

POLITICS | **BRAZIL**

Fact check: 'Witch-hunt' against Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro?

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Is Brazil a dictatorship? Is the country's Supreme Court abusing its power in the trial against the country's former president, Jair Bolsonaro, or is it defending democracy? DW Fact check takes a closer look.



Bolsonaro now has to wear an electronic ankle bracelet

Image: Eraldo Peres/AP Photo/picture alliance

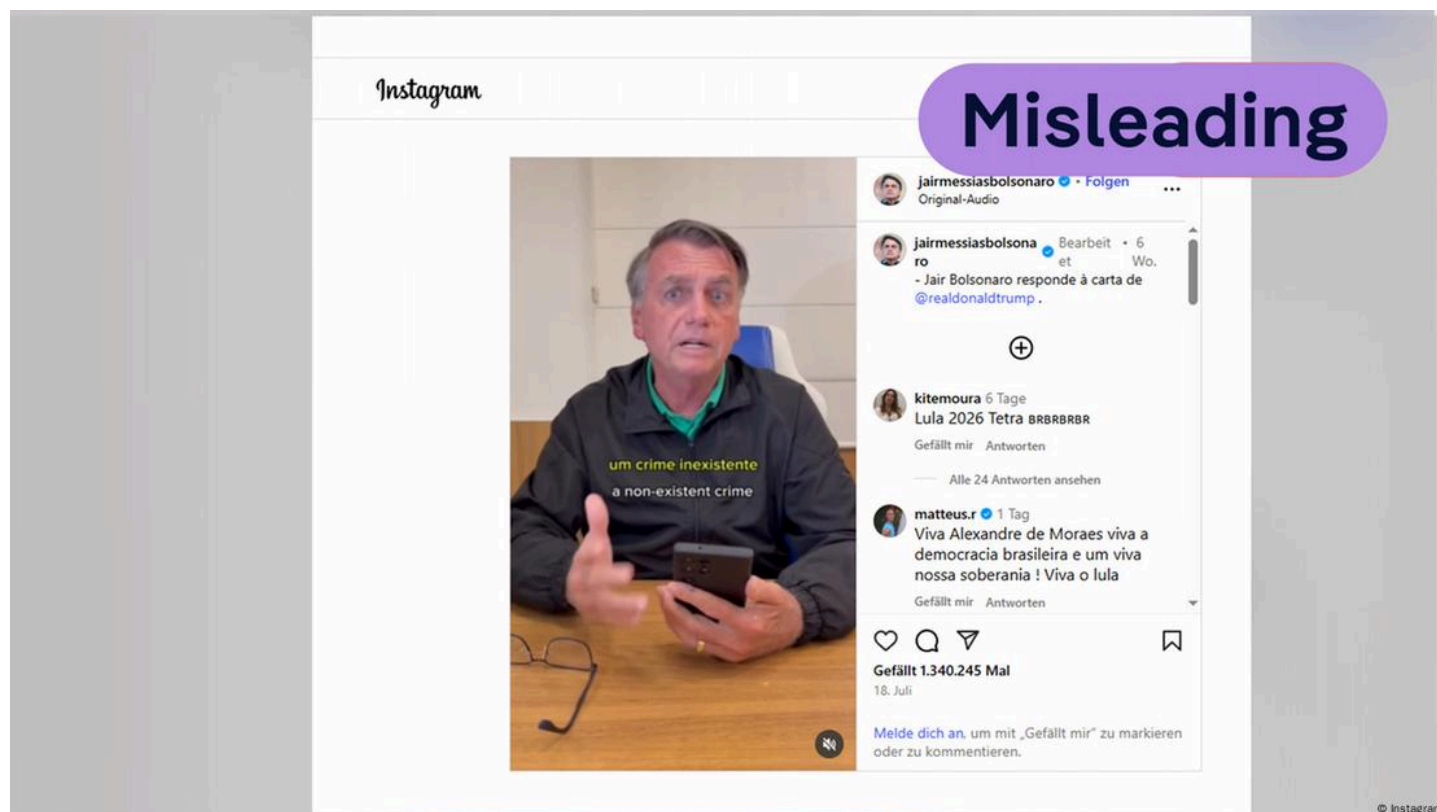
The trial of Brazil's [ex-President Jair Bolsonaro](#) is already a landmark event. It's the first time in the country's history that a former president is standing trial [for an attempted coup](#). It is also the first time since the end of the military dictatorship (1964 to 1985) that high-ranking military officials are being held to account in a civilian court.

The [proceedings before Brazil's Supreme Court](#) begin on September 2, and are due to continue until September 12. With Bolsonaro, eight people in total, including several former generals and cabinet members, are facing charges.

They are accused of attempting to topple the government and being involved in an assault on government buildings in the Brazilian capital Brasilia on January 8, 2023, and face charges that include: "The violent abolition of the democratic constitutional state, attempted coup d'état, participation in an armed criminal organization, serious damage to property, and damage to listed cultural assets."

