

Lula's imprisonment: Brazil's democracy at risk?

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Lula's detention has been a major development for Brazilian coming elections and can be vital for the future of Brazil's democracy as well. The abrupt end of a leading candidacy ([with about 30% of intentions](#)) might raise questions about the legitimacy of the upcoming Presidential race.

Lula's legacy is both associated with progress in social standards, such as the lifting of more than [20 million people out the poverty line](#), and with corruption scandals, for instance the "[Triplex case](#)". Despite having strong critics, Lula has left power in 2010 with high approval rates and his arrest happened in a moment he was leading election polls. Thus, his conviction is significant and symbolic.

An increasing social polarization characterizes the current political landscape of Brazil. The country's left lost its stronger contender in what can be considered the biggest left-wing setback after Dilma's impeachment in 2013. On the opposite movement, the political far-right has gained support and has become stronger. [The last voting intention survey](#) shows that without Lula Jair Bolsonaro assumes leadership.

Moving beyond the left-right perspective, Lula represented a particular project for Brazil, based on an idea of strong proactive State prioritizing public policies that tackle inequality. In a context of worsening economic crises, such position, prevalent for more than a decade (2003-2016), received strong resistance and was overthrown with President Dilma's impeachment. Current President Michel Temer has been implementing a neoliberal agenda expressed in the motto "[Brazil is back in business](#)".

In prison or not, Lula will remain central to the election outcome. [A recent survey](#) indicated two-thirds of Lula's electorate are willing to vote for the candidate he chooses to support. Although he hasn't designated any successor yet, two left-wing presidential aspirants, Manuela D'Ávila and Guilherme Boulos, have remained by his side during the vigil that preceded detention.

Lula has been the first former president of Brazil to be convicted of corruption, but similar criminal accusations involve many other higher figures of Brazilian politics. Among the accused are current president Temer (PMDB) and Aécio Neves (PSDB), who disputed the last election's second round with the Dilma. The fact that any of the corruption charges involving politicians with parliamentary immunity have resulted in prison yet raises suspicions of a selective and political use of justice.

This might be one of the most unpredictable elections to be ever held in Brazil. Its dynamics depends significantly on [Lava Jato's](#) process, a complex corruption investigation launched in 2014 and lead by both the Federal Police and the Public Prosecutor's Office. Investigations must be carried out whenever corruption charges exist, nevertheless the rule of law and, by consequence, democratic governance will always depend on non-selective legal proceedings and on the non-cooptation of the juridical system by political interests.

For further information, access:

BERKELEY REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES. [Brazil: Democracy at stake.](#)

FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO. [Sem Lula, esquerda ou se une ou estará fora do 2º turno, diz Lessa.](#)

NEXO. [Datafolha com Lula preso: o que a pesquisa projeta para a eleição.](#)

NYT. [Lula is in prison, and Brazil's democracy is in peril.](#)

THE GUARDIAN. [The fate of Lula da Silva is the very fate of Brazilian democracy.](#)