

Politics

Bolsonaro to Be Banned From Public Office in Brazil for Eight Years

- Brazil court bars ex-leader from office over election claims
- Bolsonaro likely to retain influence in search for successor

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Former President Jair Bolsonaro speaks to members of the media following his ban from office in Brasilia on June 30. *Photographer: Ton Molina/Bloomberg*

By [Andrew Rosati](#)

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Brazil's electoral court voted to ban Jair Bolsonaro from office for eight years for making false claims about last year's election, a ruling that could effectively end the right-wing former president's political career.

Five of the court's seven judges agreed Friday that Bolsonaro had abused the powers of his office by using a meeting with foreign ambassadors to cast doubt on the country's electronic voting system just months before his defeat to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The decision will render him ineligible to hold or seek office until 2030, when he will be 75, and rule him out of the next presidential election three years from now.

But the former army captain whose improbable rise to the presidency in 2018 unleashed a coarser, more radical version of conservatism in Latin America's largest nation is poised to retain influence over a movement known commonly as

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and that Bolsonaro must be punished.

“We are dealing with a proven, uncontested occurrence,” she said. The law “does not allow for a little more, or a little less, but indicates exactly what should happen.”

Potential Appeal

Bolsonaro has spread conspiracies about voter fraud and Brazilian elections throughout his political career. His claims in the months before last year's contest

eventually ignited the fury of his supporters, who stormed the capital city of Brasilia on Jan. 8 to protest what they considered a stolen election.

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Bolsonaro has denied wrongdoing. He insists that the July 2022 meeting with ambassadors was a matter of foreign policy that fell within the powers of the presidency, and that he was expressing potential concerns about the election.

Like his close ally Donald Trump, who is facing two indictments and multiple open investigations in the US, he has argued that he is a victim of political persecution.

“I was stabbed in the back,” Bolsonaro told reporters in Belo Horizonte after the majority had ruled. “Political abuse for arguing something that I always had argued while I was a congressman.”

“We are on the road to dictatorship,” he said.

Bolsonaro can, and is expected to, appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court. And in the merry-go-round that is Brazilian politics, there is ample precedent of comebacks.

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Lula was barred from running in the 2018 election after his conviction on corruption charges, opening the door for Bolsonaro’s rise to the presidency. The leftist served 580 days in prison before the Supreme Court annulled the convictions on grounds that the lower court that had tried him lacked jurisdiction. That ruling allowed Lula to complete his own improbable political resurrection last year.

But legal experts see a far more difficult path ahead for Bolsonaro.

The near-united front from electoral court judges makes a successful appeal unlikely, said Diego Arguelhes, a constitutional law professor at Insper. In the cases against Lula, “the balance was fragile from the start,” he said. “This is not the case now.”

Bolsonaro is also facing another 15 cases in the electoral court over accusations that he abused his authority as president and tried to undermine faith in Brazil’s electronic voting system. Any of those could similarly result in an eight-year political ban.

Judge Alexandre de Moraes, who is spearheading many of the legal proceedings against Bolsonaro, used his vote to push back on the former president’s attempts to paint himself as a political martyr.

“Freedom of expression is not freedom of aggression,” Moraes, the electoral court’s chief justice, said. “Freedom of expression is not consecration of disinformation, it’s not attacks on democracy.”

Search for a Successor

Outside of the electoral court, Bolsonaro is also under investigation for potential crimes that occurred during and after his presidency. The alleged offenses include failing to declare millions of dollars worth of gifts he received while serving as president, falsifying Covid-19 vaccination records, and inciting the Jan. 8 riots.

Despite the mounting legal troubles, Bolsonaro remains a popular figure on the Brazilian right. He won 49.1% of votes in last year’s election. His party secured the largest share of seats in Brazil’s congress, while his endorsement helped multiple conservative gubernatorial candidates prevail in the country’s largest states.

Read More: [Bolsonaro Lost Brazil, But His Brand of Conservatism Lives On](#)

His status as the country’s strongest conservative figure fueled the belief that Bolsonaro would lead opposition to Lula’s government once he returned to Brazil from a three-month, post-election vacation in Florida. It also generated speculation that he would seek another office or a return to the presidency in the near future.

In recent days, however, Bolsonaro has talked openly about passing the torch. Eduardo Bolsonaro and Flavio Bolsonaro, two of his sons, are already members of congress and the senate, respectively. This week, Bolsonaro suggested that his wife, Michelle, could run for congress or president in 2026.

Others have eyed a pair of conservative governors from two of Brazil's most populous states – Tarcisio Gomes de Freitas of Sao Paulo and Romeu Zema of Minas Gerais – as potential heirs. Both won with Bolsonaro's backing last year, and Freitas rushed to his defense after the court's ruling.

Bolsonaro's leadership "as a representative of the Brazilian right is unquestionable and endures," Freitas said on Twitter. "Tens of millions of Brazilians count on your voice. We go together, President."

Bolsonaro, meanwhile, may not be ready to cede the spotlight, or the end of his political career, just yet.

"I have a silver bullet," he said in a recent [interview](#) with the local newspaper Folha de S.Paulo when asked about the 2026 presidential election. "But I'm not going to reveal it."

– *With Beatriz Reis*

(Recast lead, adds analysis, context and Bolsonaro comments throughout)

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