

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES



Call for Manuscripts for a Thematic Issue of *Latin American Perspectives*

Revisiting the Brazilian Democratic Transition

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This thematic issue reassesses the state of democracy in Brazil forty years after the election of the first civilian president in 1985, following 21 years of military dictatorship (1964-1985) and opening the way for the restoration of democratic rule in Latin America's largest nation. Despite vigorous mobilization by civil society, and amid grave political and economic crises, Brazil's military generals succeeded in exercising significant control over the process of democratization. Still, that control was much weaker than the planned political opening ('*abertura*') sectors of the Armed Forces envisioned back in the mid-1970s, whose main political goal—besides insulating the military from punishments for human rights violations and retaining their political and material privileges—was to create a restricted democracy, one with limited popular engagement in the political realm and whose political elites would primarily come from the civilian party created to support the dictatorship (ARENA). The complex dialectics between forces in favor of a controlled opening and those pushing for accelerated democratization were evident in the pivotal year of 1985 when the military regime's political candidate lost the indirect presidential elections and a Constituent Assembly was approved by the Brazilian Congress, setting the stage for the enactment of the most democratic constitution (1988) in the country's history. At the same time, however, the "New Republic" inaugurated in 1985 kept in place several authoritarian legacies of the dictatorship and guaranteed that no institutions of transitional justice would come to fruition in the near term.

Forty years later, in what seems to be a "forever democratic transition," Brazil is experiencing what Bernardo Bianchi, Jorge Chaloub, Patrícia Rangel, and Frieder Wolf (2021) have called a process of "de-democratization", begun especially after the contested 2014 presidential elections, but greatly accelerated by the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the election of the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2018. Bolsonaro's growing anti-democratic rhetoric and attitudes during his mandate (2019-2022), in particular his campaign to discredit Brazil's electoral system, the politicization of the country's Armed Forces and the states' military polices, and Bolsonaro's antagonism towards the country's social, political and judicial institutions—especially those that attempted to contain his authoritarian drives, such as the Supreme Court—culminated in the brutal January 8th storming of the Brazilian capital. Bolsonaro supporters invaded and ransacked the Brazilian Congress, Executive Palace, and

Supreme Court in what some have dubbed as the Brazilian version of the January 6th attack on the US Capitol by Trump's followers.

The purposeful mischaracterization and misremembering of the Brazilian dictatorship and post-1985 democratic transition has only exacerbated this de-democratization trend. The process of transitional justice, for instance, was slow and mild in Brazil. Not only was Brazil the last country in the Southern Cone to hold a truth commission in 2012-14, but also no military officer has ever been punished in criminal courts for human rights violations. Nonetheless, Brazilian far right groups, represented and led by President Bolsonaro, still regard the period around 1985 as the key moment in the construction of an imagined "leftist hegemony" in Brazil. Bolsonaro contested historians' characterization of the 1964 military takeover as a coup by echoing the terminology of the military and its allies of a "revolution" that supposedly preserved Brazil's democratic institutions from communist takeover (Motta 2021). This revisionism undergirds their demands for the restoration of the political and social order reminiscent of the 1964-1985 military regime.

In this sense, the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third term as Brazilian president (2003-2010, 2023)—Lula had been a key leader of the democratic opposition against the dictatorship in the late 1970s and early 1980s—after a tense and extremely polarized presidential election in 2022, followed by Bolsonaro's lack of recognition of the electoral defeat, the growing radicalization of Bolsonarismo as a political movement, and the January 2023 coup attempt against Lula, speak to the urgency of putting past and present into dialogue. This is even more urgent given the dangerous penetration of Bolsonarismo within Brazil's state institutions, including the police and the Armed Forces, and the role that a mischaracterized representation of the Brazilian history during the military dictatorship and the transition to democratic rule play in strengthening in-group conspiratorial narratives against liberal democracy in today's Brazil.

