History of Paraguay

Spanish explorers came to Paraguay in 1524 and established Asunción in 1537. Colonial rule lasted until the 19th century. Paraguay peacefully gained independence in 1811, and José Gaspar Rodríguez Francia established the first in a long line of dictatorships. He closed the country to the outside world and ruled until his death in 1840.

The next ruler, Carlos Antonio López, began modernizing the country. But in 1865, his son Francisco Solano López took Paraguay into the War of the Triple Alliance against Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Ultimately, Paraguay lost the war (1870), along with 55,000 square miles (142,450 square kilometers) of territory and as much as two-thirds of its adult male population. Foreign troops stayed until 1876, and Paraguay remained politically unstable for another generation.

In 1932, Paraguay waged the three-year Chaco War with Bolivia over a territorial dispute. Although Paraguay gained two-thirds of the disputed Chaco territory, even more of the country’s male population died.

Various dictators and one elected president ruled until 1954, when General Alfredo Stroessner, commander of the army, took control of the Paraguayan government and established a long-term dictatorship. Although his tenure brought some economic development (mainly in the form of three hydroelectric dams), his government was responsible for human-rights violations, corruption, and oppression.

A coup in 1989 ousted Stroessner, and the coup’s leader, General Andrés Rodríguez Pedotti, was elected president. President Rodríguez restored civil rights, legalized political parties, and promised not to serve past 1993. He was the first leader to successfully implement many democratic reforms. A new constitution was ratified in June 1992. Rodríguez’s administration helped Paraguay emerge from its isolation under decades of dictatorship to join in regional and international organizations.

The nation’s commitment to democracy was tested during an attempted coup in 1996. General Lino Oviedo, who led the coup, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He ran for the presidency from his prison cell until a Supreme Court ruling forced him to withdraw his candidacy. His running mate, Raul Cubas, ran in his place and won in 1998. Oviedo received a presidential pardon, which was overturned by the Supreme Court, who ordered that Oviedo be returned to jail. In 1999, both Oviedo and Cubas fled.
the country after allegations that they were involved in the assassination of Paraguay’s vice president, who was of an opposing party.

Since 1999 there have been two more presidents, the most recent being Nicanor Duarte Frutos of the Colorado Party. Although tainted by scandal, the Colorado Party has ruled Paraguay for more than 60 years. Despite this dominance, the president faces serious challenges because of societal unrest related to political corruption and economic hardships.

References: