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DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL: ORIGIN AND ITS GROWTH

Y Satya Kameswari
Ph.D. Scholar
Department of Political Science
Osmania University

ABSTRACT:

Brazil is the largest and most populated Latin American Country. Brazil has undergone three centuries of Portuguese rule and became independent in the year 1822 with a monarchical system till 1889. A republican form of government came into existence in place of a Monarchical form of government. The country has witnessed many forms of government that include state autonomy and centralization, authoritarianism to democracy and a military coup. The Constitution of 1946 was amended several times through institutional acts which tried to eliminate the democratic character. During the 1970s when authoritarian rule was at its maximum Brazilians to a large extent accepted the existing situation. The elections of 1985 in Brazil were a milestone event for the civilian President to take over in the process of the democratic transition that had begun a decade earlier when President Ernesto Geisel began to relax the repressive measures on which the authoritarian government had relied before. The political liberalization process through the political mobilization that was taking in the past nine years starting from 1974 to 1983 significantly changed towards the end of 1983. Democracy has made significant contributions to development in Brazil in many ways. The most significant achievements of democracy in Brazil can be considered Political stability, social inclusion, economic development, transparency and accountability, rule of law and most importantly uplifting the field of education. Women's rights have got their place, a constitution with a certain stability, scientific and technological development and improved foreign relations were a few more contributions of Democracy to Development in Brazil.

Key Words: Democracy, Development, liberalization, globalisation

INTRODUCTION:

Brazil is the largest and most populated Latin American Country with an area of 8.5 million square km and a population of 202 million. Brazil has undergone three centuries of Portuguese rule and became independent in the year 1822 with a monarchical system till 1889. A republican form of government came into existence in place of a Monarchical form of government. The country has witnessed many forms of government that include state autonomy and centralization, authoritarianism to democracy and a military coup. In April 2022, the Brazilian lower house established a working group to discuss the potential adoption of a semi-presidential system by 2030.

The Prince of Portugal, who became Pedro I [Emperor of Brazil], authorized Brazil's independence on 7th September 1822. The first constitution came into existence in 1824. Since then the country had seven constitutions. The first constitution lasted until 1889 when Pedro II was overthrown from the crown leading to a Republican form of government. The second constitution which is a republican constitution came into existence in the year 1891 and has similarities to that of the United States of America with a presidential form of government. It guaranteed male universal suffrage at the age of 21. Female suffrage was not included. It has democratic characteristics like separation of powers, checks and balances, a bicameral legislature, direct elections and also created a Federal Chamber. This government which came into existence in 1930 formulated a new constitution in the year 1934. Another constitution was formulated by Vargas in the year 1937 when he faced a counter-revolution. This constitution was authoritarian in character with the concentration of all the powers in the President. He was the supreme authority elected for a term of six years by indirect elections. Vargas was overthrown by his minister and a new constitution replaced the dictatorship of Vargas in the year 1946. This led to the establishment of representative democracy. Eurico Gaspar Dutra was elected for five years. A constituent Assembly came into existence and drafted a liberal constitution that established basic individual rights and the separation of powers. It shadowed the US Constitution regarding federalism and the state's role in building the nation's economy was maintained. This constitution of 1946 was amended several times through institutional acts which tried to eliminate the democratic character.

The Constitution of 1946 was replaced in the year 1967 and again in the year 1969 with a constitutional reform. There were many similarities between the constitutions of 1967 and 1969. They were characterised by the centralized powers in the executive i.e., the President as they desired to regulate the military regime. The term

of office of the President was increased from four to five years. It was very much dictatorial in character as the military leaders could remove the opposition members from Congress. The economic development was slow due to which there was dissatisfaction among the people during the 1970s. The demand for the transition from authoritarian rule to Democracy started in the year 1974 when the country witnessed a slowdown in economic development. During tenure of the General Golbery de Couto e Silva, the country started opening to political liberalization. As a result, the first free elections were held for Congress in the year 1974. In the year 1982 after a gap of eight years, the military allowed for the conducting of direct elections for state governors and slowly made the transfers of federal powers to municipal governments. After long years of struggle only in 1985 the National Constituent Assembly [ANC] was established to draft a new constitution. This assembly consisted of 559 members¹ and took almost twenty months to deliver the “citizen constitution” in the year 1988.

