

Introduction

A Nation for All or a Few? The Political Class, the People, and the Rise and Fall of Brazil's Military Dictatorship

On January 1, 2003, Brazil inaugurated a former shoeshine boy turned democratic socialist politician as president. A union leader with a fourth-grade education, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stood before Congress and offered a daring new vision for a country that for centuries had been a global leader in social inequality: “We are starting a new chapter in Brazil’s history, not as a submissive nation, handing over its sovereignty, not as an unjust nation, passively standing by while the poorest suffer, but as an active, noble nation, courageously presenting itself to the world as a nation for everyone.”¹ Congress offered its enthusiastic applause.

On January 1, 2019, Brazil inaugurated a former military captain turned Far Right politician as president. A congressman infamous for his attacks on women, LGBTQ+ people, Afro-Brazilians, and Indigenous people, Jair Bolsonaro stood before Congress and offered another vision for a country that, over the past decade and a half, had become a global leader in expanding opportunity: “We shall unite our people, value the family, respect religions and our Judeo-Christian tradition, combat the ideology of gender, and preserve our values. Brazil will return to being a country free of ideological bonds.”² Congress offered its enthusiastic applause.

How could the Brazilian political elite support Lula’s vision to reduce class- and race-based inequalities and then, only a few years later, support Bolsonaro’s Far Right agenda? This book argues that the answer lies in understanding the dispositions of Brazil’s “political class,” especially the way it approached democracy, during the 1964–85 military dictatorship.³ The dictatorship, during which the trauma of military tutelage led politicians to embrace new possibilities for popular mobilization, was when a national political elite always defined by its fear, even hatred, of the working class began to accept that ordinary people had some role in setting

the course of the nation. This was due not simply to a commitment to democracy but also because they needed the collaboration of the popular classes to escape military tutelage. This book tells the story of how the dictatorship reshaped Brazil's political class, as a new relationship between politicians, the military, and the people was forged. The changes the political class experienced—and did not experience—have shaped Brazil to the present.

But what is the political class? It is universally acknowledged in Brazil that the country has always been ruled by an overwhelmingly white and male “political oligarchy” whose “numbers are relatively small, its ranks relatively closed, and its power concentrated in a few hands.”⁴ United not by control of the means of production but rather by a common socialization that produces shared attitudes and behaviors, this group has shared since the colonial period a “common identity as legitimate leaders of their society” by virtue of wealth, education, occupation, or, most commonly, heredity.⁵ It is known to its members, as well as to the intellectuals, businesspeople, professionals, clergy, and military officers who may join its ranks, as the “political class.” Its control of political institutions in pursuit of patronage and personal gain has been enjoyed by few, lamented by many, and, until recently, effectively challenged by no one, despite fruitless attempts—including those by the military regime—that altered political practice and replaced some members but left the political class as a group intact.⁶

On March 31, 1964, a coalition of conservative military officers and politicians overthrew the left-leaning government of President João Goulart, in what the military would call the “Revolution” of 1964.⁷ For the officers who helped plot it, this “Revolution” had three objectives: to eliminate leftist “subversion,” promote economic development, and impose reforms on politicians, many of whom, they believed, were shamelessly corrupt.⁸ Aware that all three of these objectives could founder in the face of Brazil's deeply engrained regionalism, they sought to achieve them through one overarching strategy: the centralization of power at the federal level, specifically, the executive branch. Everyone involved expected that this would take longer than a traditional military intervention, as had happened in 1945 and 1954, when the military promptly handed power back to civilians.⁹ No one expected the Armed Forces to govern for twenty-one years. For their part, politicians were shocked to discover that the military saw them as a problem for the “Revolution” to fix and were ambivalent at best to a centralization of power that would necessarily impinge on their own. Over the next two decades, politicians saw hundreds of their colleagues removed from office. They saw their own children in the student movement persecuted. They saw Congress closed three times and election law shamelessly manipulated. Most humiliating, they saw their presumed right to rule Brazil called into question.

For the military factions that triumphed in 1964, underlying these measures was the belief that if the most “subversive” and “venal” politicians could be removed, the remainder would collaborate to build a modern, moral Brazil.

