

Political careers and the chamber of deputies in Brazil

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Resumo. This paper reviews the most recent literature on the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and tries to extract from it the most salient features of its evolution from 1945 to 2006, both as an institution and as a part of Brazilian political careers. The new 'coalition-based presidentialism' established by the 1988 Constitution has created a Chamber organized on the basis of the parties there represented, with strong powers in the hands of party leaders and little passivity of individual action by its members. This has been a satisfactory solution both for the strong President and the politicians serving in the Chamber. A mandate in the Chamber is an important step in political careers in Brazil, with around 80% of incumbent members attempting to gain another term, in spite of the ample structure of political opportunities that provides alternative positions at the state and municipal levels. Claims that the high turnover of close to 40% of its members at each election is an 'endemic phenomenon' of Brazilian politics, caused by 'lateral recruitment' by political parties, are not confirmed by the facts. Municipal offices have gained importance as a path to the Chamber of Deputies, as a result of the country's growing urbanization. The Chamber has also become closer to the U.S. House of Representatives, as regards both the average time served by its members and in remuneration and total expenses per member. This evolution cannot be explained by theories of institutionalization and professionalization based on the US political system, but may be explained by Schlesinger's theory of ambition and Brazil's ample structure of political opportunities, complemented by class actions by politicians aiming at improving their chances of remaining and advancing in their political careers.

1. Introdução

The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has functioned for most of the nation's life, with very few short and widely spaced interruptions. These encompass two years before the Imperial Constitution of 1824, plus two years before the Republican Constitution of 1891 and another three before the 1934 Constitution, followed by the eight years of Vargas's 'Estado Novo', and ended in 1968 during the 1964-85 military regime. These add up to roughly 16 years, or 8% of the 190 years elapsed from independence to the present day. However, during these 190 years, profound institutional changes created distinct periods which cannot be analyzed as a whole.

In spite of the brief experiment with a parliamentary regime from 1961 to 1963, and the restrictions imposed by the military regime from 1964 to 1982, the period from 1946 until today forms a coherent basis for studying the role played by the Chamber of Deputies in political careers in Brazil. During this whole period, covering over 65 years, the same

open-list proportional representation electoral process, as well as the same statewide electoral districts and mandates, have been maintained for the selection of federal deputies. The only substantial change introduced in the electoral process was the extension of voting rights to illiterate voters, granted by the 1988 Constitution.

Also during this whole period, urban electoral bases could be built in the most important states independently from the old-time rural political bosses that dominated Brazilian politics until the 1930 revolution. And finally, candidates could rely on electoral support furnished by a growing middle class, as well as by unions and associations representing labor and business interests. Therefore, the behavior of Brazilian politicians since 1946, in their attempts to reach the Chamber of Deputies and stay there, can be compared to that of politicians in other modern representative democracies.

Under the 1988 Constitution, Brazil is formally a federation, but a singular one, in which (i) both

power and resources are highly concentrated in the federal executive; (ii) no restrictions apply on the circulation of elected representatives between the legislative and the executive, not only at the federal, but also at the state and municipal level; (iii) political parties are very easily formed and free to form electoral coalitions at all three levels of the federation; (iv) the electoral system for the state assemblies and the federal Chamber of Deputies is based on proportional representation with open lists and statewide electoral districts.

The President, unassailably legitimate, since he (or she) is inevitably elected by a majority of the electorate, enjoys extensive legislative powers: he can issue provisional measures¹, request priority for the bills he proposes and retains exclusivity in proposing federal budgets. He also has immense patronage-dispensing possibilities, since he enjoys considerable freedom in the execution of the federal budget and personally nominates close to 20,000 federal officeholders. However, his party does not command a majority in what is a multi-party Congress, and this fact induces him to form a coalition in Congress capable of ensuring approval for the legislation he needs in order to carry out his campaign commitments. The system has been called a 'coalition-based presidentialism', which functions in a way that is closer to European parliamentary democracies than to American presidential ones.

This paper reviews the most recent literature on the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and tries to extract from it the most salient features of its evolution as an institution and its status as an important step within Brazilian political careers, in particular in this new 'coalition-based presidentialism'.

