

Trump imposes new tariffs on Brazil: Imperialist intimidation ahead of October's presidential election

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The Trump administration announced last week an additional 25 percent tariff on a broad range of Brazilian products, following a trade investigation launched in July of last year by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). The tariffs took effect on July 22.

The USTR investigation falsely accuses the government of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party–PT) of unfair trade practices. But the tariffs are nakedly political in character.

They add a new layer to the 50 percent tariffs imposed on Brazil exactly one year ago, which were intended to pressure the Brazilian Supreme Court into reversing the impending conviction of Brazil's fascist former President Jair Bolsonaro, a close ally of Trump who was convicted last September for the January 8, 2023 coup attempt inspired by Trump's abortive coup at the U.S. Capitol two years earlier.

The Trump administration aims, within the context of the Trump corollary to the “Monroe Doctrine” and the “Shield of the Americas,” to install governments aligned with its drive to transform Latin America into a US neocolonial protectorate and impose authoritarian rule across the region—a process already underway within the United States itself. In Brazil in particular, the Trump administration is seeking to interfere in the October election to secure the victory of Flávio Bolsonaro, Jair Bolsonaro's son, who polls put in a technical tie with Lula.

The US is Brazil's second-largest trading partner, behind China. This close trade relationship led the Trump administration—already mired in a deepening crisis ahead of the midterm elections and under pressure to contain the inflationary impact of its war against Iran—to exempt three-quarters of Brazilian exports from the new 25 percent tariff. These include coffee, beef, orange juice, and certain industrial inputs. Even so, Brazil now faces the second-highest average tariff rate on exports to the US, at 14.42 percent—behind only the 21.5 percent applied to Chinese goods.

Drawing on the USTR investigation, Washington claimed that Brazil disadvantages US electronic payment companies by promoting PIX, the country's widely used free payment system, and that the Supreme Court—through Justice Alexandre de Moraes, the judge who oversaw Bolsonaro's conviction—unlawfully censored US social media platforms.

The USTR report further cited alleged irregularities in Brazilian taxation of US ethanol, Brazilian tariffs on Mexican and Indian goods claimed to indirectly harm US interests and purported failures to combat corruption, piracy and illegal deforestation.

The Brazilian government condemned the new tariffs, declaring in an official statement that “July 15, 2026, will go down in the history of relations between Brazil and the United States as a regrettable milestone.” Pointing to the US trade surplus in goods and services with Brazil, the statement declared: “There is no justification for unilateral measures against our country.” It concluded that the new tariffs are “part of a scheme devised with the active collaboration of the Bolsonaro family. They are false patriots who have orchestrated and publicly defended

actions against our country, driven by electoral motives.”

The new tariffs were announced by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whom Trump has tasked with managing Washington's pressure campaign against Brazil and, more broadly, with implementing his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine across the region. Rubio has cultivated close ties with the Bolsonaro family—meeting Flávio in Washington in May—and has previously denounced Lula as an “anti-American radical” who bows to “China's genocidal regime.” On June 15, Rubio posted on X:

Let there be no confusion about why: President Lula and his government have not negotiated with the US in good faith.

His economic policies are bad for Americans and bad for Brazilians. For the past year, Lula has put his own ego ahead of making a deal for the welfare of the Brazilian people, and these tariffs are the price for that.

Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira responded on June 16, declaring that Rubio's remarks “are unacceptable and offensive to the Brazilian people and the Brazilian government,” and that they “crudely and arrogantly attack the head of state of a friendly country.”

He continued:

Clearly, what bothers the US government is the fact that Brazil has not bowed to the excessive demands and unreasonable requests presented during the course of the negotiations.

I cite, as an example, demands for the total, unrestricted, and exclusive opening of entire sectors of the Brazilian economy to the United States, without any reciprocal access for Brazilian products.

In other words, they demanded capitulation.

Shedding light on what lay behind this “capitulation,” journalist Jamil Chade reported on July 17 in *ICL Notícias* that “The Trump administration demanded that Brazil block Chinese investments in the rare earths and minerals sector, while fully opening its domestic market to American goods, as a condition for negotiating any reduction in tariffs.” These demands encompass American ethanol, industrial chemicals and automotive products, as well as a requirement that Washington be consulted on digital policies implemented in Brazil.

Flávio Bolsonaro's candidacy and the specter of a new coup attempt in Brazil

Since Trump's inauguration in January 2025, members of the Bolsonaro family have worked closely with fascist figures in and around the Trump administration to pressure the Brazilian government—the imposition of punishing tariffs, the designation of Brazilian criminal gangs as “terrorist organizations,” and now, open interference in the Brazilian presidential election in favor of Flávio.

On his sixth trip to the US this year, Flávio appeared at a public USTR hearing in early July on the investigation against Brazil. In a livestream explaining his remarks at the hearing, he said he went to the US “to protect Brazil from tariffs and also from Lula ... who constantly attacks the United States, makes a point of saying he's anti-American ... [and] licks China's boots.”