Although it only became clear gradually, they had miscalculated. Time and again, the political class—ostensible allies and foes of the regime alike—pushed back. Sometimes this was because they had sincere democratic ideals; sometimes they simply wanted to regain the power they had enjoyed for generations. Regardless, the changes wrought on politicians were profound, and the regime ended in 1985 with their embrace of a level of popular mobilization that few would have countenanced in 1964.

Departing from the prevailing understandings about the Brazilian transition to democracy, which emphasize the contributions of “civil society” or the initiative of the generals, this book explores how the often-inadvertent opposition of the Brazilian political class helped precipitate the military regime’s demise. It answers unresolved questions about Brazil’s democratic transition and contributes to a global conversation about the role of elites in political and social transformation. How did the internal dynamics and shared dispositions of the political class change and remain the same under military rule? What impact did popular mobilization have on the political class? And what effect would these transformations have on both Brazil’s democratization and that democracy’s crisis starting with the 2016 parliamentary coup that removed President Dilma Rousseff? I argue that shifts in Brazil’s political class and its relationship with the rest of society contributed decisively to the demise of military rule and the consolidation of the most inclusive democracy Brazil has ever seen. In rejecting military tutelage, politicians reconciled themselves to heightened popular participation. In one sense this signified a profound shift in their dispositions, but in another it was only a strategic calculation that could—and did—reverse itself when the opportunity came in 2016 to return Brazil to something like the elite-dominated semidemocracy that had governed Brazil before 1964.

This focus on the political class’s role in Brazil’s democratization does not imply a questioning of the roles played by labor, movements against the cost of living, the Catholic Church, and the women’s, Black, and LGBTQ+ movements. Indeed, as this book demonstrates in its final two chapters, it was precisely these social movements that forced the political class to reluctantly embrace mass mobilization. Rather, this book argues that the existing scholarship has, with few exceptions, underestimated the importance of the political class in this process.¹⁰ I do not assert that the political class was solely responsible for the regime’s fall, but I do argue that its discontent with military rule would prove decisive. Students demonstrated, workers struck, business elites grumbled, and still the regime endured. It only fell when its remaining allies in the political class finally decided they had had enough.

Looking beyond Brazil, this book invites scholars to rethink how Cold War authoritarian regimes coped with conflict and competition from civilian elites, depending on the formal and informal rules governing the system. Among South America’s bureaucratic authoritarian military regimes, Brazil’s stands out for its

attempts to justify its rule through electoral politics and the appearance of constitutional legality.¹¹ In Chile and Argentina, the election of Salvador Allende and Juan Perón served as proof to the military that liberal democracy was the problem. But for the Brazilian military in 1964, Goulart had threatened democracy with his talk of leftist reforms; the “Revolution” was thus not democracy’s collapse but its salvation. Although the regime placed drastic limits on liberal institutions, the military continued to believe that the controlled collaboration of the political class, via parties, was vital to the legitimization of its reformist project. Unlike in Chile and Argentina, where the military dissolved Congress, in Brazil Congress was closed three times, for a total of eleven and a half months. While in the Southern Cone elections were suspended until the twilight of military rule, in Brazil they continued uninterrupted for nearly all offices. While the Brazilian generals reformed parties, in Chile and Argentina parties were banned for years.¹² The Brazilian generals saw civilian politicians and liberal institutions as vital to their project in a way their Southern Cone counterparts did not.

This did not mean that the military regime trusted the political class. Virtually all Brazilian elites since independence in 1822 had held that the unlettered popular classes, easily swayed by religious or populist demagogues, were not qualified to participate directly in politics. Instead, they required elite tutelage. The generals and the political class shared this basic mistrust of the popular classes. However, unlike the political class, which was almost exclusively drawn from Brazil’s upper class, military officers overwhelmingly came from the middle class. Officers’ class background combined with their intensified professional and technical training meant that by 1964 a great many officers looked down not only on the unlettered masses but also on the elites who ruled by birthright instead of merit.¹³ For the military, a fundamental transformation in political behavior was needed; after 1968, this was intensified to include overt tutelage of politicians. No longer would their perceived corruption, rivalries, and regionalism be allowed to retard Brazil’s development; rather, the nation would patriotically march toward modernity, guided by the military. Politicians could participate to the extent that they accepted these changes as permanent. Yet politicians believed that although they had the duty to exercise tutelage over the rest of Brazil, the imposition of tutelage on them by middle-class officers was a fundamental violation of how the world should work.

