

Optimism, Pessimism, and Coalitional Presidentialism: Debating the Institutional Design of Brazilian Democracy

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Research on Brazil's political institutions has gone through several phases since democratisation in 1985. In the early years of democracy, pessimism prevailed with regard to governability. This view gave way in the mid-1990s to a more optimistic view that stressed two innovations of the Constitution of 1988: enhanced presidential power and centralised legislative procedure. In recent years, a third phase of research has shifted attention to the crucial role of inter-party alliances. These analytical approaches have converged into an emerging research programme on 'coalitional presidentialism', which places executive-legislative relations at the centre stage of macropolitical analysis. This article reviews the three phases of the debate and reflects on future research agendas.

Keywords: Brazil, democratisation, executive-legislative relations, political institutions, presidentialism.

Most macropolitical analyses of Brazilian democracy immediately invoke the problem of political institutions. Institutional design – and its policy cousin, 'political reform' – have been dominant themes in social science research on Brazil almost since the military relinquished power in 1985. Admittedly, a longstanding fixation on political institutions distracts us from the many other challenges to the post-authoritarian regime, which include poverty, inequality, social exclusion, dramatically high levels of crime and violence, and disturbingly low levels of attitudinal support for democracy. That being said, the question of institutional design continues to lie at the heart of ongoing debates about the sustainability of Brazilian democracy, and 'political reform' remains on the agenda of all three branches of government.¹

1 For recent surveys of the political reform debate in Brazil, see the edited volumes by Avritzer and Anastasia (2006), Soares and Rennó (2006), and Nicolau and Power (2007).

This article, which is aimed to (over-)simplify and distill a massive literature, revisits the debate on institutions and political reform in Brazil some twenty years after it began. Mine is not the first such effort: some excellent synthetic overviews have already been generated (Amorim Neto, 2002a; Armijo, Faucher and Dembinska, 2006; Cintra, 2007; Santos and Vilarouca, 2008, forthcoming). I endeavour to go beyond these insightful essays in two ways. First, I pay close attention to the subtle ways in which the institutional debate has shifted over time. Second, I claim that the extensive literature on Brazilian political institutions can now be seen as assuming a rather clear dialectical form. Here I can briefly telegraph this dialectic by stating the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In the first decade of Brazilian democracy, a highly negative view of Brazil's political institutions was predominant, but in the second decade (c. 1995) a very successful revisionist interpretation began to take root. The revisionists claimed that legislative parties matter and that presidents can govern in concert with them. With clashing claims of dysfunctionality versus functionality, the debate then showed signs of stagnating, but in recent years a synthetic model – which Brazilians call *presidencialismo de coalizão* (coalitional presidentialism) – has begun to provide a broad analytic umbrella for many different kinds of research on political institutions. The advantages of *presidencialismo de coalizão* are two-fold. As I will argue below, the emerging model is empirically persuasive, closely approximating the realities of Brazilian democratic governance under the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–present). Moreover, *presidencialismo de coalizão* is somewhat of a 'grand unification' of earlier models, in the sense that it can accommodate insights from both the 'pessimists' and the 'optimists' at the same time.

The Early Diagnoses of Dysfunctionality

In the early years after the 1985 democratic transition, most of the influential appraisals of Brazilian democracy were both strongly institutionalist and strongly pessimistic. Because the central arguments are broadly familiar, I will not revisit them in depth. In the English-language literature, many of the dominant hypotheses were laid out in papers by Barry Ames and Scott Mainwaring, which later featured in their influential books (Mainwaring, 1999; Ames, 2001). But it is a common misconception to lay these arguments purely at the feet of Brazilianists. Early works (Lamounier and Meneguello, 1986; Reis, 1988; Almeida; 1993; Kinzo, 1993), had already laid out similar hypotheses. Moreover, it is fair to say that in their skepticism about the adequacy of national political institutions, these Brazilian scholars were joined by the majority of the country's opinion makers and journalistic establishments. The arguments of both Brazilian and Brazilianist critics alleged several key deficiencies: party fragmentation leading to permanent minority presidentialism, internal weakness of the parties, an electoral system inhibiting democratic accountability, and robust federalism and the concomitant 'excess of veto players'.