The chamber of deputies: Adapted to coalition-based presidentialism

The first studies on the performance of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies in the period immediately after the 1988 Constitution – such as Amorim Neto (2000), Mainwaring (2001), Ames (2001) and Carvalho (2003) – tended to view it as an inoperative and rebellious legislative body, composed of undisciplined members independent of their political parties and interested only in obtaining particular benefits for their electoral bases in order to improve their chances of reelection. Such characteristics of the Chamber were seen as a consequence of the very strong legislative powers attributed to the President, coupled to an electoral system that left elected deputies largely free of control from their political parties.

Based on proportional representation of statewide districts with open lists, this system compels candidates for the Chamber of Deputies to obtain resources for their electoral campaigns with very little help from their parties and then face other candidates of their own party as their fiercest op-

ponents. Once elected, they find no reason to obey their party leaders in the Chamber, and thus turn the President into a prisoner of municipal and state interests and make the functioning of the Chamber unpredictable. However, a second wave of studies shows that this is not how the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has actually functioned since the 1988 Constitution.

For instance, Brazil should be a representative example of the 'inefficient secret' model, presented in Shugart and Carey (1992), in contraposition to the 'efficient secret' model developed by Cox (1987). According to the former model, its federal deputies should tend to introduce unimportant bills of strictly local significance, leaving to the president the initiative to introduce bills significant to the country as a whole. Also, bills proposed by members of the Chamber should have a low probability of approval, especially those of little national impact. But Amorim Neto & Santos (2002) showed that, contrary to such expectations, most bills proposed since 1989 by members of the Chamber had national, not merely local significance, even though they might not profoundly affect the economic and social situation of the country as a whole. Furthermore, bills introduced by leading members of the Chamber had a good chance of approval.

Figueiredo & Limongi (1999) further demonstrated that nominal votes by the Chamber revealed great party discipline, with an 89.4% average of party votes in line with the orientation of party leaders, and an entirely predictable performance, with a 93.7% probability of correct forecasts. The Chamber also overwhelmingly approved bills introduced by the President, whose support was structured along party lines.

According to the authors, the explanation for such performance lies, on one hand, in the President's ample legislative powers, added to his control not only of the Chamber's agenda but also of access to patronage desired by the deputies. He thus retains the ability to impose discipline on deputies belonging to the party-based coalition built to support his legislative initiatives. On the other hand, while the electoral system may force candidates to follow individualistic strategies in order to be elected to the Chamber, once there deputies must follow their party leaders due to the rules that structure the Chamber's work, otherwise their proposals will rarely leave the committee level. Deputies also face a very serious collective action problem, since individually they have insufficient power to bargain with the President. Letting their party leaders coordinate this effort and complying with the resulting agreements between these leaders and the President represents the best solution to this problem.

In Amorim Neto, Cox & McCubbins (2003), the authors disagree with Figueiredo and Limongi. Their basic premise is that a coalition-based majority government must be a parliamentary cartel, i.e.,

a group which collectively controls the legislative agenda and follows established procedures to agree on which proposals will reach a vote. After reviewing the workings of four Brazilian governments since the 1988 Constitution, they recognize that only one – that of Fernando Henrique Cardoso – fulfills these conditions. The other three – those of José Sarney, Fernando Collor and Itamar Franco – preferred to use their presidential powers and not to negotiate their legislative agenda with a stable majority coalition. They conclude that Brazilian legislative politics is neither atomistic, as viewed by Ames (2001), nor parliamentary, according to Figueiredo and Limongi (2000), but rather depends on an initial decision by the President on how he prefers to govern.

In Santos (2003), Fabiano Santos calls attention to the fact that the 1988 Constitution ratified the decision powers transferred to the President by the preceding military regime. This has led to the predictable and disciplined party-led behavior of Brazilian deputies since the 1988 Constitution, as confirmed by Figueiredo and Limongi, which contrasts with what was observed before 1964. But it still leaves open a fundamental question: Why did Brazilian deputies agree with such a great transfer of decision powers from the Chamber to the President? Why don't they try to amend the Constitution in order to reduce these presidential powers?

