

# The Brazilian Military Regime of 1964-1985: Legacies for Contemporary Democracy

O regime militar brasileiro de 1964-1985: legados para a democracia contemporânea

TIMOTHY J. POWER  
University of Oxford, United Kingdom  
*timothy.power@lac.ox.ac.uk*

**Abstract:** This article revisits the 21-year military dictatorship in Brazil to examine how it shaped subsequent democratic politics after the transition to civilian rule in 1985. In particular, six legacies are analysed. The paper begins by focusing on the *relative* legitimacy of the Brazilian military regime when compared to other dictatorships in the Southern Cone. The article then examines several variables which impact on the way politics has played out between 1985 and 2014: a high level of continuity of personnel inherited from the military period, an accentuated commitment to civil liberties (as in the Constitution of 1988), a more robust level of political competition compared to the pre-coup years, and a delayed but increasingly meaningful consideration of transitional justice issues. The article concludes by noting how mass mobilization (the street) engendered the collapse of the military regime in 1983-1984, and how this strategy of collective action has been repeated on several occasions under democracy.

**Keywords:** Coup; Dictatorship; Authoritarianism; Legacies; Democratic consolidation; Brazil.

**Resumo:** O artigo revisita os 21 anos de ditadura militar no Brasil para entender como o regime militar afetou o desenvolvimento do regime democrático após a transição de 1985. Seis legados específicos serão analisados. O artigo começa por focar a legitimidade *relativa* do regime militar brasileiro quando comparado a outros regimes autoritários no Cone Sul. Em seguida, o artigo examina algumas variáveis que tiveram impacto sobre a trajetória política nacional entre 1985 e 2014: um alto grau de continuidade das elites, um compromisso fortalecido para com os direitos civis (por exemplo, na Constituição Federal de 1988), um nível mais robusto de competição política quando comparado aos anos anteriores ao golpe e

uma implementação tardia, mas significativa, da justiça de transição. O artigo conclui por observar como a mobilização em massa (a rua) levou ao colapso do regime militar em 1983-1984, notando que essa estratégia de ação coletiva tem sido repetida em varias ocasiões sob a democracia.

**Palavras-chave:** Golpe; Ditadura; Autoritarismo; Legados; Consolidação democrática; Brasil.

In April 2014, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brazilian military coup was commemorated in a country with an imperfect yet stable democratic regime. Five decades after the coup and three decades into the current democracy, the country seemed fundamentally changed, at least on the surface. The leftist Workers' Party (PT) was on its way to its fourth consecutive victory in presidential elections. The victor in the 2014 elections, incumbent Dilma Rousseff, was a former urban guerrilla fighter who was imprisoned and tortured by the military in 1970. She succeeded Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former trade unionist who led some of the most successful labour mobilizations against military rule, earning him a month in jail in 1980. Lula, in turn, had followed Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a one-time Marxist sociologist who had sought exile in Chile after the coup. For twenty years, Brazilians had been governed by the leaders of three factions of opposition to military rule: first the intellectual wing, then the social movement wing, and finally the armed resistance.

This superficial review of the country's recent leadership would seem to suggest that 21<sup>st</sup>-century Brazil has firmly divested itself of the legacy of military dictatorship between 1964-1985. Yet a closer inspection of the country's macro politics demonstrates that this thesis could not be further from the truth. Contemporary Brazilian democracy since 1985 has been, and continues to be, profoundly shaped by legacies of military rule. In this brief essay, I review six of these legacies. Taking each legacy in turn, I contend that modern Brazilian democracy has (1) confronted a slow and fragmentary process of legitimation, given inevitable comparisons with the objective economic performance of the authoritarian period; (2) displayed a high level of continuity in personnel from the dictatorship; (3) dramatically expanded civil liberties as a result of the repression under military rule; (4) displayed unprecedented levels of political competition, again as a reaction to the highly controlled environment in the 1960s and 1970s; (5) evinced a delayed and cautious approach to transitional justice and human rights; and (6) expanded the repertoire of collective action in Brazil, particularly as an echo of the successful mass mobilizations that helped to delegitimize military rule in 1983-1984.

