



REVIEW

CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE WORK 1964: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE COUP D'ÉTAT – DEMOCRACY AND REFORMS IN POPULISM

RESENHA CRÍTICA DA OBRA 1964: VISÕES CRÍTICAS DO GOLPE – DEMOCRACIA E REFORMAS NO POPULISMO

RESEÑA CRÍTICA DE LA OBRA 1964: VISIONES CRÍTICAS DEL GOLPE – DEMOCRACIA Y REFORMAS EN EL POPULISMO

**ISABELLA SPINDOLA BARBOSA¹
RODRIGO JURUCÊ MATTOS GONÇALVES²
LUCIANA DE SOUZA RAMOS³**

INTRODUCTION

This work intends to critically review the work organized by Professor and Doctor of Philosophy Caio Navarro de Toledo, entitled *1964: visões críticas do golpe: democracia e reformas no populismo* (1964: Critical Views of the Coup: Democracy and Reforms

How to cite this article:

BARBOSA, Isabella Spindola; GONÇALVES, Rodrigo Jurucê Mattos; RAMOS, Luciana De Souza. Critical review of the work 1964: critical perspectives on the coup d'état – democracy and reforms in populism. *Journal of Socio-Environmental Law - REDIS*, Morrinhos, Brazil, v. 03, n. 02, jul./dec., 2025, p. I-IX.

Submission date:
27/06/2025

Approval date:
24/09/2025

¹ Bachelor's degree in History from the State University of Goiás (UEG), Northeast Campus, Formosa, with studies beginning in 2016 and completed in 2022. Master's student in History at UEG, South Campus, Morrinhos. Contact email: isabellaspindola@gmail.com. CV: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3587368483577552>. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4342-282X>.

² PhD, Master's, and Bachelor's degrees in History. Postdoctoral fellowship completed at the Graduate Program in History of the Federal University of Goiás (PPGH/UF) (2018–2021). Professor in the History program at the State University of Goiás (UEG) and in the Graduate Program in History: Culture and Society (Master's level) (PPGHIS/UEG). Contact email: rodrigo.goncalves@ueg.br. CV: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2132772642943343>. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3736-4804>.

³ Higher Education Lecturer in the Law program at the State University of Goiás (UEG), South Campus – Morrinhos. Lecturer in the Master's program of the Graduate Program in History (PPGHIS) at UEG, South Campus. Postdoctoral fellowship in Global Inequalities and Social Justice at the University of Brasília (UnB) and FLACSO. PhD and Master's degrees in Constitutional Law and Theory of the State from the Faculty of Law of the University of Brasília (UnB). Contact email: luciana.souza.ramos@ueg.br. CV: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1023148491666492>. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4655-352X>.

in Populism). It is composed of a set of texts produced for the Seminar entitled "The 1964 Coup: 30 Years Later," held at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the State University of Campinas in March 1994. The texts, produced by various writers, highlight parts of a dark past that left marks on Brazilian society and should be remembered in respect to its victims—civilians who fought for democracy, freedom of expression, and other rights essential to human life. Therefore, this work addresses the central arguments of each of the authors present in the work, seeking not only to reflect and problematize but also to relate the discussions pointed out among the texts.

The work includes a table of contents, an introduction, five chapters, and an appendix. Each chapter seeks to cover important aspects responsible for establishing and perpetuating the military dictatorship that began on March 31, 1964, and ended on March 15, 1985. These include: I. Economics, debated by economist and Doctor of Sociology Paul Singer and sociologist Francisco de Oliveira; II. Politics and Social Movements, composed by Doctor of Philosophy Caio Navarro de Toledo, Doctor of Political Science Argelina C. Figueiredo, political scientist Lucilia de Almeida Neves, social scientist João Roberto Martins Filho, and historian and political scientist I. A. Moniz Bandeira; III. Leftists, Military: The Defeat Without Resistance, in which the texts developed by historian and sociologist Nelson Werneck Sodré, historian and social scientist Jacob Gorender, and philosopher, legal, and social scientist João Quartim de Moraes dialogue; IV. Thirty Years Later, containing the texts of sociologists Octavio Ianni and Florestan Fernandes; and V. Testimony, written by militant book publisher Énio Silveira. As a post-textual element, the appendix stands out, available in item VI, containing a Bibliography on the 1964 Coup, produced by Patrícia Trópia, and a section about the biography of the book's writers.

1 ECONOMY

To reflect on the economic aspects in the context of the military coup, the work *1964: visões críticas do golpe: democracia e reformas no populismo* (1964: Critical Views of the Coup: Democracy and Reforms in Populism) draws upon the texts "The Significance of Distributive Conflict in the 1964 Coup" by Paul Singer and "Dilemmas and Prospects of the Brazilian Economy Pre-1964" by Francisco de Oliveira.

