

Brazil's Bolsonaro seeks big turnout on national day

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Brazilian President Bolsonaro is seeking to energise his base in rallies on national day [File: Eraldo Peres/AP Photo]

Brasilia, September 6 (RHC)-- Fighting record-low poll numbers, a weakening economy and a judiciary he says is stacked against him, President Jair Bolsonaro is calling for huge rallies for Brazilian independence day on Tuesday, seeking to fire up his far-right base.

With polls putting Bolsonaro on track to lose badly to left-wing leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in next year's presidential elections, Bolsonaro is hoping to use the rally to energise his supporters.

And September 7 is shaping up to be a turbulent day, with pro- and anti-Bolsonaro demonstrations scheduled in some of the country's biggest cities. "The time has come to declare our independence for good, to say we will not allow some people in Brasilia to impose their will on us," Bolsonaro told supporters last week in a speech. "The will that matters is yours."

His words -- "some people in Brasilia" -- were widely read as a reference to the Supreme Court, which has ordered a series of investigations into Bolsonaro and his inner circle, notably over allegations of systematically spreading fake news from within the government.

Bolsonaro has responded by declaring all-out political war on justices he perceives as hostile. He has signalled that the judges should consider Tuesday's rallies an "ultimatum" – the latest in a long list of ominous warnings aimed at the legislature and the courts.

Bolsonaro plans to attend rallies in both Brasilia and the economic capital Sao Paulo that day, which marks 199 years since Brazil declared independence from Portugal. The 66-year-old ex-army captain, who is often compared with former U.S. President Donald Trump, vowed to draw a crowd of more than two million to Sao Paulo's Avenida Paulista. That would be far bigger than his recent rallies, which have had turnout in the tens of thousands.

Bolsonaro is playing "all or nothing" in his fight with Brazi's legislature, the courts and the electoral system, said political scientist Geraldo Monteiro of Rio de Janeiro State University. Bolsonaro has alleged that there is a risk of massive fraud in next year's elections.

"Each side is looking to show what it's got in its arsenal. The Bolsonaro camp is putting everything they've got into these rallies," he told the AFP news agency. "The question is whether they'll get a significant number of people in the street. I think it will be a watershed moment. If the rallies are big, it will in some ways tip the scale in the president's favour. If they're not, the crisis will continue, but 'Bolsonarismo' might go into a downward spiral," he added, referencing a term used to describe the Brazilian president's ideological leanings.

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