



Brazil — Va-PoReg Country Report

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11/15/1889 Start Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy: On 09/07/1822 Brazil became independent. On 08/29/1825 the independence was recognized by Portugal. On 11/15/1889 the Federal Republic of Brazil was proclaimed. In 1891, male suffrage was guaranteed in the Brazilian constitution excluding beggars, women, illiterates, lowest ranking soldiers and members of monastic orders.¹ An oligarchy, which controlled elections and selectively appointed the Brazilian presidency, held sway over the First Brazilian Republic.² The presidency alternated between politicians from the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo in each election, following a system referred to as ‘coffee and milk politics.’³ The political opposition was faced with oppression, thus the national elections cannot be interpreted as competitive. However, the government may cautiously be interpreted as stable in its authoritarian rule.⁴ According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem’s EF&FI scores the Brazilian elections during this regime period as not really free or fair. Their CEI scores them as not clean. According to V-Dem’s PCLI the presence of political liberties was „ambiguous” in this time. LIED classifies political liberties as absent for this period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Until 1929, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1930, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. The established tradition was disrupted in 1929 when the sitting President Washington Luís, hailing from São Paulo, chose Júlio Prestes, another individual from the same state, as his successor. This departure from the norm involved not exchanging the position with a politician from Minas Gerais.⁵

10/24/1930 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, the Brazilian Revolution started in which President Luís was deposed, and a military junta took control. The junta consisted of General Augusto Tasso Fragoso, Admiral Isaías de Noronha, and General João de Deus Mena Barreto).⁶ Fragoso, Barreto, and Noronha „declared themselves a ‘pacifying junta’ with a ‘moderating power’”.⁷ Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, who spearheaded the revolution, communicated on 10/24 that the junta members would be ‘accepted as collaborators and not directors,’ that they ‘joined the revolution at the time when its success was assured’.⁸

11/03/1930 End Military Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, the junta handed power over peacefully to Vargas as a provisional president, therefore we code this regime change event as a voluntary exit. Although the leader of the revolution, the appointment of Vargas was the result of a consultation process between the junta and the revolutionaries. At the core of these revolutionaries were the states Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraíba (known as Liberal Alliance) along with their leading chief military officers and politicians. Some junta-appointed ministers were allowed to retain their posts, such as junta member Noronha.⁹ Although Vargas dissolved the legislature, abrogated the 1891 constitution, and granted himself almost dictatorial powers, he was not able to pacify the Liberal Alliance and therefore prevent another revolution 1932 (known as Constitutional Revolution). Despite its military defeat, Vargas was forced to make concessions—most notably by calling for the election of a constitutional assembly. (Fausto 1986:

811, 827-28, Bethell 2008: 3, 17-18, Casey et al. 2020: 3).¹⁰ According to our observations, no multiparty legislative and executive elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem's PCLI codes political liberties as not really present from 1930 to 1934. LIED outcomes were still coded as absent. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. In this first period of Vargas fifteen-year rule, he neither had unlimited authority or a life-long term like in a personalist autocracy, but he was not a figurehead president chosen and guided by the military junta either. Therefore, the only possible classification is as a Non-Electoral Transitional Regime.

07/16/1934 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the new constitution was promulgated and on 07/17/1934 the constitutional assembly elected the former provisional president Getúlio Vargas as president for a four-year term. Therefore Vargas „governed as president alongside a democratically elected legislature” until 1937.¹¹ In 1935 a militant communist uprising of 1935 led by Luís Carlos Prestes and leftist low-rank military tried to overthrow Getúlio Vargas's government on behalf of the National Liberation Alliance but failed.¹² As a result, Vargas declared a national emergency and ruled by decree, thus paving the way for the Estado Novo (Zimmermann 2010: 117-119).¹³ The suffrage was still restricted, for example for women and illiterates.¹⁴ Besides the restricted suffrage, Vargas held such sway over the political landscape that a significant portion of the elected deputies tended to heed his guidance, even in the absence of more rudimentary forms of electoral coercion, which nonetheless persisted to some degree (Loewenstein 1942: 20-21). The regime period is characterized by the constitution of 1934, the first one, which was crafted anew by directly elected deputies in a multi-party electoral process¹⁵ and contributed substantially to the democratization of Brazil. But from the beginning Vargas was a huge critic, causing the constitution and constitutional reality to diverge.¹⁶ Furthermore, a constitutional amendment was passed by the parliament (the former constituent assembly), which gave Vargas „quasi-dictatorial powers by way of „legal” authorization” (Loewenstein 1942: 29). According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Political liberties are classified as absent by LIED and as not really present by V-Dem's PCLI for this period. LIED classifies the elections as not competitive and V-Dem's CEI as not clean and their EF&FI as not really free or fair. Therefore, Brazil has to be classified as an electoral autocracy. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