Two disclaimers apply to this analysis. First, in speaking of "legacies of military rule" I am generally referring to *political* legacies, that is, aspects of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime that continue to shape national political life today. I will leave aside many other dimensions of military rule that fail to meet this basic criterion but that are undoubtedly important to understanding 21<sup>st</sup> century Brazil, e.g., the transformation of national infrastructure, the modernization of the state apparatus,

the expansion of electronic media and its impact on popular culture, and changes to the administrative and territorial structure of the country. Other contributors to this Dossier are far more qualified to address the long-term reverberation of these initiatives. My second disclaimer is that for reasons of space, my treatment of each legacy will be necessarily brief, but readers are invited to consult the vast and rich secondary literature concerning political regime change in Brazil.

## LEGACY 1: DIFFICULT LEGITIMATION AT THE MASS LEVEL

The military dictatorship inaugurated in 1964 suspended political freedoms while presiding over revolutionary changes in the social and productive structures of Brazil. Economic growth was hugely impressive, reaching double digits during the “Brazilian miracle” of the 1968-1973 period, and averaging 7% annually throughout the 1970s. Although the regime’s economic policies exacerbated income inequalities, they also raised per capita income dramatically. Using a constant metric (*reais* of the year 2008), the per capita GDP in 1964 was about 5300 *reais*, but rose to 12,300 *reais* by the year 1980—an increase of 130% in real terms in only sixteen years.<sup>1</sup> Although the incomes of the rich grew much faster than those of the poor (the opposite pattern from the Lula years), a rising tide was lifting all boats. It is alarming to recognise and even more painful to say so in print, but the military dictatorship vastly improved the material conditions of most Brazilians, even while depriving them of the right to change their government. At the same time, human rights abuses, understood as direct physical repression by state authorities, were far lower in Brazil than in the neighboring dictatorships of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (Pereira 2005). If we are to make *relative* judgments about Brazilian military rule—putting the regime in appropriate regional context, and without any intent to make pointless normative assertions about “good” or “bad” dictatorships—we would have to conclude that the Brazilian dictatorship was more economically successful and less physically repressive than its counterparts in the Southern Cone.

Although the democratic regime inaugurated in 1985 swiftly restored free elections and civil liberties, its economic and social performance was initially poor. Per capita GDP in 2002, the year that Lula (PT) was elected president, was approximately the same as it was in 1980, when he was imprisoned by the military regime for his union activism. Brazil endured nearly a quarter century of income stagnation, most of it coinciding with liberalization and democratization of the political regime. Ordinary citizens, reliant on the minimum wage, were keenly aware of this. If we use a constant indicator of *reais* of the year 2009, the minimum wage at the time of the military coup in 1964 stood at 437 *reais*. When the military returned to the barracks in 1985, it

<sup>1</sup> All historical socioeconomic data cited here are drawn from the online database of IPEA, <<http://www.ipeadata.gov.br>>.

stood at 319, falling to an all-time low of 199 *reais* in 1991. The minimum wage did not recover its pre-coup level in real terms until 2009, some 45 years after President João Goulart was chased into exile in Uruguay. As Getúlio Vargas' Labour Minister in 1953-1954, Goulart had championed the aggressive use of minimum wage policies to reduce poverty, a strategy that was interrupted for a half century until the PT renewed it beginning in 2003. But paradoxically, under military rule the minimum wage was *always* higher than it was for the first two decades of the post-1985 democracy.

Average economic growth between 1985 and 2005 was less than half of what it was in the equivalent 20-year period after the 1964 coup. Simply put, military rule saw an expanding economy and massive investments in infrastructure, whereas the first two decades of democracy saw the opposite. Under these conditions, it was at first quite difficult for the incipient post-1985 democracy to prove its worth to the Brazilian population. Although strongly supported by the political elite, the regime was slow to be loved by the mass citizenry, and the military continued to be one of the most strongly supported institutions in Brazil. This pattern was first noted in a brilliant analysis by the Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell (1992). Conventional wisdom had held that democratic consolidation would be easier in countries where the outgoing dictatorship had been more economically successful and less physically repressive (e.g. Brazil, not Argentina). O'Donnell made a persuasive case for the opposite hypothesis. In countries where the political class and bourgeoisie had been thoroughly traumatized by prior experiences with military rule (e.g. Argentina, not Brazil), they would work harder to avoid an authoritarian involution. Conversely, Brazilian capitalists and party politicians had good historical reasons to believe that a military coup would not necessarily harm their interests.

