



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Brazilians act to end military rule (Diretas Já) 1983-84

March

1983

to: April

1984

Country: Brazil

Goals:

Transition from Congressional electoral college elections for president to direct popular elections, complete transition from military dictatorship to popular democracy

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Very first protest held in Abreu e Lima in Pernambuco

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › In January, the number of protests grew significantly as well as the number of protesters reaching over 300,000 in Sao Paulo

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › In February and March, the protests continued to grow, continuously maintaining crowds in the tens and hundreds of thousands. In April, that number reached over 1.5 million during the final protest

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Diretas Ja!

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- citizens of Brazil

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

The leading organization of the movement was the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). The leading politicians involved were Ulysses Guimarães, Tancredo Neves (elected president in 1985), André Franco Montoro, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Mário Covas, Teotônio Vilela, José Serra, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (president of Brazil from 2003-2011), Eduardo Suplicy and Leonel Brizola.

Partners:

Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT- Workers' Democratic Party), Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT- Workers' Party)

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

One famous singer that supported the movement was Fafa de Belem Osmar Santos.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT- Workers' Democratic Party)
- Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT- Workers' Party)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 2 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President João Figueiredo as a part of a military-rule government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Some censorship of the press and arrests were made in the days leading up to the vote on the amendment

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was successful to the extent that it helped create the political space necessary for the transition to direct elections, especially because it demonstrated the widespread public support for the amendment. However, they were unable to secure that change during the election year that they had planned, and the actual transition four years later, though largely influenced by the movement, was the result of many other political actors working at the top.

On March 31, 1983, protesters took to the streets for the first time in the city of Abreu e Lima in the state of Pernambuco to show their support for the newly introduced Dante de Oliveira Constitutional Amendment, named after the Congressional representative who introduced it. The Amendment was proposed to change the electoral process by which Brazil elected its presidents. The current system involved indirect elections that continuously put up presidents from the armed forces through an electoral college in the Congress. The Congress was split into two parties following the transition from the military dictatorship, one that was directly linked to the military and the other that did not offer any significant opposition. The new amendment would open up the elections to a popular vote for all the citizens of Brazil and would most likely have the consequence of transitioning the government to civilian rather than military rule.

?Members of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) organized this initial protest, which set off a series of demonstrations throughout the country showing stronger and stronger support for the new amendment and a desire for an end to the military regime. Although these first demonstrations were not covered widely in the media nor paid much attention by the military-run government, they continued to grow. In June 5,000 people held a demonstration in the city of Goiania in Goias. By November the crowds began to surpass 15,000 people in several cities in various states such as Pernambuco and Paraná. The Workers' Party (PT) and the Democratic Labor Party (PDT) joined the action adding to the numerical and organizational power of the campaign.

?In January 1984, the campaign took off. Demonstrations on the 12th, 20th, and 21st drew crowds of 40,000; 15,000; and 22,000 respectively in several different cities, but it wasn't until the 25th that the campaign showed its true might. In Praça a Sé, the main square in São Paulo, over 300,000 gathered to simultaneously celebrate the city's 300th anniversary and demand direct elections. Throughout all of February and March, the protests became more numerous in cities throughout the country with crowds ranging from the tens to the hundreds of thousands. The sudden rise in numbers and support for direct elections was largely unexpected by the incumbent government and therefore there was no official response from the President nor the military.

Then on April 10, over 1 million protesters gathered in front of the Candelaria Church in Rio de Janeiro demanding that the

direct elections be put into effect immediately. The urgency of the campaign was growing to have the Amendment passed before the upcoming elections later in the year. Six days later, on April 16, Brazil witnessed the largest public demonstration in its history. In the city of Sao Pao, 1.5 million protesters filled the streets and paraded from the plaza at Praça da Sé to the Vale do Anhangabaú plaza chanting “Diretas Já” (Direct Elections Now!). From this moment until the vote on the Amendment, set for April 25, President Figueiredo increased the security measures, which included censoring the press and arresting demonstrators. Two days before the vote, the government instituted several preemptive measures to prevent another uprising. He placed Brasília and the surrounding area under emergency military rule, live television and radio was cut, and economic and political pressure was put on politicians who could possibly influence the votes of the deputies. The day finally arrived for the vote, and in a very close decision the amendment lost. A total of 298 representatives had voted to pass it, but 320 were needed.

The next election occurred as it always had through the electoral college; however, civilian rule was restored regardless. Tancredo de Almeida Neves, a member of the PMDB and leader of the movement, was chosen for the Presidency. He died before taking office, but his Vice-President, José Sarney, took his place and maintained the civilian government. In 1988 a new democratic Constitution was passed that included direct elections, and in 1989 Brazil held its first popular elections for President. The success of the Diretas Já campaign was not felt for 4 years after it had ended, but its effects were undeniably linked to the new changes.

Research Notes

Sources:

Selcher, Wayne A. Political Liberalization in Brazil: Dynamics, Dilemmas, and Future Prospects. Boulder: Westview Press, 1986.

Mettenheim, Kurt . The Brazilian Voter: Mass Politics in Democratic Transition, 1974-1986. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.

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