In search of an adequate answer to these questions, Santos (2003) reminds us that the 'electoral connection' – the classic concept used to explain the behavior of US representatives – cannot be applied to Brazil, due to the differences in the two countries' electoral systems. This connection exists in the US because the nation's electoral system allows its representatives to accumulate reliable information on their voters' preferences. But the Brazilian electoral system makes this impossible, since very few deputy candidates are elected with their own votes and most depend on the transfer of votes from non-elected candidates, either of the same party or of other parties belonging to the same electoral coalition. As a result, Brazilian federal deputies cannot identify their own true constituency, but must try to increase it during their mandate. In order to do this, the easiest way available is by signaling to the electorate the positions on significant national issues which, under Brazil's strong presidential regime, the President is compelled to submit to the Chamber. In other words, it is very convenient for Brazilian deputies to transfer legislative power as much as possible to the President.

This literature, taken as a whole, presents an attractive explanation for the behavior of Brazilian politicians elected to the Chamber of Deputies. It furnishes good reasons why the framers of the 1988 Constitution maintained the ample legislative and agenda powers given to the President by the military regime. It also clarifies why the Chamber's internal rules give so much power to party leaders

to keep their own party members disciplined within the committees, as well as in important voting sessions. And finally, it satisfactorily refutes the view that the Chamber is both rebellious and inefficient, composed by undisciplined deputies who are strongly independent of their parties, and mostly aim at obtaining benefits for their electoral bases, in order to improve their chances of reelection.

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This situation is satisfactory for the President, who needs legislative support in order to keep his campaign promises and achieve reelection or ensure that an ally becomes his successor. It is also satisfactory for the deputies, who must position themselves regarding important national issues in order to expand their constituencies and thus advance in their political careers, either by reelection to the Chamber or by appointment or election to an important federal, state or municipal office. In order to improve their bargaining position with the strong President, they unite behind their party leaders, who then coordinate the bargaining with him for the legislative support provided by their party, and obey the agreements reached by these leaders.

What is still missing in this literature is reliable information and analysis on how much independence from their party leadership may be enjoyed by candidates for the Chamber. In other words, what is needed is confirmation of the degree to which these candidates may defy their party leaders and still be successful in their electoral campaigns. Until then, the suspicion may remain that, although the Brazilian electoral system of proportional representation with open lists generates fierce competition among candidates of the same party, it still requires more party cohesion and support – and thus more disciplined candidates – than may be realized.

The chamber of deputies: an important step in brazilian political careers

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The chamber of deputies: an important step in brazilian political careers

Samuels (2003) tries to demonstrate that the 'electoral connection' – which he calls the 'reelection assumption', according to which the main objective of federal legislators is to be repeatedly reelected to the national assembly – does not explain the behavior of Brazilian federal deputies. Samuels (2003) argues that "Brazilian deputies (...) do not aim to build careers within the Chamber of Deputies, nor are they primarily interested in rising through the ranks of a national party. Instead, (...) following a relatively short stint in the Chamber, they seek to continue their career outside the Chamber, particularly in state and/or municipal politics" (Samuels, 2003, p.2).

Samuels finds an explanation for such behavior in the peculiarities of the Brazilian electoral system and of the Brazilian federation. Federal deputies represent not simply an electoral district but their entire state, and are thus subject to the organized interests and electoral pressures developed in a much wider political system. Their electoral success depends upon the relationships they develop within the political networks in that wider system. And, in his view, "on many measures Brazil remains one of the most highly decentralized federations in the world" (Samuels, 2003, pp.4-5).²

Through interviews, Samuels finds that Brazilian politicians value executive offices, even at the state or municipal level, more than a federal legislative mandate. To him, "the structure of political careers in contemporary Brazil resembles in important ways the political career ladder in the early nineteenth-century United States" (Samuels, 2003, p.7) and "the key to why the opportunity structure in Brazil has not changed so that congressional careers are relatively more important lies both in the persistence of federalism as a defining political cleavage and in the lack of clear nationalized political-partisan cleavages" (Samuels, 2003, p.32).

As confirmation of his judgment, Samuels (2003) shows the percentage of deputies seeking reelection from 1950 to 1998, shown in Table 1/**Graph 1**. The average percentage of deputies seeking reelection within this period is 73.8%, which he admits "one might consider 'high' rather than 'low'" (Samuels 2003, p. 36), but still takes as confirmation of the Brazilian deputies' lack of interest in a career in the Chamber.

