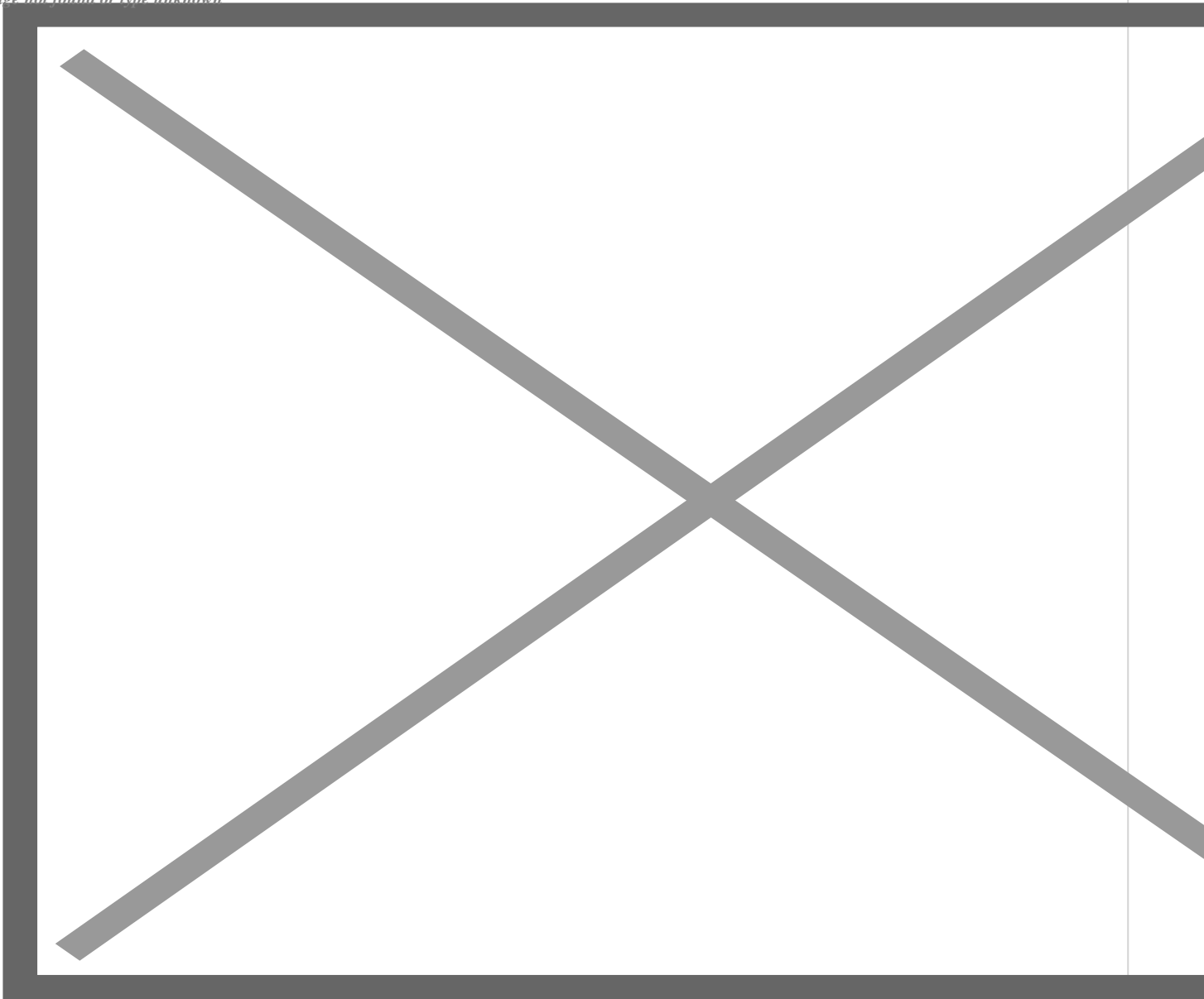


Brazil chief justice says top court will not tolerate threats

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A supporter of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro during a march in Sao Paulo on September 7
[Amanda Perobelli/Reuters]

Brasilia, September 9 (RHC)-- The chief justice of Brazil's Supreme Court has said encouraging people to disobey the court's rulings is an anti-democratic act, a day after President Jair Bolsonaro said he would not obey the decisions of a member of the court.

"The Supreme Court will not tolerate threats to the authority of its decisions," Luiz Fux said during a court session on Wednesday. Fux also said encouraging people to disregard court decisions by a "head of state" was an attack on democracy and a crime for Congress to deal with.

His comments come a day after Bolsonaro continued his verbal attacks against the Supreme Court in speeches to hundreds of thousands of his supporters, who rallied in the capital Brasilia, Sao Paulo, and other cities.

The Supreme Court has ordered investigations into the far-right leader's claims that Brazil's electronic voting system is rife with fraud – an allegation rejected by judicial experts as baseless – and his push to have paper receipts printed.

Critics have accused the former army captain of planning to contest the results of the presidential election next year, in a move similar to former US President Donald Trump, whom Bolsonaro has long tried to emulate.

Recent polls show Bolsonaro – who has seen his popularity plummet amid the COVID-19 crisis and corruption allegations – would lose the vote to former left-wing leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, should Lula choose to seek the presidency.

Bolsonaro's continuing attacks against the Supreme Court have spurred what experts have called an "unprecedented" institutional crisis in the country.

The speaker of Brazil's lower house of Congress, a Bolsonaro ally, on Wednesday urged the country to focus on more pressing issues such as the coronavirus and high unemployment in the aftermath of the pro-Bolsonaro rallies.

Arthur Lira did not mention Bolsonaro by name, but said that discussion of a paper ballot was a closed matter. The lower house last month voted down the effort by Bolsonaro to change the voting system.

Without the change, Bolsonaro has threatened not to recognise the result of next year's vote. But Lira said Brazil's constitution would not be violated, rebuffing the president's core supporters who have proposed closing the Supreme Court and other anti-democratic moves.

"I don't see how we can have room for radicalism and more excesses. The House is committed to real Brazil, which is suffering from a pandemic and unemployment," he said during a news conference. Lira said questioning decisions already made by the chamber was "unacceptable" and called on Brazil to focus on "real" problems, such as high petrol prices and other economic issues.

Analysts said that while Bolsonaro may have gained a short-lived boost in popularity after Tuesday's demonstrations, which he had hoped would re-energise his most fervent supporters, they would do little to improve his chances of re-election next year.

"In the end, what counts is reality," Naue de Azevedo, a political scientist based in the Brazilian capital, told Al Jazeera. "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."



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