Many of these analyses depart from something that is not debatable: extreme party fragmentation. Given one of the most fractionalised systems in the world – the effective number of parliamentary parties in 2009 is above nine – it is almost a certainty that the party of the Brazilian president will never control a majority of the seats in Congress. Currently, the Workers' Party (PT), founded by President Lula, controls only 15 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Given the daunting mathematics of congressional support, and given the survival of the government in office does not

depend on the loyalty of the nominal supporters of the president, the combination of presidentialism with extreme party fragmentation is seen as leading to unpredictable outcomes (Mainwaring, 1993a, 1993b). Note that even when the executive constructs a broad coalition, parties can and do abandon the president on key votes. A telling example occurred in February 2005, when despite having built a massive progovernment coalition in the Chamber of Deputies, the Lula government could not secure the election of its preferred candidate for speaker. In December 2007, the president could not persuade the Senate to renew a tax on financial transactions, despite a government majority in the upper house and the fact that the tax was a linchpin of fiscal policy, defended vociferously by all three presidents since 1994.

Critics also claimed that save for a handful of parties on the left – Lula's PT is by far the most important – the parties are largely devoid of ideology and discipline. Most catch-all parties are seen as having weak organisations, generic platforms and low levels of continuity (Mainwaring, 1999). In a typical four-year Congress, better than one in three federal legislators will switch parties, some more than once (Melo, 2004). Elections are largely an individual affair, and politicians often believe that their mandate belongs to themselves rather than to their parties (Power, 2000; Carvalho, 2003). The personalisation of elections extends to campaign finance, making Brazilian elections staggeringly expensive (Samuels, 2002). The Brazilian variant of open-list proportional representation (OLPR), which is used in combination with high district magnitudes, is seen as inducing high fragmentation, low institutionalisation of parties and minimal party fidelity.

Two other institutional challenges to Brazilian democracy are executive-legislative relations and robust federalism. In executive-legislative relations, presidents control much of the agenda-setting power in Brazil. More than 85 per cent of all legislation adopted since 1985 has originated in the executive branch, often via presidential decrees (Figueiredo and Limongi, 2006: 258). Presidents also have a high level of discretion over public spending, because Congress can only authorise the budget and it is up to the executive to actually disburse it (Pereira and Mueller, 2004). The reactive status of Congress makes legislative life unappealing to many ambitious politicians. Their preference for executive office is understandable in the context of Brazilian federalism. The Constitution of 1988 returned more than half of central revenues to states and municipalities, making sub-national offices (the 5,500 mayoralties and especially the 27 governorships) extremely attractive. Sub-national executives control budgets and have the power to hire and fire, the essence of Brazilian political careers. State governors are vastly important: since they often dominate their state delegations to Congress, presidents must negotiate with them continually, especially with regard to expenditures and debt (Samuels and Abrucio, 2000). Cardoso made important strides forward on this, drafting a Fiscal Responsibility Law and forcing the privatisation of several profligate state banks, but recurring tensions in the federal pact continue to lend an air of unpredictability to national politics.

Critics concluded that the institutional design of Brazilian democracy favours a strongly clientelistic style of politics. All political systems have patron–client relations, but in Brazil the concentration of power in the executive branch creates a small number of patrons and a very large number of potential clients. At the national level, presidents must offer cabinet portfolios to different parties in exchange for legislative support (Abranches, 1988; Amorim Neto, 2002b), while at the sub-national level, politicians line up in vertical chains of command extending from municipal mayors through state governors to the powerful presidency (Samuels, 2003). These horizontal and vertical

relationships are lubricated by favours, jobs and pork (Hagopian, 1996; Bezerra, 1999; Ames, 2001). The rules of the game are known to all political actors and compliance with them is unavoidable. After twenty years of excoriating ‘traditional politics’, since taking office in 2003 the PT has had no choice but to follow the time-honoured practices of exchanging jobs and resources in exchange for support from governors and legislators (Hunter, 2007). This has dismayed many of Lula’s longtime supporters (for example Sader, 2005).

If the above interpretation sounds familiar, it is because it was largely unchallenged in the first decade of post-authoritarian rule. By the mid-1990s, the diagnosis of dysfunctionality was the conventional wisdom in the study of Brazilian political institutions, and by extension, in the study of Brazilian democracy (Lamounier, 1996; Power, 2000). The landmark books by Mainwaring (1999) and Ames (2001), while multidimensional in their approaches, both placed a great deal of emphasis on open-list proportional representation as the ultimate source of Brazil’s perceived ‘ungovernability’. Ames was probably the most holistic of the critics, linking OLPR, presidentialism, federalism, budgetary politics and party (in)discipline into a single overarching framework that stressed the deleterious impact of political institutions on public policy and social welfare. According to Ames, presidents simply could not be expected to govern effectively in such a chaotic institutional matrix.