His justification is that this percentage is distorted upwards by the fact that many deputies take a leave of absence or actually resign to serve in executive positions at all three levels of government in Brazil and also those who become mayors are not technically eligible for reelection. Samuels registers that, on average, from 35% to 40% of Brazilian federal deputies exhibit their preference for leaving the Chamber, either by renouncing their mandates to accept political offices, mainly at the state and municipal level, or by unsuccessfully trying to do this (Samuels, 2003, p.57). However, he does not mention an important fact: that in Brazil, federal deputies can run for mayor or governor without renouncing their mandate,

which substantially decreases the costs and risks of doing this. Actually, an electoral campaign for such jobs will certainly have a positive effect on his electoral chances in the future, even for reelection to the Chamber. In any case, the fact remains that, on average, approximately three-quarters of incumbent Brazilian federal deputies eligible for reelection try to remain in the Chamber, which invalidates the claim that they lack an interest in a legislative career.

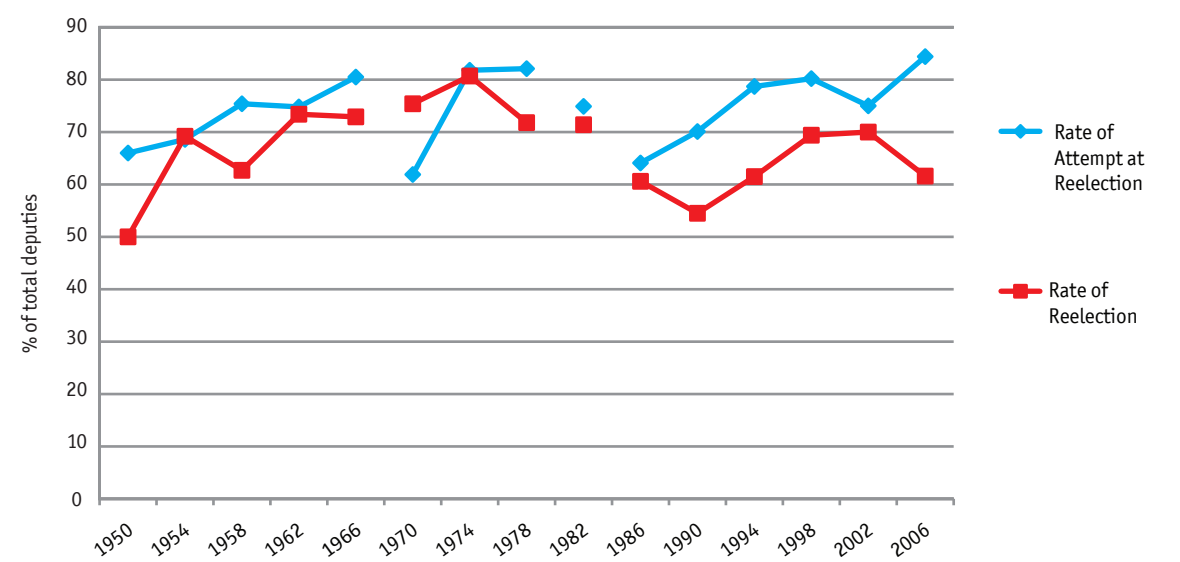
Samuels (2003) also compiles the percentage of incumbent deputies seeking reelection who succeed in getting another mandate, also in **Table 1/ Graph 1**, which shows an average of 63.6% in the

Table 1. Rate of Attempt at Reelection and Rate of Reelection
In the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies: 1950 – 2006
(% of total deputies)

Election Year	Rate of Attempt at Reelection	Rate of Reelection
1950	66.0	50.0
1954	68.6	69.2
1958	75.4	62.7
1962	74.8	73.4
1966	80.5	72.9
1970	61.9	75.4
1974	81.8	80.7
1978	82.1	71.8
1982	74.9	71.4
1986	64.1	60.6
1990	70.1	54.5
1994	78.7	61.5
1998	80.2	69.4
2002	75.0	70.0
2006	84.4	61.6