A (POLITICAL) CLASS THAT RULES

The term “political class” arose from a century of “elite theory” that originated near the turn of the twentieth century with Italian and German theorists.¹⁴ They challenged both the Marxist vision of a classless society and liberal democracy on the grounds that both were unsustainable.¹⁵ Rather, the domination of the many by the few was an immutable law.¹⁶ The few, who Gaetano Mosca called the “political class,” are distinguished not only by control of the means of production but

also by political power and socialization, and they work to protect their collective interests. For classical elite theorists, “the most that can be hoped for is a relatively liberal but still quite unequal political order governed by capable, cooperative, and enlightened elites.”¹⁷ Ultimately the incompetence “of the masses” keeps oligarchies in power. “The masses are content to employ all their energies to effecting a change of masters.”¹⁸

In the wake of World War II, classical elite theorists fell into disrepute due to their appropriation by fascism.¹⁹ Yet postwar scholars did not challenge the thesis that a political class should inevitably dominate human societies; after all, Hitler and Mussolini had initially achieved power through democratic mechanisms, proving that the masses were untrustworthy. Other scholars lamented elite rule but accepted it as unalterable, even in “advanced democracies.” Rather than a class in the Marxist sense, elites were seen as the people who occupied the most influential decision-making positions, many times because of their own merit and not as a result of wealth or privilege.²⁰ These scholars developed convenient means of conceptualizing the elite and its various subgroups, and the generation of political scientists and sociologists they influenced left rich empirical studies of the composition of elite groups.²¹

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* added much-needed clarity. Bourdieu argues that the “dominant class” is united not by conspiracy or cohesion but rather by habitus, a set of “structured [and] structuring structures” that are “collectively orchestrated without being the product of . . . a conductor” and do not require a conscious “obedience to rules.”²² A habitus is *unconscious*. Predicated on membership in the “dominant class,” it “is a set of dispositions, a general, basic stance which determines a person’s perception, feeling, thinking, behavior, and which, more than anything else, marks the boundaries drawn for every individual by his social origin and position.”²³ United by a habitus based on their position among the economically dominant class, those who exercise power can disagree on nearly anything without undermining their group consciousness and presumed right to exercise political power. Moreover, since a habitus should be known without having been consciously learned, the dominant class tends to reproduce itself, since it is difficult for nonmembers to acquire the proper socialization.²⁴

Elite theorists, then, have shown that there is a politically active subset of the upper class (the so-called *classes conservadoras* or *dirigentes*, conservative or directing classes) that is united by a set of dispositions and behaviors that produce a habitus. Though members of the Brazilian political class may or may not own land, factories, or banks, they are united by a common way of seeing the world that is reinforced by education and socialization. New members enter and old ones leave, but the term describes a group whose members see themselves as sharing interests that distinguish them from not only the middle and lower classes but also the rest of the upper class. The political class encompasses civilian elites who due to pedigree, wealth, profession, or education choose to participate in political

decision making at the local, state, or national level, particularly by being elected or appointed to public office. This may include career politicians; industrial, business, and landholding elites; media moguls; and lawyers, doctors, engineers, university professors, and other members of the “liberal professions.” As a result of long-standing regional divides, the federal political class is effectively made up of delegates from the twenty-six state political classes.²⁵ These state political classes are small, probably no more than a few hundred men (and, only recently, women) in number. They attend the same social functions, send their children to the same schools, dine at the same restaurants, and negotiate marriages and alliances among themselves. Subregional power brokers and members of the industrial, business, professional, and intellectual classes of large cities together make up the state political class. In turn, each town has its own political class, often composed largely of landowning families.

