

Former Brazil President Convicted for Corruption



Summary: Brazil's former president and a top candidate for next year's election was convicted on corruption charges with a ten-year sentence.

A top contender for Brazil's presidential election next year was convicted of corruption with a ten-year prison sentence. Former leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will remain free on appeal but will likely not have a chance at a future political career.

Lula was the country's first working-class president and still popular among voters when he left office six years ago. Next year's presidential race was supposed to be his political comeback. He left office with a 63-percent approval rating, greatly in part for his work to transform social policies aimed at bridging inequality in the region's biggest country.

An investigation into possible corruption has been going on for over three years, revealing an intricate system with top levels of business and government putting Brazil's political system into disarray. Lula's conviction was the highest—profile conviction from the investigation.

Judge Sergio Moro found Lula guilty of accepting \$1.2 million in bribes from OAS SA, an engineering firm. The bribe came in the form of a remodel to his beach apartment in exchange for his help in securing contracts with Petroleo Brasileiro, a state oil company.

Investigators allege that when Lula took office in 2003, he devised a plan involving kickbacks to Petrobras. The scheme was uncovered to be a long-running plan with Lula as the mastermind. He has denied any guilt, vowing to appeal any guilty ruling.

Lula's legal team claims the trial has been a partisan witch hunt with Moro as a biased judge out to get Lula for political reasons. Moro denies these allegations.

Head of the Workers Party, Senator Gleisi Hoffmann claims the conviction was made in order to prevent Lula from running for president again. She states that the party will protest the ruling and is confident an appeal will result in the ruling being overturned.

If the guilty verdict holds up on appeal, he will be barred from taking office again. The appeal is expected to take at least eight months for a decision to be reached. If he is unable to run, the left party will be forced to find a suitable leader that can push past the dark shadow Lula has placed on Brazilian politics.

Political scientist Claudio Couto explained, "Lula's absence opens a gaping hole in the political scene, it creates an enormous power vacuum on the left. We have now entered a situation of extreme political tension, even beyond the chaos we have been living for the last year." Couto predicts the guilty verdict to be upheld.

During Lula's two-terms, he pushed the country into a commodity boom to become of the world's fastest-growing economies. Even former U.S. President Barack Obama called him the most popular politician on earth. When he left office and his hand-selected successor took over, the economy turned, diving into the worst recession for the country on record. That successor, Dilma Rousseff was soon after impeached for breaking budgetary rules. Her vice president took over as president but is now also facing corruption charges.

Do you think Brazil can break free of corruption in its politicians? Tell us in the comments below.

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