Source: Samuels (2003) and TSE

Graph 1. Rate of Attempt at Reelection and Rate of Reelection of Brazilian Deputies: 1950 – 2006
(% of total deputi



democratic periods and 75.3% in the military-dominated period. In the US, this has been used as an index of the 'advantage of incumbency' generated by the time served and helped by the body of rules and means created by US congressmen to defeat their opponents and achieve reelection. Samuel finds (Samuels, 2003, pp. 39-40) that this rate does not show, as it should, an appreciable correlation with the time served by deputies in the Chamber. Therefore, it does not confirm the existence of an advantage of incumbency in Brazil. Again, this conclusion is inconsistent with the fact that practically two-thirds of those deputies who try to gain another term succeed in this attempt.

However, there is one very important point to be raised regarding these conclusions reached by Samuels (2003), which is that averaging results for the whole 1950-98 period hides the dynamics resulting from the regime changes experienced by the Brazilian political system during these years, which become clear when the numbers are presented in graphic form. The data collected by Samuels (2003) for the period 1950-1998, regarding Brazilian deputies' attempts and success at reelection are shown in Table 1 and **Graph 1**, complemented by those for 2002 and 2006, as presented in Santos & Pegurier (2011). **Graph 1** shows clearly that there are two important points of inflection, in the 1970 elections – the first under the new rules introduced by the 1967 Constitution – and in the 1986 elections – the first in the transition from the military regime to a fully democratic one.

In the democratic period from 1950 to 1966, the rate of attempt at reelection shows an increase from 60.0% to 80.5%. The same tendency is shown by this rate during the elections that happened during the military period, in the years from 1970 to 1978, when it climbed from 61.9% to 82.1%. And the same tendency is observed in the more recent democratic period, when this rate climbed from 64.1% to 84.4% in the period from 1986 to 2006. In all three periods, the rate of reelection attempt rises from slightly above 60% to over 80%.

The fall in the rate reelection attempt, from 80.5% in 1966 to 61.9% in 1970, is easily explained. The Institutional Act of 1967, decreed by the military government, forced the concentration of all politicians into two new parties, ARENA in support of the government and MDB in opposition to it. An intervention of such magnitude must have strongly affected the patterns of recruitment of candidates to the Chamber. Furthermore, many leading opposition politicians lost their political rights and were thus forbidden to compete in the 1970 elections. Under these circumstances, the number of incumbent deputies with a reasonable chance of getting reelected was much smaller, especially in the opposition party, and many gave up the attempt.

The other sharp fall in the rate of reelection attempt, from 82.1% in 1978 to 74.9% in 1982 and 64.1% in

1986, also has a convincing explanation. In 1979, as part of the transition process to a democratic regime, the military regime authorized the creation of two additional political parties, although still under important restrictions. Also, in 1982 it allowed direct elections to the state governorships. And in 1985, direct elections were approved for the choice of mayors of all municipalities. These new conditions greatly changed the structure of political opportunities for all politicians, especially for those in opposition to the military regime, as well as the recruitment patterns of candidates to the Chamber by all political parties. Many incumbent deputies, among those who supported the military regime, faced worse chances of reelection and gave up the attempt, just as many in the opposition had done in 1970.

These numbers show that whenever the constitutional rules that define the structure of political opportunities remained stable, in particular the rules regulating the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, the percentage of incumbent deputies interested in another term climbed to around 80%. Such a high percentage clearly belies the thesis that Brazilian politicians feel a mandate in the Chamber is less desirable in comparison with an executive office at the state or municipal level. On the contrary, the available data show that a large majority of those politicians who reached the level of a federal legislative mandate consider this an important step in their career and prefer to keep it.

The rate of reelection shows a similar tendency to increase under stable rules, but not so strong as the rate of attempt at reelection: it climbs from 50-55% to 70-75% in both democratic periods. As a reflection of the advantage of incumbency, it shows that this was not so great in both democratic periods, with averages of 65.6% in the first and 63.4% in the second one, than during the military regime, when its average rose to 76.0%.

As emphasized in Santos & Pegurier (2011), the missing element in Samuels's analysis is a perspective of the Brazilian political system, not as a finished construct, but as a process under development. When carefully appraised, his own data show an evolution during the period under analysis that does not lead to the conclusion that a mandate as federal deputy is a secondary office within the career of a Brazilian politician.

