

[MUSIC PLAYING]

INTERVIEWER: Welcome to this Trending Globally explainer. I'm sitting with Professor Jim Greene who knows more about Brazil than practically anyone else we could find. And we're going to talk about the Brazilian elections. So Jim, the result's in. Tell us about it.

JIM GREENE: Well Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right candidate polled 55% of the votes, 57 million. And Fernando Haddad, representing the left, the Workers Party, and other supporters, got 45% of the votes, about 47 million. So Bolsonaro is the new president of Brazil.

INTERVIEWER: So why did the Workers Party not do as well as it done in the past, particularly because Bolsonaro has been quite explicit on basically what he wants to do to leftist personally, and what he wants to do it the public policy. You would think that the people that have benefited from Bolsa Familia and other programs would be motivated to get out more.

JIM GREENE: So I think many people who did benefit were motivated to get out, and they did vote, and they vote clearly in favor of Haddad. He did very well in the Northeast, which has historically been the most impoverished and most disadvantaged part of the country, and he did extremely well there. I think there are a lot of factors which led people to decide that Bolsonaro was their savior, including a strong discourse, a campaign against corruption, in which the Workers Party and other parties were involved.

Some people in those parties a fear that has been engendered within the population about violence and crime and his simplistic solutions to them. And a discrediting of the traditional politicians. Although, actually, if one would make that argument that they threw all the bums out, they actually didn't throw out the Workers Party because the Workers Party although lost seats in the Senate and a few seats in the Congress and the lower house, if you sum their votes with those of the party to the left of them, the party of socialism and liberty, they actually have about the same number of people in the Congress.

Bolsonaro's party, which went from 147 to 46 congresspeople is only represent only 10% of the Congress. So he has a lot of work ahead to sew together a working majority to get his legislation passed.

INTERVIEWER: So let's start there. So there is a presidential system. Someone from a minor party who is very

much a populist figure or has now won the presidency, but he doesn't command a congressional or parliamentary majority. There is no natural party for him with enough seats to get things through, is that right?

JIM GREENE: Right, and so there are two ways in which coalitions are built. One is wheeling and dealing within the Congress so that they can choose a speaker of the house that will represent in the lower, upper house a working majority, theoretically. And also the way that the president will hand out ministries to allies and other people in other political parties, and politicians are interested in heading ministries because there's a lot of plum jobs and appointments, political appointments for their advisers, the people that have worked with them.

So there are-- I'm not remembering this very moment, but there's Tens of thousands of political appointments within the administration that the president can affect by choosing certain ministers who then will choose the people in the lower level of the higher echelon of the bureaucracies.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't this the very definition of the corruption that he was railing against?

JIM GREENE: He would have argued that people took those positions and used them to get paybacks and put money into their pockets. In fact, the people that he will most likely be building his coalition with are the very people that have been under investigation for corruption in the centrist parties, the political parties in the center. So we're probably going to see several ministers, if not more than a few ministers who are actually under investigation for corruption.

However, people in Congress have investigative immunity. So while they're in Congress, they can't be condemned for crimes they've committed. So there's actually a reason why some people want to run for office because that gives them immunity from prosecution.

INTERVIEWER: So there's a tremendous irony here then basically, the car wash shakes loose corruption in these mainstream parties. The left party will I presume stand on principle and say we are not taking part in this coalition. And that creates a set of incentives for people who are deeply corrupt and publicly known to be slow to cooperate so they can get a job to protect them from prosecution.

JIM GREENE: In addition to that, to carry out the policies and the programs that they defend, which will include several things. Really implementing a very open door policy to foreign investment, encouraging foreign capital investment. It will include privatization of many state owned

industries and government entities. It will include opening the amazon to agro business and deforestation.

I would assume he will withdraw from the Paris Agreement. I will assume he will try to build close bilateral relations with Trump, although there will be problems with tariffs and issues about tariffs and trade there. He will carry out his promises to encourage the sale of firearms to anyone in the population, with no controls at all. He will try to pass a provision in which police who are involved in any shootings or have impunity from any investigation about the cause of their shooting, so that they cannot be investigated.

And since there's already been a strong tradition in Brazil of many innocent people presumed guilty for being black and therefore shot by the police before they can really determine what is really happening, this will just encourage the police to feel that they can shoot at will anyone who looks allegedly suspicious. It's a very serious moment for Brazil.

INTERVIEWER: Certainly sounds like it. I mean we want to here about the overreach of authority and police targeting certain groups in society, but this just seems to be a whole different scale.

JIM GREENE: It's going to be much, much worse. And in addition to that, he's promised to bring many military leaders into the government as head of ministries, so there will be a cabinet which will have many generals in them, which is something that people really fought against in the process of democratization after the military ruled from 1964 to 1985.

INTERVIEWER: So let's try and puzzle this through, apart from the left not doing well enough except in this one core strong hold. Other reasons behind this. You said earlier that the population had been inculcated with this fear of crime, but is the fear of crime real? Has it been increasing? Is it something that as a general concern?