Paul Singer points out that in 1964, Brazil was experiencing a serious problem with high inflation. The author notes that before the 1964 coup, it was unviable for the popular classes to open savings accounts; to build their nest eggs, they opted to purchase land in peripheral areas. As emphasized by the author, the economy of the period depended entirely on the export of commodities

like coffee, and in 1964 and the preceding years, coffee constituted 70 or 80% of the volume of products exported from Brazil. In the author's words:

Quando o preço do café caia, o Brasil entrava em crise; quando o preço do café subia havia, não apenas no setor cafeiro, mas através da expropriação cambial, também no setor industrial. As divisas proporcionadas pela cafeicultura permitiam importar meios de produção. Quando o volume importado crescia, a indústria se acelerava. Portanto, o ritmo de desenvolvimento do Brasil era comandado pelo câmbio, pela exploração e pelo preço do café (Singer *apud* Toledo, 1997, p.16).

In 1963, the country faced a serious problem with its external debt, comprised of loans granted by intergovernmental institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and others. High inflation was one of the means of transferring income from the working classes to capital. Added to this was the aggravating factor of the mismatch between wage values and the cost of goods.

In this sense, the labor movement was enormously important in demanding wage improvements, which at the time were disproportionate to inflation, which reached 80% per year in the 1960s. It is worth remembering that a large part of the Brazilian population still lived in rural areas in 1964, and the majority survived on their labor, which was undervalued and poorly paid, in agriculture.

Despite all the major hardships faced in the country, democracy was well utilized by the population, which consistently chose to vote for the opposition. This statement is clear and reinforced by the following excerpt:

Linhares perdeu a eleição porque não era a favor de Dutra, Dutra perdeu porque não era a favor de Getúlio, Getúlio morreu, mas Café Filho não conseguiu evitar a eleição de Juscelino, assim como Juscelino não conseguiu evitar a eleição de Jânio Quadros. (Singer *apud* Toledo, 1997, p.18).

This rebelliousness can also be observed in three social movements of the period. The student movement was defined by the author as "active, articulate, strong, and with a great impact on public opinion" (Singer *apud* Toledo, 1997, p.18). The peasant movement transgressed the rules established by private property and received significant media attention, which even predicted an agricultural revolution. Regarding the labor movement, it is worth highlighting that it was an important means found by workers to take over state-controlled unions, with greater ferment in São Paulo. In 1953, a time when the PT (Workers' Party) already existed, bricklayers, carpenters, metalworkers, and other workers mobilized in São Paulo in a strike that lasted about six weeks, and since then, this proletarian movement became increasingly solid and organized, intensifying in 1983

with the emergence of the CUT (Unified Workers' Central). Returning to the discussion about the period before the dictatorship, it is necessary to emphasize the indispensability of these social movements for the occurrence of wage readjustments, which began to correspond to inflation thanks to the Labor Court.

Thus, it is worth highlighting that the coup executed by the Armed Forces on March 31, 1964, was realized under the aegis of the economic problems plaguing Brazil in the period in question. However, the topic "Dilemmas and Prospects of the Brazilian Economy Pre-1964," by Francisco de Oliveira, problematizes the widely disseminated ideological predeterminism that characterizes the 1964 coup as the only alternative capable of leading Brazil towards overcoming the economic crisis faced in the years prior to the coup.

In addition to economic aspects, it is necessary to emphasize the political and ideological relationship behind the coup. Given the Cuban Revolution, the possibility of such a revolution occurring in Brazil was an idea that the right feared obsessively, since the press, television, and radio disseminated the notion that the left was already on the rise in the country and that democracy would be extinguished by this political spectrum. After the military seized power, the social movements of workers, students, and peasants were brutally repressed, and the "economic miracle" that occurred between 1968 and 1976 was used to justify and legitimize the downfall of democracy.

2 POLITICS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

As the contributors to the work argued, the democracy established in 1946 was threatened on numerous occasions. The parliamentary system, implemented after Jânio Quadros' attempt to return to power and suspend Congress, was seen by conservative civilians as a "compromise solution" in the face of coup attempts that frequently loomed over Brazil. In this context, Toledo draws attention to the conditions under which the government that preceded the military coup was established:

O governo Goulart nasceu, conviveu e morreu sob o signo do golpe de Estado. Durante seus dois anos e meio de existência (setembro de 1961 a março de 1964), um novo contexto político social emergiu no país. Suas características básicas foram: uma intensa e prolongada crise econômico-financeira (recessão e uma inflação com taxas jamais conhecidas); constantes crises político-institucionais; ampla mobilização política das classes populares (as classes médias, a partir de meados de 1963, também entram em cena); fortalecimento do movimento operário e dos trabalhadores do campo; crise do sistema partidário e um inédito acirramento da luta ideológica de classes (Toledo, 1997, p. 31-32).