11/10/1937 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Right-Wing (Corporatist) Autocracy: On this date in a self-coup President Getúlio Vargas overthrew backed by the military the electoral regime. Following the coup, Brazil witnessed the establishment of a semi-fascist, authoritarian state, fashioned after the political models seen in European fascist countries (Putnam 1941, Casey et al. 2020).¹⁷ During the Estado Novo, state autonomy ceased to exist as appointed federal officials took the place of governors, and patronage emanated from the president downwards. The dissolution of all political parties until 1944 further restricted opportunities for opposition organization.¹⁸ Press censorship was enforced by the government, with propaganda being centrally coordinated by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP). Political liberties were absent for this period according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1938 to 1944, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1945, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. While Vargas ruled before and after 11/10/1937 there are many indicators that a

regime change must be coded. One noteworthy sign is that the time span between 1930 and 1937 in Brazil is referred to as the Second Brazilian Republic, while the subsequent portion of the Vargas Era, spanning from 1937 to 1946, is identified as the Third Brazilian Republic or *Estado Novo*.¹⁹ Unlike Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy there was no regime party in Brazil in this period and the regime did not hold elections. Hence, this non-electoral regime comes close to a personalist autocracy. According to our observations, no multiparty legislative and executive elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

10/29/1945 End Right-Wing (Corporatist) Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Growing political movements and democratic demonstrations, originally led by university students, forced Vargas to abolish censorship in 1945, release numerous political prisoners, and allow for the reformation of political parties, including the Brazilian Communist Party. Despite strikes being officially banned under the regime, economic pressures such as war-related inflation led to the resurgence of labor strikes and protests. Opposition forces were broadened, including some government figures like Oswaldo Aranha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who supported a move toward democratization. Vargas had expanded the constitution so that 90 days later, the new electoral law was passed. Although he announced that he had no intention of running for president, the military feared that Vargas wanted to gain absolute power. This was partly because he had replaced the police chief with his brother on 10/25/1945.²⁰ Under military pressure, Vargas resigned from office (Bethell 2008: 71-72, 83-84, Casey et al. 2020: 3).²¹ A caretaker government was installed by the army to ensure free and fair elections which were scheduled for 12/02/1945.²²