Even ahead of the ruling, the case has received international attention. [US President Donald Trump](#) caused a stir when he weighed in with his opinion: In July, he accused the Brazilian authorities of carrying out a "witch hunt" against the former president and his family in a post on his social media platform Truth Social.

[DW fact check](#) has looked at three narratives surrounding the trial



Bolsonaro claims he could not have staged a coup as he was out of the country

Image: Instagram

Claim: The trial is to disqualify Bolsonaro from politics.

In a video posted on Instagram, Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro stated: "I am on trial for supposedly staging a coup. On a Sunday, without troops, without weapons, and while I was in the United States. Simply unbelievable. It's a crime that doesn't exist. In truth, you want to politically eliminate me, and with me, the largest right-wing political alliance in South America."

DW Fact check: Misleading.

It is not the first time that Brazil's former president is in court. He has already been convicted twice by Brazil's Supreme Electoral Court (TSE). Once in June 2023, for making false claims about electronic voting machines. And again in October of the same year for exploiting the 200th anniversary of Brazil's independence for campaign purposes.

As a result of these two rulings, he is already unable to run in the upcoming 2026 elections, regardless of the current trial. According to Brazilian law, candidates who have been convicted by the courts are barred from running for office for eight years.

Thus, the current trial will make no difference to whether he can run in next year's elections.

While it is true that Bolsonaro was in the US on January 8, 2023, when his supporters stormed the presidential palace in Brasilia, the trial will clarify whether this is proof enough to support the claim that he was not involved in the attack.

Brazilian judiciary is biased

Claim: A Supreme Court justice is abusing his power.

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, the former president's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, who is a Brazilian lawmaker, wrote: "Not even the politically left-wing *New York Times* can hide the abuse of power" by Supreme Court justice Alexandre de Moraes, referring to a report in the US daily newspaper.

DW Fact check: Misleading.

[Supporters of the former president](#) have long alleged that the Brazilian judiciary, and more specifically de Moraes, abuse their power.

At a press conference in July, opposition politicians in the upper house of Brazil's National Congress described the precautionary measures imposed on Jair Bolsonaro by the Supreme Court as "arbitrary, authoritarian, and a sign of a state of emergency." The measures included requiring the former president [to wear an ankle monitor](#), and [telling him to refrain from using social media](#) and break off contact with political allies.

In its article of August 29, 2025, *The New York Times* wrote: "[Brazil](#), which emerged from a brutal dictatorship just 40 years ago, will have accomplished something that the United States could not: bring a former president to trial on criminal charges that he attempted to cling to power after losing an election. Yet the way Brazil did it has left the nation grappling with uncomfortable questions over the very democracy it sought to protect."

One of the "uncomfortable questions" is whether the Brazilian Supreme Court, which "has given itself extraordinary powers" will exercise these to the fullest extent. The court itself blocked nationwide access to X, formerly Twitter, after the platform allegedly spread fake news during the election campaign. Despite its

criticism of the Supreme Court, *The New York Times* does not accuse it of exceeding its powers.

Legal experts have also voiced criticism of the trial. "Although it is a trial under the rule of law, as a lawyer I am disturbed by the fact that Moraes himself is sitting in court, even though according to the indictment he was one of the planned murder victims alongside [President Lula](#)," said Georg Witschel, referring to charges that allege Bolsonaro had planned to poison de Moraes for having overseen the 2022 elections as Brazil's top electoral judge.

Witschel is the president of the German Brazilian Society (DBG) and served as Germany's ambassador to Brazil from 2016 to 2020. He told DW that he believed de Moraes should recuse himself.

Is Brazil still democratic?

Claim: Brazil is a dictatorship.

"If my 'crime' is fighting against the Brazilian dictatorship, I hereby declare myself guilty in advance," Eduardo Bolsonaro wrote on X on August 21, 2025.

Earlier this year, he took an extended leave of absence from his lawmaker post and moved to the US after saying he was the victim of "political persecution" in Brazil.



Supporters of Bolsonaro want him to be amnestied

Image: Mauro Pimentel/AFP/Getty Images

DW Fact check: False.

Bolsonaro's supporters have for years claimed that Brazil is sliding into a dictatorship. This was also the case at recent rallies across Brazil calling for Bolsonaro to be amnestied.

However, just the fact that these demonstrations could take place in several major cities proves that Brazil is not a dictatorship.

Furthermore, the work of elected officials is not restricted in Brazil. Unlike Eduardo Bolsonaro, his two brothers Flavio (member of the Senate) and Carlos (member of the Rio de Janeiro council) continue to exercise their mandates in the country.

The findings of the investigations against the former president, including a report by the federal police, are available to the public, which would also not be the case if Brazil were a dictatorship.



The historic trial has attracted widespread international attention.

Image: The Economist

This DW fact check was translated from German.

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