Still, not all members of the upper strata identify with the political class. Despite their wealth and power, many intellectuals, businesspeople, and professionals, along with virtually all high-ranking military officers, are contemptuous of the political class. The disdain with which many military officers regard politicians is shown again and again throughout this book. This divide between the political class and the military is not a simple result of differing class origins. For while it is true that the political class tends to be drawn from higher social strata than the military,²⁶ the self-perceived interests of the middle and upper classes in Brazil (and indeed throughout Latin America) have long been recognized as coinciding. Rather, the political class and military clashed because of their socialization into distinct *habitus*. Politicians, on the one hand, saw themselves as Brazil’s rightful rulers based on their pedigree, wealth, and education, legitimated by the institutions of liberal electoral democracy (however restricted in practice). Military officers, meanwhile, saw themselves as heading a national institution that did not merely represent the people; rather, it *was* the people—*o povo fardado*, the people in uniform. As leaders of this institution, officers saw themselves and the men they led as a “moderating power” that had the right (or duty) to overrule the executive, legislative, and judicial powers in defense of the nation—a belief used to justify numerous interventions across the twentieth century. Along with representativity and the duty to moderate national politics, the *habitus* of the officers who led the coup was based on values related to hierarchy, professionalization, and modernization.²⁷ At its core, the conflict between the military and the political class between 1964 and 1985 was a result of each group’s conviction that it alone had the right and ability to lead Brazil.

I focus heavily, particularly in the second half of the book, on São Paulo, Brazil’s most populous and powerful state. With 25 million residents in 1980, São Paulo was home to 21 percent of Brazilians. Since the 1950s its population had skyrocketed, as migrants from Brazil’s Northeast came to work in its expanding manufacturing sector.²⁸ In the 1970s, the state produced between 30 and 40 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP), and São Paulo and its political,

commercial, and industrial elites benefited most from the 1968–74 “economic miracle,” when Brazil’s economy grew by an average annual rate of 10.9 percent.²⁹ Yet this stubbornly independent state had long been a thorn in the side of the federal government, most notably, during its 1932 armed revolt against the centralizing regime of Getúlio Vargas. Then, in 1964, São Paulo played a key political and military role in the coup that deposed Goulart. Demographic muscle, a dynamic economy, and rapid urbanization combined with vocal opposition, regionalism, and political marginalization set São Paulo apart from the rest of Brazil and rendered it especially problematic for the regime. It was in this singularly powerful and volatile state that politicians’ support was most vital for the generals, but it was here that they failed most spectacularly.

STRUCTURE VERSUS RATIONAL CHOICE AND GENERALS VERSUS CIVIL SOCIETY

In ascribing a decisive role in the dictatorship’s demise to the political class, this book departs from most social science scholarship on the military regime. The twenty-one years of military rule are probably the most exhaustively studied period of Brazilian history, with contributions from economists, political scientists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists. Although this body of work spanning five decades has responded to varying political, methodological, and theoretical imperatives, certain debates have remained constant. In particular, explanations for the regime’s rise, consolidation, weakening, and fall have centered on questions of agency (who) and causality (what). Who deserved more credit for the regime’s fall, the generals who permitted liberalization and willingly stepped aside or the civil society that pressured them at every turn? Were the political and social changes unleashed by the two decades of military rule the product of structural factors or of the decisions of key actors?

Some of the most respected studies of the dictatorship have ascribed the power to effect political change primarily to the military, particularly the generals who occupied top posts in the Armed Forces and executive. Alfred Stepan’s classic study of the military between 1945 and 1964 does this for the coup, and many of the contributions to his enormously influential 1973 edited volume reproduced this approach as they debated whether the military had succeeded at creating a lasting political model.³⁰ Thomas Skidmore and Leslie Bethell and Celso Castro, writing in 1989 and 2008, respectively, gave primary credit to the military for the move to a more democratic political system.³¹ Elio Gaspari’s elegantly written five-volume history of the regime, based largely on the private archives of Ernesto Geisel (1974–79) (the fourth general-president) and the papers of his personal secretary, reproduces this pattern.³²