Subsequent survey data on regime preference and on trust in the military lent credence to O'Donnell's comparative insights. Over the past 25 years public support for democracy has consistently been higher in Argentina than in Brazil, despite greater political instability and more severe socioeconomic crises in Argentina.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, for example, 73% of Argentines believed that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, as did 71% of Uruguayans, 63% of Chileans, and only 49% of Brazilians.<sup>3</sup> The relative "success" of the military dictatorship, compared to the middling socioeconomic performance of the post-1985 governments, created a more challenging environment for regime legitimation in democratic Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the Latinobarómetro time series data presented in the statistical appendix to *Democracy in Latin America: Toward A Citizen's Democracy*, a comprehensive report of the United Nations Development Programme on which O'Donnell served as lead consultant (UNDP 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The equivalent figure in Brazil in 2003 was 45%, meaning that from 2003-2013—a decade of extraordinary improvement in personal incomes and social indicators—Brazilians barely changed their view of the political regime. In both 2003 and 2013, a significant minority of Brazilians (19%) said that under certain circumstances an authoritarian regime could be preferable. Source: Latinobarómetro 2013, cited in *The Economist*, 2 November 2013.

## LEGACY 2: CONTINUITY OF POLITICAL PERSONNEL

After the coup of 1964, and in sharp contrast to the recent bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, Brazil's generals welcomed the cooperation of civilian professional politicians. Two years after the coup, military rulers helped establish a progovernment party (known as ARENA until 1979, and PDS thereafter), assisted it in electoral competition, and afforded party politicians positions of power in the executive branch, especially at the levels of state and local government. Also in contrast to their counterparts in the Southern Cone, Brazilian leaders chose to preserve the national legislature. The ARENA/PDS leadership was thereby guaranteed domination of an emasculated, but still visible, political institution. Equipped with a government-sanctioned political party and control of a symbolically important forum (the Congress), the civilian political right fared far better in Brazil than in neighbouring dictatorships.

Outside of Latin America, other exclusionary regimes have attempted to incorporate and adapt the democratic institutions of parties, elections, and parliament (e.g. Hermet/Rose/Rouquié, 1978; Gandhi/Lust-Okar, 2009). The Brazilian experiment was distinctive, however, in that these institutions assumed greater importance over time, and played a central role in the demise of the military regime (Linz 1973; Kinzo 1988; Lamounier 1984, 1989). Brazil's professional politicians were able to cling to the representative institutions held over from the defunct democracy of 1946-1964, inhabiting them and dominating them, and thus survive an era which for the Latin American political class in general could only be described as disastrous. The political right, which supported the incumbent military dictatorship, was clearly advantaged by this process (Nunes 1978; Hagopian 1996; Power 2000). But it is also the case that the availability of legal channels of dissent allowed the emergence of high-profile opposition figures, especially after cautious liberalization began in 1974 (Alves 1985; Skidmore 1988). Thus, the peculiar institutional framework of Brazilian authoritarianism was very favourable toward the maintenance of political careers, both on the progovernment right and the antigovernment left.

This continuity of political personnel was one of the most oft-noted characteristics of the post-1985 Brazilian democracy. In the National Constituent Assembly that wrote Brazil's current Constitution in 1987-1988, approximately 40% of the members had been members of ARENA/PDS, the official party of the military regime. This was still true of 25% of the members of Congress as recently as 1999. The first president under democracy, José Sarney (1985-1990), served the military loyally after 1964 and had been president of the pro-military party as recently as one year before the transition to democracy. His successor, Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), had a similar trajectory; both were members of traditional Northeastern oligarchies cultivated by the generals. Numerous state governors and mayors who had appointed by the military regime were able to hold onto their offices even after the resumption of direct elections, due mainly to the patronage networks that they built under dictator-

ship. In the Northeast, this ex-authoritarian legacy persisted well into the mid-2000s, when the successes of the Lula government helped the PT make significant inroads into the region (Montero 2012).

As noted earlier, since the impeachment of Collor in 1992 Brazilian democracy has been led by a series of figures who were shaped politically by their opposition to military rule: Itamar Franco (1992-1994), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Lula (2003-2010), and Dilma (2011-present). Cardoso's governing style was notably influenced by the pragmatic pact-making that led to the transition to democracy in 1984-1985, in which he himself played a role as a senator for the PMDB; Lula has stated on numerous occasions that his inclination toward dialogue and negotiation was the natural by-product of his experience as a unionist trying to win small concessions from military autocrats. Thus, one constant of national life since redemocratization in 1985 has been that Brazil's major political figures, whether left or right, were socialized politically by the authoritarian regime initiated in 1964. This is one of the main reasons why the mainstream figures of Brazil's political class continue to strongly value democracy, even despite its glaring shortcomings.

