenario does not change radically, everything indicates that the municipal parliamentary groups of the most radical Bolsonaro supporters will be diminished. In addition, the parties opposing *Bolsonarismo* achieved a good result in general. We should in any case stress the very reactionary political situation, the survival of a deeply rooted anti-leftism among middle-class property owner sectors (affected by the discourse of corruption in

the PT years) and among the poorest, under the influence of the neo-Pentecostal churches friendly to the president.

In nine of the 18 capitals balloting, an opposition candidate is competing. Three from the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB, which is a bourgeois-oligarchic party more to the centre than to the left), in Recife and Maceió (NE) and Rio Branco (North, Amazonia). In two important capitals, the PSOL has reached the second round (São Paulo and the Amazon Belém); two are from the PT, in Vitória (Espírito Santo) and Recife; two are from the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT, founded by the nationalist Leonel Brizola and today led by former minister Ciro Gomes), in Fortaleza and Aracaju (Northeast). In Porto Alegre, the young PCdoB candidate Manuela D'Ávila is on the ballot.

In the 25 largest cities (of the 55 that will have a ballot), the PT has elected 48 councillors, of which 22 are women. The PCdoB obtained councillors in six cities. The PSOL has elected councillors in 12 of the 25 largest cities, with a total of 33 elected, including 17 women, mostly black - including the first two transgender councillors: the most voted-for candidate from Aracaju, Linda Brasil, and the black trans Beny, from Niterói (RJ) - as well as two openly eco-socialist councillors. The PSOL also elected five mayors of small cities: Ribas do Rio Pardo (MS), Potengi (CE), Janduís (RN) and Marabá Paulista (SP).

But what was most “surprising” for the corporate media and the bourgeoisie was the success of the PSOL in the largest city in the country. After entering the party in 2018, to compete for president, the activist and leader of the Movement of the Homeless (MTST) Guilherme Boulos, accompanied by the former mayor Luíza Erundina, started with just over 4% of voting intentions in September to reach more than 20% and get to the second round; in which he will face the current mayor Bruno Covas (PSDB), close to the right-wing governor João Doria. In the capital, the PSOL parliamentary group jumped from two to seven councillors.

Unfortunately for the PSOL and for the entire left, Rio de Janeiro, the second capital of the country, experienced a quite different electoral scenario and will have to choose between the Bolsonarista and neo-Pentecostal mayor, Marcelo Crivella, and the former mayor of the old and corrupt MDB, Eduardo Paz. Although enjoying a broad and traditional political space in the city, the PSOL could not count on the candidacy of federal deputy Marcelo Freixo, who gave up running in May, on the grounds that, faced with the impossibility of uniting all the opposition under his name in a single front, it would not be possible to win. Still, the young black state (provincial) deputy Renata Souza eagerly represented the party and helped secure the seven councillors the party elected or re-elected.

Will there be a left front in 2022?

The idea of diversifying political representation has gained traction on the left. And the PSOL was the biggest beneficiary of this. As BBC Brazil pointed out, there was a general search for renewal in all senses. Boulos, 38, and Manuela, 39, are the maximum expression of the phenomenon.

In fact, the left in a less broad sense (without the bourgeois centre-left of the PDT and PSB) has regressed a bit in parliamentary representation (due to the numerical fall of the councillors of the PT and PCdoB, see the table below). The PSOL is the party that has advanced the most. Lessons will have to be learned from that.

The most probable thing is that the so-called progressive electorate, with social, environmental, anti-racist and feminist concerns, will coalesce in the next few years around a frontally anti-Bolsonaro identity and pressure the left (PSOL, PT, Pcdob) to seriously attempt viable electoral alliances to defeat the right. The absence of the left in Rio's second round reinforces this thesis. But it will be necessary to overcome the most difficult obstacle: the refusal of Lula and a large part of the PT leadership to negotiate alliances without their hegemony (now quite contested).

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However, it is equally or more important that the big and small successes and victories of this difficult campaign are, for the left and activism in Brazil, like raindrops that fertilize the earth, reviving people for struggles of resistance to the plans of Bolsonaro and of governors and mayors of the neoliberal right wing. And that the pressure for unity of the left comes mainly from below, in the social movements and communities, so that we achieve the unity necessary to defeat the genocide in the streets.

https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/left_mayors_big_-_copie.jpg

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Jacobin América Latina](#).

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