This emphasis on key military actors is counterbalanced by a vast body of scholarship on the role of “civil society” in the regime’s liberalization and collapse. Beginning in 1974, when the opposition stunned the generals with a decisive

victory in legislative elections, sociologists and political scientists produced a flurry of studies of voter behavior.³³ Over the next decade, as opposition to the generals' project surged among organized labor, students, the progressive Catholic Church, and the nascent Black, women's, and LGBTQ+ movements, a regime that had once seemed nearly unassailable suddenly appeared vulnerable to popular demands.³⁴ The studies of these new and resurgent social movements were part of a burgeoning political science literature on democratization globally. Overall, the picture that emerged was of a heroic civil society collectively toppling military rule. Jean Rossiaud put it rather bluntly when he said that the "process of democratization [was] constructed by . . . social movements and civil society organizations," but he was not far off from the general view.³⁵

The narrative that was consolidated was of a process characterized by a dichotomous relationship between the military-dominated state and civil society. As Maria Helena Moreira Alves put it, state and opposition had an "essentially dialectical" relationship in which each sought to "control, check, or modify the other."³⁶ But of course this formulation leaves out the political class. The cabal that has ruled Brazil for its own benefit for over five centuries has been nearly forgotten in accounts of the military regime's demise. This is all the more surprising in light of near-universal recognition among scholars that the support of the political class was vital to the success of the 1964 coup, so much that Brazilian scholars have recently taken to labeling it a "civilian-military" coup and regime.³⁷ One possibility is that when narratives about the fall of the regime were consolidated in the late 1980s, historians had been shaped by two decades of "history from below" that actively pushed back against studying elites; similarly, political scientists at the time were eager to research the role of civil society (beyond political institutions and parties) in political change. Either way, the role of the political class in the regime's fall remained largely unexplored. The present book tells for the first time the story of the political class's decisive role in the demise of the military regime.

To be sure, politicians have not been completely ignored, and there are several excellent studies of political parties by political scientists and historians. Lucia Grinberg's recent study of the military-allied party, the Alliance of National Renovation (ARENA) stands out for highlighting how the regime's civilian allies chafed under the yoke of military tutelage.³⁸ And Célia Melhem's book on the São Paulo branch of the legal opposition party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) reveals how its growth in the state was due not only to electoral strategy but also to the time-honored Brazilian traditions of clientelism and personalism.³⁹ The one scholar who studied the political class as a whole, independent of party, was Frances Hagopian. Her *Traditional Politics and Regime Change in Brazil* shows that as the regime crumbled, the state and local political classes in Minas Gerais were motivated primarily by their desire to hang onto power amid the pressures of democratization. Still, Hagopian privileges the rational choices made by politicians in pursuit of self-interest; she has much less to say about political culture

and socialization. In addition, she studied elites in the largely rural state of Minas Gerais, whose political class is very different from that of São Paulo, the highly diverse, urbanized hub of Brazilian industrialization, with large populations of foreign-born immigrants and internal migrants.⁴⁰

Hagopian's book is illustrative of another debate that has animated much of the scholarship on the military regime. If the answer to the question of agency has been posed in terms of a dichotomous choice between generals and civil society or state and opposition, the question of causality has been answered with functionalist explanations based on structure (dependent development, economic inequality, political institutions) or interest (rational choice). The ascription of causality to individual cost-benefit calculations reflected broader methodological trends in political science; such an approach is familiar to historians too, with their emphasis on the contingent nature of historical change. As Bolivar Lamounier puts it, "In fact, [the regime's liberalization] involves a *calculus* of decompression, that is, an interactive model in which the various actors, whatever their ideologies, calculate the costs and benefits of the status quo and of alternative solutions."⁴¹ Rational choice rejects any claim that structural factors are so powerful "that political agents are not free to pursue strategies to revise those relations and institutions and that they cannot be effective in doing so."⁴² Yet just as the generals/civil society binary fails to account for the political class, structure/interest does not adequately account for a third causal factor: culture, specifically, political culture.

