

Brazil's "Tropical Spring" and its long-lasting consequences

2013 is a fundamental year for understanding Brazil's current democratic crisis. It has marked the beginning of the political instability that led to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. The ascension of Michel Temer to the presidency that followed signified a [reordering of national political hegemony](#). The social inclusion project that characterized PT administrations was replaced by a neoliberal agenda. It all started with the mass protest movement that is completing 5 years this month.

In a context in which Brazil had undergone [increases in general wellbeing](#) which lifted millions of people out of the poverty line, Brazilians expressed their discontent with their representatives through protest. What has started as a demonstration against increases in bus fares has become a nationwide mobilization after authorities reacted to manifestations disproportionately. [Police truculence and repression](#) strengthened citizen's dissatisfaction while images of protesters and [journalists covered in blood](#) gained extensive media attention.

The 2013 social upheaval in Brazil did not have either a clear agenda, neither a unified leadership. The movement "It is not about 20 cents" was heterogeneous and gradually integrated a variety of public agendas, ranging from advocacy against corruption to better education, health and transportation. For instance, people on the streets questioned public expenditures and priorities on the eve of the World Cup. Demonstrations also progressively grew in [social composition](#), with middle class massively joining the movement.

After approximately three weeks of widespread demonstrations, Dilma Rousseff, former President of Brazil, gave an [emblematic speech](#). She affirmed "protests have shown the strength of Brazilian democracy and the youth's desire to make Brazil move forward" and has proposed a structural political reform through plebiscite. Despite the president's compromise to answer the "voices of the streets", she was not able to act in response to most demands for lack of Congressional support.

In 2014, she was reelected, but started her second mandate discredited. Dilma's legitimacy and political support deteriorated further with the [deepening of the economic crisis](#) in Brazil. In this context, conservative politicians led by Eduardo Cunha acquired power and support in Congress to move the impeachment process forward. Brazilian elites and part of the country's middle class went back to the streets in 2015, now dressed in yellow and green and shouting "Dilma Out".

The anti-corruption discourse has been used to legitimize an antidemocratic seizure of power. Ironically enough, according to a [New York Times](#) article, 60% of the members of Brazil's Congress that voted to impeach Rousseff "faced serious charges like bribery, electoral fraud, illegal deforestation, kidnapping and homicide".

The consequences of the June 2013 protests are still pervasive today. After two years in power, President Michel Temer has already approved a series of reforms [dismantling the social policies](#) implemented by previous governments and has advanced a neoliberal austerity agenda that deepened [Brazil's democratic, social and political crisis](#). The national elite ruling

Brazil today could not win 2014's election, but still reached power capturing and mobilizing middle class resentment with PT's social programs. "It was not about corruption."

For more information, access:

American Quarterly. [Revisiting Brazil's 2013 protests: what did they really mean?](#)

Brasilwire. [June 2013: A Retrospective.](#)

Carta Capital. [12 retrocessos em 12 meses de Temer.](#)

The Economist. [The streets erupt.](#)

Open Democracy. [2013-2016: polarization and protests in Brazil.](#)

NYT. [Dilma Rousseff Targeted in Brazil by Lawmakers Facing Scandals of Their Own.](#)

Stratfor. [Evaluating the National Effect of Brazilian Protests.](#)

The Guardian. [The real reason Dilma Rousseff's enemies want her impeached.](#)

The Guardian. [Brazil erupts in protest: more than a million on the streets](#)