the problem would be settled by the military, in a coup d'état that ended civilian rule.

On March 31, 1964, a military revolt spread rapidly across Brazil as military units seized important government offices in both Rio de Janeiro and Brasília. In effect, there was no resistance, and violence was limited. Within twenty-four hours João Goulart was forced to flee to Uruguay in exile. The military moved to fill important government positions, turning to fellow conspirators and their civilian allies to do the job. Once again, Brazil had opted for an authoritarian solution to its political problems.

Many historians argue that behind the scenes the real issue this time was the rising threat of class conflict. Vargas had opened the door to organizing the urban working class, but this was seen as more or less acceptable to the upper and middle classes. However, Goulart seemed to pose a bigger threat, accompanying radical rhetoric with active mobilization of both peasants in the countryside and the urban working classes. In other words, the threat of an organized lower-class alliance, combining both urban workers and rural peasants, against the elite establishment was growing. As in the past, the military used its power to veto civilian politics, this time to create a military-led “bureaucratic-authoritarian” regime.

**BRAZIL'S MILITARY DICTATORSHIP**
(1964–1985)

The coup to oust Goulart would mark the beginning of two decades of military rule in Brazil. At least initially, the military intervention was greeted enthusiastically by the media, the church, and elites in business and politics. The coup, called the “revolution” by its military engineers, was seen as necessary to counteract the upheavals and social instability that were the feared results of Goulart’s reforms—in this sense it was seen as a preemptive strike to stop the lower sectors of Brazilian society from increasing mobilization and
growing power. The initial enthusiasm, however, would begin to wane as the military’s repressive tactics, including torture, became more widely known by the public.

Importantly, unlike other dictatorships in Latin America dominated by a single “strongman,” the new military government would be run by the full military bureaucracy, with Brazil’s generals actively seeking to transform the state and Brazilian society. This was the first of a number of “national security regimes” to be seen in Latin America—others followed in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. These regimes focused on creating economic growth in a “controlled” political environment; repression of human rights was a key ingredient.

There were a number of distinct phases of military rule in Brazil, but each of the regimes was headed by a four-star general, and all witnessed coalitions of military officers, technocratic administrators, and civilian politicians (from this coalition comes the label “bureaucratic-authoritarian”). In the early years the military ruled without dramatically changing the structure of the government. However, in 1967 a new constitution was passed by Congress; by this time all opposition politicians had been removed. At this point the president would be elected by an electoral college, but only military officers could be candidates. The constitution also allowed the president to rule by decree, even if the legislature were in session. So what had started as a relatively moderate dictatorship in 1964 turned into a markedly more repressive regime.

The year 1968 was critical in the evolution of military rule. As in other parts of the world, Brazil witnessed huge protests and demonstrations, typically staged by student organizations. The military, fearful of growing opposition and equating democracy with subversion, began cracking down on “the communist threat.” Through a number of institutional acts in late 1968 the military allowed for indirect elections, eliminated all existing political parties and replaced them with two government-controlled parties, suspended the legislature, and suspended habeus corpus (a person’s right to challenge detention or
imprisonment) for crimes against “national security.” The year 1969 would bring yet another constitution, further strengthening the executive’s power and weakening individuals’ rights.

It is generally agreed that the years between 1968 and 1975 witnessed the darkest hours of military rule in Brazil. Political parties and workers’ unions were outlawed or limited to government-controlled groups. Censorship was ubiquitous. Congress was marginalized, and its actions were limited. The military-controlled universities and many of the country’s top intellectuals, musicians, writers, and artists went into exile. Most startling, torture, executions, and disappearances became common occurrences. Opposition and resistance within Brazil had effectively vanished.

**Brazil’s Economic Miracle**

Brazil’s military rulers moved quickly to invigorate the economy. In essence, business—both domestic and foreign—had gone along with the coup because of fears surrounding Goulart’s populist rhetoric, high and rising inflation, and the mobilization of workers and peasants. The military, then, had to prove that it could engineer economic growth and development. Brazil’s so-called economic miracle took place in 1968 to 1974, under the rule of General Emílio Garrastazú Médici. The “miracle” referred both to high rates of growth and the enormous infusion of capital, often foreign, that was devoted to developing Brazil’s infrastructure (the Transamazionian Highway is a good example) and basic industry, not to mention purchases of military hardware.

