



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Shutting down X in Brazil—Musk between the interests of two election campaigns



Thousands of internet providers in Brazil are shutting down the X platform (formerly Twitter) this weekend, which could result in a nationwide suspension of its use starting on Monday.

The companies are hereby implementing an emergency **order** from Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes to shut down X in Brazil. This is the culmination of a war waged by state institutions against the company and its owner, Elon Musk.

Justice Moraes has undertaken a risky operation in the name of the state, which, although not without precedent in the world, is extremely radical for a democracy like Brazil and even dangerous for a free society.

Over the weekend, Mr Moraes will be without access to X, where he has an enviable 1.1 million followers despite not posting since January. However, he is prepared to endure this inconvenience, as the stakes he has taken are significantly higher.

X is at the **top of the list** of news applications in Brazil, and it is one of the main sources from which Brazilians follow the news. In a country with more than 150 million voters, nearly 25 million use the X app, making Brazil the world's fourth largest user of this network.

Although not all X users are interested in following the news through this platform, there is no doubt that it is one of the country's main channels for political debate.

The search for objective news on social media in Brazil is also a consequence of the distrust in the impartiality of the mainstream media, where many see the influence of the government, even its funding of media companies.

Harsh measures

However, by shutting down X, Brazil joins the infamous club of countries that includes, for example, China, Iran, Russia, and North Korea. With previous orders to delete hundreds of

accounts criticising the policies of the ruling left and President Lula da Silva, Brazil has adopted a practice, similar to that of Turkey and some other countries, which is often classified as a violation of freedom of speech.

The measures passed by Justice Moraes on Friday, however, do not give its critics much hope that they will be able to circumvent them. He has imposed fines of up to \$9,000 a day on anyone who tries to access X through a VPN.

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It is a very harsh penalty, considering that it is five to six times higher than the average monthly salary in Brazil.

Also, in the package of measures of Justice Moraes is the settlement of a previous fine to X of about \$3 million, which is why he froze the finances of Elon Musk's other company, SpaceX's Starlink satellite-internet service, which is widely used in Brazil.

Musk between political interests

The American billionaire clearly disagrees with Alexandre Moraes' decisions, and he primarily uses his strategy of struggle to discredit the left-wing establishment as a censor and stifler of free speech.

"We will begin publishing the long list of (Alexandre Moraes's) crimes, along with the specific Brazilian laws that he broke tomorrow. Obviously, he does not need to abide by US law, but he does need to abide by his own country's laws. He is a dictator and fraud, not a justice," **posted** Musk on X on Saturday.

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Musk's business interests in Brazil are therefore caught in a gap between the political interests of the left-wing Brazilian establishment and partly the same interests at home in the US.

The months leading up to the important local elections scheduled for October 6 and 27, in Brazil, have seen a sharp increase in pressure on X. The main complaint of Justice Moraes and those politically like-minded in the administration is that X serves to promote extreme right-wing policies and spread misinformation.

"Just because someone has money doesn't mean they can do whatever they want. They must accept the country's rules," said Brazil's president, the left-wing populist Lula da Silva, welcoming the decision to shut down X.

It is uncertain, though, how far the US will go to defend the business interests of one of its wealthiest and unquestionably most influential entrepreneurs.

Winners and losers

Musk's political views are directly opposed to the Democratic administration in Washington. "The attacks this year on free speech are unprecedented in the 21st century. It will happen in America too if Kamala/Walz gain power. Just listen to what they've said," wrote Musk on X on Friday.

Some of the most influential Republican representatives came to his defence because of the Brazil case. Senator Ted Cruz did not fail to use shutting down X in Brazil in the current presidential campaign.



The Biden-Harris administration has shown nothing but contempt for free speech here in the United States - Ted Cruz

"Brazil is banning X for one reason: to suppress free speech and thought. Unsurprisingly, Lula supports this decision, because he too seeks to ban free speech and thought. Biden courted Lula, celebrated his election, and called him a personal friend. The Biden-Harris administration has shown nothing but contempt for free speech here in the United States," wrote senator Cruz on X on Saturday.

There are estimates that shutting down X in Brazil will be short-lived, perhaps only a few days, as was the case with similar conflicts in other countries and other platforms when the owners responded to court requests and were allowed to resume operations.

But even in such a scenario, the consequences of this war will be long-term, both for Brazil and for X and its owner. Brazil will hardly be able to wash away the accusations that it has resorted to one of the most drastic measures against social media, and this decision will long follow its democratic reputation.

Elon Musk, on the other hand, will undoubtedly make a reputational profit as a fighter for freedom of speech, but he will also be a victim of authoritarian policies that want to suppress that freedom.

The Republican Party in the US can also expect an indirect benefit ahead of the autumn elections because the Brazilian ban on X appears as a convenient case for promoting its narrative of suppressing the votes of right-wing political options.