Brazil

Period of democratic transition: 1984–85
Pro-democracy civic movement: present

At the time of the transition, Brazil was ruled by the military, as it had been since 1964. Repression peaked in the early 1970s; by the end of that decade, redemocratization was on the horizon. Elections of variable quality were held throughout the 1970s, but the powerful presidency remained under the control of the military. Impatience with the military regime accelerated after the economy went into crisis in 1982. By 1985, the military was ready to return to the barracks; though an attempt was made to install its preferred candidate in the presidency, the opposition was able to overcome the system of indirect elections and prevail in the election.

Brazil's democratic transition advanced gradually between 1979 and 1985. A sanctioned opposition had been permitted for most of the period of military rule, but as the Brazilian economy faltered in the late 1970s, the military regime proved increasingly incapable of holding democratic demands in check. The labor movement became the most important force in the transition, staging a series of massive strikes between 1978 and 1980. Direct elections of governors and most federal and local representatives were reintroduced in 1982. The opposition consisted of labor unions, the Catholic Church, intellectuals, and other segments of civil society that expressed varying degrees of militancy. While not formally unified, opposition groups frequently cooperated in order to organize mass demonstrations, such as those of 1983–84 calling for direct presidential elections. That effort failed, but the military was unable to prevent opposition candidate Tancredo Neves from triumphing in indirect elections in 1985.

Since 1985, Brazil has seen the deepening of democratic practices. Direct elections to the presidency returned in 1989, and several different parties have come to power since that time. The threat of military intervention in politics has declined significantly throughout the post-transition period.