The economy returned to growth after 1967. From 1968 to 1974 the rate of economic growth averaged an amazing 10 percent, with exports more than quadrupling. Importantly, manufactured goods finally surpassed coffee as the country’s leading export—these types of achievements generated the talk of the Brazilian miracle. However, the miracle would fade by the
end of the 1970s, and Brazil’s generals would then face a number of economic problems, like high inflation, high and growing levels of government debt, and fading economic growth.

While the government attempted a return to growth in 1982, global events would dash its hopes. The world was hit by a major recession, caused in large part by high U.S. interest rates (which were designed to end its own inflationary problems). The recession drove down the prices of Brazil’s exports, but the high interest rates meant the cost of servicing the foreign debt was increasing and reaching unsustainable levels. In fact, in 1982 Brazil had the single largest foreign debt in the world: $87 billion. Brazil, like Mexico and Argentina, had to suspend payments on principal and agree to a tough economic plan with the IMF to obtain emergency financing for short-term obligations.
FROM LIBERALIZATION TO REDEMOCRATIZATION

Brazil's political violence reached new peaks in 1969, as the country experienced guerrilla warfare for the ensuing four years. The government responded with extensive repression. In 1969 the U.S. ambassador was kidnapped; he was then released without serious harm in exchange for fifteen political prisoners. By 1973 the military regime had all but wiped out the guerrilla movement.

General Ernesto Geisel assumed the presidency in 1974 and signaled a desire to return to democracy. This period would be dubbed the *abertura*, or political opening. The more moderate leaders within the military government argued that a reduction in repression, amnesty for dissidents, and a stronger role for the opposition could actually prevent more radical opposition to the regime. The Brazilian Democratic Movement was the main vehicle for opponents of the regime and would become the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) when the government reinstated political parties in 1979.

The problem for the government, however, was its clear inability to win free elections; the new government learned this the hard way when it allowed relatively free congressional elections, which the opposition party won in a landslide. The harsh economic conditions would make efforts to return to democracy even more difficult as more and more people actively opposed the regime. The process was begun under Ernesto Geisel. President João Figueiredo (1979–1985) would then take the reins from Geisel, working to fulfill a campaign promise for direct elections in 1982. In a first since 1965, in November 1982, Brazil directly elected all state governors, with the PMDB winning the big races in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais. The government party lost control of the Chamber of Deputies but retained control of the electoral college, which was set to elect a new president in 1985.
The 1985 presidential election was won by the PMDB candidate, Tancredo Neves, who had shrewdly won enough votes from the government's party, the PSD, to win over the electoral college. However, Neves fell ill and underwent emergency surgery on the night before his inauguration, and never recovered. A former senator and candidate for vice president with Neves, José Sarney, would become president upon Neves's death. Ironically, while Sarney would be Brazil's first civilian president in more than twenty years, he had for years been a PSD leader and for some time a key player in the military regime.

The Sarney presidency was largely centered on the process of redemocratization, but the weakened economy would
severely limit its overall success. Likewise, Sarney had few strong allies; democratic forces distrusted him because of his previous involvement with the military government, while the military resented his desertion to the democratic opposition. The term would end badly, with rampant inflation and general policy drift.


Sarney was followed by Fernando Collor de Mello, a relatively unknown politician who had been the governor of the poor northeastern state of Alagoas. The young Collor ran in 1989 against a former labor union leader named Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, better known as “Lula” and Brazil’s current president. Collor favored a relatively free-market program, while Lula called for a more left-leaning social democratic program. Fernando Collor de Mello won the election in a run-off ballot, but his presidency would prove to be a disaster; he was ultimately impeached.

During his presidential term Collor tried to implement economic stabilization, cooperating with the IMF, but this ultimately failed to reduce Brazil’s rampant inflation. One of his policies, freezes financial assets, turned out to be wildly unpopular. In short, by 1991 annual inflation was running at a rate of 1,585 percent, and all hope of gaining fiscal control was lost. The president also began a series of reforms, dubbed “neo-liberal” for their emphasis on opening the economy to freer trade, privatizing state-owned companies, and deregulating the economy. Collor did not make it through his term, however, as he was involved in a huge corruption scandal. In September 1992 Brazil’s Chamber of Deputies voted overwhelmingly to impeach the president, and Collor was forced to resign. Notably, after nearly twenty-five years without democracy, the impeachment process took place entirely within the democratic system, with no meddling or intervention by the military. To many, this was a strong signal that democracy had taken hold.