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FEATURED Q&A

How Secure Is Brazil's Electronic Voting System?



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who faces a tough battle for re-election in October, has repeatedly raised allegations—without providing evidence—that the country's voting system is susceptible to fraud. // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Q Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on July 18 gathered foreign diplomats to his residence to repeat his claims that Brazil's electoral system is susceptible to fraud. The claims by Bolsonaro, who has presented no evidence to support the allegations, has raised concerns that he will refuse to give up power or seek to overturn the results if he loses the October election to former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, whom he trails in polls. How reliable is Brazil's electoral system, and what safeguards does it have to prevent fraud? Are the country's election officials doing enough to prevent irregularities in the October vote? What role will international observers play in monitoring the election? How likely is it that Brazil will see an uncertain transfer of power in this year's election?

A Alfredo Attié, justice at the Supreme Court of São Paulo: "While no one questions the reliability of electronic devices that govern our daily lives, antidemocratic arguments from vile political interests are used to discredit the Brazilian electoral system with electronic voting machines. Electoral authorities have been proactive in responding to the threat by seeking oversight from international observers and civil society monitors, and by being transparent about the electronic and physical security measures of the electoral system: essentially encryption, digital signature and digital summary technologies, public sealing and monitoring of voting machines and software development, advanced control tools and fragmented access to the source code of voting systems, and no access to source code for the millions of people working in polling stations. Nevertheless, resistance to

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Seeking Control of Cargo Jet Grounded in Argentina

The U.S. Justice Department said Tuesday that it was seeking to take possession of a Venezuelan cargo jet that is grounded in Argentina. The plane was previously owned by an Iranian airline with alleged ties to terrorist groups.

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BUSINESS

Ecuador to Pay Perenco \$374 Mn in Dispute

Ecuador's economy ministry said it would pay Perenco \$374 million in connection with a dispute with the Anglo-French oil company.

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POLITICAL

Former Mexican President Peña Nieto Investigated

Mexico's attorney general's office said Tuesday that it had launched an investigation of former President Enrique Peña Nieto in connection with money laundering allegations.

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Peña Nieto // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Mexican Authorities Investigating Former President Peña Nieto

Mexico's attorney general's office said Tuesday that it has launched an investigation of former President Enrique Peña Nieto in connection with allegations involving money laundering and illicit enrichment, the Associated Press reported. The announcement came several weeks after Mexico's anti-money laundering agency accused Peña Nieto, who was in office from 2012 to 2018, of handling millions of dollars in potentially illegal funds, the AP re-

Peña Nieto last month denied wrongdoing and said his money was legally obtained.

ported. A statement from the attorney general's office referred to the former president only as "Enrique P" in accordance with its policy of not naming people accused of crimes, but an official at the office confirmed to the AP that the allegations involved Peña Nieto. The attorney general's office said it was "developing investigation procedures" related to various alleged federal crimes involving Spanish construction company OHL, Reuters reported. The company did not immediately respond to a request for comment by Reuters. In 2016, OHL's unit in Mexico was fined due to inadequacies related to its financial reporting, according to Reuters. The \$4 million fine at the time was the largest that Mexico's National Banking and Stock Commission had ever issued, the AP reported. OHL's Mexican unit said at the time that it "has always acted with transparency and with the best corporate practices." The attorney general's office also said the matters currently under investigation stem from complaints by tax authorities, Reuters reported. Peña Nieto, who has not been charged with a crime, denied

wrongdoing when Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit announced allegations against him last month. The agency said it was asking the attorney general's office to investigate millions of dollars in money transfers abroad that had been addressed to Peña Nieto, Reuters reported. The former president, who has been living in Spain since leaving office, at the time said in a posting on Twitter that his money was obtained legally. "I am certain that before the competent authorities I will be allowed to clarify any question about my assets and demonstrate their legality," Peña Nieto said.

U.S. Seeking Control of Jet Grounded in Argentina

The U.S. Justice Department said Tuesday that it is seeking to take possession of a Venezuelan Boeing 747 cargo jet that has been grounded since June 6 at Ezeiza International Airport outside Buenos Aires, the Associated Press reported. According to the U.S. government, the plane was transferred from Iranian airline Mahan Air—which allegedly has ties to terror groups—to Emtrasur, a subsidiary of Venezuelan state airline company Consorcio Venezolano de Industrias Aeronáuticas y Servicios Aéreos, or Conviasa. The October aircraft transfer without prior U.S. authorization was a violation of a 2008 Department of Commerce court order, the Justice Department said, the wire service reported. Argentine Federal Judge Federico Villena on Monday ordered that the passports of 12 of the 19 crew members of the Boeing 747 be returned to them, allowing them to leave Argentina for the first time since the aircraft was seized in June, MercoPress reported. The other seven members of the crew, including the airplane's Iranian captain on whom the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raised suspicions, are still banned from leaving the country. "What is being investigated is whether, under the appearance of legal activity, they are financing terrorism operations ... or whether they are part of a plan that has ties with" Hezbollah, Villena wrote in his ruling, the AP reported.