By the mid-1990s, Brazil was widely viewed as a problematic case of multiparty presidentialism. Part of this was certainly due to the objective underperformance of the newly democratic regime, especially in the 1987–1993 period, which featured low growth, hyperinflation, and unpopular executives. The situation changed rather dramatically with the *Plano Real* in 1994, which ended hyperinflation, and especially after the inauguration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso as president in 1995. The Cardoso alliance (based largely on the PSDB [Party of Brazilian Social Democracy] and PFL [Party of the Liberal Front]) was the first sustained experience with successful coalition government since the Kubitschek period. Both horizontal (executive–legislative) and vertical (president–governors) political relationships seemed to be much better coordinated than before, and the president soon registered some impressive achievements in financial stabilisation, structural adjustment, and administrative reform. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that within a year or two of Cardoso’s inauguration some revisionist analyses of Brazil’s political institutions began to appear.

The Revisionist Challenge: A More Optimistic View of Brazilian Governability

The roots of the revisionist interpretation of Brazil’s political institutions can be found partly in the changing domestic political context, as noted above, but also in the development of new analytical perspectives on political institutions. The thunderclap here was provided by Shugart and Carey’s (1992) *Presidents and Assemblies*, which was the first major comparative study of presidentialism and remains the most important such work to date. Shugart and Carey took multiparty presidentialism seriously and attempted to identify the types of electoral rules, executive powers, and party dynamics that were correlated with this type of regime, particularly in Latin America. The work focused heavily on founding constitutional choices. Drawing on rational choice and especially on principal-agent (delegation) theory, Shugart and Carey observed

that these initial choices exhibited certain patterns. Wherever constitution-writers had good reasons to believe that governability would be difficult to achieve in the future (for example, because of party fragmentation), they would opt for certain institutions designed to lubricate or streamline the policy-making process. These could include presidential agenda power, decree authority, centralisation of legislative deliberations or relaxed majorities for amending the constitution. Such institutions were seen as having a pre-emptive quality: they were quite clearly intended to correct for the inherent problems of multiparty presidentialism.

In Brazil, Figueiredo and Limongi (1999, 2000) were the first to identify the presence of these 'corrective' institutions in the Constitution of 1988 and in the legislative reorganisation that immediately followed it. They placed great emphasis on two variables: presidential power and the existence of centralised leadership in the lower house. The Brazilian executive has very expansive rights of legislative initiation, has the right to request urgency for most bills, and under certain conditions can legislate via decree. The overwhelming agenda-setting power of the president means that Congress is essentially reactive, and explains why more than 85 per cent of all bills approved in the post-1985 democracy have been introduced by the executive. Both Santos (2003) and Figueiredo and Limongi (2006, 2007) placed these reforms in historical perspective, noting that in the 1946–1964 democracy the roles of the president and assembly had been almost reversed, and adding that enhanced presidential agenda power was probably the biggest single difference between the present and past democratic regimes. In terms of internal legislative organisation, Figueiredo and Limongi stressed the importance of the Mesa Diretora (the governing board of the lower house) and especially of the Colégio de Líderes, which centralised authority in the hands of a very small number of floor leaders. In contrast to Ames, who lamented a surplus of veto players in executive–legislative relations, Figueiredo and Limongi claimed that the Colégio de Líderes reduced the number of relevant congressional actors to a mere handful.

Rather than stress their two independent variables separately, Figueiredo and Limongi stressed the interactive effect of having enhanced presidential power *and* centralised legislative organisation at the same time. The beneficial product, in their view, was governability. Differently from Ames and Mainwaring, who took an 'extramural' view of the legislature by focusing on the electoral system, Figueiredo and Limongi advanced an 'intramural' model, which focused on internal congressional rules. The concentration of power in the Colégio de Líderes generated higher rates of party discipline on the floor than one might have assumed under conditions of OLPR. Because individual deputies have little or no power, the pulverising effects of the electoral system encounter a stop sign at the ramp of Congress, and are completely counteracted by the standing orders (Regimento Interno) that govern life inside. This intramural model is what allowed Figueiredo and Limongi to claim that 'parties matter'. that presidents negotiate with parties and not with individual legislators and/or supra-party groups, and that behaviour on the legislative floor (*plenário*) is reasonably predictable and consistent (for a review, see Lyne, 2008). In sum, this interpretation holds that Brazil is eminently governable: minority presidents possess the means to obtain legislative support through negotiations with the parties.