### LEGACY 3: THE REACTIVE EXPANSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

A key feature of the Brazilian military regime was its curtailment of the freedom of expression, especially after the draconian Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) of December 1968, which essentially allowed the military presidents to rule by decree. Public protests were severely repressed, and the freedom of assembly depended on the consent of local military commanders. Prior censorship of print media became routine, and to avoid complications, editors often adopted policies of self-censorship as well (Smith 1997). In the cultural sphere, anti-regime artists were harassed, imprisoned, or forced to pursue their careers abroad. Universities were monitored for "subversive activities" by state agents operating undercover or posted directly into the upper university administration. The ability of lawyers and judges to defend the rule of law was constrained by so-called "national security" legislation (Alves 1985; Pereira 2005). AI-5 was not abrogated until 1978, well into the period of military-led political liberalization, and the various National Security Laws persisted throughout the regime. (The last version of the anti-subversion statute, Law 7170 of 1983, is still in effect in a diluted form today, though prosecutions are rare.)

However, after the military initiated a cautious, controlled liberalization beginning in 1974, organized civil society in Brazil began to push back against the various erosions of the rule of law. The 1970s and 1980s were characterized by the growth and consolidation of non-partisan societal forces such as the bar association, the press association, women's groups, neighbourhood associations, and even private sector lobbies. This rapidly increasing density of Brazilian civil society transformed the nation's politics, economy, and culture; by the early 1980s, a vibrant and diverse

network of fully autonomous secondary associations provided a countervailing force against state power.

These developments led to a significant revalorization of civil liberties, human rights, and the rule of law, especially among political elites. The removal of these laws and decrees dating from the 1964 dictatorship —what then-Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso termed the “authoritarian debris” (*entulhos autoritários*)— was elevated to one of the primary objectives of the new democratic regime after 1985. This shift in elite political culture, combined with unprecedented activism by civil society and social movements, had a major impact upon the National Constituent Assembly of 1987-1988 (Martínez-Lara 1996). The constitutional process produced a document so favourable to individual rights and civil liberties that it was nicknamed by Ulysses Guimarães, the assembly’s president, as the “Citizens’ Constitution” (*Constituição Cidadã*). The charter promulgated in October 1988 featured a preamble enshrining various rights and freedoms, expanded the concept of equality before the law, instituted fundamental rights of habeas corpus and freedom of information, and at the same time converted many of these protections into “bedrock clauses” (*cláusulas pétreas*) that are immune to future amendment. Chapter 1 of the constitution, entitled “Individual and Collective Rights and Duties,” is one of the longest and most detailed catalogues of rights and freedoms found anywhere in the world (Rosenn 1990).

In many ways, the focus on “citizenship” as the core focus of constitutional jurisprudence parallels the changing focus of progressive civil society, which shifted from a simple negative goal (defeating the dictatorship) in the 1970s to a complex positive goal (building effective, multidimensional citizenship) in the 1980s and beyond (Hochstetler 2000). The dramatic expansion of rights and freedoms in Brazil after 1988 can be interpreted as the long-term outcome of the military’s decision to undermine democracy in 1964.

## LEGACY 4: THE REACTIVE EXPANSION OF POLITICAL COMPETITION

When the military took power in the coup of 1964, they were terminating Brazil’s first democratic experience, which began in 1946. That first democracy is commonly described as having lasted for eighteen years, but in fact it was marked by several instances of what political scientists would term presidential interruptions (Hochstetler 2006) or breakdowns (Llanos/Marsteintredet 2010), not to mention some dubious institutional improvisations. The suicide of Getúlio Vargas in 1954, the opposition to Juscelino Kubitschek’s and later João Goulart’s taking office, and the aborted presidency of Quadros created significant political instability. Nine different men took the presidential oath of office between January 1946 and September 1961 (Eurico Gaspar Dutra, Vargas, Café Filho, Carlos Luz, Nereu Ramos, Kubitschek, Jânio Quadros, Ranieri Mazzilli, and Goulart). The system of government changed from presidential to parliamentary in 1961 and then back again in 1963. In terms of the institutional and

constitutional stability of the regime, the post-military democracy has fared much better than the pre-coup democracy. It is true that, since 1985, unelected presidents have ruled Brazil for about 25% of the time (recall that both José Sarney and Itamar Franco were originally elected to the vice presidency), but these replacements of executives saw no interruption of democratic legality, and Itamar's presidency was the legitimate outcome of an impeachment process conducted according to the constitution (Pérez-Liñán, 2007; Sallum, 2015).