The elections of 1985 in Brazil were a milestone event for the civilian President to take over in the process of the democratic transition that had begun a decade earlier when President Ernesto Geisel began to relax the repressive measures on which the authoritarian government had relied before.² There were a series of events that led to the change. The strikes against the government wage policy, IMF’s recommendations of recession-inducing policies in 1981 and the intensified calls for democratization from the business groups and professional groups like the Lawyers Guild, the National Academy of Science, and the Journalists Association played a very important role in formulating recommendations to an end to the political repression and re-democratization of the political system.³ The most breathtaking protests took place in 1984 when the authoritarian regime faced national-level undercurrents that called for direct Presidential elections. Throughout the timeline, though democratization was a topic of discussion in the authoritarian military regime, it dawdled about the alternative. The phrase used in Brazil for the process of democratization is “the abertura democratica” or democratic opening. Brazil’s period of transition to democracy is lengthy and cryptic. Brazil has had a lengthy and enigmatic period of achieving democracy through which it became antagonistic to authoritarian rule and developed a fond affinity to democracy.

¹ Lirio do Valle, V.(2020). The Brazilian Constitution: Context, Structure and Current Challenges. *British Journal of American Legal Studies*, 9(3) 423-440. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjals-2020-0009>

² Rochon, T. R., & Mitchell, M. J. (1989). Social Bases of the Transition to Democracy in Brazil. *Comparative Politics*, 21(3), 307–322. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422295>

³ Rochon, T. R., & Mitchell, M. J. (1989).

Brazil's Transition to Democracy:

In 1985 on January 15th Brazil got its elected a new president – Tancredo Neves, 74-year-old who is a moderate politician who had been part of the notable leadership of the opposition during the military regime. Before taking the oath of office he died and the Vice-President-elect, Jose Sarney took over as the President of Brazil on March 15th, 1985. This brought an end to the 21 years of Military rule.⁴ There were quite a few leaders who expressed their intention to transmit Brazil, gradually into a political liberalization process. President Castello Branco (1964-67), Costa e Silva (1967-69) and Medici (1969-74) were among those leaders. Despite their efforts the process couldn't be initialized. Only in 1985, did the military regime decide to open the process of political liberalization. The question that arises here is why the military decided to initialize the process. Most leaders never predicted that military rule would be a permanent solution for governing and considered it as a power to restore order and return the power to the civilians.⁵ The authoritarian regime to an extent maintained the existence of liberal democratic institutions like the Party system and the Congress - which was closed only for a short period twice i.e., in the years 1968-69 and 1977. Knowingly or unknowingly the authoritarian regime paved the way for democratic institutions to work for the establishment of democracy. The presence of democratic institutions though in a minority base helped the liberalization process. The existence of political parties, constitution, election and congress helped the transition. The whole transition can be traced to two phases:

- a. from March 1974 to October 1983 and
- b. October 1983 to January 1985

⁴ Mainwaring, S. (1986). The Transition to Democracy in Brazil. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 28(1), 149–179. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165739>

⁵ Mainwaring, S. (1986).

4.3. 1974 to 1983:

During the 1970s when authoritarian rule was at its maximum Brazilians to a large extent accepted the existing situation. Survey results during the 1970s portrayed that 73 percent of Brazilians believed that “the people do not know what is best for Brazil”. 46 percent of Brazilians favoured “news censorship” in the mass media. Only a meager 32 percent of the people considered “elections as important”. In that, 16 per cent made it a priority to have an elected government by the people.⁶ During the years 1974 to 1982, the economic problems faced by Brazilians were considered to be policy breakdown of the then-existing authoritarian regime including the issues like income differences, failure in medical care and welfare of the people. With these failures, on one hand, economic growth was to a large extent successful averaging 7 per cent annual growth throughout the 1970s. The regime has seen economic inequalities at the same time raised per capita income. The per capita GDP in 1964 was about 5300 reais but rose to 12,300 reais by the year 1980.⁷ When compared to neighbouring dictatorship nations, Brazil was far ahead of them in improving the material conditions of the Brazilians while depriving them of the right to have the government of their own choice. The Brazilian government was more economically successful than its counterparts or neighbouring nations. The military regime welcomed the cooperation and involvement of civilian political personnel. The military regime helped the establishment of a pro-government party known as ARENA till 1979 and later PDS. It helped them achieve political positions in the executive organ of the government at local and state governments. The Brazilian military regime diminished the freedom of expression by the draconian fifth institutional act (AI-5) of December 1968.⁸ This reform allowed the military presidents to rule by decree, the public protests were repressed and the public gatherings or assembly depended on the approval of the immediate military commanders. In the cultural sphere, the anti-regime artists were harassed, imprisoned or forced to move abroad. Education at every level was monitored by the undercover agents of the state. The lawyer's and judge's right or ability to defend the rule of law was also curtailed by the national security legislation.

⁶ Rochon, T. R., & Mitchell, M. J. (1989)

⁷ Power, T. J. (2016). The Brazilian Military Regime of 1964-1985: Legacies for Contemporary Democracy / O regime militar brasileiro de 1964-1985: legados para a democracia contemporânea. *Iberoamericana* (2001-), 16(62), 13–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43901533>

⁸ Power, T. J. (2016).

