

# THE DIALOGUE

## Latin America Advisor

[www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org)

Friday, April 10, 2026

## BOARD OF ADVISORS

**Merike Blofield**Professor of Political Science,  
University of Hamburg**Joyce Chang**Global Head of Research,  
JPMorgan Chase & Co.**Marlene Fernández**Corporate Vice President for  
Government Relations,  
Arcos Dorados**Peter Hakim**President Emeritus,  
Inter-American Dialogue**Donna Hrinak**Director,  
Covista**Jon E. Huenemann**Council Member,  
GLG Inc.**James R. Jones**Chairman,  
Monarch Global Strategies**Craig A. Kelly**Senior Director, Int'l Gov't Relations,  
Exxon Mobil**John Maisto**Director,  
U.S. Education Finance Group**Nicolás Mariscal**Chairman,  
Grupo Marhnos**Thomas F. McLarty III**Chairman,  
McLarty Associates**Ernesto Revilla**Head of Latin American  
Economics, Citi**Gustavo Roosen**President,  
IESA**Andrés Rozental**President,  
Rozental & Asociados

## FEATURED Q&amp;A

## What Factors Are Driving Brazil's Presidential Race?



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is seeking to fend off a challenge this year from Senator Flávio Bolsonaro (L-R), the son of his former opponent. // File Photos: Brazilian Gov't via Flickr [CC BY-ND 4.0](#), Agência Senado via Flickr [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Q** Brazilian opposition Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, former President Jair Bolsonaro's son, has risen to draw even with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in recent opinion polls ahead of this October's election. The development points to a competitive race, similar to the 2022 election, in which Lula defeated Jair Bolsonaro by less than two percentage points. What is driving Flávio Bolsonaro's rapid rise in the polls? What factors between now and the election will decide the outcome? What do these dynamics suggest about Brazil's broader political landscape, including the prospects for polarization, the role of third-way candidates and the potential for shifts among key voter blocs?

**A** Thais Pavez, political scientist and director of *Estratégia Política Consultoria*: "Until recently, there was distrust toward the sons of Jair Bolsonaro among his more moderate voters—especially around issues like corruption—but Flávio Bolsonaro was progressively legitimized within the bolsonarista camp, evidencing the resilience of this political field despite the imprisonment of its main leader. This projects a more hard-fought electoral scenario, leaving little room for a third way. The polarization seen since the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 remains a structuring axis of Brazil's political system. It involves the consolidation of political identities marked by mutual rejection. Within the bolsonarista camp, the anti-Workers' Party stance is key. Flávio Bolsonaro's candidacy represents at once continuity and an attempt at renewal. On the one hand, he embodies the maintenance of the bolsonarista camp and has already demonstrated a capacity to mobilize

Continued on page 3

## TODAY'S NEWS

## ECONOMIC

### Venezuela Approves Opening Mining Sector to Investment

Venezuela's National Assembly on Thursday unanimously approved legislation to open the mining sector to foreign investment.

Page 2

## ECONOMIC

### Ecuador to Impose 100% Tariffs on Imports From Colombia

Ecuador's government on Thursday announced that it will impose tariffs of 100 percent on imports from Colombia, saying the neighboring country has failed to implement adequate border security measures.

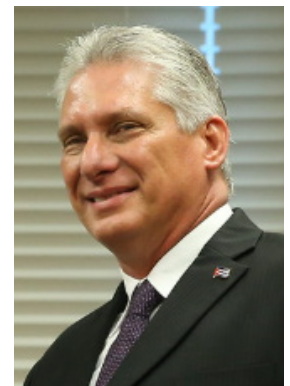
Page 3

## POLITICAL

### Cuba's Díaz-Canel Insists He Won't Step Down

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said Thursday in an interview with NBC News that he will not step down despite pressure from the United States.

