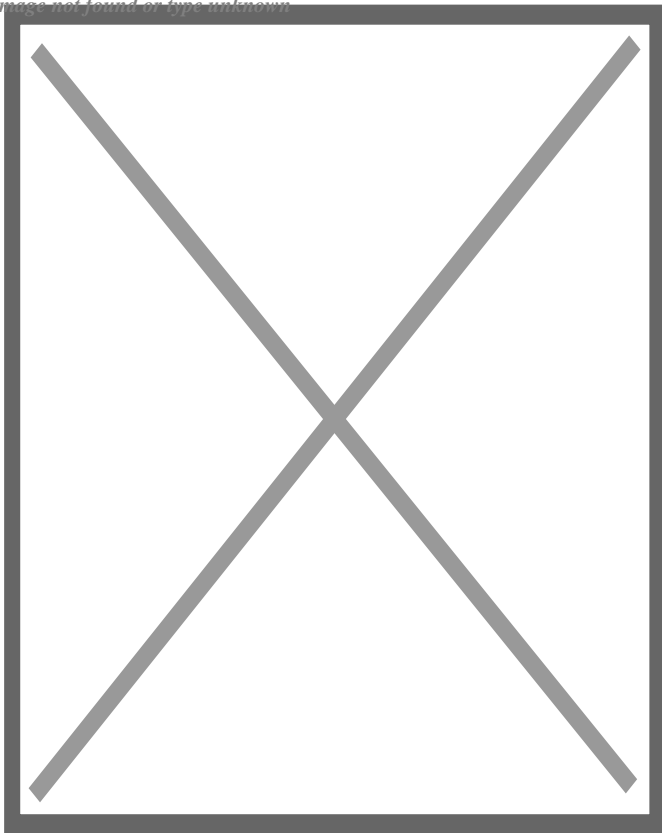


Brazilian police accuse ex-President Bolsonaro of involvement in coup attempt

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Ex-President Jair Bolsonaro purses his lips while watching a "Power of The People" event hosted by Turning Point USA

Brazil's former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro has denied any wrongdoing [File: Marco Bello/Reuters]

Brasilia, November 22 (RHC)-- Brazil's Federal Police have formally accused former President Jair Bolsonaro and several of his ex-ministers and aides of being involved in an attempted coup after the far-right leader lost an election in 2022. Police said in a statement on Thursday that Bolsonaro and 36 other people had planned the "violent overthrow of the democratic state."

Several Bolsonaro administration officials were accused of involvement, including former Defence Minister Walter Braga Netto, ex-National Security Adviser Augusto Heleno, former Justice Minister Anderson Torres and the head of Bolsonaro's Liberal Party, Valdemar Costa Neto.

The police findings were to be delivered to the Supreme Court to be referred to Prosecutor General Paulo Gonet, who will either agree with the charges and put the former president on trial or toss out the investigation. "The final report has been sent to the Supreme Court with the request that 37 individuals be indicted for the crimes of the violent overthrow of the democratic state, coup d'etat and criminal organization," the police statement said.

The case centers around an alleged conspiracy after Bolsonaro's narrow defeat to his left-wing rival Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in the 2022 presidential election. Bolsonaro, a former Brazilian army captain who served as president from 2019 to 2022, has denied any wrongdoing and said he is the victim of a political witch hunt.

In a statement shared on social media on Thursday, he vowed to mount a legal "fight" while accusing the Supreme Court judge in charge of the case of overstepping the law. Shortly after Lula took office in January 2023, thousands of Bolsonaro's supporters angered over the election results stormed the presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court in the capital, Brasilia.

The attack drew comparisons to the insurrection in the United States two years earlier, on January 6, 2021, when a group of then-U.S. President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol building in Washington, DC.

Some Brazilian protesters at the time said they wanted to create the conditions for a military coup, and there have long been questions about whether Bolsonaro — an admirer of Trump — was involved in instigating the riots. Brazilian police have said some of the accused planned to assassinate Lula before he took office.

Speaking to the Reuters news agency before Bolsonaro was formally accused of involvement in the coup attempt, one police source said the former president was aware of the alleged plot. Earlier this week, five people were arrested for suspected involvement in a plan to kill Lula and his vice president, Geraldo Alckmin.

Police said on Tuesday that most of the men under investigation in the alleged plot are military personnel with special forces training or close aides to Bolsonaro.

Separately, the former president has also been accused of being involved in smuggling diamond jewellery into Brazil without properly declaring it, and in directing a subordinate to falsify his and others' COVID-19 vaccination statuses — accusations he has denied.

In June of last year, the Supreme Court also ruled that Bolsonaro had abused his power to cast doubt on Brazil's electronic voting system in the lead-up to the 2022 election. It barred him from seeking public office until 2030. The far-reaching investigations have weakened Bolsonaro's status as a leader of the country's right wing, Carlos Melo, a political science professor at Insper University in Sao Paulo, told The Associated Press news agency.

"Bolsonaro is already barred from running in the 2026 elections," Melo said. "And if he is convicted he could also be jailed by then. To avoid being behind bars, he will have to convince Supreme Court justices that he has nothing to do with a plot that involves dozens of his aides. That's a very tall order."

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES]

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