

## **Brazilian Supreme Court panel orders ex-President Bolsonaro to stand trial over alleged coup plan**









RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — A panel of Brazil Supreme Court justices on Wednesday unanimously accepted charges against [former President Jair Bolsonaro](#) over an alleged attempt to stay in office after his 2022 election defeat, and ordered him to stand trial.

Prosecutor-General Paulo Gonet has accused Bolsonaro and 33 others of attempting a coup that included a plan to poison his successor, current [President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), and kill a Supreme Court judge.

The justices said seven close allies should also stand trial on five counts: attempting to stage a coup, involvement in an armed criminal organization, attempted violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, damage characterized by violence and a serious threat against the state's assets, and deterioration of listed heritage.



The former president has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and says he's being politically persecuted. A lawyer for Bolsonaro did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"It seems that there is something personal against me," Bolsonaro told journalists after the panel's decision. "The accusation is very serious and (is) unfounded."

Under Brazilian law, a coup conviction carries a sentence of up to 12 years. When combined with the other charges, it could result in a sentence of decades behind bars.

"Coups kill," Justice Flávio Dino said when casting his vote. "It doesn't matter if it happens today, the following month or a few years later."

Gonet on Tuesday said those facing the charges sought to keep Bolsonaro in power "at all costs," [in a multi-step scheme](#) that accelerated after the far-right politician lost to the current president.

As [in his February indictment](#), Gonet said part of the plot included a plan to kill Lula and Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who were put under surveillance by the alleged conspirators. The plan did not go ahead at the last minute because the accused failed to get the army's commander on board, Gonet said.

"Frustration overwhelmed the members of the criminal organization who, however, did not give up on the violent seizure of power, not even after the elected president of the republic was sworn in," he said.

That was a reference to the Jan. 8, 2023, riot [when Bolsonaro supporters stormed](#) the Supreme Court, presidential palace and Congress in Brasilia a week after Lula took office.





De Moraes on Wednesday showed the panel a video with scenes from that day. “We had a very violent coup attempt,” he said. “A savage violence, in total incivility, with the request for military intervention in the coup d’état.”

Bolsonaro on Wednesday denied any involvement and said he was in the U.S. at the time, having left a few days before the end of his term. “One of the five charges against me is destruction of property. Only if it were by telepathy,” he told journalists.

Bolsonaro’s running mate during the 2022 election and former Defense Minister Walter Braga Netto, ex-Justice Minister Anderson Torres and his aide-de-camp Mauro Cid, among others, will also stand trial. The court will decide on the others’ fate later.

Observers had expected the charges to be accepted.

Lula said Thursday that the evidence supported the charges against Bolsonaro.

“It is clear that the former president tried to stage a coup in the country. It is clear from all the evidence that he tried to contribute to my assassination, to the assassination of the former president of the Brazilian Electoral Court,” Lula said while on a four-day visit to Japan.

“I just hope that the justice system will do justice,” he added.

João Pedro Pádua, a law professor at the Fluminense Federal University, said the vote was not a surprise, but it was historic.

“It is the first time a former head of state will be tried for the crimes of coup d’état and violent abolition of the democratic and legal state,” he said.

Bolsonaro, a former military officer who was known to express nostalgia for the country’s past dictatorship, openly defied Brazil’s judicial system during his 2019-2022 term in office.

He has sought to shore up political support before the possible trial, including with [a protest](#) in Rio de Janeiro earlier this month. Local media said around 18,000 people attended, based on figures from a monitoring project linked to the University of Sao Paulo.

Bolsonaro's allies had hoped to draw 1 million people. Some analysts have said his ability to [mobilize voters is diminishing](#). He has called for a new demonstration on April 6 in Sao Paulo.

The former president and his allies also will push for Congress to grant amnesty to those in jail for their roles in the Jan. 8, 2023, riot.

Carlos Melo, a political science professor at Insper University in Sao Paulo, said he didn't expect Wednesday's decision to have much impact on next year's presidential election.

Bolsonaro has already been [banned by Brazil's top electoral court](#) from running in elections until 2030 over abuse of power while in office and casting unfounded doubts on the country's electronic voting system.

"Bolsonaro will claim he's a candidate anyway. Why? To avoid being sidelined. He will claim it's him, or someone he appoints. He doesn't want to give up a political asset he has," Melo said.

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Associated Press journalists Gabriela Sá Pessoa in Rio de Janeiro and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.