

A Joyful March for Lula

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Tens of thousands of Brazilians marched in Sao Paulo Saturday in a final show of support for former president Lula da Silva before Sunday's election. "March" is a far too military work to describe what was really a dance, a party, an explosion of hope. For the soured mainstream media that has tried to depict this election as a choice between two evils, the enthusiasm belied the line that Lula's supporters are simply voting against the current president, Jair Bolsonaro. Although the chant of JAIR OUT! repeated constantly on the route down the emblematic Avenida Paulista to the Roosevelt Plaza, just as often the crowd chanted, or rather sang, LU-LA, LU-LA and held up the thumbs and index fingers in the letter "L". All ages, colors and affiliations turned out for the march, favored with sunny skies until the end, when a downpour shortly after dark sent marchers into nearby bars and restaurants. Lula rode on the top of a truck, with José Mujica at his side. He smiled, stretched out to shake hands with the crowd, signed baseball caps and t-shirts people tossed onto the truck and spoke briefly: Alongside him rode Fernando Hadad, candidate for Sao Paulo in a close race against the far right, and former Uruguayan president José Mujica—reminder that Lula the chance to see a consolidated second "pink Tide" this century, after progressives dominated South America in the early 2000s. Thousands of flags with LULA HADAD and other slogans waved against blue skies. In buildings along the route people gathered on balconies and leaned out of windows far above to dangle LULA banners and shout approval. Passing cars honked their horns and accepted campaign stickers and flags through open windows. A cheer rose when new spread of a new poll showing Lula pulling farther ahead of Bolsonaro at 54% to 46%. Voting is obligatory in Brazil, but the fine is minimal – far less than the cost of transportation for Brazilians who live in remote areas or can barely scrape together the cost of a bus ticket. That's a lot of people—a recent study by the Fundación Getulio Vargas, 23 million live in poverty—more than 7 million more than 2020. In the first round. The fight in the run-off has been for the large but now greatly narrowed number of undecideds and the 31% who did not vote. A larger turnout favors Lula, who is far more likely to have the support of those for whom voting is more difficult. I can't recall a more joyful campaign event—in any country. AMLO's marches were huge and confident and in the spontaneous outpouring after Petro's election on the streets from Suarez to Cali driving back on election night, Colombians danced and took over the streets. But here it's still the day before the elections and already the passion of victory over a truly dangerous rival has taken over. Nothing is assured and the reports of vote buying, and other tactics from the far rights bag of dirty tricks have grown in recent days. But if current estimates hold, it's an easy bet that we'll see the largest public outpouring in the nation's history after election results are in.