12/02/1945 End Non-electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date presidential elections took place, which were won by Eurico Gaspar Dutra of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), whilst the PSD also won a majority of seats in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.²³ On 09/18/1946 the fifth constitution was adapted, underpinning the country's return to democratic rule. In 1946, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. On 10/03/1950 general elections were held. Getúlio Vargas, former autocratic president, and now candidate of the Brazilian Labor Party won.²⁴ Vargas attained the presidency through a direct popular vote, marking the first and only instance in his political career (Skidmore 1988: 81). The election was considered free and secret. He assumed office on 01/31/1951.²⁵ Much of the opposition, originally stemming from the protest against the Vargas dictatorship, experienced a sense of humiliation and anger as the former dictator regained power through the electoral process – a mechanism they had strived to reinstate. Unable to hinder his formal assumption of office through lawful channels, they were not inclined to embrace Vargas' invitations for involvement in his government during 1951 and 1952 (Skidmore 1988: 122-127). The military was suspicious about Vargas' presidency as well and demanded strict compliance with the constitution. But only a minor part of the military officers wanted to remove him immediately from all political activities. But still the military remained the ultimate authority in the Brazilian political system (Skidmore 1988: 100-108). However, in 1954 Brazil's democracy was on the brink of a breakdown. On 08/05/1954 there was an assassination attempt on journalist Carlos Lacerda, a staunch opponent of Getúlio Vargas, carried out by intimates of Vargas, without his knowledge. Afterwards a legal investigation into the assassination took place immediately. However, protests against Vargas formed in politics, the military and civil society. The military gave Vargas an ultimatum to resign. He refused to end his presidency early but agreed to take a leave of absence. On 08/24/1954 Vargas committed suicide (Skidmore 1988: 136-143). Since Café Filho, his vice president, assumed the office, the event is not classified as a breakdown of democracy. On 10/03/1955 presidential elections were held. Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira of the Social Democratic Party won.²⁶ Between 11/08/1955 and 11/11/1955 Carlos Coimbra da Luz became acting president, due to health issues of Café Filho. Luz was the next in line of the constitutional succession.²⁷ After recovering, that he had been removed from power on a temporary basis for health reasons, he tried to reassume presidential power but due to military pressure the congress and the supreme court denied it.²⁸ On 11/11/1954 the minister of defense feared acting president Luz was part of a civilian-military plot to block the president-elect from assuming office. The Minister deposed of Luz and placed Ramos as acting president.²⁹ On 01/31/1956 de Oliveira took

office.³⁰ On 10/03/1960 the last free and fair presidential election until 1989 were held. Jânio da Silva Quadros of the National Labour Party won and took office on 01/31/1961.³¹ We classify that period as an electoral hybrid regime, because more or less free and fair presidential elections were held and respected, but the military as non-elected state actor played a crucial role during this period. Only LIED classifies this period as exclusive democracy, AF, BR, GWF and MCM as democracy. According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies the elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI reached its highest score up to this point, scoring the elections as somewhat free and fair. The CEI scores their cleanliness as ambiguous. According to LIED political liberties were absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as somewhat present from 1946 to 1963. According to our classification Brazil in this period is a severely defective electoral democracy. It is a borderline case between an electoral democracy and an electoral hybrid regime. The veto power of the military contributes to this assessment. During this regime period, according to Polity5's categorization, various periods regarding executive constraints can be identified. From 1947 to 1960, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks. From 1961 to 1962, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. In 1963, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. For the year 1946, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 1947 to 1963, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

04/01[-03]/1964 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup backed by right-wing elements of the society ousted the elected government of President João Goulart because they feared his move to socialize large corporations and established a military junta to rule (McCann 1998, Skidmore 1988). The regime was marked by significant political repression, including censorship, suppression of political dissent, and widespread human rights abuses (Skidmore 1988). The most infamous of all Institutional Acts, was issued by dictator Artur da Costa e Silva, president at the time on 12/13/1968. With this act, the congress was de facto dissolved and civil rights cancelled. However, during the regime period, the degree of autocratization of the regime varied. Subsequently, a competitive congressional election took place in 1986, with the political opposition achieving a sweeping victory (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 17).³² As classified by FH for the years 1972 and 1973, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. In 1974 the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH's evaluation for 1975 to 1977, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. In 1978 Brazil is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. From 1979 onwards, a score of 6 to 7 for the assessed regime period designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were not really present in 1964, absent from 1965 to 1978 and again not really present from 1979 to 1984 while LIED still considers them as absent. Until 1981, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1982 to 1984, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. From 1967 to 1979, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1980-1984, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1964 and 1965, in 1966 executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held, in 1967 multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, in 1968 and 1969 only executive elections were held, from 1970 onward multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. From 1985 on, a scheduled vote of the electoral college, a soft-line military government reluctantly accepted

the transfer of the presidency to a moderate civilian supported by the opposition party.