An older but still influential scholarship on the legacies of dictatorship and the transition in Brazil largely consolidated along two major axes. One strain of this literature, including works by Alfred Stepan (1989), Timothy Power (2000), and Frances Hagopian (2006), has emphasized continuities between the authoritarian period and the present that have impeded the full consolidation of Brazilian democracy, pointing especially to military control of the formal political transition. Another strain including works by Eder Sader (1988), Sonia Alvarez (1990), and Margaret Keck (1992) emphasized moments of democratic rupture within the formal process of democratization by pointing to the remarkable resurgence of civil society. A flourishing contemporary scholarship has incorporated actors previously excluded from accounts of democratization and continued to expand our understanding of the arenas in which democracy was negotiated beyond the usual focus on electoral politics.

Consequently, this thematic issue of LAP seeks to deepen and focus scholarly understanding of the democratic transition in Brazil and its reverberations in the present through both case-studies and theoretical works, including comparative perspectives that examine Brazil's experience relative to other transitions. We invite submissions on all relevant topics, but especially encourage works that situate the transition period within historical processes and/or in relation to contemporary phenomena. In doing so, this issue aims to not only produce a new synthesis of contemporary work, but to critically examine the very notion of a "democratic transition."

Articles can be submitted in English, Portuguese, and Spanish that address but are not limited to the following topics:

- The democratic transition as a “pacted” process, civil-military relations, especially issues related to the 1979 Amnesty Law (*Lei da Anistia*), human rights, and transitional justice; challenges to the rule of law
- Social movements, citizenship, and democracy, changes in forms of social mobilization including the “NGO-ization” of social movements, specific focuses on but not limited to groups representing Afro-Brazilians, Indigenous people, women, LGBTQIA+, urban and rural residents, landless and unhoused persons, and organized labor.
- The democratic transition and the multicultural turn; race and identity in relation to democratization.
- The restoration of constitutional rule, especially social mobilizations around and after the Constituent Assembly of 1987-88.
- Socioeconomic inequality and social welfare policy, from dictatorship-era political economy, hyperinflation, and the Plano Real to the creation and implementation of the SUS.
- Democracy and the business community, state-business relations, including the debates over privatization.
- Foreign relations and national development, considering the limits and possibilities of foreign policy in combating social and economic problems in Brazil, with particular focus on “responsible pragmatism” and South-South relations.
- The far right and conservative forces during the transition, fears of the “communist threat,” the continued consolidation of the religious right, especially among evangelicals.
- Environment, climate change, and democracy, the struggle over deforestation and degradation in the Amazon, Indigenous rights and sovereignty in relation to environmental issues.
- Media and culture, including television, radio, and print media from the transition to the present, the role of theater, cinema, and other media in re-democratization.

SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS

To avoid duplication of content, please contact the issue editors to let them know of your interest in submitting and your proposed topic. We encourage submission as soon as possible, preferably by March 1, 2024 but this call will remain open as long as it is posted on the LAP web site.

Manuscripts should be no longer than 8,000 words of paginated, double-spaced 12 point text with 1 inch margins, including notes and references, using the LAP Style Guidelines available at www.latinamericanperspectives.com under the “Submit” tab where the review process is also described. Manuscripts should be consistent with the LAP Mission Statement available on the web site under the “About” tab.

Manuscripts may be submitted in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. If you do not write in English with near native fluency, please submit in your first language. LAP will translate manuscripts accepted in languages other than English. If you are not submitting in English, please indicate if you will have difficulty reading reviews and/or correspondence from the LAP office in English.

Please feel free to contact the issue editors with questions pertaining to the issue but **all manuscripts should be submitted directly to the LAP office**, not to the issue editors. A manuscript is not considered submitted until it has been received by the LAP office. You should receive acknowledgment of receipt of your manuscript within a few days. If you do not receive an acknowledgment from LAP after one week, please send a follow-up inquiry to be sure your submission arrived.

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Subject Line: Author name – Manuscript for Brazilian Transition issue

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Include: Abstract (100 words), 5 Keywords, and a separate cover page with short author affiliations (less than 130 words) and complete contact information (e-mail, postal address, telephone).

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