After the military initiated a cautious and controlled liberalization in 1974, the civil society in Brazil started the organisation of non-partisan societal forces such as the bar association, press association women's associations etc. This led to the transformation in the nation's politics, economy and culture by the 1980s and significantly revolutionized civil liberties, human rights and the rule of law. The removal of these laws and decrees dating from the 1964 dictatorship was termed by the then-senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso as the "authoritarian debris"⁹ This scrapping of authoritarian rubble became the primary objective of the beginning of the new democratic regime in Brazil after 1985. Political Liberalization between 1974 and 1983 was a political mobilization process that created a new activation force from the opposition to the authoritarian regime. This whole process during these nine years of liberalization gave a new regulation to enhance the role of the opposition in the efforts to expand the cause of democracy in Brazil.

4.4. 1983 to 1985:

The political liberalization process through the political mobilization that was taking in the past nine years starting from 1974 to 1983 significantly changed towards the end of 1983. The authoritarian regime/military regime lost its ability to face the challenges further and paved the way for the presidential succession and the transition to democracy. The regime throughout its entire timeline was able to count on the party created by itself i.e. National Renovating Alliance [ARENA] and Partido Democrático Social [PDS] as a party of the government. The authoritarian regime could impose its will on the party at any point in time. This situation changed in the year 1983 after July as a liberal faction won 35% of the votes in the second half of 1983 for the election of Executive. The cause of the PDS revolt was the debate over wage policy and amid a severe recession that began in 1980 reached its low point by 1983. The IMF-sponsored stabilization plan was utilised by the government to present a new wage policy that resulted in the huge deterioration of the real earnings of the various sectors of the nation. President Figueiredo's decision to not campaign for the next president marked a subtle change in the political situation. This increased tension between the PDS and the government and consequently, the government lost its competence to formulate a winning political strategy.

⁹ Power, T. J. (2016).

Continuous proposals from the opposition parties for the direct elections of the president existed in the regime, but the enormous public campaign for the direct elections to the office of the President began only in January 1984. The largest city of the southern state of Parana-Curitiba witnessed the first demonstration that took place on January 13th with thirty thousand people around. This paved the way for the hundreds of demonstrations around the nation in favour of direct elections. On April 10th, 1984 masses gathered in Rio and on April 16th, 1984 in Sao Paulo which marked Brazilian history. Following this, the members of PDS including vice-President Chaves supported direct elections. The regime of the military started collapsing with the spurring of the direct election campaign. This crisis gave confidence among the opposition which it has not experienced since the beginning of the military regime. It's in a way bizarre for the Military regime/authoritarian regime to have conflicts publicly and accuse each other of the same. The economic crisis and the corruption scandals during 1983 desiccated public confidence in the regime to a large extent. When the military captured power in 1964, the reasons they showed were economic crisis and corruption to authenticate the coup and overthrow Goulart. With the same problems bursting during the Figueiredo administration, the people reverberated against it. The key factors that changed the situation at this point are:

- The deep desire of society to restore democracy
- The Brazilian authoritarian regime was unable to take a rigid stance during the economic crisis.
- The public image of the authoritarian regime was clouded with corruption, misuse of power and deceit.

4.5. 1985 to 1988:

The economic crisis could have been handled by the authoritarian regime with a much more rigid stance but due to the above factors the regime was under pressure from the circumstances by 1983 and paved the way for restoration of democracy. After long years of struggle only in 1985 the National Constituent Assembly [ANC] was established to draft a new constitution. This assembly consisted of 559 members and took almost twenty months to deliver the “citizen constitution” in the year 1988. The elections of 1985 in Brazil were a milestone event for the civilian President to take over in the process of the elitist-led transition to an elitist

democracy that had begun a decade earlier when President Ernesto Geisel began to relax the repressive measures on which the authoritarian government had relied before.¹⁰

As the military backstepped from power, many challenges for Brazil were from the system of party and the electoral systems. The parties were considered to be weak and the electoral system was new to the polity. Major decisions about the governmental institutions were taken in 1985 for the first time and modified during the Constituent Assembly of 1987-88. Though there were many opinions and decisions during the process. The political elites demanded reforms that would strengthen parties and their accountability by limiting the intervention of individual politicians. The majority of the people's preference was for open-minded and tolerant representative institutions that would grant maximum length to politicians at the cost of the political parties. Mainwaring termed this as “democratic Libertarianism” – or the idea that democracy meant freedom for independent or individual politicians.¹¹ These preferences designed the institution of political parties to create new parties and to pendulum between the parties. The number of parties increased from five in 1982 to 12 in 1986, 19 in 1994 and 28 in the 2014 elections. With this, the challenge shifted from preferences to the organisation of the inter-party coalitions in Congress.¹²

