



By: Joseph E. Stiglitz

Brazil has refused to submit to America's bullying



For decades, the United States was the champion of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

Of course, there were glaring discrepancies between rhetoric and reality: during the Cold War, the US overturned democratically elected governments in Greece, Iran, Chile, and elsewhere in the name of defeating Communism.

At home, the US was in a battle to uphold African-Americans' civil rights a century after slavery's end. More recently, the US Supreme Court has acted aggressively to restrict efforts to rectify the legacies of the long history of racial discrimination.

But while the US has often failed to practice what it preached, now it does neither. President Donald Trump and the Republican Party have seen to that.

In his first term, Trump's contempt for the rule of law culminated in his attempt to overturn democracy's most important principle: the peaceful transition of power.

He claimed – and still insists – that he won the 2020 election, even though Joe Biden received some seven million more votes, and even though dozens of courts ruled that there had been no significant electoral irregularities.

Anyone familiar with Trump may not have been surprised; the big surprise was that some 70% of Republicans believe that the election was rigged.

Many Americans – including a majority of one of the two major parties – have gone down the rabbit hole of outlandish conspiracy theories and disinformation.

For many Trump supporters, democracy and the rule of law are less important than preserving the American way of life, which in practice means ensuring domination by white males at the expense of everyone else.

Brazil's institutions held firm

For better and for worse, America has long provided a model for others to follow.

And unfortunately, there are demagogues around the world more than willing to adapt Trump's formula of trampling on democratic institutions and repudiating the values that underpin them.

A prominent example is Brazil's former president, Jair Bolsonaro, who went so far as to try to emulate the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol to prevent Biden's election.

Attempted coup on January 8, 2023, in Brasília was larger than the attack on the US Capitol, but Brazil's institutions held firm

That attempted coup on January 8, 2023, in Brasília was **larger** than the attack on the US Capitol, but Brazil's institutions held firm – and now they are demanding that Bolsonaro be held accountable.

Meanwhile, the US has been moving in the opposite direction since Trump's return to the White House in January.

Once again, Trump has made it clear that he loves tariffs and abhors the rule of law – even violating the trade agreement he made with Mexico and Canada in his first term.

Trump's unconstitutional actions

And now, ignoring the US Constitution, which gives Congress the sole authority to impose taxes – and tariffs are just a particular tax on imports of goods and services – he has **threatened** to impose a 50% tariff on Brazil unless it stops the prosecution of Bolsonaro.

Here was Trump violating the rule of law to insist that Brazil, which has adhered to all the strictures of due process in **prosecuting** Bolsonaro, do the same.

Congress has never enacted tariffs as an instrument for inducing countries to obey a president's political dictates, and Trump could cite no law that gave him even a fig leaf for his unconstitutional actions.

What Brazil is doing stands in marked contrast to what has happened in the US

What Brazil is doing stands in marked contrast to what has happened in the US.

While the legal process had moved slowly but judiciously to hold to account those who had participated in the January 6 insurrection, immediately after his second inauguration, Trump used the president's **pardon** power to forgive all who had been duly convicted – even the most violent.

Complicity in an attack that left five people dead and more than 100 police officers injured was no crime.

Bullying by the world's most powerful country

Like China, Brazil has refused to submit to America's bullying. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva called Trump's threat "unacceptable blackmail," adding, "No foreigner is going to give orders to this president."

Lula has defended his country's sovereignty not only in the domain of trade, but also in regulating US-controlled tech platforms.



Trump has undermined democracy and the rule of law in the US – perhaps irreparably. He must not be allowed to do so elsewhere – Joseph E. Stiglitz

America's tech oligarchs use their money and influence worldwide to try to force countries to give them free reign to **pursue** their profit-maximizing strategies, which inevitably cause enormous harms, including by serving as a channel of misinformation and disinformation.

As in recent elections in Canada and Australia, Lula got a "Trump bump" in national support as Brazilians recoiled from the US administration and rallied around him.

But that wasn't what motivated Lula to take his stance. It was a genuine belief in Brazil's right to pursue its own policies without foreign meddling.

Under Lula's leadership, Brazil has chosen to reaffirm its commitment to the rule of law and democracy, even as America seems to be renouncing its own Constitution.

It must be hoped that other leaders of countries large and small will demonstrate similar bravery in the face of bullying by the world's most powerful country.

Trump has undermined democracy and the rule of law in the US – perhaps irreparably. He must not be allowed to do so elsewhere.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank (1997-2000), former chair of the US President's Council of Economic Advisers, former co-chair of the

High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices, and lead author of the 1995 IPCC Climate Assessment. He is Co-Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.