Figueiredo and Limongi's revisionist critique was rolled out as a series of essays in the mid-1990s, and was finally published as a book in 1999. Along the way, it acquired numerous endorsements, partly because it was tightly argued, partly because it was a refreshing antidote to the wave of pessimism that had preceded it and partly because it offered an explanation for what was happening on the ground in the Cardoso

years (enhanced governability and policy stability). The success of the critique inspired other scholars to seek for further ‘efficient secrets’ in the web of Brazilian political institutions, both on the legislative and executive side. For example, Amorim Neto, Cox and McCubbins (2003) examined the formation of legislative cartels in the lower house, while Santos (2003) emphasised the new ascendance of committees after the legislative reorganisation of 1989. Pereira and Mueller (2004) drew attention to another major ‘corrective’ power appearing in the Constitution of 1988: the executive’s final say over the disbursement of budgetary amendments. The degree to which presidents use their discretionary budget powers to secure favourable legislative outcomes can hardly be understated. The tools of governability are several, and moreover, the Cardoso period seemed to suggest that they could be used effectively.

The general message of this revisionist literature was: look more closely, and you will find the rules and institutions that make Brazilian multiparty presidentialism work. The appeal of the Figueiredo and Limongi diagnosis was such that by the end of the 1990s, it had already become the ‘conventional wisdom’ in Brazilian political science circles (Amorim Neto, 2002a). Given linguistic issues and the normal lags inherent in scholarly consumption and citation, it took some time for this interpretation to become fully diffused outside of Brazil. So for a time there were essentially *two* conventional wisdoms, with thesis and antithesis coexisting simultaneously.

A New Synthesis? The Umbrella Framework of Coalitional Presidentialism

In the current decade, the literature on institutional design and democratisation has taken some new directions. Robert Elgie (2005) has noted that the terms of debate about presidentialism have changed considerably since the time of Linz’s (1994) classic critique. The discussion has moved far beyond the relative merits of presidentialism or parliamentarism. As Elgie notes, today there is more disaggregation of regime type and attention to finer or ‘extrinsic’ features of presidentialism and parliamentarism. There is more attention to combinations of institutions, particularly hybrid forms such as semi-presidentialism. Also, there is far less of a prescriptive or doomsday character (e.g. the ‘perils of presidentialism’) and more of a ‘normal science’ impulse that links the study of democratisation to the study of political institutions writ large, including those in long-established democracies (Elgie, 2005).

Some of the most promising advances in recent years have come under the rubric of what has come to be called ‘coalitional presidentialism’, a concept that travels only to multiparty presidential regimes.² The coining of the phrase *presidencialismo de coalizão* is usually attributed to a Brazilian political scientist, Sérgio Abranches (1988), who was among the first scholars to recognise that presidentialism can work like parliamentarism. This view contests two arguments implicit in Linz: (i) the idea that executive power cannot be shared under presidentialism, and (ii) the idea that inter-party coalition formation is rare under presidentialism. Both assumptions are now widely rejected.

2 This article discusses coalitional presidentialism in Brazil. For comparative perspectives on other Latin American cases see, among other works, Lanzaro (2001), Amorim Neto (2006a), Cheibub (2007), and the theses cited in note 3.

They were made at a time when there were few comparative data about presidential democracies, but both of these arguments were very quickly overturned when real empirical research on presidentialism got under way in the 1990s. The dissertations by Deheza (1997), Amorim Neto (1998) and Altman (2001) were important steps forward in recognising how Latin American presidents use multiparty cabinet composition to secure governability.³ More recently, in a pioneering cross-national analysis, Cheibub, Przeworski and Saiegh (2004) established that coalition government occurs under presidential regimes more frequently than generally assumed. The numbers in their study are astounding. They examine government formation and control of legislative seats in all democracies from 1946 to 1999, comparing parliamentarism and presidentialism. The authors find that in 78 per cent of the parliamentary 'situations' (distributions of seats), there is majority coalition government, and that this also happens in 66 per cent of the presidential situations. So coalitions are far from uncommon. What is truly rare is American-style 'divided government', that is, situations in which there is a majority party and it is not the party of the president. Cheibub et al. identify only 23 cases of divided government, and 16 of these were in Washington.

