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**Brazil**

# **Hundreds of thousands protest against amnesty for Bolsonaro**

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**SÃO PAULO - Spring in the Southern Hemisphere began a day early in Brazil. On Sunday, 21 September, around 100 cities across the country – including the capitals São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, Porto Alegre, Recife and Brasília – witnessed something unprecedented in the last three years: activism, the left and social movements took to the streets and squares, alongside a broader popular sector, equally outraged by two measures voted on by the Chamber of Deputies. The demonstrations in São Paulo and Rio were the strongest since the mobilizations for Fora Bolsonaro (Bolsonaro Out) between 2021 and 2022, and the celebration of Lula's victory on Paulista Avenue in October 2022.**

The spark that ignited popular anger was the approval by the Chamber of Deputies, the most reactionary congressional body in the country's history, of an emergency regime for considering amnesty for those involved in the 2022-2023 coup. Added to this was the hasty approval of a Proposed Amendment to the Constitution (PEC) that would prevent investigations and punishments of any kind against parliamentarians during their terms of office – a measure quickly dubbed the "PEC da Bandidagem" (Banditry PEC). The vote on the two measures showed a score of approximately 350 (the sum of the extreme right and the traditional oligarchic right gathered in the "Centrão") against just over 150 votes against.

The reactionary offensive by the right wing in Congress was a response to the conviction of Bolsonaro and seven accomplices from the core of the 2022-2023 coup plot by the Federal Supreme Court on 11 September. Bolsonaro and his accomplices in the authoritarian coup attempt – which included a plan to assassinate Lula, his deputy, Alckmin, and magistrate Alexandre de Moraes – were sentenced to more than a decade in prison. The trial and verdict were celebrated by democratic governments, social movements, and non-fascist media outlets around the world. But on the domestic front, the neo-fascists did not stand idly by.

## Advantage over far-right demonstrations

Extremely careful counting points to the participation of more than 600,000 people in the demonstrations – a number that may increase as protesters in cities in the interior of populous states such as São Paulo and Minas Gerais are counted. Compared to the far-right (Bolsonaro) demonstrations held on 7 September – in defence of amnesty – last Sunday's democratic protests had a clear advantage, both in terms of numbers and quality.

Organized in less than a week by a de facto "coalition" of progressive artists and social movements – trade union federations, independent unions, homeless movements, black movements – after an explosion of indignation on social media, the demonstrations were more widespread nationally. The organisations that called for the protests were then joined by left-wing parties (PSOL, PCdoB, PT, UP), parties that are not so left-wing (PDT, PSB) and many people from the working classes.

The wave of protests marked a turning point in the central political dispute in the country, between the broad left and neo-fascism. Still with an important and threatening mass base, the Brazilian far right had been taking advantage, since August, of an explicit alliance, without any scruples of dignity, with the US government, to forcibly obtain the amnesty with which they intend to free Bolsonaro and his military friends and former civilian subordinates from prison.

At the 7 September rally in São Paulo, the far right even unfurled a 20-metre-long US flag on the avenue. While in the United States, Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, the former president's third son, was openly negotiating with the White House to increase sanctions against the country and the judges in the case against the coup plotters, in the Chamber of Deputies last week, the neo-fascists concentrated their efforts on negotiating with the right-wing leader of the house, Hugo Motta, for the rapid passage of the amnesty. In these negotiations, Bolsonaro's supporters took advantage of a common interest with the "Centrão" (protecting themselves from Supreme Court proceedings in cases of misuse of budget funds allocated to deputies\*) to give birth to the ill-fated PEC da Bandidagem.

They miscalculated. While the government and its base, other left-wing parties and their electorate were more directly involved in the "conviction of coup plotters versus amnesty" debate, the threat of total impunity for "politicians" outraged and inflamed the anger of broader sections of the population. In a concise assessment on the pre-spring Sunday, one of the leading commentators on the powerful Globo communications network, Andrea Sadi, analysed: "Sunday's demonstrations against the PEC that shields parliamentarians from prosecution and amnesty left the Chamber of Deputies exposed. The demonstrations were a response to the approval of the Shielding PEC and the urgency of the amnesty bill."

## First results

In addition to showing that it is possible to "break the bubble" of the democratic camp and attract people to the streets, the protests also had, according to other commentators in the corporate press, two important symbolic achievements in the recent history of this polarised country. With the "help" of Trump's imperialist attack on the country's economy and political sovereignty, the left has regained (at least for now) the Brazilian flag, which had been misused for more than ten years by Bolsonaro's followers. At the same time, it was the first time since 2013 that anti-corruption outrage in the state apparatus was led by the progressive mass movement.

The concrete result of Sunday's journey, beyond the recovery of the spirit of activism, can already be seen in the four right-wing MPs who publicly apologised for voting for the bills, in the apparent regret of at least two of the 12 PT MPs who voted with the right, and in the promises of the Senate president – who must assess the proposals according to the country's laws – that he will hinder the proceedings and, therefore, the approval of the two resolutions.

None of this – except for the renewed spirit to continue fighting – guarantees that Bolsonaro will serve his sentence of more than 27 years in prison, or that the offensive by the corrupt and potentially corrupt will be effectively defeated. If we consider the period since Lula's election against Bolsonaro, the social movement and the left have achieved an important draw in the streets and are in a position to turn the tide. But the struggle will be tough: the far right can count not only on the government of the most powerful country in the world taking consecutive measures against Brazil, the Brazilian government and the judiciary, but also on a not insignificant electoral card up its sleeve – a "tamed Bolsonaro", a neo-fascist with a controlled temper, in the guise of a good administrator, who is the governor of São Paulo, Tarcísio de Freitas.

The situation demands that street mobilisations continue. And it makes the political-ideological dispute and the concrete struggle of the workers of São Paulo against Tarcísio one of the central challenges of the coming months.

*23 September 2025*

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