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**After Jair: Can Flávio Carry
the Bolsonaro Movement to Victory?**

By

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29 September 2026

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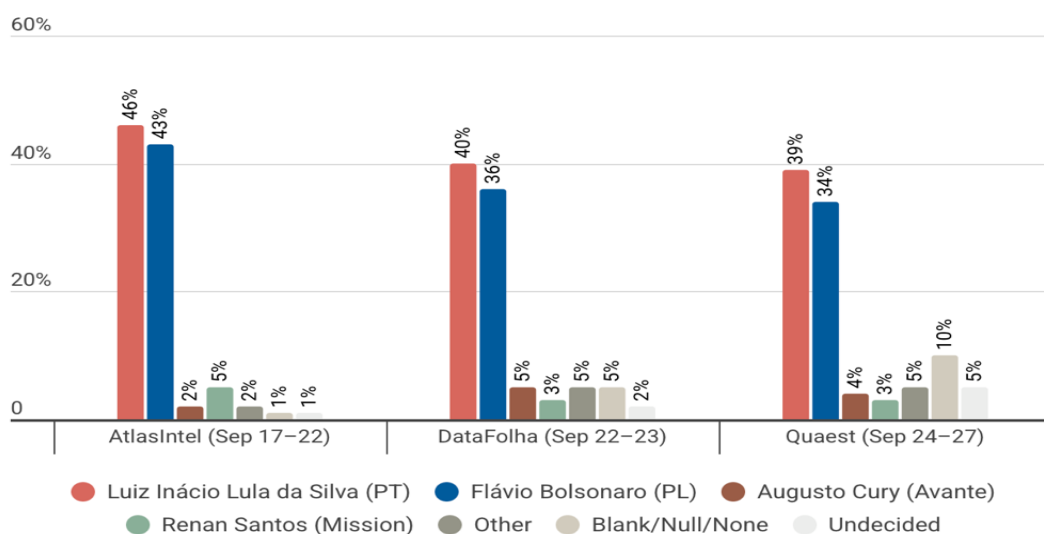
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Executive Summary

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- ✦ Brazil goes to the polls on 4 October and the race is incredibly close. Every runoff poll published in the week of 14 September put President Lula and Senator Flávio Bolsonaro within the margin of error.
- ✦ Flávio was numerically ahead in most of them, despite running a single-party ticket with only four minutes of free time to advertise on television.
- ✦ The movement since July has largely been on Lula's side. His approval rating is at its lowest point of the year and has fallen in the Northeast, while the Banco Master scandal appears to have become a wider indictment of the political class that the incumbent is absorbing.
- ✦ Public security is the main policy area in which Flávio has an advantage over Lula, and it ranks highly among voters' concerns.
- ✦ The polling margin obscures several weaknesses in Flávio's campaign. He has no coalition, faces around 50 per cent rejection and is dealing with a federal investigation, while other conservative candidates could divide the anti-Lula vote in the first round.
- ✦ Polls also understated the right's support in 2022, leaving reason to question how much confidence should be placed in polling at this stage.
- ✦ The Supreme Court is becoming even further politicised and remains a critical part of the election itself. The court that barred Jair Bolsonaro from standing and later convicted him is now a central target of both campaigns, making amnesty for those convicted over the January 2023 attacks a shared promise across the right.
- ✦ Two-thirds of the Senate will also be elected on the same day, making the composition of Congress part of the same political contest and extending the issue beyond the presidential vote.

Key Picture: Voter Intention across the Polls



Source: [AS-COA](#)

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1. The Race Since July

On 21 July 2026, the editor of *Americas Quarterly* wrote that the Bolsonaro family had never looked more vulnerable.¹ Flávio Bolsonaro, running in place of his father convicted of plotting a coup, had been recorded asking a jailed banker for money, had been denounced on video by his stepmother, and had watched the United States impose a new 25 per cent tariff on Brazil that voters blamed on his family; Quaest had Lula seven points clear in a runoff. Two months later, four polls published in the week of 14 September put Flávio level with or ahead of the president.² The change appears to have come less from his campaign than from the deterioration in Lula's position and the growing political significance of the Supreme Court.

Jair Bolsonaro was sentenced on 11 September 2025 to 27 years and three months, imprisoned in November after tampering with his ankle monitor, and moved to humanitarian house arrest in March 2026; the justice supervising his sentence extended that regime on 3 July.³ In May, Congress overrode a presidential veto to cut the sentences of everyone convicted over the plot; the court has yet to apply the change to him.⁴ He endorsed his eldest son on 5 December 2025, passing over the São Paulo governor whom the centre-right parties preferred.⁵ Those parties then declined to join the ticket: the four main centre-right parties stayed neutral for the first round, and Flávio registered a PL-only slate on 13 August with a running mate chosen after the women he approached declined.⁶ This single party strategy has left him with around four minutes of free television time in the electoral advertising block.⁷