Despite the fact that coalitional presidentialism has become the modal form of democracy in Latin America, presidential coalitions have received far less attention than parliamentary coalitions in the literature. This imbalance is not surprising given that the most frequently studied presidential system (that of the United States) features single-party cabinets. Also, until the Third Wave of democratisation, relatively few examples of multiparty presidential democracies existed as sources for building theory (although as Abranches pointed out in his path-breaking essay, Brazil in 1946–1964 was one such case).⁴ However, even as the number of relevant cases has risen in recent years, especially in Latin America, several theoretical factors militate against a direct translation of the coalitional politics literature to the context of presidentialism. Under presidentialism the survival of the government does not depend on assembly confidence, meaning that certain Eurocentric concepts must be modified. Take, for example, the concept of government 'formation' as applied to presidentialism. This concept can be unremarkable in the case of unipartisan cabinets, as in the United States, or can be a complex process of negotiation as in the multiparty presidential democracies of Latin America – but in the end the government needs no mandate from the legislature to begin operations. A more serious case of conceptual stretching occurs with the notion of government 'termination'. Given the 'separate origin and survival' (Shugart and Carey, 1992) of the executive and legislative branches, government termination has little analytical relevance for the study of presidentialism, except in rare cases of impeachment and removal.⁵ (Linz was essentially right on that score: most of the time, a weak or bad president remains in office while the clock ticks painfully.) With a fixed term of office and no need for parliamentary confidence, the real business of politics occurs in the period between formation and termination, which is when minority

3 Confirming the emerging intellectual shift discussed here is the fact that the new literature on coalitional presidentialism continues to be driven by doctoral dissertations. See also Mejía-Acosta (2004), Martínez-Gallardo (2005) and Martorelli Hernández (2007).

4 Another such case – much debated in the 1970s literature on democratic break-downs – was Chile prior to 1973. See Valenzuela (1994).

5 For analyses of presidential interruptions and impeachments in Latin America, see Hochstetler (2006) and Pérez-Liñán (2007).

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presidents typically must cultivate the political support of two or more parties. As Table 1 illustrates, Brazil is the Latin American country where presidents most directly face this challenge.

Before proceeding to the Brazilian case, it is worth noting that the term ‘coalitional presidentialism’ is used in several different ways in Brazil. One usage, commonly encountered in journalism, is essentially a political slang term for an inclusive style of governance, as in ‘Itamar está praticando o presidencialismo de coalizão: Collor não o praticou’ (‘Itamar is practising coalitional presidentialism, but Collor didn’t’). The implication is that the chief executive is open to dialogue with other parties, to giving them a seat at the negotiating table, and to accommodating their demands. This usage refers to a political style, not an institutional framework, and it is broadly compatible with longstanding traditions of Brazilian political culture, i.e. pragmatism, co-optation, and elite conciliation. A second usage of *presidencialismo de coalizão* is simply descriptive, and refers to an institutional design in a very narrow sense. Coalitional presidentialism is a mathematical response to the problem of permanent minority presidentialism (see Table 1), and is a way of putting together legislative majorities; this is the way the term is used in political science works produced outside Brazil.

A third use of the term, which has evolved over the past decade in Brazilian political science circles, refers to a much broader way of understanding the

Table 1. The Mathematics of Multiparty Presidentialism in Latin America circa 2003–2004

Country ^a	Effective number of parties in Lower House	Lower house seats held by the President’s party (%)	Index of coalitional necessity ^b
Brazil	7.81	18.50	63.65
Ecuador	6.71	25.00	50.33
Chile-1	5.08	8.33	46.57
Bolivia	5.21	26.50	38.29
Venezuela	4.75	34.00	31.35
Peru	4.24	40.50	25.23
El Salvador	3.50	33.50	23.28
Guatemala	3.46	43.00	19.72
Panama	3.09	39.00	18.85
Costa Rica	3.12	40.00	18.72
Mexico	2.79	37.00	17.58
Argentina	3.18	48.00	16.54
Colombia	2.02	20.00	16.16
Uruguay	2.73	43.00	15.56
Dom. Rep.	2.52	41.00	14.87
Paraguay	2.73	51.00	13.38
Honduras	2.30	50.00	11.50
Nicaragua	2.39	53.50	11.11
Chile-2	2.02	55.00	9.09

^a Chile-1 assumes all parties are effectively independent, while Chile-2 considers the two longstanding alliances (*Concertación* and *Alianza*) as de facto parties.