But the most important advantage of the current regime over its postwar predecessor lies in the robustness of democratic procedures. Both participation and contestation, the two critical dimensions of democracy as identified by Dahl (1971), have broadened and deepened. The percentage of Brazilians eligible to vote has risen at every election since 1958, and the expansion of the suffrage has been nothing short of spectacular in the past three decades. Although in 1945 only 16 percent of Brazilians could vote, this rose to 27 percent in 1966, 51 percent in 1986, and to an astonishing 70 percent in 2014, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup. The main changes under the current regime have been the granting of suffrage to illiterates in 1985 and the reduction of the voting age to sixteen in 1988, but the impact of these changes has been accelerated by rising literacy and also an overall aging of the population (a greater share is now of voting age). By the standards of today, the postwar democracy appears rather low-intensity, and the current regime has given Brazil levels of political participation and contestation never before seen in the country's history.

At as the military withdrew from power in the mid-1980s, many observers commented on the challenges posed by the party and electoral systems in Brazil (e.g. Lamounier/Meneguello 1986; Reis 1988). Parties were held to be weak and the electoral system unrepresentative. Key decisions in institution building were taken in 1985 and again during the Constituent Assembly of 1987-1988, and the debates surrounding those decisions revealed a divided political class. A minority of political elites demanded reforms that would strengthen parties and improve accountability by limiting the freedom of action of individual politicians. Yet the majority preferred a permissive set of representative institutions that would grant maximum latitude to politicians at the expense of parties—an orientation that Mainwaring (1999) termed “democratic libertarianism,”—or the idea that democracy meant freedom for free-floating politicians. These preferences led to an institutional design in which politicians' ability to create new parties and to move between parties is extremely high. Not surprisingly, the number of parties represented in Congress rose from 5 in 1982, to 12 in 1986, to 19 in 1994, and to 28 in the 2014 elections. Thus, one of the major challenges of governance in contemporary Brazil is the management of large interparty coalitions in a highly fragmented Congress (Power 2010).

These preferences and decisions by elites are often rationalized with reference to the experience of the military regime. Given that the dictatorship restricted the number of parties to two, made party switching almost impossible, and enforced party discipline in Congress, politicians after 1985 wasted no time in “flexibilizing”



the rules surrounding the party and electoral systems. The result was a kind of post-authoritarian overreaction to the institutional framework of military rule. On the one hand, Brazil has an extraordinarily open and inclusive party system, with strong representation of minority factions and in which voters (not party elites) determine who is elected to Congress. Competition, in terms of candidates per available seat, is now higher than at any time in Brazilian history. On the other hand, extreme fragmentation poses on-going challenges to coalition formation and policy decisiveness. The reactive expansion of political competition is one of the most salient institutional legacies of military rule.

## LEGACY 5: A DELAYED NATIONAL DEBATE ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

If one takes the question “what is the main legacy of the Brazilian military regime?” and puts it to a human rights specialist in Latin America, most responses will be remarkably similar. Despite a known record of human rights abuses (including torture) by the armed forces between 1964 and 1985, Brazil has long been perceived as a laggard in the area of transitional justice. Transitional justice is defined by the United Nations as “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.”<sup>4</sup> These processes are extraordinarily diverse, including amnesties, truth commissions, trials, and memorials. Unlike other post authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Brazil neither put military officers on trial (as did Argentina) nor established a truth commission (as did Chile or Peru) in the early years after the transition to democracy in 1985. A truth commission (*Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, or CNV) was not emplaced until 2012, some 27 years after redemocratization.