Even under detrimental economic conditions, Democracy can be sustained. Here in the case of Brazil, it is not only the question of sustaining budding Democracy at the same time stabilising the economy is also a major challenge for the government. At the same time, the threat of a military coup is always afresh in Brazilian history. The economic crisis staged two important problems for the then-Sarney government. Firstly it's about the legitimacy of the government. As the government was a budding democracy democratic institutions needed time to be rooted. Secondly, the government was in the whirlpool of a foreign debt trap by which it was constrained to take up developmental policies.¹³

¹⁰ Rochon, T. R., & Mitchell, M. J. (1989). Social Bases of the Transition to Democracy in Brazil. *Comparative Politics*, 21(3), p. 307

¹¹ Mainwaring, S. (1986). The Transition to Democracy in Brazil. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 28(1), 149–179. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165739>

¹² Power, T. J. (2016).

¹³ Ibid, Hagopian, F., & Mainwaring, S. (1987).

The period between 1989 to 1998:

This decade is considered “the decade of reforms” in the history of Brazil. Though there was an action plan throughout the end of the late eighties, considerable or momentous changes occurred in 1990. The decade of the 1980s has a changing point in the history of the democracy of Brazil so the economic history of Brazil has seen a change in the 1990s. Having seen a hegemonistic economy under an authoritarian regime with high inflation and the state as the only producer of goods for over three and half decades, Brazil breathed a sense of freedom at the end of the 1990s with an open economy. The budding democracy in Brazil was brittle by the severe economic recession that was floating. In 1992 the first elected president of Brazil was impeached on the grounds of corruption even before the end of his term. It was the first time in the history of Republican Brazil an elected President was impeached and replaced with a new one. The impeached president was replaced by the elected vice-president Itamar Franco by the constitutional method.

The period between 1999 to 2010:

During the second term of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in the municipal elections of October/November 2000, the opposition parties were victorious. This gave certain uncertainties to the government of Cardoso. There was immense pressure from the opposition parties. In July 2002 the campaigning for the presidential elections of January 2003 began. In the elections of January 2003 Lula – a founding member of the Worker’s Party (Portuguese: Partido dos Trabalhadores) took over the office. The list of his tasks in the office at the time of assuming was too big. The financial crisis that developed globally in the year 2008 had a tremendous impact on the economic growth of Brazil too. There were charges of corruption and political scandals at different levels.

The mensalao scandal in the year 2005 which involved illegal payments for the exchange of support in Congress to the politicians is one of the scandals which Lula’s government faced. These scandals broke the trust of the public in the government and raised questions and concerns about liability, authenticity and transparency. This period has contributed to the growth and stabilization of Democracy in Brazil. The institutions of democracy were strengthening the political sustainability and got consolidated. This period has witnessed the most significant contribution to democracy in Brazil through social inclusion and reducing inequality. The social gaps that tormented Brazil for a long period were addressed with programs like Bolsa Familia, educational policies, increased healthcare and poverty reduction programs to improve the living

conditions of the marginalized. A sense of political participation was ensured for Brazilians. The charismatic leadership of Lula appealed to the working class and he could mobilize support from a wide range of voters thus ensuring political participation and engagement. This period has seen transparency and accountability making democracy strong and sustainable. All through Lula himself faced allegations of corruption but the corresponding investigations and the prosecutions in the court of law proved the supremacy of the rule of law and the functioning of democracy. This period has witnessed the strengthening of democracy in Brazil with a commitment to social inclusion, political participation of the people and the accountability of the government.

Democracy has made significant contributions to development in Brazil in many ways. The most significant achievements of democracy in Brazil can be considered Political stability, social inclusion, economic development, transparency and accountability, rule of law and most importantly uplifting the field of education. Women's rights have got their place, a constitution with a certain stability, scientific and technological development and improved foreign relations were a few more contributions of Democracy to Development in Brazil.

Conclusion:

Democracy and Development co-exist for the achievement of success of each other. The output of scientific and technological development in Brazil has seen considerable growth since 2011. The healthcare sector has seen two major challenges/epidemics: in 2015 Zika Virus and in 2019 COVID-19 virus and have successfully stood up to the challenges of these epidemics. The objective of compressing the regional differences in the fields of science, technology and engineering has seen a growth segment due to the efforts of the National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (2016-2022). The policies that were implemented before 2015 are bearing fruit. Brazilian scientists made considerable progress in completing Sirius -the most sophisticated synchrotron light source. Satellite technology also made huge progress by launching geostationary satellites which can provide broadband to the remote parts of the nation.