

BRAZIL: Specter of Bolsonaro-Haddad run-off has tactical voting implications

The most likely run-off scenario pits the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) against Fernando Haddad, heir to former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the leftist Workers' Party (PT). Odds in fact have increased in favor of such an outcome after Haddad became the official PT on 11 September pursuant to an electoral court decision. Of the five major candidates, the one that suffered the most from the new configuration was the center-left environmentalist Marina Silva (Rede), who saw her voting preferences cut in half in the polls (12-16 to 6-8%) and her rejection rate increase accordingly. Center-right social-democrat Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB) stayed where he was (below two-digits) while center-left labor democrat Ciro Gomes (PDT) oscillated within the margin of error (11-12%), thus maintaining his ground despite the obvious threat by the newly anointed PT candidate.

One week after Haddad's appointment and thirteen days after [Bolsonaro's stabbing](#), conditions are given for a natural strengthening of both candidacies in a peculiar cross-feeding process where the hikes in poll numbers on one side prompt a corresponding movement on the other. In that sense, the "anti" sentiment tends to equality on both sides. This could extend "indefinitely" but rejection rates are too high for the two candidates. Polls have consistently shown that more than half of the electorate "could not vote under any condition" for Bolsonaro or Haddad. In principle, the more the polarization persists, the more the remaining half of the electorate considers other options – the so-called "useful" vote.

An interesting sign of discomfort in much of the voting population is the movement "Women against Bolsonaro", a Facebook phenomenon that in just a few days had one million followers, has almost tripled in size since, and has organized major protests to take place before the end of September. Revealingly, the group is just against one candidate but there

is no indication of a specific preference for another that could defeat him.

That is in fact the main difficulty for those that might consider a "useful" vote in the first round: none of the other three major candidates seems to present any reason, apart from unexpected disruptions, that could justify an "escape" *en masse* to one of them so as to empower him or her to reach the run-off vote. Part of what might be driving current voting preference trends may just be another type of "useful" vote: that which is based on the fear of a first-round victory by either side of the pack leaders which may prompt voters to go to the ballots as opposed to avoiding it in protest or even to anticipate their second-round preference.

It is difficult to project which useful vote might prevail – but such a vote will be significant, hinging strongly on how the candidates arrive at the last few days before the first round. Essentially, unless Gomes manages to do better than just remain stable, there will be no upsetting third option. More significantly, if voters throw the towel in before the end of the game, valid votes may even define the ultimate outcome already in the first round. Alckmin and Marina, meanwhile, need a miracle.

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