

Prosecutors in Brazil charge ex-President Bolsonaro over alleged coup plot



Brasilia, February 20 (RHC)-- Brazilian authorities have charged the country's far-right former president, Jair Bolsonaro, and dozens of his supporters with attempting to stage a coup to overturn his 2022 election loss, the country's top prosecutor has announced.

Prosecutor General Paulo Gonet said on Tuesday that he had filed charges with Brazil's Supreme Court against Bolsonaro and 33 other people, including some former ministers and an ex-navy chief.

"The responsibility for acts harmful to the democratic order falls upon a criminal organisation led by Jair Messias Bolsonaro, based on an authoritarian project of power," the charging document stated.

Bolsonaro, a former army captain who served as president from 2019 to 2022, is unlikely to be arrested before his trial unless Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who is overseeing the case, deems him a flight risk.

The indictment marks the first time Brazilian authorities have charged the right-wing populist leader with a crime, and represents a new blow to the 69-year-old, who had been plotting his increasingly unlikely political comeback.

The charges come following a two-year Brazilian federal police investigation – which concluded in November – into Bolsonaro’s role leading an election-denying movement that culminated in thousands of his supporters rioting in the country’s capital, Brasilia, in January 2023.

The riots took place a week after leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office after narrowly defeating Bolsonaro in the 2022 national election.

Bolsonaro’s supporters stormed Brazil’s presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court in scenes reminiscent of the January 6, 2021 insurrection in Washington, DC, when United States President Donald Trump’s supporters stormed the Capitol building.

In their report, published in November, police accused Bolsonaro, along with 36 others, of planning the “violent overthrow of the democratic state”.

Among the Bolsonaro administration officials also accused of involvement were the head of his Liberal Party, Valdemar Costa Neto, as well as former Defence Minister Walter Braga Netto, ex-national security adviser Augusto Heleno and former Justice Minister Anderson Torres.

Bolsonaro, who has denied breaking any laws, has labelled allegations against him a politically motivated witch-hunt orchestrated by his opponents.

Two previous court decisions have blocked Bolsonaro from running for president in 2026, as judges ruled to bar him from holding public office until 2030 over his conduct following the 2022 election.

Also in November, Brazilian police accused five people of planning to assassinate President Lula and Vice President Geraldo Alckmin before they took office in December 2022.

Police said most of the men under investigation are military personnel with special forces training, or close aides to Bolsonaro.

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