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FEATURED Q&A

Will Bolsonaro Try to Stay in Power if He Loses Next Year?



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, whose approval ratings have fallen, has leveled unsubstantiated claims of fraud in the country's electoral system. // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Q Brazil's Senate and Supreme Court last week rejected a provisional measure by President Jair Bolsonaro to ban social media companies from deleting some content. Bolsonaro's temporary order would have required congressional approval to become law. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are among the companies that have previously deleted misinformation that Bolsonaro has posted on topics including the Covid-19 pandemic. Bolsonaro's social media measure came amid his feud with the Supreme Court, which is investigating the president and two of his sons, and with electoral authorities over Bolsonaro's unsubstantiated allegations of fraud in Brazil's voting system. Are there real concerns about the reliability of Brazil's elections, or is Bolsonaro setting up an effort to challenge the results in the event that he loses next year? What will result from his allegations in terms of Brazilians' acceptance of the eventual winner? Will Bolsonaro's failed social media order have any lasting effects?

A Mariana Giorgetti Valente, director of InternetLab: "There is no evidence whatsoever of fraud in Brazil's voting system, and claims otherwise are unsubstantiated, aim to create more political distress and set the stage for questioning the results of next year's election in case Bolsonaro loses. Bolsonaro's strategy has been to put democratic institutions to the test, and questioning the voting system itself is one of the many attempts to create instability and organize a base of radical supporters for future actions. His strategy regarding social media is very aligned with that more general strategy. During his presidency, Bolsonaro and his political allies have fed

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U.S. Sanctions Seven Central American Officials

The U.S. State Department slapped sanctions on seven Central American officials, including five Salvadoran Supreme Court magistrates, accusing them of corruption.

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Ecuador Planning \$1.9 Bn in Energy Investments

The investments will include concessions for private companies to build and operate power generation plants and a new transmission system for the country's oil sector.

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POLITICAL

Trudeau's Liberal Party Wins in Canada, Fails at Majority Gov't

Canadians returned Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to office but denied him a majority government in the country's parliamentary elections.

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Trudeau // Photo: Facebook Page of Justin Trudeau.

POLITICAL NEWS

Trudeau's Liberals Win in Canada, Fail at Majority Government

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party won a hotly contested election on Monday but fell short of its goal of reaching a majority government, CNN reported. The Liberals won 158 seats in Parliament, or 46.8 percent, short of the 170 seats that would have been needed for a majority, according to results that Elections Canada posted this morning, with 98.8 percent of polls reporting. The Conservative Party of Trudeau's rival, Erin O'Toole, won 119 seats, or 35.2 percent, according to Elections Canada. "You are sending us back to work with a clear mandate to get Canada through this pandemic and to the brighter days ahead. My friends, that's exactly what we are ready to do," Trudeau told supporters early this morning in Montreal, CNN reported. "What we've seen tonight is that millions of Canadians have chosen a progressive plan. Some have talked about division but that's not what I see. That's not what I've seen these past weeks across the country." In mid-August, Trudeau called for an early election, hoping his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic would garner him enough support to win a majority government. However, O'Toole and the Conservatives gained support in recent weeks, bringing the race to a statistical tie. In his concession speech, O'Toole had a celebratory tone. "Five weeks ago, Mr. Trudeau asked for a majority," said O'Toole, the Financial Times reported. "Tonight, Canadians did not give Mr. Trudeau the majority he wanted." Several factors were working against Trudeau's effort to win enough seats for a majority, Christopher Sands, director of the Canada Institute at the Wilson Center, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Monday. "The persistence of the pandemic, weak economic performance, horrifying discoveries of hundreds of Indigenous children in mass graves, grim data on climate change, rising belligerence from China and the shambolic retreat from Afghanistan have

Canadians in a pessimistic mood," said Sands. In the same issue, Duane Bratt, professor of political science at Mount Royal University in Calgary, said Trudeau was "hamstrung in his campaign from day one" amid the fourth wave of Covid-19 infections in Canada and international concerns such as the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

U.S. Sanctions Seven Central American Officials

The U.S. State Department on Monday announced a new round of sanctions on seven Central American officials it has accused of corruption. "Today we are adding seven perpetrators to the United States' Undemocratic and Corrupt Actors list, under section 353 of the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act, which generally makes the perpetrators ineligible for visas and admission to the United States," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. Among the officials listed are the five magistrates of El Salvador's Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, all of whom were appointed by the ruling party-dominated National Assembly after it ousted the country's previous magistrates and attorney general in May, the Associated Press reported. Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, whom critics accuse of showing increasingly authoritarian tendencies, responded to the announcement on Twitter, saying, "It's clear the list has NOTHING to do with 'corruption,' it's pure politics and the lowest kind of interference." The list also included Guatemala's current attorney general, María Consuelo Porras, whom the State Department said has "obstructed investigations into acts of corruption by interfering with criminal investigations in order to protect political allies and gain personal political favor." Porras has been accused of removing the lead prosecutor of the country's anti-corruption unit, Juan Francisco Sandoval, for launching an investigation into President Alejandro Giammattei. The other official is Angel Arnoldo Pineda, the current secretary general of Guatemala's Public Minis-

