

Elon Musk faces Brazil inquiry after defying X court order

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Elon Musk faces a legal investigation in Brazil after becoming embroiled in a public row with a supreme court judge over an order requiring the social network X to take down some far-right accounts. Justice Alexandre de Moraes had issued a court order forcing the site formerly known as Twitter to block several users as part of his investigation into the former president Jair Bolsonaro's attempts to stay in power after his 2022 election defeat. The order also barred the social network from publishing details of which accounts were blocked, and came with fines of about £16,000 a day for failure to comply. Now, Musk says, the company will reverse those blocks. The multibillionaire also called on Moraes to resign or be impeached. In response, the judge announced late on Sunday that he had opened an inquiry into what he called Musk's obstruction of justice. News of the court order broke in an apparently coordinated disclosure as part of Musk's "Twitter Files", a collaboration with a number of journalists that has resulted in them being given access to the social network's internal records. On Wednesday, the US writer Michael Shellenberger published more than two years of communications between Twitter's legal team and Brazilian courts, calling it evidence of "a sweeping crackdown on free speech". On Saturday, Musk responded, calling the action "aggressive censorship" and committing to lift all restrictions. "This judge has applied massive fines, threatened to arrest our employees and cut off access to X in Brazil," he added. As a result of refusing to comply, Musk predicted: "We will probably lose all revenue in Brazil and have to shut down our office there. But principles matter more than profit." Within a few hours, Musk escalated his dispute with Moraes, promising to publish "everything" demanded of Twitter by the supreme court justice. "This judge has brazenly and repeatedly betrayed the constitution and people of Brazil. He should resign or be impeached," Musk said. Moraes responded by launching his inquiry, which was backed by the current government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which criticised Musk and called for regulation of social media. "We cannot live in a society in which billionaires domiciled abroad have control of social networks and put themselves in a position to violate the rule of law, failing to comply with court orders and threatening our authorities," said the federal solicitor general, Jorge Messias. "Social peace is non-negotiable." Senior members of Lula's administration condemned Musk's interventions. "We will not allow anyone – no matter how much money and power they have – to affront our country," wrote the communications minister, Paulo Pimenta, on X. "Brazil is not the jungle of impunity and our sovereignty will not be subordinate to the power of internet platforms or the business model of big tech." "Brazil is not, nor will it become the backyard of the far right," Pimenta added in another post. The head of Lula's Workers' party, Gleisi Hoffmann, said Musk's arrogant and "truculent offensive" was an attack on Brazilian sovereignty and the rule of law. Hoffmann said Musk's "pathetic" attack on Moraes was an attempt to inflame Brazil's far right by falsely insinuating that the judge was censoring citizens. As well as his

investigation into the “digital militias” who backed Bolsonaro’s administration and the alleged coup attempt on 8 January last year, when hundreds of people stormed government buildings in the capital, Brasília, Moraes is leading a second investigation into executives at Telegram and Google over their role in a campaign criticising an internet regulation bill. On Saturday, Bolsonaro posted a video of a meeting he had with Musk in May 2022. The former president also issued a call for his supporters to gather in Rio de Janeiro on 21 April.