

Bolsonaro says only God will take him out of Brazil's presidency

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Brasilia, September 8 (RHC)-- Hundreds of thousands of Brazilians rallied across the country on Tuesday in support of far-right populist President Jair Bolsonaro and his embattled administration, while calling for the removal of Supreme Court justices.

The demonstrations, encouraged by Bolsonaro who then verbally antagonised the court in speeches at two separate rallies, will likely exacerbate a crisis between the executive and the judiciary that has escalated in recent months.

“Either the head of this power gets in line or this power can suffer what we do not want,” the former army captain said at a demonstration in the capital Brasilia on Tuesday morning, in what was widely considered a threat against the court.

In recent months, the Supreme Court has authorised investigations into Bolsonaro and his allies for alleged attacks on Brazil's democratic institutions. "They release bandits [from prison] and arrest conservatives," hospital worker Carlos Alberto Juliao, 45, who attended a pro-Bolsonaro demonstration in Sao Paulo, said of the court.

Amid growing scandals, rising inflation, high unemployment and one of the world's worst COVID-19 death tolls, Bolsonaro's approval ratings have sunk to record lows.

Elections are scheduled for October next year and opinion polls suggest Bolsonaro would lose by a wide margin against former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the left-wing Worker's Party if he decides to run.

Other left-leaning or center-right candidates, such as the former governor of the northeastern state of Ceara, Ciro Gomes, or current Sao Paulo governor Joao Doria, would also beat Bolsonaro in a second-round runoff, polls suggest.

The far-right leader has however hinted that he will refuse to accept defeat if Brazil's electronic voting system is not changed for paper ballots, a demand that was recently defeated in Congress.

Bolsonaro has insisted – without evidence – that the electronic system is vulnerable to fraud, a claim rejected by judicial experts and other experts, and which critics say is part of a plan to contest next year's election results.

"Only God will take me out of Brasilia," he told a crowd of 114,000 supporters on Sao Paulo's Paulista Avenue on Tuesday afternoon, according to local military police estimates.

}The rallies were attended by protesters wearing the canary and green colours of the Brazilian flag, with some carrying banners and placards calling for "military invention with Bolsonaro as president."

Bolsonaro himself is an outspoken advocate of Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship, during which hundreds of political opponents of the regime were murdered and thousands more tortured.

With political tensions high in Brazil, fears of violent clashes similar to the riot that broke out at the United States Capitol on January 6 had been mounting in the run-up to the rallies.

In the end, however, unrest was mostly restricted to some Bolsonaro supporters trying to breach police barricades in the capital Brasilia before being driven back with pepper spray.

Turnout, while not small, also was lower than had been expected in Sao Paulo and Brasilia. While the president may have gained a temporary boost after the demonstrations by re-energising his hardcore supporters, few analysts see his prospects of re-election improving.

"In the end, what counts is reality. And the reality today is one of inflation, overpriced food and fuel, energy crisis and an increase in the population in poverty and social vulnerability," said Naue de Azevedo, a political scientist based in the Brazilian capital.

Protesters are seen during a rally outside the Rio Tinto office in Perth, Australia, June 9, 2020. Rio Tinto recently detonated explosives in an area of the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara, destroying two ancient deep-time rock shelters, much to the distress of the Puutu Kuntj Kurrama and Pinikura people. [Richard Wainwring/EPA-EFE]



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