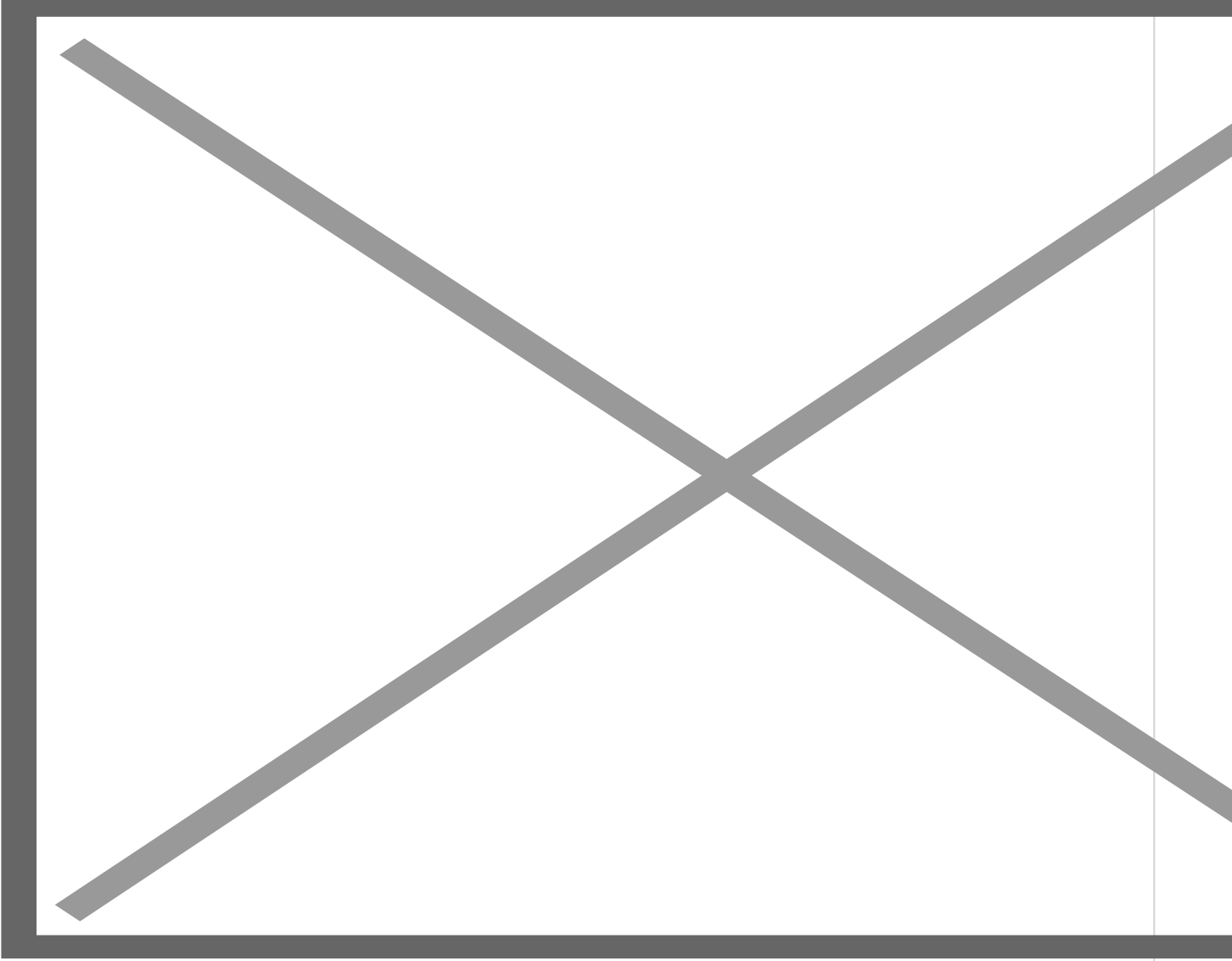


Brazilian Supreme Court rules judge who convicted Lula was biased

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A Supreme Court judge on March 8 annulled corruption convictions against ex-President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, opening the door for him to run in presidential elections next year [File: Amanda Perobelli/Reuters]

Brasilia, March 24 (RHC)-- The Brazilian Supreme Court has ruled that a judge was “biased” in convicting former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of corruption in 2017, in the latest victory for the left-wing leader. Justice Carmen Lucia on Tuesday reversed an earlier decision, swinging the majority 3-2 in Lula’s favor.

The Supreme Court determined that Judge Sergio Moro, who spearheaded a wide-reaching corruption probe known as Operation Car Wash, was not impartial.

The ruling comes after a Supreme Court judge on March 8th annulled the corruption convictions against Lula, citing a jurisdictional issue with the court that heard the case, and saying he must be retried in a court in Brasilia, the capital. That decision opens the door for Lula to run in presidential elections next year.

Tuesday’s Supreme Court ruling is an enormous blow for Moro, who spearheaded the corruption investigation, and it throws out evidence that could have been used against Lula in a new trial.

Lula and his supporters had accused the judge of conspiring to keep him out of the running for Brazil’s 2018 presidential elections. Lula was the frontrunner heading into that contest, which was ultimately won by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

Moro went on to accept the post of justice minister in Bolsonaro’s government – a fact some of the justices cited in ruling Moro biased.

Lula, who served as president from 2003 to 2010, has not yet confirmed his plans for a potential presidential run next year. During an event on March 10th, Lula said he would tour the country and speak with supporters before making a final decision.

“My head has no time to think about the 2022 candidacy,” Lula said at that time. “When the moment to discuss the 2022 candidacy comes we will have immense pleasure to announce to Brazil that we are thinking about 2022.”

Brazil is currently in the throes of a coronavirus crisis, as new infections and deaths are mounting rapidly and the country’s healthcare network is stretched to its limits. Bolsonaro, a COVID-19 sceptic who has downplayed the threat of the virus, has faced mounting pressure to account for his government’s handling of the situation.

To date, more than 295,000 people have died in Brazil due to the coronavirus, according to Johns Hopkins University data, while more than 12 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported.

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