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Defends Expulsion of Haitian Migrants From Texas Border Town

U.S. officials on Monday defended the removal of thousands of migrants from Haiti and other countries from the Texas border town of Del Rio, the Associated Press reported. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas called it a "challenging and heartbreaking situation." Haitian officials have asked the United States to stop the flights, saying they are unable to handle the influx following last month's earthquake and hurricane that hit the country.

Italian Court Rejects Venezuela's Request to Extradite Ex-PDVSA Head

A court in Rome has rejected the Venezuelan government's request to extradite Rafael Ramírez, the former longtime head of state oil company PDVSA, who fled to Italy after a rupture with President Nicolás Maduro and resigning as the country's ambassador to the United Nations in 2017, the Associated Press reported. The court denied Venezuela's request to extradite Ramírez on corruption charges, citing the Andean nation's record of human rights violations, Ramírez's lawyer said Monday. Ramírez has said Venezuela's charges are retaliation for his break with Maduro.

China Three Gorges Eyes Acquisition of Mexican Renewable Energy Unit

State-owned power company China Three Gorges Corp. is eying the acquisition of X-Elio Energy SL's Mexican renewable energy unit, as the Chinese firm seeks to expand its international presence, Bloomberg News reported today, citing people familiar with the matter. X-Elio has about 535 megawatts of projects in operation in the North American country. The company's Mexico portfolio could reportedly be valued at approximately \$400 million.

try, for his alleged involvement in obstructing the investigations. In a statement, Guatemala's Public Ministry called the U.S. accusations "totally false and unfounded."

ECONOMIC NEWS

Ecuadorean Gov't Planning \$1.9 Bn in Energy Investments

The Ecuadorean government will grant concessions for private companies to build and operate power generation plants as well as a new transmission system for the country's oil sector, totaling \$1.9 billion in investment, Energy Minister Juan Carlos Bermeo said Monday, Reuters reported. President Guillermo Lasso aims to revive private sector participation in strategic areas of the economy. Ecuador's GDP contracted 7.5 percent in 2020, according to data from the International Monetary Fund. "We ratify our openness to responsible investors," Bermeo said in presenting the projects. The announcement comes as Ecuadorean state utility CELEC is looking to repair thermal power plants that are currently offline to provide backup electricity supply. The company has earmarked \$80 million to revamp the plants as erosion puts the country's Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant at risk. "The regressive erosion of the Coca River is a latent risk for the water collection works at the Coca Codo Sinclair ... taking into account that its annual generation contribution to the electricity matrix is more than a quarter," Eduardo Rosero Rhea, president of the Ecuadorean Association of Renewable Energies and Energy Efficiency (AEEREE), told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Sept. 17. "The government of President Guillermo Lasso has significant challenges in the energy sector, and it must incorporate disruptive changes in both the state vision and in the planning in the short, medium and long terms, opening the way for regulatory reform that effectively—not just rhetorically—incorporates new private investment in the electricity sector," he added.

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the narrative that social media is trying to censor their legitimate political views. The provisional measure on content moderation might have been an effort to avoid having his content taken down for violating terms of service and gaining more space for anti-democratic actions. It could also have been part of a larger strategy of creating chaos and distrust, using it as a future argument when social media punishes other violations. It could as well be both. Even if we consider that Bolsonaro lost his first attempt—which is still early to say, since the measure might come back in a new guise—the second involves a slow process that is definitely ongoing."

A Raúl Echeberría, executive director of the Latin American Internet Association (ALAI):

"While it's very good news that Bolsonaro's provisional measure was invalidated, the discussion is not necessarily over. Bolsonaro's provisional measure tried to prohibit platforms from having their own policies for dealing with content that their users publish. We have already seen similar proposals in other countries that, under the supposed objective of protecting freedom of expression, would produce exactly the opposite effect, reducing the platforms' ability to limit content that pollutes the digital environment and the quality of public debate (such as through disseminating fake news and hate speech and encouraging gender violence). We must learn some lessons from this case. Evidence-based discussions and the participation of all stakeholders are key to avoiding unintended consequences of digital policies. Platforms have to be transparent about their policies, procedures and their resolutions, but limiting their flexibility to have those policies will only contribute to a more unsafe Internet. Policy issues that by their nature are clearly cross-border issues need to be considered and addressed internationally. Isolated measures are not the solution and risk fragmenting the Internet.