^b Index of Coalitional Necessity is obtained by multiplying the effective number of parties by the inverse of the percentage of seats held by the president’s own party, then dividing by ten for ease of interpretation. Source: Calculated by author from data in Jones (2007).

institutional architecture of Brazilian democracy and its attendant political practices. *Presidencialismo de coalizão* is now often used as a shorthand for the totality of ways in which macropolitics has adapted to the Constitution of 1988, including executive-led alliance strategies, party responses to executive inducements, ancillary institutional variables that affect these relationships (presidential agenda power, internal legislative rules), clientelism and exchange politics, intergovernmental relations, and numerous spillover effects in electoral behaviour and political recruitment. It is not only a shorthand for really-existing Brazilian politics, but also a proto-paradigm for analysing the same. This third use of the term is very broad and abstract, yet it highlights presidential power and coalitional politics as the key variables in Brazilian governability. In the remainder of this article, I will rely on this third, connotative sense of *presidencialismo de coalizão*, which is now ascendant in Brazilian political science.

The core insight of coalitional presidentialism is that presidents must behave like European prime ministers. Executives must fashion multiparty cabinets and voting blocs on the floor of the legislature. In Brazil, it is widely acknowledged that coalitional presidentialism has become the 'best practice' of executive-legislative coordination under the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Both Cardoso and Lula have been noted for their large, heterogeneous and generally supportive coalitions in Congress. Since 1995, it has become routine for presidents to command the allegiance of up to 70 per cent of deputies in the lower house (Figueiredo, 2007: 190). Legislative coalitions are therefore not only 'oversized' (meaning that they amass more nominal members than what would be necessary to pass legislation), but also 'disconnected' (meaning that the parties that compose the alliance are not ideologically adjacent to one another). The alternative conception – a compact, minimum-winning, ideologically coherent governing coalition – is sacrificed at the altar of governability. The exaggeration of coalitional size no doubt reflects the desire of opportunistic legislators to align themselves with the executive, but it also suggests a presidential expectation that some indiscipline and defections are likely to occur. Oversized and disconnected coalitions are thus insurance policies: the goal is to protect the president's legislative programme via various forms of political overcompensation.

Empirical studies of coalitional presidentialism in Brazil are still in their infancy, but so far we can divide them into two broad types. One type focuses on cabinet formation, while the other examines strategies of coalition management over time. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to these as 'composition' versus 'cultivation' studies. The most influential studies of the composition type have been authored by Octavio Amorim Neto (2002b, 2006b, 2007), who has collected data on every cabinet configuration under the post-1985 democratic regime.⁶ Amorim Neto has shown that Brazilian presidents govern essentially by agreeing to share executive power, for example by allocating different ministerial portfolios to other parties, much like an Italian or Israeli prime minister. A major insight from his work is that 'cabinet coalescence' – defined as the degree of proportionality between the pro-presidential parties' share of seats within the government's floor voting coalition in the Chamber and their share of ministerial portfolios – is an important predictor of the legislative success of presidents. His contribution to Morgenstern and Nacif's *Legislative Politics in Latin America*

6 For a discussion of Amorim Neto's approach and an extension of data coverage to the 1946–1964 democracy, see Figueiredo (2007).

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(2006b) examines roll-call voting by the pro-presidential blocs in the Chamber of Deputies, and he finds that coalition discipline is associated positively with cabinet coalescence and negatively with the amount of time elapsed in a president's term. Amorim Neto (2006b) has also found that cabinet formation patterns are linked to the legislative strategies of presidents, a finding extended by Pereira, Power and Rennó (2005, 2008). Presidents tend to appoint non-partisan individuals (technocrats) to cabinets when they plan to legislate via decree, but a high degree of cabinet coalescence induces presidents to rely more on ordinary statutes.

Studies of the cultivation type are beginning to examine how alliance politics are administered over time by executives, a phenomenon that Pereira, Power and Rennó (2005, 2008) have referred to as 'coalition management'. The underlying expectation here is that cabinet formation alone is an insufficient strategy to guarantee legislative success, and that presidents (augmenting their baseline strategies of alliance size and cabinet coalescence) will seek to seal these unstable coalitions with other forms of political glue such as agenda control, budgetary clientelism and selective use of presidential prerogatives. In a recent paper, Raile, Pereira and Power (2006) argue that in a coalition-based presidential system the executive has to face at least three interconnected trade-offs concerning how to manage his coalition. One is size: the executive must decide if he/she will invite few or several parties to take part in his/her government. A second trade-off concerns the distribution of ideological preferences within the coalition. The president may assemble a very homogeneous alliance with only parties that are situated on the same side of the left-right spectrum, or he/she may opt for a heterogeneous coalition with parties drawn from different ideological families. A third trade-off is the one that Amorim Neto identified: power-sharing among coalition members, understood in terms of the percentage of cabinet ministries that are allocated to each pro-presidential party. Cabinets can range from more coalescent (proportional) to more monopolistic (i.e. the portfolios end up in the hands of one or a few coalition members).