At the time Toledo's text was written, thirty years after Goulart's government, there was still no consensus regarding this government. While conservatives and liberals fervently disapproved of the government in question, for some leftist groups "it was an authentic nationalist, democratic, and popular government" (Toledo, 1997, p.32), and "for others, we were facing a government with a populist and bourgeois reformist character, without any real commitment to broader socio-economic transformations" (Toledo, 1997, p.32). There are even some criticisms from leftist groups that go further: for them, Goulart acted favorably towards the ruling classes and imperialism, handing over power to the right without any resistance.

However, despite all these criticisms, in general, the left agreed that there had been, from the first months of Goulart's government, an enormous ideological and political advancement of the popular classes, since politics advanced towards spaces that did not welcome it in earlier times, such as the countryside, factories, streets, and other spaces.

Goulart fulfilled part of his term under a parliamentary system, from September 1961 to January 1963. However, incapable of meeting institutional and administrative demands, parliamentarism was revoked, giving way once again to presidentialism.

To address the political, social, and economic problems, the "Three-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development: 1963-65" was adopted during João Goulart's government. Prepared by economist and Planning Minister Celso Furtado with the help of Finance Minister San Thiago Dantas, the plan in question sought to combat inflation but failed in its purpose. Subsequently, involvement in the purchase of American Foreign Power (Amforp), coupled with the failure of the Three-Year Plan, highlighted some of the signs of the anti-national economic-financial policy of João Goulart's government.

Another aspect that should be highlighted about the historical context prior to the beginning of the dictatorships relates to João Goulart's defense of the need to implement social reforms, necessary both for the improvement of the country's industrial capitalism and for the easing of tensions present in the social field. Agrarian reform, although not revolutionary in nature, was harshly rejected by Congress and by "right-wing sectors (Ipes/Ibad, ADP, the Church, women's associations, etc.), some of which were widely financed by the U.S. embassy and multinational companies, which began to denounce 'subversion' and the 'communization of the country'." According to these sectors, the government was accused of encouraging "disorder and social agitation" (Toledo, 1997, p.36). Under such circumstances, the Goulart government lost strength, because despite raising the nationalist banner and that of basic reforms, the government did not prioritize implementing measures that would justify raising these banners.

3 LEFTISTS, MILITARY: THE DEFEAT WITHOUT RESISTANCE

When discussing the question "Was the coup inevitable?", Nelson Werneck Sodré pointed to a series of coups that had occurred since 1945: "the coup of 1945, immediately after the end of the War; that of 1954, which deposed Getúlio Vargas; the attempted coups of 1955 and '61; and the coup of 1964" (Sodré *apud* Toledo, 1997, p.103). The author draws attention to the ideological conflict that followed World War II between the powers of the USA and the Soviet Union, in which, with the aim of defending capitalism, any attempt to promote changes in the political and social field was combated through coups against the democratic state.

Within this reflection, the author points to the fact that the 1964 coup could have been avoided if Brazilian institutions had been truly democratic. In this discussion, Jacob Gorender, through a Marxist lens, emphasizes that "historical events and social transformations are the effect of defined causes, occurring within a set of determinations" (Gorender *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 109). That said, Gorender speculates that if, a few months before the coup's execution, the left had been sufficiently organized, the right would have felt intimidated, and thus the execution of the coup would have been avoided.

However, given the circumstances to which pre-military dictatorship Brazil was subjected, João Quartim de Moraes expresses disbelief regarding the adoption of other tools to solve the problems present in the political-institutional scenario of that period. In his words, "there was a moment when the victory of the coup plotters became inevitable" (Moraes *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 118).

4 LEFTISTS, MILITARY: THE DEFEAT WITHOUT RESISTANCE

To reflect on the Brazilian conjuncture thirty years after the coup was carried out, the time when the book was organized, Octávio Ianni draws attention to the following fact: from the 1930s onward, Brazil adopted a model of national development; after World War II and with the advent of the Cold War, it opted for a model of associated, or dependent, development; and after the end of the military dictatorship, Brazil was experiencing transnational, or globalized, capitalism.

In this new configuration, the country's economy turned toward world capitalism, where transnational and multinational corporations began to influence governmental practices, which dynamize the banking system, commerce, agriculture, and industry within a logic of denationalization and privatization aimed solely at productivity and profitability in pursuit of a supposed modernization established by the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund. After the military dictatorship, the Brazilian economy came to be understood no longer as agrarian or underdeveloped, but rather as part of an emerging market of globalized capitalism.

5 TESTIMONY

Finally, the work includes the testimony of Énio Silveira entitled "The Resistance in the Cultural Sphere," in which the author recounts his experience during the military dictatorship period. In his account, he mentions that he used to gather at his home with various left-wing intellectuals. One of them, Nelson Werneck Sodré, who also contributed to the production of one of the texts available in the work analyzed in this paper, even prepared a list with the names of the military officers who were eager for the coup, delivering it to Goulart, who unfortunately took no action to prevent the consummation of this threat.