01/15/1985 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: The political transition on this date marked a pivotal moment in the return to democracy. This transition was characterized by the election of Tancredo Neves, a civilian, by an electoral college. Neves was chosen over a candidate endorsed by the military, signaling a significant shift from military dictatorship to civilian rule. However, Neves tragically passed away before his inauguration on 04/21/1985. In accordance with constitutional protocol, José Sarney, the vice president-elect, assumed the presidency. Notably, Sarney had been a member of the party that supported the military regime but had joined Neves and the opposition in the period leading up to the transition (Skidmore 1988:250-260, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 48, Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 17). On 11/15/1986, Brazil conducted parliamentary elections, marking the commencement of a period characterized by competitive electoral processes. Subsequent to these elections, the country's political landscape has been marked by significant polarization. Additionally, this period has been characterized by elevated levels of violent crime and persistent economic marginalization of minority groups. Furthermore, the issue of endemic corruption remains a critical challenge within the Brazilian political regime.³³ Brazil operates as a federal republic governed under a presidential system. The public elects the president for a four-year term and he or she can be reelected for a consecutive second term. The parliament, which is bicameral, consists of a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies.³⁴ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED rates the elections in this regime period as competitive and V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as clean, free and fair. As per FH's classification for 1985, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Between 1986 and 1987 the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Per FH's classification for 1988, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. In 1989 the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. For the period between 1990 and 1992 the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. According to FH, for 1993 until 2001 the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. Between 2002 and 2004 the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. As per FH's classification for the period from 2005 to 2019, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. From 2020 onwards, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework.³⁵ According to LIED political liberties were present from 1990 to 2017 and absent from 2018 onward. V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were in an ambiguous state in 1985, somewhat present from 1986 and 1987 and as present since 1988 with the exception of 2021 coded as somewhat present. From 1987 to 1987, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. Since 1988, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. For the year 1985, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 1986 and 1987, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the following two years, For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1990 to 2016, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. From 2017 to 2021, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. Since 2022, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. On 10/02/2022 general elections were held. The election concluded with a runoff in late October, resulting in Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party securing 50.9 percent of the vote compared to Bolsonaro's Liberal Party 49.1 percent. During the concurrent legislative polls, the Liberal Party secured the position of the

largest party in both houses of the National Congress. Parties aligned with the non-ideological center constituted, at the same time, the largest group in the lower house. The strongly divided campaign was tainted by the spread of misinformation, forceful rhetoric, instances of harassment, and incidents of political violence.³⁶ Brazil functions as a democratic nation with competitive elections, fostering a politically polarized yet vibrant public dialogue. However, independent journalists and civil society activists encounter risks of harassment and violent attacks. Political violence remains prevalent, and the government faces challenges in addressing crime, disproportionate violence against minorities, and economic exclusion. Corruption continues to be endemic at the highest levels of government, with a recent decline in transparency exacerbating public disillusionment. However, persistent societal discrimination and violence against LGBT+ individuals further compound the country's challenges.³⁷

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Ames 2001, Arceneaux 2001b, Arceneaux 2001a, Cameron 1994, Domínguez 2002, Loewenstein 1942, Mainwaring 1986, Mainwaring 1995, McCann 1998, Philip 1984, Skidmore 1988, Stepan 1978, Wallerstein 1980)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930

⁴ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Brazil_R: 1, Brazil_V: 1.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Revolution_of_1930

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_military_junta_of_1930

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Revolution_of_1930

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutionalist_Revolution

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vargas_Era

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_communist_uprising_of_1935

¹³ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Brazil_V: 1

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Constitution_of_1934

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Constitution_of_Brazil

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Constitution_of_1934

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1937_Brazilian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

¹⁸ <https://countrystudies.us/brazil/16.htm>

¹⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vargas_Era#New_State_\(Estado_Novo\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vargas_Era#New_State_(Estado_Novo))

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_Brazilian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get%C3%BAlio_Vargas#Fall_from_power

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_Brazilian_general_election

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_Brazilian_general_election

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950_Brazilian_general_election

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1955_Brazilian_presidential_election

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1955_Brazilian_presidential_election

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Luz

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caf%C3%A9_Filho

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Luz

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juscelino_Kubitschek

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1960_Brazilian_presidential_election

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_Brazilian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

³³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2022>

³⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2023>

³⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2024>

³⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2023>

³⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2024>

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