2. Why the Polls Moved

Lula's approval is at its lowest point of the year and is falling in the Northeast, the region that carried him to victory in 2022.⁸ About half of voters say they would not vote for him under any circumstances, and the same is true of Flávio.⁹ Thomas Traumann's reading is that independents decide in the last weeks and choose the candidate they dislike least, and an incumbent with a record is easier to dislike, potentially pointing at the possibility of additional last minute support for Flávio.¹⁰

The Banco Master collapse gave voters something specific to judge. Daniel Vorcaro's bank failed in November 2025, and the police reports and phone records released since have placed him in contact with senators from both blocs, at least one Supreme Court justice and senior law-enforcement officials.¹¹ There is no evidence, however, that Lula or his campaign took anything from Vorcaro. When a scandal reaches every branch of the state, voters tend to read it as evidence that the whole system is corrupt, and Lula ran in 2022 as the defender of that system against a coup. Nexo's analysis posits that it is this positioning which won him the last election that is now costing him this one.¹²

Public security is the other key voter issue. Polling this year has found voters trust Lula more than Flávio in most areas of government, with public security and drug trafficking the exceptions, but it is those very exceptions which voters rank of most importance.¹³ Flávio chairs the Senate's public security committee, has promised five maximum-security prisons on the Salvadoran model and a narco-terrorist designation for the gangs, and chose a former state security secretary as his running mate.¹⁴ Lula's anti-organised-crime plan arrived on 12 May, late enough that it was read largely as a response to the opposition's agenda rather than an area of pressing concern for him.¹⁵

3. What the Polls Do Not Show

Flávio's campaign is thin by the standards of previous Brazilian front-runners and the polls fail to show his structural fragility. He faces a first round in which Ronaldo Caiado, Renan Santos and the self-help author Augusto Cury are dividing conservatives who want Lula out but do not want another Bolsonaro.¹⁶ Conservative legislators and business figures told *Americas Quarterly* in July that the family was wasting its best chance in a decade.¹⁷

He is also associated with corruption scandals he is campaigning broadly against on principle. Leaked audio from May has him asking Vercaro for money to finish a biopic of his father; the fund behind the film received about US\$12 million, and he is under federal investigation for corruption and money laundering. He denies wrongdoing and no charge has been brought but this remains an area of voter significance.¹⁸ The tariffs and broader US/Brazil relations are a second exposure. He met the US president in the Oval Office on 26 May and asked the US Trade Representative in July to delay the new levy until after the election; the request was refused, and Quaeset found more Brazilians blamed him than Lula for the outcome.¹⁹ This led a surge of voters to move their votes back to the incumbent.

4. The Supreme Court and the Senate

The institutions that barred Jair Bolsonaro from office and later convicted him have become central to the campaign. The Supreme Court has become a central campaign issue, with Flávio attacking its authority while Lula has been forced to defend parts of its record while calling for judicial reform. Flávio said on 28 August that he would pursue an amnesty for his father during the transition, before taking office, and on 19 September repeated his call for Alexandre de Moraes to leave the court.²⁰ In the same week Lula accused André Mendonça, the justice handling the Master case, of "doing politics" with selective leaks to the press, and called for judicial reform.²¹ The two justices are also in open dispute with one another, further adding public flames to the fire as Mendonça sent the police report naming Moraes to the full court, and Moraes accused him in return of bias.²²

The court's position, however, does not depend on who wins the presidency and is likely to be reformed regardless. Indeed, amnesty for the coup plotters is a promise across the right: Caiado, the establishment's preferred candidate, said on 30 March that it would be his first act in office.²³ Two-thirds of the Senate is elected on 4 October, and Traumann's estimate is that a right-wing majority there would have the votes to impeach justices, whoever is president.²⁴

Much like prevailing trends in contemporary electoral politics, the legitimacy of the count itself is now part of the argument. Flávio told a room of ambassadors on 21 July that Brazil's voting machines were Venezuelan, which the electoral court corrected; he has since said he will accept the result; and on 17 September he announced a recruitment drive for volunteers to monitor the machines at closing time, just as his father's campaign did in 2022.²⁵ If the margin on 25 October is a point or two either way, readers should expect the losing side to challenge the process more aggressively. In what would be a remarkable turn of events, any resolution would then depend on the judgement of the Supreme Court justices whom both campaigns have spent the year attacking.

5. The Verdict

The Bolsonaro movement has transferred enough of its support to Flávio to put the presidency within reach, but it has not yet replaced Jair as the centre of the coalition and the question remains whether Flávio can assume this helm with the same authority. Flávio has gained recently as Lula has weakened, while conservative candidates outside the family continue to hold part of the right. His 47 per cent rejection rate is the same as Lula's, and the first-round vote will determine whether he can consolidate enough of the anti-Lula electorate to make the current runoff numbers actualise.

The first round of voting on October 4th will reveal much. If Flávio emerges with the conservative vote largely consolidated behind him, the current runoff numbers will have a stronger foundation. If the right remains divided, his position will look less like a durable Bolsonaro succession and instead simply a product of Lula's weakening. Either way, Jair's exclusion has not removed his movement from the election but it remains to be seen whether it can be carried forward without him.

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