High turnover of federal deputies: an 'endemic phenomenon' of Brazilian politics?

Marenco (2000) presents the results of an extensive investigation into the recruitment process used by Brazilian political parties in their selection of candidates to the Chamber of Deputies. For this purpose, the author collected a novel and interesting body of data on the past political experience of Brazilian legislators before their entrance into the Chamber.

Among his conclusions are that (i) there is an abnormally high turnover in the Chamber of Deputies; that (ii) this is an ‘endemic phenomenon’ of Brazilian politics, which is caused by distortions in the Brazilian structure of political opportunities and cannot be explained by political circumstances; and (iii) this has contributed to inhibit the formation of cohesive party blocs within the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.

The most recent literature on the functioning of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has already put to rest this last assertion, but the first two must still be questioned. Is the turnover of members of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies abnormally high? Is it really caused by some kind of distortion in the Brazilian political system?

According to the information registered by the Chamber on every legislature from 1946 to 1998, summarized in **Table 2/Graph 2**, the percentage of deputies in their first term has always remained above a threshold of approximately 40%. Actually, this percentage underwent considerable variation within this period. The numbers furnished by Marenco (2000) show that in the first democratic period, from 1945 to 1958, it fell precipitously from 75.4% in 1946 to 44.3% in 1958, recovered a bit to 49.9% in 1962, and fell back to 44.0 in 1966. In the elections held during the military regime, it remained within the 44-46% range. After the return to full democracy, it first climbed to 58.3% in 1990 and then fell to 39.4% in 1998.

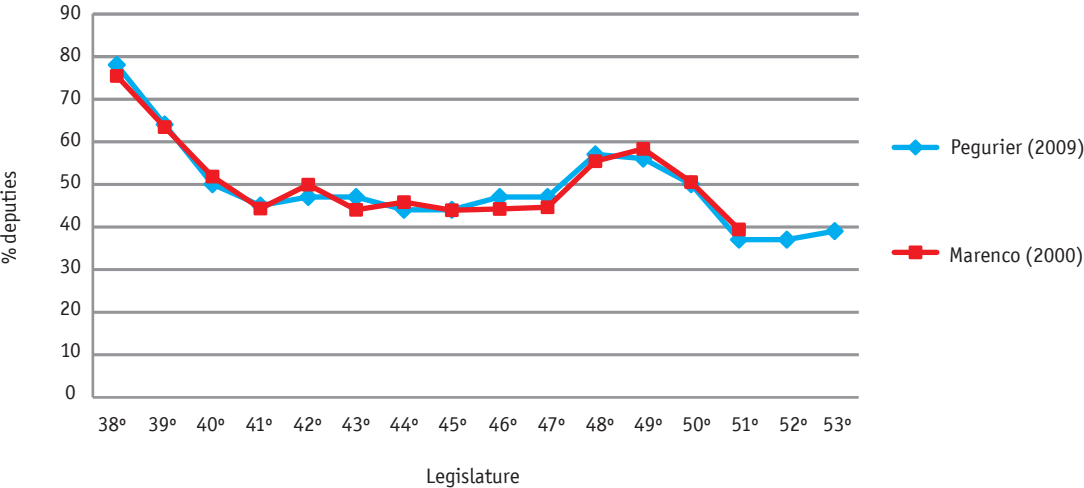
The numbers shown in Pegurier (2009) differ very slightly from those of Marenco (2000) for the 1945-

Table 2. First-mandate deputies
(% of total deputies)

Legislature	Election Year	Mandate	Pegurier (2009)	Marenco (2000)
38th	1945	1946 – 1951	308 (78%)	75.4
39th	1950	1951 – 1955	257 (64%)	63.4
40th	1954	1955 – 1959	230 (50%)	51.8
41st	1958	1959 – 1963	210 (45%)	44.3
42nd	1962	1963 – 1967	299 (47%)	49.9
43rd	1966	1967 – 1971	182 (47%)	44.0
44th	1970	1971 – 1975	149 (44%)	45.8
45th	1974	1975 – 1979	178 (44%)	43.9
46th	1978	1979 – 1983	230 (47%)	44.2
47th	1982	1983 – 1987	269 (47%)	44.6
48th	1986	1987 – 1991	339 (57%)	55.4
49th	1990	1991 – 1995	334 (56%)	58.3
50th	1994	1995 – 1999	309 (50%)	50.5
51st	1998	1999 – 2003	238 (37%)	39.4
52nd	2002	2003 – 2007	212 (37%)	
53rd	2006	2007 – 2011	207 (39%)	

