

## Opinion: Where is 'my' Brazil?



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Commentary

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**Brazil's runoff election highlights the extent of the political divide. But Astrid Prange de Oliveira, for whom the country is a second home, believes that the rifts can be overcome.**



Incumbent Jair Bolsonaro faces his challenger, Lula da Silva, in the runoff on Sunday

Image: Ueslei Marcelino/REUTERS

Is this still "my" Brazil? The country of human warmth, exuberance, and joie de vivre, for which I have come to feel such affection? The country where I lived for eight years, gave birth to two children, and found the love of my life?

I ask myself this, because Brazil has changed. For four years now, President Jair Messias Bolsonaro has been in power. And for four years the country has shown a disturbing side of itself, one that is anything but life-affirming.

Four years ago, and again in the first round of this election, millions of people voted for a man who has never made any secret of his contempt for humanity. Sentences like "The great mistake the **military dictatorship** made in Brazil was to torture instead of kill," or "My sons are not in danger of becoming gay or having a Black girlfriend, because they've been well brought up" say it all.

### The other Brazil

His description of COVID-19 as a "**little flu**," and his comment on the death toll from the pandemic — "So? I'm sorry about it. But what am I supposed to do? My name may be Messias [Messiah], but I don't perform miracles!" — show irresponsibility and lack of empathy. More than 600,000 people have died in the pandemic in Brazil.

The list of these disturbing quotes goes on and on. On October 30, Bolsonaro will face his challenger, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in a runoff election. According to the latest poll, conducted by the polling institute DataFolha on October 27, it will be neck-and-neck. Lula is currently polling at 49%, with the incumbent, Bolsonaro, on 44%.

However, regardless of the outcome of **Sunday's election**, the poll shows that the population of Brazil does not consist solely of people who identify with the values and policies of this self-proclaimed patriot, despite his dominance of the news coverage.



DW's Astrid Prange De Oliveira

Image: Florian Görner/DW

## "Way out of hell"

In the first ballot on October 2, 51 million people (43%) voted for Bolsonaro, and 57 million (48%) for Lula. A Brazilian friend of mine sums up the current mood in many parts of the country as follows: "Lula is certainly not the gate to paradise, but he is the way out of hell."

Sad but true: For the past four years, many of my Brazilian friends have felt as if they were living in hell. Almost all of them have lost relatives in the COVID-19 pandemic. Their children have emigrated, because they cannot see a future for themselves in Brazil at the moment.

Many Brazilians are exhausted by the human tragedies, the political manipulation, the growing poverty. They want a return of hope and human empathy; they want the vilification and abuse of political opponents to cease, and the flood of fake news to subside.

They want the infiltration and discrediting of democratic institutions to stop. And they want an end to the idealization, at the highest level, of Brazil's military dictatorship — including regular hints about the possibility that the generals might return.

## Fighting to preserve democratic rights

In 1989, the year I emigrated to Brazil, millions of people took to the streets to demand free elections. They achieved their goal. On November 15, 1989, Brazil held the **first free elections** after the end of the military dictatorship.

Over the past four years, many Brazilians have been demonstrating once again for the preservation of democratic rights and institutions—despite being subjected to great hostility. I admire them for their perseverance, their capacity for suffering, and their endurance. This is "my" Brazil. After four years of Bolsonaro, it does still exist, thanks to their efforts.

Like many Brazilians, I am sometimes at odds with the country, and sometimes I feel I am becoming estranged from my second home. I fear for "my" Brazil. I miss it a great deal.

*This article has been translated from German.*

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