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Trump's Tariff Warning Shakes Brazilian Politics as Lula Gains Ground and Bolsonaro Faces Legal Heat

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President Donald Trump recently sent shockwaves through Brazilian politics after threatening a 50% tariff on imports from Brazil, a move directly tied to the ongoing trial of Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro. Trump, calling the trial a “witch hunt,” urged its immediate dismissal and made it clear that his tariff policy was a tool to voice disapproval.

However, the strategy may have had the opposite effect. Brazil's Supreme Federal Court (STF – *Supremo Tribunal Federal*) instead intensified its probe into Bolsonaro, prompting federal police to raid his home and office. Bolsonaro was slapped with restrictions, including a social media ban and an ankle monitor. Meanwhile, Lula, once mired in declining approval ratings and congressional resistance, has emerged reinvigorated, using the international dust-up to rally political momentum.

Trump's intervention, though likely intended to protect a key ally in Bolsonaro, triggered a nationalist response in Brazil. Lula capitalized on the moment, donning a “Sovereign Brazil Unites Us” cap at a student event and pushing back against what he called “unacceptable blackmail” by a foreign leader. “A gringo will not give orders to this president,” he declared.

Polling data supports this shift. According to the Atlas Institute, Lula's approval rating rose from 47.3% to 49.7% after the tariff threats, with over 62% of respondents opposing the

measure. In contrast, Bolsonaro's political troubles deepened, and even traditional allies began to distance themselves.

Brazilian agribusiness leaders, often aligned with Bolsonaro, publicly criticized Trump's move, warning that punitive tariffs lacked any legitimate trade rationale. Lawmaker Arnaldo Jardim, part of the influential agricultural caucus, said the threats stirred national outrage and pushed Congress to back a reciprocity bill. "Even among sectors that initially thought this could benefit Bolsonaro, many had to reconsider their positions," Jardim told the *Associated Press*.

The drama also shifted the dynamics in Brazil's Congress, where lawmakers had been gearing up for a confrontation with Lula over economic policy. In the wake of Trump's tariff threat, congressional leaders signed onto Lula's pledge to enact reciprocal measures against the U.S. if no resolution is reached by August 1.

Moreover, Congress began advancing Lula's stalled proposal to expand income tax relief for working-class Brazilians, an initiative thought to be dead after legislators overturned one of his decrees. Trump's interference appears to have temporarily united Lula's critics behind a shared national interest.

At the heart of the turmoil, Bolsonaro is facing multiple legal battles. Brazil's Attorney General recently called for a guilty verdict against him on charges including attempting a coup, leading a criminal organization, and undermining democratic institutions. The court's most recent actions also include scrutiny of his son, Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, who resides in the United States and is reportedly under investigation for alleged collusion with U.S. officials to sanction Brazilian authorities.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes, overseeing Bolsonaro's cases, directly cited Trump's statements and Bolsonaro family social media activity in the court's rationale. "Brazil will always know how to defend its democracy and sovereignty," Moraes stated, emphasizing that foreign influence would not sway Brazil's judiciary.

For his part, Bolsonaro called the ankle monitor a "supreme humiliation" and denied plans to flee the country. Eduardo Bolsonaro responded sharply, accusing Moraes of trying to criminalize Trump by targeting his father. "Since he has no power over them, he decided to make my father a hostage," he said in a public statement.

While Trump's move was likely well-intentioned toward a political ally, it appears to have inadvertently reignited support for a struggling Lula and added fuel to Bolsonaro's mounting legal firestorm. The former president's populist approach to international diplomacy once again underscores the risks of intertwining domestic politics with foreign policy.