Source: <http://www.camara.gov.br>

Graph 2. First-mandate deputies
(% of total deputies)



98 period – probably due to a different classification of the deputies present in each legislature – and include the elections of 2002 and 2006, with 37% and 39%, respectively. Based on these numbers, it seems safe to assume that (i) the sharper variations up and down are due to the regime changes in 1946, 1964 and 1985, and (ii) a range of 40-50% for the turnover in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies is characteristic of the Brazilian political system.

This is higher than the parliamentary turnover verified in other Western democracies, especially in the USA, where it has kept close to 16%, but also in France and Germany, where it has stabilized within the 20-30% range. But it is not much higher

than what is shown by Finland (34.7%), Canada (39.2%), or other well-functioning political systems. It would hardly justify its classification as an ‘endemic phenomenon’, especially in face of the fact that the Chamber has functioned reasonably well since the 1988 Constitution.

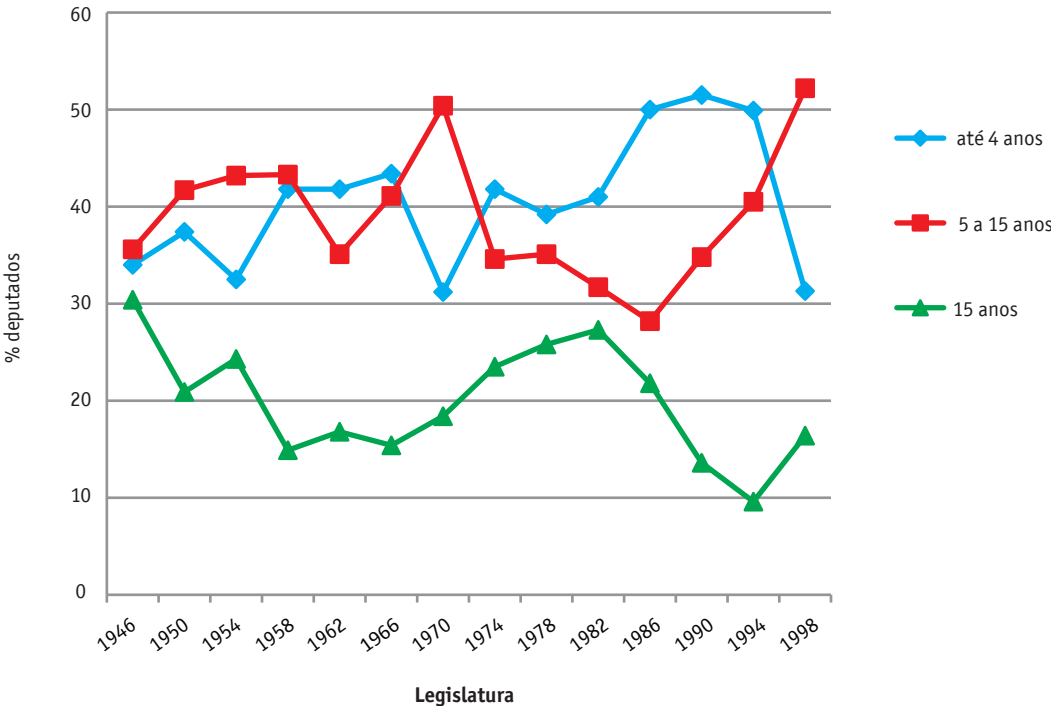
Marenco (2000) associates this high parliamentary turnover with the lateral recruitment, as opposed to an endogenous one, used by Brazilian political parties in their selection of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. By lateral recruitment, Marenco (2000) means the high value placed on candidates who bring to the party electoral resources they have acquired without any party support,

