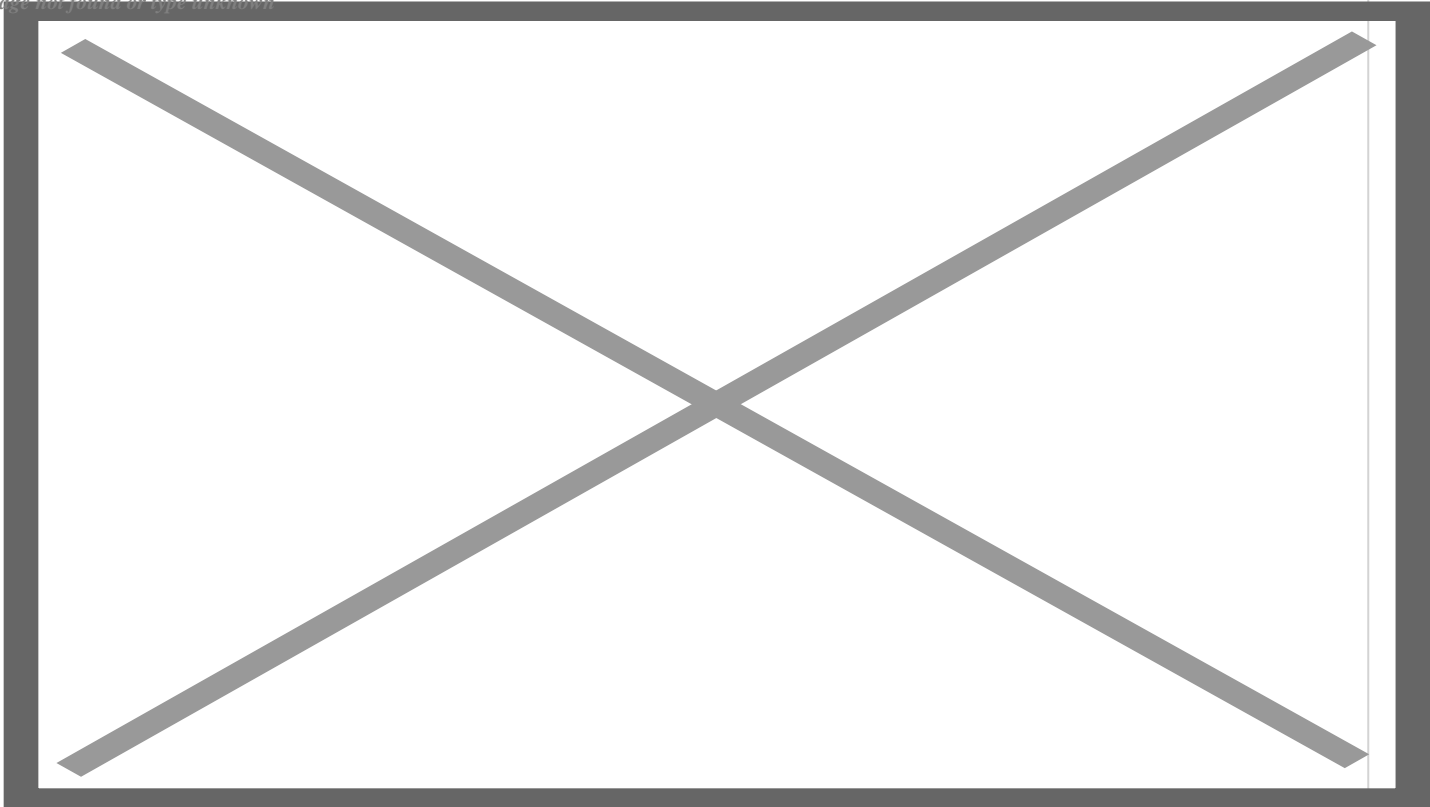


Brazilian police search Bolsonaro's condo in Brasilia

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Search operation at former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's home, in Brasilia?

Brasilia, May 3 (RHC)-- The Brazilian Federal Police on Wednesday searched the residence of former President Jair Bolsonaro and seized his cell phone, as part of an investigation into the falsification of COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

Preliminary investigations showed that the ultra-right-wing politician, as well as some members of his family and his advisers, manipulated COVID-19 certificates to obtain U.S. visas. Through a criminal organization that was dedicated to falsifying the Health Ministry's data, anti-vaxxers managed to issue certificates and use them to circumvent health restrictions imposed by both the U.S. and Brazil.

The president confirmed the search on his residence while speaking with reporters, as did his wife Michelle on her Instagram account. She said her phone wasn't seized, contrary to media reports.

The Federal Police's press office provided a statement saying officers were carrying out 16 searches and six arrests in Rio de Janeiro related to the introduction of fraudulent data related to the COVID-19 vaccine into the nation's health system.

Local media reported that the vaccine cards of Bolsonaro, his advisors and his family members were altered. During the pandemic, Bolsonaro spent months sowing doubt about the efficacy of the vaccine and defiantly refusing to get a shot. In September 2021, that prompted doubt about whether he would be able to attend the U.N.'s General Assembly in New York.

"There was no adulteration on my part, it didn't happen," Bolsonaro told reporters on Wednesday after the search. "I didn't take the vaccine, period. I never denied that."

The search adds to Bolsonaro's mounting legal headaches. Federal Police have questioned him at their Brasilia headquarters twice in the past month related to separate investigations — first, about three sets of diamond jewelry he received from Saudi Arabia and, second, regarding his potential role in sparking the January 8th uprising by his supporters in the capital.

Bolsonaro is also the subject of several investigations by Brazil's electoral court into his actions during the presidential election campaign, particularly his unsubstantiated claims that the nation's electronic voting system is susceptible to fraud. Those threaten to strip him of his political rights and render him unable to run for office in upcoming elections.

Separately, Bolsonaro and his allies are also facing a sprawling Supreme Court-led investigation regarding the spread of alleged falsehoods and disinformation in Brazil, and a federal police investigation for the alleged genocide of the Indigenous Yanomami people in the Amazon rainforest by encouraging illegal miners to invade their territory and thereby endangering their lives.

The police statement said that the insertion of false COVID-19 data occurred between November 2021 and December 2022, and enabled the people whose vaccine cards were altered to comply with the U.S. vaccine requirement to enter the country. The investigation indicates the objective was related to "ideological agendas" and meant to "sustain the discourse aimed at attacking the vaccine against COVID-19," the statement said.

For months, Bolsonaro insisted that the anti-malarial hydroxychloroquine was a treatment for COVID-19, despite a lack of robust medical evidence. At one point, the former president warned Brazilians that there would be no legal recourse against Pfizer for anyone suffering irreversible side effects. He also linked the vaccine to AIDS — an assertion rejected by doctors and scientists — prompting a justice of Brazil's top court to order his comments be investigated.

Brazil's pandemic death toll was the second-highest in the world. A congressional investigation determined Bolsonaro should be indicted for bungling the nation's COVID-19 response, including him insipiscing unproven treatments.

Bolsonaro recently returned to Brazil after several months outside Orlando, where he mostly kept a low profile aside from a few speaking engagements. This weekend, as he seeks to reclaim his position of influence in Brazil, he traveled to the interior of Sao Paulo state and appeared at a massive agriculture show.



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