Page 2



Díaz-Canel // File Photo: Spanish Gov't via Flickr [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Cuba's Díaz-Canel Insists in Interview He Won't Step Down

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said Thursday in an interview with NBC News that he will not step down despite pressure from the United States. "Stepping down is not part of our vocabulary," Díaz-Canel told Meet the Press host Kristen Welker in an interview in Havana. "In Cuba, the people who are in leadership positions are not elected by the U.S. government, and they don't have a mandate from the U.S. government. We have a free sovereign



**Stepping down is not part of our vocabulary."**

— Miguel Díaz-Canel

state, a free state. We have self-determination and independence, and we are not subjected to the designs of the United States," he added. The interview came amid pressure from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, which has blocked almost all of Cuba's imports of oil, leading to an increasing frequency of blackouts and worsening the country's already severe shortages of basic goods including food. Trump has called Cuba a "failing nation" and said last month that he believes he will be "having the honor of taking Cuba." Trump last week allowed a tanker loaded with 730,000 barrels of Russian oil to dock in Cuba, a supply that could last about a month. In mid-March, The New York Times cited unnamed people familiar with the talks between the two governments in reporting that the Trump administration wants Díaz-Canel to be pushed out of office. The Cuban president, however, has "has no real office from which to be removed, and Trump knows this, so he has made it clear that he doesn't want to deal with him at all," Carlos Eire, a professor of history and religious studies at Yale University, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#)

published April 3. "Díaz-Canel has always been a mere figurehead, totally devoid of charisma, nothing more than a gruff and highly disposable puppet. Real power resides in the Castro dynasty and those members of the military junta trusted by them," Eire added.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Venezuela Approves Opening Mining Sector to Investment

Venezuela's National Assembly on Thursday unanimously approved legislation to open the South American country's mining sector to foreign investment, Bloomberg News reported. Acting President Delcy Rodríguez presented the bill before the legislature shortly after U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum visited Venezuela last month. The bill, which Rodríguez is expected to sign into law, caps taxes for foreign mining firms operating in Venezuela at 6 percent of gross revenue and allows for 30-year mining concessions. It also permits international arbitration in the event of investment disputes, a key shift from Venezuela's active legal framework for the mining sector that was implemented in 1999, the Associated Press reported. Language in the bill passed on Thursday still allows for Venezuela's government to impose "special conditions" for resources or areas deemed to be of national interest, Bloomberg News reported. Rodríguez's government has highlighted extractive industries, specifically hydrocarbons and mining, as the country's principal engines of economic growth in the short and medium terms, the AP reported. Venezuela's "geological upside is large and competition remains limited" for multinational firms, Alejandro Valerio, founder of Valerio Consulting Group, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published March 20. "Still, obstacles are significant: sanctions snapback risk, weak institutions, security concerns in mining zones, illegal armed actors, environmental liabilities and a legacy of expropriations," Valerio added. Illicit gold mining activities in Venezuela

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Peruvians Head to Polls Sunday to Elect President, Congress

Peruvians will head to the polls on Sunday to select a new president among several candidates in a crowded field as well as members of Congress. Right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori has led polls, but no candidate has close to the 50 percent support required to avoid a runoff.

## Police in Caracas Block Protesters Demanding Higher Wages

Venezuelan police officers on Thursday disrupted a march of union leaders, pensioners and public sector workers that was headed toward the presidential palace in Caracas, the Associated Press reported. The protesters had planned to demand higher wages and pension payments from acting President Delcy Rodríguez, who on Wednesday said her government would raise Venezuela's minimum wage beginning on May 1 but gave few details of the plan, the AP reported. "Call for elections and leave," a union leader said of Rodríguez to the wire service on Thursday.

## Fire Reported at Pemex's Dos Bocas Oil Refinery

Part of Mexican state-run oil firm Pemex's Dos Bocas refinery in Tabasco state caught fire on Thursday, marking the second blaze in the past month at the firm's newest refinery, Reuters reported. An emergency response team extinguished the fire on Thursday, and Pemex reported no injuries. Last month, five people were killed after "oily waters" around the refinery's perimeter burst into flame, Reuters reported. The Dos Bocas refinery, also known as the "Olmecca" complex, was among the flagship projects executed by the administration of former Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

generated more than \$4 billion in revenue in 2023, according to a report from the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. The legislation passed on Thursday establishes prison sentences for people who participate in illegal mining activities and harshens legal penalties for environmental destruction, the AP reported.

