

Bolivia

Period of democratic transition: 1982

Pro-democracy civic movement: present

Bolivia was governed by a military regime for most of the period between 1964 and 1982. Transition to civilian rule was initiated in the late 1970s under the rule of General Hugo Banzer; elections were held in 1978, 1979, and 1980, but the military prevented a full democratic transition from occurring. The years between 1978 and 1982 witnessed a succession of weak, though often brutal, military and civilian governments.

Luis Garcia Meza's oppressive and corrupt military government, which took power in 1980, was brought down in 1981. His repressive and internationally isolated government eroded support in the military's ranks. Amid a severe economic crisis that triggered mass protests and a crippling general strike in 1982, the military high command decided to return to the barracks. Throughout the preceding period, opposition to the regime had centered on the main union in Bolivia, the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB). By 1981, the Confederation of Bolivian Private Entrepreneurs had joined the COB and sectors of the middle class in pushing for rapid democratization. The Catholic Church was also actively involved as a mediator among all sides. The Congress elected in 1980 was reconvened in October 1982 and selected as the new president Hernan Siles Zuazo, who had won a plurality of votes in the annulled 1980 elections. He assumed office on October 10, 1982.

Since the democratic transition in 1982, Bolivia has not achieved sustained political or economic stability. The rise of largely indigenous social movements as a powerful force changed the Bolivian political equation, especially after democratically elected president Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada was forced from power in 2003. Though the military has not staged large-scale interventions in politics, democracy remains unconsolidated and social conflict is rife.