NEWS BRIEFS

Guatemalan Agents Arrest 19 in Raids Against Alleged Migrant Smugglers

Guatemalan police and federal agents on Tuesday carried out raids in four of the country's provinces against a migrant smuggling ring, the Associated Press reported. Among the 19 arrested on Tuesday was Felipe Diego Alonzo, the alleged leader of a criminal ring smuggling migrants from Guatemala to the United States. Four of the detained, including Alonzo, were arrested at the request of U.S. authorities in connection to the death of Marta Raymundo Corio, who was found dead in Texas last year after being smuggled through Mexico.

Power Outages Lead to 27% Fall in Oil Exports at Venezuela's PDVSA

Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA saw a 27 percent fall in its July oil exports compared to the previous month, partially due to outages that disrupted the country's power and gas supplies to the company, Reuters reported, citing Refinitiv Eikon vessel tracking data and PDVSA internal documents. Last month, 29 vessels departed the Andean country, carrying 460,323 barrels per day of crude and refined products, as well as 252,000 metric tons of methanol and petroleum coke, the wire service reported.

John Laing Group to Acquire Electric Bus Concessions in Bogotá

London-based John Laing Group on Monday announced its agreement to acquire two electric bus concessions in Colombia's capital city, the investment group said in a statement. John Laing will be acquiring the Electribus Bogotá Fontibón II and Electribus Bogotá USME I S.A.S. concessions, and the transaction is set to be completed during the third quarter of this year.

BUSINESS NEWS

Ecuador to Pay Perenco \$374 Mn After Asset Freeze

The Ecuadorean economy ministry said Monday that it would pay the \$374 million that the World Bank's International Center for Investment Disputes, or ICSID, had ordered it to pay Anglo-French oil company Perenco, Agence France-Presse reported. Perenco filed a \$1.42 billion suit against Ecuador more than 10 years ago following the country's increase of its profit share from 50 percent to 99 percent after a rise in oil prices. Ecuador's economy

Perenco said it was able to freeze bank accounts in Luxembourg that Ecuador uses for bond coupon payments.

ministry said work was underway to determine payment terms after Perenco said it was able to freeze all of the Luxembourg bank accounts that the Andean country uses to make bond coupon payments, AFP reported. "Unless and until Ecuador fulfills its obligations under the Washington Convention and its express undertaking to pay Perenco in full, Perenco has been left with no choice but to take steps to enforce its payments rights against Ecuador in Luxembourg and other jurisdictions," Perenco said in a statement, AFP reported. The account freeze served "to highlight the risks the international investment community faces in any dealings with Ecuador," Perenco added in a statement, the news service reported. The Ecuadorean economy ministry said on Monday that it had not formally been informed of the asset freeze, Reuters reported. The ministry said in a statement that it is not "aware of any effect on the assets of the country abroad," the wire service reported.

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the recognition of the election results and some threats can be expected from some who still support the idea of a dictatorial regime. Some have not broken with the old idea of military interference in civil and political life. Fortunately, these threats are not as serious as the 2021 invasion of the U.S. Capitol and the 1985 siege of Colombia's Palace of Justice. Cooperation between international observers and the international media in providing adequate information to the international community and the timely rejection of fake news can ensure the support of international public opinion."

A John M. Carey, Wentworth Professor in the Social Sciences and associate dean of faculty for the social sciences at Dartmouth College: "Brazil was a voting technology pioneer with its move, more than two decades ago, to direct-recording electronic voting machines. The system has important efficiency advantages, but these come with tradeoffs, as it does not produce physical proof of the voter's intent. To their credit, the Brazilian electoral authorities have organized regular public security tests where outside cybersecurity experts test and probe their systems. Those tests have uncovered some vulnerabilities, as they are designed to, and, if all actors operated in good faith, they should play a key role in maintaining and improving the security of voting. The problem is that Bolsonaro and his supporters are now motivated to undermine public confidence in Brazil's elections, and one path to doing so is by selective promotion of the vulnerabilities the testing regimen has revealed. Proving a negative—that a system was not compromised or could never be compromised—is a hopeless proposition. The U.S. experience with Trump and the Republican Party demonstrates that partisan-motivated reasoning can provide traction for fraud claims. In Brazil, as in the United States, the success of this election will depend on thousands of election officials doing their jobs

and on tens of thousands of volunteers and poll watchers monitoring them—and each other—and communicating to citizens whether they should trust the results. That job will be harder now than in the past because we can no longer rely on the basic democratic norm that election losers acknowledge defeat."