The open, participatory and multistakeholder characteristics of Internet governance are key values that must be protected and preserved."

A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue:

"Bolsonaro is no great fan of democracy. He views two decades of military rule, 1964-1985, as the best of times ever for Brazil. Nor does he have much interest in governing. He has failed to accomplish, even seriously pursue, his campaign promises of three years ago. Economic reform has stalled, while corruption and violent crime remain rampant. Despite Bolsonaro's chumminess with Donald Trump, nothing much changed in U.S.-Brazilian relations, which today are at a standstill. Brazil's management of the pandemic is considered to be among the world's worst. With presidential elections in October 2022, Bolsonaro's only objective now is holding on to power. But with sagging poll numbers and a widening gap with front-runner Lula, his re-election chances are slipping away. His biggest obstacle may be Brazil's ailing economy with sky-high unemployment, ballooning poverty, accelerating inflation and vicious droughts threatening food and energy supplies—all compounded by Covid-19 and global economic uncertainty. Warning that he will not accept an electoral loss, Bolsonaro has begun to test the alternative of openly confronting democratic institutions, so far focusing his intimidation on the Supreme Court with threats to ignore its decisions and replace justices he disapproves of. He is also mobilizing his core supporters, who massed in large numbers in Brasília, São Paulo and other major cities on Sept. 7, the nation's independence day. They declared allegiance to Bolsonaro, demonstrated their belligerency and appear ready to be unleashed to do whatever he asks. Bolsonaro could well disrupt the operation of critical institutions and longstanding norms, and

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provoke disorder across the country, leaving a political mess in his wake. A critical unanswered question is about the role of the Brazilian military in a situation of instability and turmoil. Might Brazil's military leaders agree to extending Bolsonaro's presidency to restore order? Or will they, whatever the circumstances, stand fast to preserve Brazilian democracy?"

A **Alberto Pfeifer, coordinator of the Group for the Analysis of International Conjuncture (GACInt) at the University of**

São Paulo: "Brazil's direct electronic recording (DRE) ballot box was first used in 1996. Reliable and effective, it's nevertheless up for improvements and updates: technology has evolved, and new vulnerabilities abound. Redundant layers of verification and safety will strengthen confidence in the handling of around one billion votes in October 2022—every four years, Brazilians mandatorily pick the president, state governors and three to four local and federal legislators in one single visit to the voting station. The whole process is quick and trustworthy, but some recent breakdowns justify extra caution. The Electoral Supreme Court recently installed an Electoral Transparency Commission, composed of high-level public servants and acknowledged experts, entitled to monitor, oversee and audit the whole electoral process. Bolsonaro, a proactive politician, can claim a partial victory on this issue. However, the root cause for the recent massive street demonstrations was a cold calculation about 2022. For a smooth second term, he needs full support from the Senate, a third of whose seats are up for election. Bolsonaro's recent moves aim to counter the left and strengthen state-level alliances, and then reap the most Senate seats possible. Bolsonaro is a master in playing with instincts and rationale. His social media order follows this same pattern and aims at achieving two goals: it caters to his electorate, and it keeps the issue of tech censorship versus freedom

of speech at the top of public debate. Again, a balanced combination of guts and brains—Bolsonaro's successful formula, so far."

A **Gilberto M. A. Rodrigues, head of the graduate program in international relations at the Federal University of ABC in**

Brazil: "President Bolsonaro is clearly trying to deconstruct Brazil's democracy for his benefit. To do this, he repeatedly defies core political institutions, regardless of their importance in Brazil's political system. His far-right ideological project has evolved in more than two years to become an authoritarian political project that has faced strong resistance from the Supreme Court and, at some points, from Congress. Social media has played a central role in this strategy, which includes massive amounts of fake news produced by a digital militia that is fueled by the so-called 'hate office' managed by Bolsonaro's sons and advised by Donald Trump's collaborators. Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes has investigated these suspicious acts, and Bolsonaro and his sons have designated him their main enemy. In this context, the order that Bolsonaro signed has two main objectives: stopping this digital militia from being controlled and paving the way for his main objective of contesting next year's election in the event that he loses, opening the door for a coup. Even the attorney general, who is close to Bolsonaro, declared the order unconstitutional. In the end, both the Senate president's rejection of the decree and Supreme Court Justice Rosa Weber's decision to suspend it have protected Congress' jurisdiction in this matter."

[Editor's note: The Advisor requested a commentary from Brazil's ambassador to the United States and its foreign ministry and was referred to the Brazilian president's communications office, which did not respond to a request for a commentary.]

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