

Brazil's Supreme Court announces it will try Jair Bolsonaro for coup attempt



Police officers stand near the Brazilian Supreme Court, as the court is expected to continue holding deliberations on whether former President Jair Bolsonaro and some of his closest aides should stand trial in Brazil [Adriano Machado/Reuters]

The former president has been accused of five crimes including attempting a coup d'état.

Brasilia, March 26 (RHC)-- Brazil's Supreme Court has ordered former President Jair Bolsonaro to stand trial on charges of attempting a coup d'état after failing to win the re-election in 2022.

Bolsonaro, a far-right former army captain who served as Brazil's president from 2019 to 2022, is accused of five crimes, including an alleged attempt to violently abolish the democratic rule of law. He has denounced the accusations against him as "grave and unfounded."

On Wednesday, a five-judge panel decided unanimously to put Bolsonaro on trial. If found guilty in the court proceedings, expected later this year, Bolsonaro could face a long prison sentence, further isolating him. He has not named a political heir.

In his opening remarks, Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who is overseeing the case, screened dramatic footage of Bolsonaro's supporters storming government buildings in violent scenes that unfolded just a week after the inauguration of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in January 2023.

Moraes added that Bolsonaro led "a systematic effort to cast doubt on the electronic voting machines" used in Brazil, part of his efforts to undermine the election he lost.

Reporting from Buenos Aires, Al Jazeera's Teresa Bo recalled the chaotic and violent scenes in January 2023, when Bolsonaro's supporters stormed the capital Brasilia, refusing to accept the new president's inauguration.

"A week after Lula was sworn in, we saw thousands of supporters of President Bolsonaro storming buildings in Brazil .. there were scenes of chaos in the capital ... around 1,500 people were detained," she said.

The Supreme Court began reviewing charges against Bolsonaro and seven of his closest allies on Tuesday in a session that Bolsonaro voluntarily attended, sitting silently in the first row in an echo of his ally, US President Donald Trump's trial last year.

In the run-up to the landmark court hearing, Bolsonaro called a beachfront rally in Rio de Janeiro, hoping to seize on Lula's waning popularity and pressure Congress to pass an amnesty bill favouring him and his jailed supporters.

The demonstration, which some allies suggested could draw more than a million backers, was widely considered a washout after two independent polling firms found that only between 20,000 and 30,000 people showed up.

Meanwhile, Bolsonaro has continued to insist that he will run for president again next year, despite a ruling by Brazil's Superior Electoral Court that barred him from running for public office until 2030 for his efforts to discredit the country's voting system.

Bolsonaro's handling of the COVID-19 crisis while president has also drawn intensive legal scrutiny.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and REUTERS]

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