John D. French defines political culture as a set of "overlapping discourses" that constitute "recurrent and readily identifiable motifs and gestures that cross differences in education, geography, socioeconomic roles, and occupations and professional specializations."⁴³ For French, political culture is *discursive*, as individuals deploy common symbols to advance their political goals. While anthropologists have produced a rich literature on contemporary Brazilian culture, political science, the field that has contributed the most to the study of the military regime until very recently, had little interest in culture and other hard-to-quantify variables.⁴⁴ As for historians, since the 1960s, the "social turn" toward "history from below" has generated vast interest in subaltern political consciousness and struggles for citizenship while largely ignoring elite political culture. Yet as Emília Viotti da Costa writes, "It is impossible to understand the history of the powerless without understanding the history of the powerful."⁴⁵ The Brazilian voters, workers, clerics, and demonstrators who have so captivated scholars cannot be understood without a more nuanced investigation of the political culture and *habitus* of politicians whose beliefs and practices conditioned and responded to their actions.

Both the political class and Brazilian political culture have received little attention in studies of the military dictatorship's demise. But the problem is not simply that the dichotomies employed by earlier scholars leave them out; it is also that dichotomies, whether state/opposition, military/civil society, or structure/rational

choice, oversimplify the always contingent nature of historical change. The lived experience of human beings, with all the messy intersections of structure, interest, culture, identity, values, and personality and the contingencies of the moment, cannot be easily fit into dichotomous boxes. Categories are vital to historical and social scientific analysis, but they can never fully capture the lived experiences of which history and culture are made. After all, many politicians in the 1960s and 1970s had served in the military when they were younger or had relatives in the Armed Forces; it is difficult to place them in either the military or the political class. Whether they had a military background or not, individual politicians' relationship with the regime could change with shifting public opinion, electoral law, intramilitary conflicts, state and local politics, patron-client relationships, and personal vendettas. And many leftist activists had parents in the political class, often regime allies. With party boundaries fluid, ideology at the margins, and interpersonal relationships tantamount, it is essential to acknowledge that dichotomies, including "political class/military," do not supersede historical contingency.

This book thus destabilizes dichotomies and privileges contingency while bringing back into focus the words and dispositions of political elites. In doing so, it is indebted to the French historian Maud Chirio, who applies a similar approach to the study of the military between 1964 and 1985. She argues that as the regime evolved, the terms of the debates within the military shifted as well; at the same time, military factions were based not only on disputes about the duration and severity of military rule but also on the same personalism and rivalries that they so reviled in civilian politicians.⁴⁶ Furthermore, military factions all built alliances with sympathetic groups within the civilian political class. The military/civilian dichotomy tells little about an actor's ideology or relationship with the regime, and overreliance on it obscures the ever-shifting loyalties and in-between spaces that define the day-to-day practice of politics.

SOURCES AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

This book utilizes sources gleaned from nineteen archives in Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, and Spain. The most important source is newspapers, which offer rich possibilities for achieving a textured reading of the culture of the political class. Controlled by powerful families with an extensive network of political connections, Brazil's dailies contain a wealth of political analysis. Political reporters enjoyed access to politicians and often knew more about alliances, rumors, and vendettas than politicians themselves.⁴⁷ Biography, memoir, and oral history also shed much light on politics under the regime. They contain detailed and often contradictory behind-the-scenes accounts of closed-door meetings, personal conflicts and slights, and innuendos that newspapers often only hint at.

Legislative and electoral records also provide a wealth of insight. In particular, the archive and technical staff of the federal Chamber of Deputies have organized

and digitized a staggering amount of material. This includes both the daily transcript of the Chamber's proceedings (the *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*) and audio recordings of sessions from the 1960s to the present. Comparisons of the written transcripts with the recordings often reveal telling editing of the former designed to soften the speeches before the generals could read them. Even more important, the rare opportunity to listen to historical sources facilitates the analysis of not only words but also tone, applause, accent, and shouting matches among the deputies.⁴⁸ In addition, this project made extensive use of the archive of the São Paulo state electoral court, which contains candidate registries, electoral prosecutions and appeals, and election results.

This book also relies heavily on more private sources. One particularly intriguing source is correspondence from embassies in Brazil to their home foreign ministries. Politicians often hid their true feelings from the press but not from foreign diplomats hungry for information about a rapidly changing political situation. The most extensive records were produced by the US State Department, but the British National Archives and the archives of the Spanish and Portuguese foreign ministries contain similar documents. The military regime also maintained a network of intelligence services whose archives reveal the behaviors that the military found laudable and threatening among politicians. These include the state-level political and social police (Department of Social Order and Policy [DOPS] and its successor, the Department of Social Communication [DCS]); the information-gathering arm of the federal Justice Ministry, the Division of Security and Information (DSI-MJ); and the recently opened records of the regime's primary intelligence gathering service, the National Information Service (SNI).⁴⁹ Finally, I was also privileged to conduct oral histories with prominent surviving politicians from the military period, including former governors, finance ministers, and congressmen.