## Ecuador to Slap Colombian Goods With 100% Tariffs

Ecuador's government announced Thursday that it will impose tariffs of 100 percent on imports from Colombia in an escalation of the trade war between the two countries, Reuters reported. President Daniel Noboa's government said Colombia has failed to implement adequate border security measures. "After confirming Colombia's failure to implement concrete and effective border security measures, Ecuador is compelled to take sovereign action," Ecuador's government said in a statement. The tariff hike, up from a level of 50 percent, will take effect May 1, the government added. Colombia, which in February announced it would increase its tariffs on Ecuadorean goods to 50 percent, did not immediately announce a retaliation on Thursday, but officials blasted Ecuador's move on social media. "This is simply a monstrosity," Colombian President Gustavo Petro said in a post on social media site X. Colombian Energy Minister Edwin Palma said in a post on X that Quito's decision to impose 100 percent tariffs was "a clear aggression against brotherly peoples who have historically walked together." Palma added, "Amid a complex energy situation, with power cuts already affecting millions of Ecuadoreans, it is even more concerning that President Daniel Noboa opts for confrontation and acts with arrogance, rather than advancing toward shared solutions that ensure energy security for the region." Colombia's government has repeatedly denied Ecuador's assertions that it is failing to cooperate adequately on security, noting that it operates joint counter-narcotics operations with Ecuador.

### FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

its most loyal core, reinforcing conservative agendas. On the other hand, there is an attempt to soften his image and broaden his reach among undecided or moderate voters. Flávio Bolsonaro also incorporates elements of renewal within bolsonarismo, in line with the rise of politicians that combine politics, entrepreneurship and savvy digital language. Among the decisive factors until the elections, the following stand out: 1.) Flávio Bolsonaro's ability to reduce his public disapproval and project himself as a less radical leadership; 2.) the management of internal tensions within bolsonarismo, especially between its more ideological wing and sectors linked to the business community and the financial system; and 3.) the impact of issues related to corruption, which may both wear down candidacies and reinforce anti-system sentiments among certain segments of the electorate."

**A** **Julio E. Ligorria, senior director of public relations and government affairs at Roar Media:** "Flávio Bolsonaro's rise is mostly a story about Lula's decline. His father's endorsement consolidated a loyal base of 20 to 25 percent almost overnight, but the gains beyond that reflect anti-incumbent anger more than personal appeal. Food inflation hit 8 percent in 2024, damaging Lula's standing despite a sharp deceleration to 1.4 percent in 2025. Household debt now reaches 80 percent of Brazilian families with 29 percent of monthly income going to debt service. A Genial/Quaest survey in early March put Lula's approval at 44 percent with 59 percent saying he does not deserve another term. And in a first for Lula, women disapprove of his administration more than they approve of it. The Banco Master scandal has compounded the damage, pulling in supreme court justices and central bank officials from both Bolsonaro and Lula eras and leaving voters convinced the political class has failed across the board. Between now and October, the outcome hinges on

whether Flávio can assemble a credible economic team and whether São Paulo Governor Tarcísio de Freitas wins re-election easily, making him Flávio's most powerful national surrogate in the final stretch. One risk Flávio's camp is not talking about is his unresolved corruption case in Rio de Janeiro, where prosecutors charged him with running a salary kickback scheme as a state deputy. If it resurfaces during the campaign, Lula gains a corruption weapon against the Bolsonaro name that mirrors what the right has used against the Workers' Party for years. With more than 80 percent of first-round votes going to the two front-runners, there is little oxygen for third-way candidates. The race will be decided by a narrow band of voters who dislike both options, choosing based on which side they fear less."

**A** **Thomas Traumann, journalist and political risk consultant:** "Brazil is experiencing a calcified polarization, a divide that cuts across politics and splits society not only in terms of state projects, but also in values and beliefs. It is a polarization similar to that seen in the United States. The eldest son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro quickly rose in the polls as soon as his father confirmed him as a candidate. Although he has no administrative experience and avoids presenting even a draft of an economic program, Flávio is tied with President Lula in polls simply for being the heir to bolsonarismo. So far, Flávio Bolsonaro's only message is that he is not Lula. For now, that is enough. But it remains an open question how he will navigate the campaign once the public is reminded of his involvement in corruption cases in Rio de Janeiro. Now in his third term, Lula, 80, is showing signs of political wear and tear. His Workers' Party has governed Brazil for 18 of the past 24 years. This third term has delivered solid economic indicators: average growth of 2.7 percent, unemployment at its lowest level in decades and wages rising

Continued on page 4

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 3

above inflation. These macroeconomic figures, however, have not translated to government popularity—a majority of the population disapproves of the administration. A crisis of affordability, along with household debt and high interest rates, have created a sense of unease that the Lula administration has yet to address. Lula and Jair Bolsonaro inspire both love and hatred in equal measure, and the fact that a son of the former president is among the candidates eliminates any possibility of a third contender. As in 2022, this is likely to be a race defined by rejection. It is reasonable to assume that the result will be as close as in 2022, when Lula won by 2.1 million votes out of a total of 118.5 million.”