JIM GREENE: So there is an increase in violence and crime. It's largely connected to two factors. The drug trade, the cocaine trade, and the dispute between different gangs to have control of poor communities, which are the places in which drugs are stored and sold and transported out of the country or through the country. There's also been high unemployment in the last two years with a deep recession, which has caused a lot of unemployment has led a lot of people to resort to crime as a way to survive.

So yes, this is a social problem, and I think that the Workers Party wasn't as effective as it could have been about offering solutions that really understands this is a global problem that

cannot be solved just by sending the army into the poor communities or giving impunity to officers who shoot to kill. But they didn't offer something that was tangible and immediate that people could hang onto I believe, so middle class and other people who have been victims of crime, I think saw these simple solutions as the way that the country could improve.

INTERVIEWER: So it's a bit of a natural experiment to happen. So advocates for continued freedom over let's say possession of firearms in the United States must be watching this one closely because you have a baseline amount of crime, there about to put a huge number of guns into circulation, we'll see if the crime rate goes down, which is what many of those people would hypothesize.

JIM GREENE: Right, and also we have to understand that there's a huge arms industry in Brazil, and an international arms industry, which is very interested in seeing the increase in the sale of arms because it's a billion dollar industry.

INTERVIEWER: Wow, who even knew. One last thing. I was reading something today about Costa Rica. So Costa Rica is everyone's favorite little social democracy on the estimates. But it turns out in 2017, they had a very, very contested and polarizing set of elections. And the piece that I read highlighted the role of evangelicals. Essentially, creating faith-based mini parties that blew up the party system. Stalled and needed budget reform and nearly sent them into bankruptcy.

We know that there's an evangelical component to the vote here, but I haven't really had it spoken about last time we spoke very usefully about the status anxiety of middle class and upper middle class white Brazilians about maids, et cetera. Can you say something about how evangelicals have changed Brazilian politics?

JIM GREENE: So until 30 years ago, Brazil was the largest Catholic country in the world. I think it still is, but the number of evangelicals has grown to 24% to 25% of the population. We see evangelicals, it's a mixed bag. It's both what we today in the United States we call them mainline Christians. Protestants, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Congregationalists, but also the Pentecostal movement, which is very much community-based, it's neighborhood-based, it's based with people who basically can rent out a hall and open up a church, and there are literally hundreds of thousands of these small churches.

Many of them offer real, spiritual responses to people's needs, and our social networks and support networks are very important in poor neighborhoods as a means of building community and support. Many of them are clearly money making businesses, where people take advantage of people's desire for religiosity and spirituality to get the 10% tithe and build

business. In the most egregious example of this is the Universalist Church of the Kingdom of God, which is a multi-billion dollar, international enterprise founded in Brazil, with churches. They've even constructed a alleged authentic copy of the Solomon's temple in Sao Paulo.

And they have taken over the second largest television broadcasting company. They endorsed Bolsonaro and throw their weight very heavily behind him. In addition to many other evangelical Christians. And so these are people very susceptible to issues of LGBTQ rights and to answer their previous question more fully about why Bolsonaro won. In part, this was due a very effective Whatsapp campaign. Whatsapp is an application that people use to communicate by telephone, cheaply or inexpensively or free. And they were able to send millions and millions and millions of these fake news about their opponent to create tremendous anxiety, especially among religious people, who then voted [INAUDIBLE] for Bolsonaro.

INTERVIEWER: So the dynamics of populism, violence, polarization, and fake news are not unique to the United States.

JIM GREENE: Not at all. In fact, Bolsonaro made a point of attacking the most important newspaper. The [INAUDIBLE] because they had reported on the fact that it seems that a large number of industrialists illegally give millions of dollars to these companies to pay for the generation of the fake news. And this is something that will need to be investigated, but he then launched out against the press, and in the same tone of Donald Trump. And it's no accident that Donald Trump immediately called him and congratulated him. They'll try to build a strong alliance.

INTERVIEWER: Who'd have thought we would end up in this race?

JIM GREENE: I certainly didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did not see this coming.

JIM GREENE: Well I saw it coming in the last three years, in the sense that clearly, the attempts to end the effective ability to impeach President [INAUDIBLE] for fake reasons and trumped up reasons that are really not justifiable. And the rise of the conservative right, the discrediting of politicians as a whole, and the international wave of right-wing governments in power, I think made this somewhat predictable.

INTERVIEWER: So in a sense, we have seen this one coming. It's just that we're attuned to the signals coming

from places like Western Europe, but we are really dealing with a truly global phenomenon.

JIM GREENE: It's a global phenomenon.

INTERVIEWER: We live in interesting times.

JIM GREENE: We do, and let's hope that we can see a quick return to democracy in Brazil. Real democracy, not the kind of democracy that can be chipped away at by Bolsonaro, and even the threat of a military intervention.

INTERVIEWER: Let's hope. Thanks for the shot, Jim.

JIM GREENE: Thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SARAH BALDWIN: This has been Trending Globally, politics and policy. If you enjoyed today's conversation, you can subscribe to the podcast on iTunes, SoundCloud, or Stitcher, or download us on your favorite podcasting app. If you like us, rate us, and help others who might enjoy the show find us. For more information, go to Watson.brown.edu.

[MUSIC PLAYING]