

Two Ballots, Two Days Apart

Words spoken from the rostrum in New York do not stay in New York.

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Published 6 October 2026

On Sunday 25 October, Brazilians go back to the polls. Two days later, on Tuesday 27 October, Israelis vote for the 26th Knesset. Two democracies, two very different countries, and one question that runs through both: how a nation's choice shapes the way it stands with the Jewish people.

Brazil's first round on 4 October settled less than either camp hoped. In the final national count, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro of the Liberal Party won 56,104,503 votes, 47.03 percent of valid votes. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won 53,879,538, or 45.16 percent. Nobody crossed half, so the two men meet again in three weeks. Flávio carried 14 states and the Federal District; Lula led in 12. Between them they took more than nine in ten valid votes, so the runoff will be won at the margins.

For Israel, the gap between the two candidates could hardly be wider.

On 22 September, Lula opened the General Debate of the UN General Assembly, the tenth time he has done so. He said that generations of Palestinians would carry "the pain and trauma left by the genocide of women and children perpetrated by the Netanyahu government in Gaza." Brazil recalled its ambassador from Israel in 2024, and relations have stayed cold since.

Flávio has gone the other way. During a January visit to Israel that took him to the Western Wall, he told JNS: "I will move the embassy to Jerusalem during the first six months of my mandate." Since the first round, he has vowed to restore ties with Israel.

Between the two campaigns lives Brazil's Jewish community, the second largest in Latin America. In March, the Israelite Confederation of Brazil, Conib, published its report for 2025: 989 reported antisemitic incidents, down from the 2024 peak but 149 percent above the 397 recorded in 2022, the year before 7 October. About four in five took place online. Conib's own reading is the sobering part: after the war began, the hatred did not recede. It settled in.

Words spoken from the rostrum in New York do not stay in New York. They land on Instagram feeds in São Paulo and Rio, and they reach the Jewish child who has to walk into school the next morning.

Israel does not choose Brazil's president. Brazilians do, and they should. But Jews everywhere can do two things in these three weeks. We can insist on plain words: a war against Hamas is not a genocide, and saying so is not a matter of taste. And we can keep the instruction of the Mishnah: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for fear of it, people would swallow one another alive" (Avot 3:2). We pray for Brazil's peace, for the safety of its Jews, and for leaders on every continent who will speak the truth about Israel.

Two ballots, two days apart. On 25 October and on 27 October, may both nations choose wisely, and may the Jews of Brazil and of Israel be blessed with peace.

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