**A** **Mariano Machado, principal analyst for the Americas at Verisk Maplecroft:** “Six months out, Flávio Bolsonaro is rising in the polls because the right settled on inheritance over reinvention. Jair Bolsonaro’s family managed to block a cleaner succession and kept the brand in-house throughout, with Flávio offering a less abrasive public style than his father. Once the polls showed a dead heat with Lula, Brasília took note: The Liberal Party rebuilt its strength as legislators switched sides and moved back above 100 deputies, while Congress began treating Lula as beatable rather than assured of victory. The election will hang on whether Lula can turn macroeconomic stability into a feeling of well-being among voters. Inflation has eased and unemployment is low, yet most Brazilians still say their income is not keeping pace with prices. That gap is lethal, and Lula knows it—hence the government’s push on diesel subsidies, debt renegotiation and consumer relief. But the window is narrow: High-profile corruption cases, electorally mandated cabinet departures and continuing friction between the presidency, Congress and the judiciary have further reduced the government’s room for clean execution. Brazil’s centrão can swing the election either

way but cannot contest it. Third-way candidates matter more as bargaining assets than as plausible presidents. Goiás Governor Ronaldo Caiado’s presidential candidacy under the PSD might help his party to build a larger congressional bench, but it does not yet offer a real route to the presidency. The major battleground is Minas Gerais, Brazil’s second-largest voting state and, since 1998, the nation’s political bellwether. Lula’s push to get Senator Rodrigo Pacheco onto the Minas gubernatorial ticket—de facto in charge of his fourth presidential bid in the state—is telling in this respect.”

**A** **Pedro Frago Pires, foreign legal consultant at Diaz, Reus & Targ, LLP:** “The same factors that drove the Brazilian population to bring Lula back straight from prison in 2022 may bring Bolsonaro’s family back to power in 2026. Unsatisfaction with the current administration and high levels of corruption are driving Flávio Bolsonaro’s rapid rise in the polls. Many people did not vote for their candidate of preference in the latest election, but rather against the other candidate. Factors between now and the election that will decide the outcome are the ability of right-leaning political parties to join forces toward only one candidacy and not compete among themselves, the outcome of the Banco Master investigation and the expected cooperation agreement to be entered into by its controlling shareholder, Daniel Vorcaro, the outcome of an investigation on social security administration fraud and an anticorruption agenda. The dynamics suggest we will see the same polarization of the last presidential election. Third-way candidates want to take advantage of those voters who cannot stand the polarization anymore and this may affect Lula and/or Flávio Bolsonaro.”

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.*

## LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue ISSN 2163-7962

**Gene Kuleta**  
Editor

**Jack Quinn**  
Reporter

**Luiza Franco**  
Reporter



**Rebecca Bill Chavez, Ph.D.,** President & CEO

**Lila Abed,** Director, Mexico Program

**Alfonso Blanco,** Director, Energy Transition & Climate Program

**Margaret Myers,** Senior Advisor, Asia & Latin America Program

**Manuel Orozco,** Director, Migration, Remittances and Development Program

**Bruna Santos,** Director, Brazil Program

**Peter Hakim,** President Emeritus

**Latin America Advisor** is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005 [www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org)

The opinions expressed by the members of the Board of Advisors and by guest commentators do not necessarily represent those of the Inter-American Dialogue. The analysis is the sole view of each commentator and does not necessarily represent the views of their respective employers or firms. The information in this report has been obtained from reliable sources, but neither its accuracy and completeness, nor the opinions based thereon, are guaranteed. If you have any questions relating to the contents of this publication, contact the editorial offices of the Inter-American Dialogue. Contents of this report may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted without prior written permission from the Inter-American Dialogue.