What explains this long delay? An “Amnesty Law” passed in 1979 pardoned all crimes of a political nature committed after the coup of 1964, including both human rights abuses committed by military officers and violent acts by the left-wing guerrillas who took up arms against the dictatorship. The legitimacy of this Amnesty Law was questioned by many who claimed that the Congress of 1979 was not democratically elected and that it had been subject to behind-the-scenes pressure from the military leadership (Abrão/Torelly 2012: 153-154). In 1985 when the military returned to the barracks, preservation of the Amnesty Law was understood to be an unwritten understanding between the outgoing military and the incoming civilian president, the centrist Tancredo Neves of the PMDB. For the next two decades, both retired and active-duty military openly resisted any attempt to revisit the 1979 amnesty, and attempted

<sup>4</sup> As cited in numerous UN publications. For example, see “Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice,” March 2010, available in: <[http://www.unrol.org/files/TJ\\_Guidance\\_Note\\_March\\_2010FINAL.pdf](http://www.unrol.org/files/TJ_Guidance_Note_March_2010FINAL.pdf)> (05.09.2015).

to thwart various human-rights initiatives by the Cardoso and Lula administrations, especially those revisiting torture and disappearances of political prisoners under the 1964-85 military regime (Pereira 2005).

Given the military's recalcitrance, progress in transitional justice was slow, but the persistent activism of victims and their families —backed by an increasingly dynamic new generation of legal scholars— led to incremental advances. In 1995, the Cardoso administration formally recognized the responsibility of the Brazilian state for human rights abuses after 1964. This made it legally possible for the state to pay reparations to former political prisoners and also to the survivors of the murdered and disappeared. After 2003, the Lula government went further, expanding the reparations program, and awarding posthumous pardons to army officers who had left their posts to join the left-wing opposition in the 1960s. Meanwhile, human rights activists stepped up their efforts to revisit past abuses, filing repeated lawsuits claiming that the 1979 Amnesty Law did not protect torturers. In May 2010, the Supreme Court held in a 7-to-2 vote that the Amnesty Law was a bilateral amnesty that had been correctly negotiated with the opposition during the dictatorship, and that torture was in fact a “political crime” covered by the statute. At the same time, however, the Court strongly recommended full disclosure of secret military files and a full airing of past crimes.

These developments set the scene for the historic initiatives of Dilma Rousseff. Within weeks of her presidential inauguration in 2011, Dilma —who had been tortured by the security services as a 22-year old and who had lost numerous friends to military repression— took up the issue of transitional justice as a personal cause. Her first foreign visit was to Buenos Aires, where she donned a white kerchief and marched with the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The symbolism of the televised images was not lost on the Brazilian Congress. A Truth Commission with investigatory but not punitive powers was finally approved by Congress in November 2011. The CNV was formally installed in May 2012 in an emotional ceremony in which Dilma was symbolically flanked by all four of her living predecessors (Sarney, Collor, Cardoso, and Lula). After two years of research, hearings, and testimony, the CNV issued its 2000-page final report in December 2014, shortly after Dilma's reelection. The report documents 191 direct murders committed by state agents after 1964, in addition to 210 unsolved disappearances, and 33 other disappearances in which a body was later recovered. At the same time, the CNV noted that these numbers refer only to solved and fully documented cases, and as such they represent only a fraction of the actual crimes by the military dictatorship.

Of the 377 people the CNV named as responsible for human rights abuses, it is estimated that as many as 100 were still alive on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coup of 1964. The final CNV text argued, once again, that the 1979 Amnesty Law should not benefit these perpetrators, and that they should be brought to trial while it is still possible. Despite the CNV's eloquent exhortation, the commission had no power to initiate proceedings itself. Moreover, its recommended strategy remains inconsistent with the 2010 Supreme Court ruling upholding the amnesty.

## LEGACY 6: MASS MOBILIZATION AND THE REPERTOIRE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The final legacy of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship to be discussed here concerns the circumstances of the regime's demise. The regime was mortally wounded by an historic series of popular protests that, while failing in their immediate goal, set the stage for the military's withdrawal from national politics. The legacy of the *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now) movement of 1983-1984 inscribed mass mobilization firmly within the repertoire of collective action in the current democratic regime.