Raile, Pereira and Power hypothesise that coalitions that are larger, have greater ideological heterogeneity, and have a higher concentration of power (at the expense of other coalition members) can be unwieldy. They show that since 1995, Cardoso and Lula have managed these problems with the aid of four tools: continual adjustment of the three variables mentioned above (size, heterogeneity and proportionality of the support coalition in Congress), *plus* the use of pork (budgetary clientelism). These tools have heretofore been treated separately, but Raile, Pereira and Power integrate them into a single analytical perspective – a 'presidential toolbox' – that they propose as a proto-framework for the analysis of governability under multiparty presidentialism.

Not all of the newer literature on multiparty presidentialism in Brazil fits easily into the categories of composition or cultivation, however. Other studies treat the consequences of the patterns discussed above, showing that *presidencialismo de coalizão* cannot be dismissed as a 'cause in search of an effect'. Taylor (2009, forthcoming) and Goldfrank and Wampler (2007) link recent corruption episodes to the requisites of alliance politics. Santos (2003) illustrates how the internal organisation and legislative output of Congress are affected by inter-party coordination among the pro-presidential parties, while Lemos (2005) shows that legislative oversight of the executive is contingent upon a coalitional logic as well. Alston, Melo, Müller and Pereira (2005) extend the framework in a broad fashion to address patterns of public spending and other policy outputs. In fact, the vast majority of newer work on Brazilian democracy recognises coalitional presidentialism as an implicit 'master frame' for research. In twenty years,

presidencialismo de coalizão has gone from being described as a ‘dilemma’ (Abranches, 1988) to being understood as ‘ordinary politics’ (Zucco, 2007).

Coalitional Presidentialism as a Unifying Framework

The goal of a review article is to simplify the literature, not make it more complicated than it already is. At the risk of over-generalisation, I have suggested that appraisals of Brazilian political institutions have evolved from a diagnosis of dysfunctionality in the first decade of democracy, to a revisionist trumpeting of ‘efficient secrets’ in the second decade, and finally to a possible synthetic convergence in the third. This is obviously an over-simplification, both temporally (the dates are not so neat) and theoretically (some works remain wedded to extreme optimism or pessimism). Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to flesh out a bit more what I mean by ‘synthesis’ in the dialectical sense. As an analytic framework, does *presidencialismo de coalizão* really transcend the approaches that preceded it? Can it serve as a ‘grand unification’ of previous insights, for example a theoretical umbrella for emerging research on how Brazil’s democratic institutions actually work?

I would argue that coalitional presidentialism does, in fact, provide a master frame that can unite foregoing contributions from both pessimists and optimists. The first wave of critics of Brazilian political institutions claimed that presidents cannot govern in such a problematic institutional environment, while the revisionists claimed to have identified mechanisms that made governing relatively easy. The former group stressed the pulverising, anti-party effects of Brazil’s electoral laws, while the latter group argued that these effects could be counteracted by presidential agenda power and the internal rules of Congress. The wider view of *presidencialismo de coalizão* can incorporate both extramural and intramural visions of the legislature. The framework is compatible with all of the following assumptions. Open-list PR really does cause extreme multipartism; permanent multiparty presidentialism generates severe collective action problems; these collective action problems are addressed on the executive side by impressive agenda power and on the legislative side by centralising rules; presidents must act like prime ministers in multiparty parliamentary systems, cultivating the support of other parties by sharing power with them; presidents face many of the same risks as prime ministers, facing blackmail threats and the high costs of keeping diverse coalition partners happy; and to the extent that presidents can neutralise some of these risks, they can attain legislative success by deploying some or all of their governing tools.

As a framework, coalitional presidentialism accepts that multiparty presidentialism is not a user-friendly format for executives, but also recognises that it is a self-regulating system capable of generating corrective and pre-emptive measures aimed at ensuring governability, much as Shugart and Carey (1992) anticipated. However, if we are to move forward with this framework, we cannot assume that the efficient secrets neatly cancel out the objective challenges on one-to-one basis. The equation is not so easily solvable. Even with institutional innovations such as presidential decree authority or rules-induced partyarchy in the lower house, the system requires executives to work hard and to deploy their partisan as well as their constitutional powers. This is why we need more study of the ‘cultivation’ side, i.e. on how presidents engage in coalition management.