A Mark Langevin, director of BrazilWorks and senior advisor to Horizon Client Access:

"Brazil's democratic backslide began with former President Dilma Rousseff's dubious impeachment in 2016 and accelerated with Jair Bolsonaro's victory in 2018. Bolsonaro has not surprised anyone; he has defied precedent, eroded constitutional checks and balances and attacked the Supreme Court and federally supervised electoral system to protect his clumsy inner circle while gradually opening the door to a self-coup. The president's complaints about the national balloting system, administered by the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TSE), are never accompanied by evidence. Nevertheless, the TSE has improved the system's cybersecurity amid the growing risk of attacks by domestic and foreign actors, including the president's own followers. The system effectively verifies voter registration, provides closed-system electronic balloting machines that are easy to use and impossible to hack externally. Additionally, there is district-level ballot verification through a transparent and committee-led publication of a public bulletin that electronically transmits local-level results through a closed-system to the TSE vote tabulation process. The Brazilian system is built to be efficient, reliable and secure. Regardless, Bolsonaro openly questions the integrity of the 2022 election, hoping to trigger massive protests that disrupt the vote. However, Brazilians are pushing back against the president and his followers, including those within the armed forces officer corps such as his running mate, army General Walter Braga. The presi-

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dent's attacks have backfired amid a growing movement of political leaders and celebrities willing to push back against his tirades, often extending support for former President Lula. Bolsonaro's re-election campaign is losing steam; he will rally his followers on Sept. 7, Independence Day, but it will likely become his swan song. Meanwhile, most Brazilians eagerly await the opportunity to cast their ballots and celebrate their nation's vibrant democracy."

A **Joel Korn, president of WKI Brasil and senior international partner at UPITE Consulting Services:** "President Bolsonaro's stubborn challenges on the reliability of the electronic voting system in Brazil are totally unfounded. Brazil has successfully used electronic voting for the past 25 years, with no cases of fraud uncovered. The evolving technology over the years has been further enhanced by additional layers of security and auditing to ensure trust and authenticity, under the firm commitment and leadership of the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court. Sealed electronic ballot terminals are not connected to the Internet or any network, thus hindering the possibility of hacking. Moreover, the integrity of the elections is backed by a series of preventive measures such as biometric identification, cryptography techniques, public testing, up-front reviews of each electronic ballot terminal to ensure its good functioning prior to the beginning of the voting and digital ballot counting reports. Aiming at maximum transparency, the Superior Electoral Court established a supervisory committee made up of representatives of the candidates, political parties, Congress, the bar association, the Supreme Court, the public attorney's office, the army and international observers. Thus, there is no basis to support President Bolsonaro's attempt to reinstate anachronistic paper voting in the elections, replaced long ago precisely to avoid its past record of fraudulent actions. As head of state,

President Bolsonaro's meeting with foreign diplomats for the purpose of conveying a misleading view regarding the integrity of the electoral process was a disservice to the country's democracy, its institutions and for Brazil's image abroad. It may well harm his campaign against former President Lula da Silva and other contenders. The anticipated resistance of President Bolsonaro to accept an electoral loss and potential tensions associated with it should not hinder the transfer of power in full respect of the country's democratic institutions."

A **Riordan Roett, professor and director emeritus of the Latin American Studies program at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies:** "In contrast to the highly decentralized U.S. electoral system, Brazilian elections are national. There are no paper ballots and therefore no 'hanging chads,' as there were in Florida in 2000. Brazil's election system is computer-driven; returns are announced the next day. There is no room for disappointed chief executives to seek ballots that don't exist in order to overthrow the election. Conspiracy-driven lawyers of dubious quality providing idiotic advice may exist, but they have no role in the outcome of Brazil's election. The rules are simple—the candidate receiving 50 percent plus one vote wins. If no candidate receives that amount, there is a second round a few weeks later, which often occurs. The outcome is accepted as legitimate. Bolsonaro and his palace thugs threaten the integrity of the electoral system as they will probably lose. The courts and the armed forces, if necessary, will stop any coup attempts and guarantee a final democratic outcome."

[Editor's note: Brazil's embassy in Washington declined an invitation from the Advisor to submit a commentary for this issue, saying that the embassy does not comment on domestic politics.]

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