As is well known, the coup of 1964 suspended direct elections for the presidency for a full generation, and one of the main demands of the civilian opposition was the right to select the chief executive in free elections. On 25 April 1984, the Chamber of Deputies was scheduled to vote on a constitutional amendment, proposed by Deputy Dante de Oliveira of the opposition PMDB, which would have restored direct presidential elections. Although few believed the amendment could muster the necessary two-thirds vote of a chamber wherein the pro-regime PDS still controlled nearly half the seats, the opposition parties went ahead with a series of energetic public rallies in support of direct elections. These *showmícios* (a concatenation of the English word "show" with *comício*, or political rally), which featured up to 1 million participants in the larger cities, were pathbreaking events not only political history but also in popular culture, due to the strong presence of artists and musicians alongside opposition leaders. Due to the astonishing success of the rallies and the overwhelming support of public opinion for *diretas já*, a number of prominent PDS politicians—including the vice president of Brazil, Aureliano Chaves, the first civilian to hold that post in many years—took the bold step of endorsing the direct elections movement. When the Dante de Oliveira Amendment finally came up for a vote on April 25, it fell short of the two-thirds majority by a mere 22 votes. The 298 votes in favour included those of 55 PDS deputies who ignored immense pressure from the military (Skidmore 1988: 244). While the *Diretas Já* movement had failed to achieve immediate stated objective, it succeeded in dividing the PDS, leading to the transition to democracy a year later (Mainwaring 1986). Thus, the "failure" was in truth a smashing success.

In a country with little or no previous experience with mass popular mobilizations around programmatic issues, the model of *Diretas Já* proved influential. It has been repeated on at least two occasions. First, in 1992, the student movement in Brazil played an important role in the eventual fall of Fernando Collor de Mello. The *União Nacional dos Estudantes* (UNE) organized a series of popular protests in which students painted their faces in the national colours of green, yellow, and blue (becoming *caras-pintadas*), crying *Fora Collor* (Down with Collor) while dressing in black to reflect their rejection of the disgraced president. Second, in 2013, a series of popular protests (the *jornadas de junho*) rocked the government of Dilma Rousseff. Those who took to the streets in June 2013 expressed a wide-ranging set demands about corruption, public services, human rights, and the cost of sporting mega-events, among other issues.

Unlike the *Diretas Já* or *Fora Collor* movements, these protests were spontaneous, diffuse, and multidimensional. The 2013 protests did not produce a notable organization or leader, and they relied heavily on social media (rather than political parties, trade unions, or the student movement) to mobilize Brazilians into the streets.

In 2015, another wave of protests was directed at the Dilma government, by now extraordinarily unpopular in the midst of a protracted recession. These rallies were far more partisan than earlier popular mobilizations, and it is unclear whether they will develop into the broad-based, cross-cutting protest phenomena of 1984, 1992, and 2013. But one thing remains clear: on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1964 coup, *Diretas Já* showed Brazil (particularly urban Brazil) the value of using “the street” as a way of seizing the political agenda through the use of direct action, impressive “visuals,” and the strategic manipulation of electronic media, whether television in 1984 or Facebook and Twitter in 2013.

The value of this lesson remained powerful on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coup in 2014. Popular mobilization has been able to bring about real “change,” whether the demise of a dictatorship or the replacement of a democratically elected government. This form of protest is now permanently inscribed in the country’s repertoire of collective action.

## CONCLUSIONS

Fifty years after the coup of 1964, Brazil in many ways a changed country, particularly in the political sphere. There is greater political competition, wider popular participation, and more extensive democratic freedom than ever before. The differences between the post-1985 democracy and the military regime—and even between the post-1985 democracy and its failed predecessor of 1946-1964—are marked and real.

Yet change is never absolute nor complete. Brazil has always lent itself well to Charles Anderson’s classic notion of a “living museum,” in which new actors, institutions, and processes are added to the mix but old ones are never entirely displaced (Anderson 1964). As this essay has shown, the experience of military rule has shaped the development of the present democracy, which itself passed the milestone of 30 years in March 2015. In some ways, the legacies of military rule have been positive: they encouraged a strong anti-authoritarian “pushback” in the areas of civil liberties, interparty competition, citizen participation, and the rule of law. In other ways, these legacies have been cause for concern: the slow mass legitimization of democracy as a form of government, or the longstanding inattention to pressing issues of transitional justice, are only two examples. Naturally, the democratic regime that is now entering its fourth decade of life will have to contend with these issues in a sober and considered manner in order to develop a strong basis for long-term sustainability.

How and when these legacies will fade remains uncertain. However, it is clear that Brazil’s 21 years of military dictatorship, which now constitute a much shorter

period than the lifespan of the current democracy, have had an influence extending far beyond their temporal measurement. The events of 1<sup>st</sup> April 1964 continue to echo.

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| Timothy J. Power is University Lecturer in Brazilian Studies and a Fellow of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford, where he is also a member of the Department of Politics and International Relations. An associate fellow of Chatham House, he is a specialist on Brazilian politics and government, having written extensively on presidentialism, elections, the party system and executive-legislative relations in Brazil.