The burgeoning literature on exchange politics in Brazil (Bezerra, 1999; Geddes and Ribeiro Neto, 1999; Ames, 2001; Samuels, 2002; Pereira and Mueller, 2004) is a good

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place to start. The extreme discretionary powers enjoyed by the Brazilian president in budgetary matters may not be generalisable to other countries, but they are key to understanding the political glue that holds coalitions together. The missteps made by the Lula government in 2004-2005, when the *mensalão* (monthly bribes) scandal threatened the political survival of the president, show that it is sometimes difficult for presidents to manage composition and cultivation at the same time. Lula's original cabinet grossly overrepresented his own party, the PT, and he – or at least his inner circle – appeased unhappy coalition partners by awarding them illegal side payments (Raile, Pereira and Power, 2006). To understand how coalitional presidentialism works, we need more contextual analysis of how alliance partners are over-compensated and under-compensated.

However, an agenda for future research on coalitional presidentialism need not focus exclusively on composition and cultivation. To date, the literature has generally lacked an evaluative dimension that would assist us in assessing the post-1985 democratic regime on grounds of democratic quality. The emphasis so far has been on how coalitional presidentialism 'solves' the governability equation (with governability being understood here as legislative support for the president) with little attention to how this 'solution' may impact other aspects of democratic practice. With regard to the latter, five questions come immediately to mind. The first question, which merits examination in order to respond to Ames's (2001) analysis of the policy-making process, is whether coalitional presidentialism leads to excessive incrementalism and/or policy dilution. The second question is to what extent coalitional presidentialism degrades the pre-election identifiability of governments, which has been held to be one of the representational advantages of the presidentialist framework (Shugart and Carey, 2002). Following on this, and noting that several Brazilian parties regularly appear in governing coalitions regardless of the president in power, a third question is whether coalitional presidentialism is linked to the generally low reputation of the political class in Brazil. A fourth question might train a more normative eye on some of the empirical regularities described in the newer 'cultivation' studies: does the centrality of pork, of budgetary clientelism, and side payments erode horizontal and vertical accountability? The fifth and final question concerns how coalitional presidentialism perpetuates a strongly executive bias in Brazilian macropolitics. Is presidential empowerment – defined in terms of the 'corrective' institutions enshrined in the Constitution of 1988 – a *desirable* feature of representative democracy? If not, then how should it be reformed? This final question turns our attention to what Amorim Neto (2008) has called the 'short blanket effect' that is inherent in all constitutional choices: 'if you cover your head, you uncover your feet'. In other words, the enhancement of presidential agenda power (to achieve governability) implies a reactive legislature (which may erode democratic quality).

These are questions that can and should be examined as the literature moves out of a revisionist phase and settles into synthesis; authors such as Santos (2006) are already beginning to discuss proposals for legislative strengthening. At present, however, the literature still appears focused on describing and explaining the new patterns of governability that have been observed under Cardoso and Lula. Although *presidencialismo de coalizão* at present appears to provide a promising master frame for future research, we still do not know if our principal findings will turn out to be period effects. Coalitional presidentialism has a far better 'fit' with reality after 1995, during the Cardoso-Lula era, than it did in the comparatively chaotic early years of democracy. We cannot yet be sure why this is the case. Is it because formidable politicians such as Cardoso and Lula elevated presidential leadership to a new level – a

hypothesis that Figueiredo and Limongi (2007: 182) explicitly reject? Is it because the post-1994 economic stabilisation created far more favourable conditions for legislative support of presidents? Is it because global and domestic factors have moderated ideological polarisation in Brazil over time? Or is it simply due to a cumulative process of political learning – democracy by trial and error? My own guess would be that there is some truth in all of these explanations, but particularly so in the final one. By stressing the construction of oversized and disconnected alliances that united former ideological enemies, Fernando Henrique Cardoso wrote a sort of ‘user’s manual’ for coalitional presidentialism in Brazil. His playbook is one that has been followed closely by Lula, and its relative success may influence the strategic choices of future executives. This is a hypothesis that must be tested in order to rule out period effects and presidential idiosyncrasies. Only with time and further research will we know if Brazil’s *presidencialismo de coalizão* is ‘the only game in town’, or if history has simply been playing tricks on us.

Acknowledgements

Several of the ideas in this article grew out of collaborative research I have conducted in recent years with C. Pereira, E. D. Raile, and L. Rennó, whom I thank for stimulating interactions. For comments on an earlier version of this paper, I am grateful to O. Amorim Neto, G. O’Donnell, and the participants in the seminar on ‘Democratisation: Theory and Practice’, Nuffield College, spring 2008.

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