He then recounts that he was at Rádio Nacional in Rio de Janeiro together with comrades Nelson Werneck Sodré, Álvaro Pereira Pinto, and Alex Vianni (also an author of this book), alerting the Brazilian population about the military coup at the exact moment the military seized power. Faced with the instantaneous invasion of the military at the location where they were, the militants in question even hid for twenty-four hours at the Yugoslavian embassy.

After that, "an entire process of violence and abuses began" (Silveira *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 152), in which the editor's political rights were annihilated for ten years, his bookstore was destroyed, he was arrested seven times, and faced charges for four crimes against National Security. However, despite so many difficulties, Silveira did not become discouraged and made the Civilização Brasileira publishing house a suitable space for disseminating knowledge useful in the fight against the dictatorship.

Although he was a member of the Communist Party, the author reveals that the desire to go against and fight the dictatorship came from a personal place, and for this, he used the publishing house. The militant highlighted some of the important books published by the publishing house before the coup, among them *Breve história do fascismo* (Brief History of Fascism) by Italian journalist and filmmaker Mário Fioranni, *Cangaceiros e fanáticos* (Bandits and Fanatics) by Rui Facó, *Pioneiro e*

nacionalista (Pioneer and Nationalist) by Delmiro Gouveia, *O Estado militarista* (The Militarist State) by Fred J. Cook, and *Introdução à revolução brasileira* (Introduction to the Brazilian Revolution) by Nelson Werneck.

Foreseeing the coup, with the aim of raising public awareness, *Civilização Brasileira* launched the collection *Cadernos do Povo Brasileiro* (Notebooks of the Brazilian People), composed of a series of affordable pocket books that discussed, for example, the interests of which social strata the military sought to represent and satisfy. The collection came to include between thirty and forty books but ended up being suspended by the military. Also notable is the collection launched in Brasília, *Violão de Rua* (Street Guitar), which brought together various poets with different ideological positions.

Ênio Silveira faced significant financial difficulties, as the military prohibited numerous bookstores from selling *Civilização Brasileira*'s books, banned the publishing house from using Banco do Brasil, and censored countless of its books. However, Silveira continued to resist the offensives of censorship. In his words: "A publisher is not a mere merchant of books, not a butcher who wraps meat in paper; it is someone who seeks to put the cause ahead of commercial interests" (Silveira *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 155). Later, he reiterates: "fighting against the dictatorship was for me something viscerally necessary" (Silveira *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 156).

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is undeniable that the work used for this paper was successful in its objective of responsibly discussing the delicate topic of the military dictatorship that occurred in Brazil. The care taken by its organizer, Caio Navarro de Toledo, in selecting the contributors to the book is noticeable, as all of them presented valuable contributions in reflecting on the proposed theme.

It is evident that several aspects were responsible for provoking and maintaining the military dictatorship. Among these, the economic crisis faced by the country stands out, where external debt and inflation permeated the financial system; the ideological crisis stemming from the Cold War, in which, under U.S. influence, fear of communism took hold and spread rapidly throughout the country; the unpreparedness of João Goulart's government to counteract the coup attempt; the disorganization of the left in providing means to block the coup; and the very fragility of Brazilian democracy.

It is always necessary to reflect on this set of factors, as doing so makes it possible to problematize the perception of the coup as if it were merely a desire of the military. In *The Meaning of the Military Dictatorship*, Florestan Fernandes reminds us of the responsibility that civilians had

in executing and maintaining the 1964 coup. He emphasizes that many civilians, originating from and defending "traditional families," clamored for the dictatorship; these individuals "saw through the same lens the need for oppression and repression, used the State as an instrument of 'preserving order' and the 'legal means' of collective defense in defensive and offensive disputes to keep 'the rabble in their place'" (Fernandes *apud* Toledo, 1997, p. 141).

The work presented the consequences of the military dictatorship, the main one concerning the restriction of human freedoms. It was a long and brutal period for thousands of Brazilians; however, the resistance of many was also a consolidated fact. To exemplify this, Toledo invited left-wing militant Ênio Silveira to share his experience in the fight against the dictatorship.

REFERENCES

TOLEDO, Caio Navarro de (Org.). 1964: Visões críticas do golpe: Democracia e reformas no populismo. Campinas: Unicamp, 1997.

This version was originally presented in Portuguese and translated into Spanish with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence.

Copyright 2025 – Journal of Socio-Environmental Law – ReDiS

Editors:

Liliane Pereira Amorim;
Karla Karoline Rodrigues Silva;
Isabel Christina Gonçalves Oliveira;
Giovana Nobre Carvalho.

Editor-in-Chief: Thiago Henrique Costa Silva.



This work is licensed under a License [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).