

Police report proves Brazil's far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro plotted election coup in 2022



Brasilia, November 27 (RHC)-- Brazilian federal police have published a report implicating former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro in an alleged criminal organisation designed to overturn the 2022 presidential

election, won by his leftist challenger and current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The 884-page report, made public on Tuesday, outlined eight main pieces of evidence against Bolsonaro, including an alleged meeting he took with members of Brazil's armed forces to plan the coup.

"The evidence collected throughout the investigation shows unequivocally that then-President Jair Messias Bolsonaro planned, acted and was directly and effectively aware of the actions of the criminal organisation aiming to launch a coup d'etat and eliminate the democratic rule of law," the report explained.

Prior to its release, the report was sent to Brazil's top prosecutor, Paulo Gonet, who has yet to decide whether to bring charges against Bolsonaro. The report expands on bombshell accusations last week that Bolsonaro and 36 others conspired to retain power, even in the event of an electoral defeat.

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

The police accusations are the latest in a string of investigations and legal woes for Bolsonaro, who led Brazil from 2019 to 2022. Bolsonaro has denied all claims he tried to stay in office after his narrow electoral defeat in October 2022.

But already, his baseless claims about the accuracy of the election have prompted Brazil's Superior Electoral Court (TSE) to bar him from holding office again until 2030.

In the lead-up to the 2022 election, Bolsonaro made false and unsubstantiated claims on the campaign trail that Brazil's electronic voting machines could not be trusted, laying the groundwork for a contested election months before the first ballot was cast.

The race ended in a run-off, with Lula emerging ahead by just over 2.1 million votes. Experts called it the closest race since Brazil's return to democracy in the 1980s.

But Bolsonaro refused to publicly concede defeat, and his supporters took to the streets in protest. They blocked highways, attacked police headquarters in the capital Brasilia, and even were implicated in a bomb threat against the incoming president.

Tensions boiled over on January 8, 2023, a week after Lula was sworn into office. Thousands of Bolsonaro supporters descended on the Three Powers Plaza, a square in Brasilia that houses the presidential palace, the Supreme Court and both houses of Congress.

They broke into the government buildings, looting and destroying property in the apparent hope of sparking a "military intervention" that would remove Lula from power.

Critics of Bolsonaro have long questioned his role in the events, though Bolsonaro has staunchly denied participating.

Leaked recordings

But leaked audio recordings suggest high-ranking members of the Brazilian Army were involved in conspiring to keep Bolsonaro in power.

On Monday, The Associated Press obtained the audio recordings, which date from the weeks leading up to Lula's inauguration in late 2022. In the 53 recordings, some military officers can be heard expressing their desire to keep Lula from taking office.

One recording features Colonel Roberto Raimundo Criscuoli, a former sub-commander of the army's special forces. He tells retired Brigadier General Mario Fernandes — who was, at the time, second in command to the general secretary of the presidency — that Bolsonaro had a clear choice about how to respond to the election.

“It will be either a civil war now or civil war later. We have a justification now for civil war. People are on the streets. We have massive support,” Criscuoli said.

“Let's do this now. Speak to 01,” he said, using a code for Brazil's president.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who is overseeing the federal police's sprawling investigation into Bolsonaro, quoted some of the recordings in a ruling last week ordering the arrest of five people for plotting the assassination of then-President-elect Lula in late 2022.

Last week, Bolsonaro told the Brazilian news website Metropoles that police accusations were the result of “creativity,” not fact. He added his lawyers were reviewing the matter and would fight the accusations.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

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