This book starts not in 1964 but in 1968. For although the military had stripped hundreds of politicians of their political rights, instituted indirect elections, abolished the old political parties, and, in 1967, imposed a new constitution, by 1968 it appeared that these reforms were drawing to a close. Politicians hoped that with its goals accomplished, the military would now permit a return to civilian rule. The year 1968 is when the uneasy truce was shattered, the stage set for seventeen years of conflict between the political class and the military. First, as chapter 1 describes, the military and the political class clashed over the demands of a revitalized leftist student movement, in which politicians' own children were often prominent players. In the face of politicians' vicious denunciations of the military's repression of their children, the military demanded that the Chamber of Deputies grant them permission to prosecute an opposition deputy for insulting the Armed Forces in a congressional speech. Chapter 2 analyzes the drama that followed, as the Chamber of Deputies debated whether—and ultimately refused—to revoke the parliamentary immunity of the offending deputy. After four years of military infringement on their prerogatives, the political class would

tolerate no more. In response, an infuriated military closed Congress for nearly a year and suspended civil liberties.

Chapter 3 analyzes this period of open dictatorship, in which the military resolved to punish the political class. In 1969 over three hundred politicians were removed from office. The military also reformed the constitution to ensure that the parliamentary rebellion of 1968 would never repeat itself. Politicians had refused to collaborate with the Armed Forces for the good of Brazil; now they would be forced to collaborate. As chapter 4 shows, although some young members of the opposition were determined to challenge the regime frontally, most preferred to, as one put it, “wait under the tree for the storm to pass,” hoping to survive until the regime collapsed. Other politicians worked within the system to win elections, emphasizing everyday issues that mattered to voters. Except for a few noisy dissidents, it appeared that the politicians had acquiesced to military tutelage, convincing the generals that their political model was succeeding. In order to secure politicians’ continued cooperation, the new general-president, Ernesto Geisel, resolved to allow a limited relaxation of the political system.

Chapter 5 shows how this liberalization backfired. In the 1974 legislative elections, the MDB stunned the generals by winning sixteen of twenty-two open Senate seats, nearly half of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and control of six state legislative assemblies. In response the military launched a campaign of violence against the banned Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), whose infiltration they believed had played a decisive role in the MDB’s victory. And in 1977 Geisel briefly closed Congress again and decreed another set of humiliating electoral reforms designed to cement the regime’s hold on power. Yet this backfired too, as even the regime’s own allies took offense at the repression and intensified military tutelage. Their discontent was exemplified by the 1978 São Paulo gubernatorial contest, as ARENA rejected the regime’s anointed candidate and nominated the former São Paulo city mayor, Paulo Maluf.

This was the beginning of the end for the regime. Chapter 6 analyzes politicians’ response to massive strikes in suburban São Paulo that were led by future president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The strikes forced some politicians to accept expanded popular political participation, as opposition politicians defended striking workers in Congress in the streets and thereby crafted an alliance with the working class that held the potential to transform Brazilian social relations by rejecting both military rule and elite-dominated liberalism. The promises and limits of this coalition became clear during the presidential succession of 1984. Chapter 7 shows how, via the famed *Diretas Já* demonstrations, opposition (and some regime-allied) politicians endorsed popular mobilization on an unprecedented scale. Yet when *Diretas Já* failed to pressure Congress into ratifying a constitutional amendment to reinstate direct elections, politicians defaulted to the backroom deals that remained their preferred way to resolve conflict. A pact between dissident members of the regime-allied party and the opposition led to

the indirect election of Tancredo Neves as president of the republic. With the election of this moderate oppositionist, the regime came to a close. The “Revolution” ended not because of any commitment to democracy on the part of the military, or as a direct result of popular mobilization, but because it lost its base of support in the political class.