In the same livestream, he also advocated for a free trade zone with the US, declaring: “Instead of the old NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], we can drop the ‘N’ and start using AFTA—the Americas Free Trade Agreement—which Brazil can certainly be a part of. Our economies—the US and Brazil—are complementary. We have a wealth of opportunities to bring American investments here.”

Following the announcement of the new tariffs, Flávio amplified Rubio's statement on X, writing: “Lula is no longer fit to be Brazil's president. We're on a plane without a pilot. The Brazilian Biden is grumpy, reckless, and has become a danger to our nation.”

The reference to Biden is not incidental. Kamala Harris, Biden's chosen successor in 2024, lost the presidential election to Trump after receiving the open backing of Lula and PT officials. In March, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the United States, Flávio accused the Biden administration of having interfered in Brazil's 2022 presidential election to “install a socialist who hates America.”

Ahead of the 2022 election, then-candidate Lula and PT officials engaged in intense behind-the-scenes lobbying of the Biden administration, seeking to secure its public endorsement of Brazil's electronic voting system and the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. Bolsonaro's sustained assault on the integrity of the electronic voting system was a central pillar of his political strategy, which culminated in the fascist coup attempt of January 8, 2023.

Today, Flávio is following directly in his father's footsteps, reprising the same electoral fraud narrative that Bolsonaro deployed in 2022—and that Trump himself echoed last week with fresh attacks on the integrity of the US voting system. At a meeting with ambassadors on Tuesday, Flávio claimed that many of Brazil's electronic voting machines “come from the same source as that Venezuelan company,” referring to Smartmatic, which was cited in US intelligence reports in connection with alleged electoral fraud in Venezuela. Brazil's Superior Electoral Court (TSE) promptly rejected these false allegations. Brazil's voting machines were designed and developed by civil servants and technicians of Brazil's electoral agency.

While cynically disclaiming any intention to question the Brazilian voting system, Flávio called for “all countries to send as many observers as possible to our elections, as they always do, as well as people who are knowledgeable about this technology and how Brazil can hold more secure and transparent elections.”

With Trump in the White House rather than Biden, however, the outcome could be very different. In an interview with *Folha de S. Paulo* last Saturday, Anthony W. Pereira, a professor of political science at Tulane University and a leading expert on Brazil, elaborated on the threat:

as close as it was in 2022—and it probably will be. If Flávio refuses to accept the result and, at the same time, the Trump administration [says], “We do not accept this election,” that could create a chaotic situation here [in Brazil]... it's possible that some government officials might propose this kind of interference. If this kind of crisis drags on without a concrete resolution, it could create an incentive for the Armed Forces to intervene or perhaps pressure to hold new elections—something unprecedented in the last few decades of Brazilian democracy.

Less than four years after the fascist coup attempt of January 8, 2023, and with Trump moving rapidly and openly toward establishing a dictatorship in the United States, the threat of a new coup is very real, and it should set off alarm bells for the working class in Brazil, Latin America as whole and internationally. The working class, however, cannot delegate its defense against the threat of dictatorship to the PT, nor to any faction of the Brazilian bourgeoisie—nor to the Democrats in the US, nor to representatives of other imperialist powers that may be more diplomatically aligned with the Lula government.

In the same statement condemning the new tariffs—in which it branded Flávio and the Bolsonaro family as “false patriots”—the Lula government asserted that “Protecting our sovereignty is an obligation that transcends all parties and all political tendencies.”

The PT is once again constructing a bankrupt “broad front,” seeking, as it stated in a party manifesto released in April, to “consolidate a broad process of social dialogue that overcomes fragmentation and establishes a new pact for national development.” It further explained: “This movement must bring together the productive sector and the business community committed to the nation, the working class, the labor movement, and popular movements into a coalition that transcends the institutional defense of democracy.”

Over the past year and a half, Lula and the PT have responded to Washington's imperialist offensive by systematically downplaying US threats and capitulating at every turn. At the same time, the Lula administration is deepening austerity and dramatically expanding military spending. This trajectory lays bare the class character of the PT: a party of the Brazilian bourgeoisie that manages capitalism and cannot break with US imperialism without jeopardizing the interests of the national capital it represents.

As the WSWS has consistently argued, Trump's tariffs are not primarily a commercial weapon; they are an instrument of militarist policy. They represent one front in a developing world war aimed at reversing, through military means, the erosion of US hegemony driven by China's rise over recent decades. To this end, the Trump administration is seeking to install brutal dictatorships across Latin America.

The only coherent response to this offensive is the independent political mobilization of the working class in Brazil, throughout Latin America, and internationally. This requires a decisive break with the PT and its pseudo-left allies, and the building of a unified international struggle for socialism alongside workers in the United States who oppose the fascist agenda of Trump and Rubio.



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Let's suppose the result [of the October presidential election] is