Table 3. Years of Previous political experience before election to the Chamber of Deputies (% of First-mandate deputies)

Legislature	Election Year	Mandate	Up to 4	5 to 15	15 or more
38th	1945	1946 – 1951	34.0	35.6	30.4
39th	1950	1951 – 1955	37.4	41.7	20.9
40th	1954	1955 – 1959	32.5	43.2	24.3
41st	1958	1959 – 1963	41.8	43.3	14.9
42nd	1962	1963 – 1967	41.8	35.1	16.8
43rd	1966	1967 – 1971	43.4	41.1	15.4
44th	1970	1971 – 1975	31.2	50.4	18.4
45th	1974	1975 – 1979	41.8	34.6	23.5
46th	1978	1979 – 1983	39.2	35.1	25.8
47th	1982	1983 – 1987	41.0	31.7	27.3
48th	1986	1987 – 1991	50.0	28.2	21.8
49th	1990	1991 – 1995	51.5	34.8	13.6
50th	1994	1995 – 1999	49.9	40.5	9.6
51st	1998	1999 – 2003	31.3	52.2	16.4

Source: Marenco (2000)

Graph 3. Years of Previous political experience before election to the Chamber 1946-1998 (% of First-mandate deputies)



which induces fast and discontinuous political careers. In contrast, endogenous recruitment would demand from an aspiring candidate a disciplined adaptation to party rules and directives, which would turn political careers into a *cursus honorum* and parties into political schools, where the aspiring candidates would be socialized, by acquiring values and learning rules characteristic of each party (Ibid., pp. 39-40).

The main evidence presented by Marengo (2000) for the lateral recruitment exercised by Brazilian political parties is in his Graphs 9 and 10 (Ibid. pp. 96-98), which are reproduced here as **Table 3/Graph 3**. These show the time accumulated by first-term deputies in political activities before

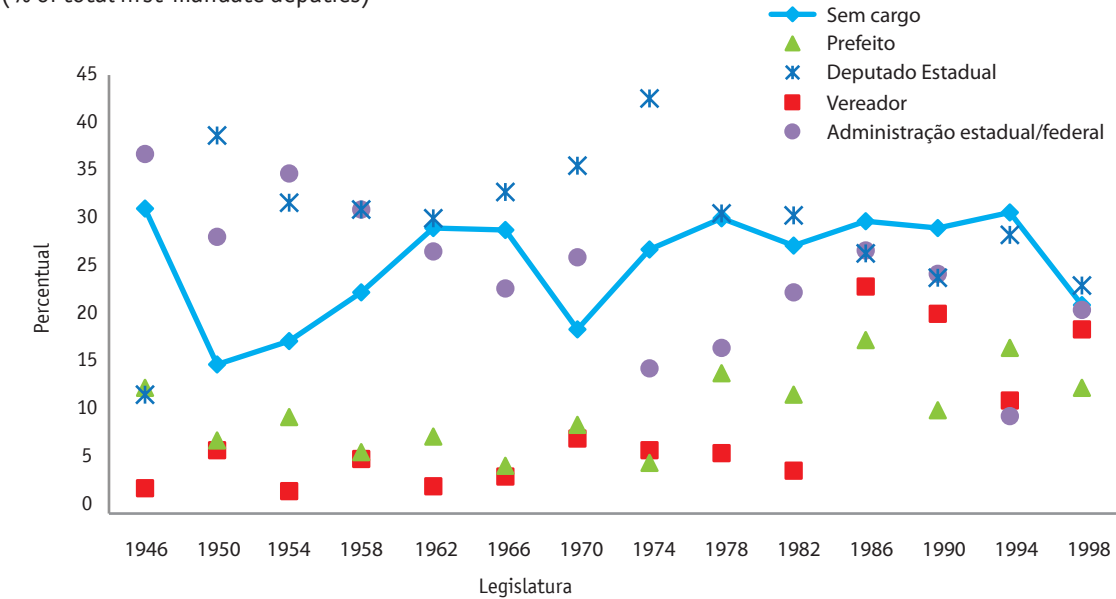
their election to the Chamber, divided into three categories: (i) up to 4 years; (ii) 5 to 15 years; and (iii) more than 15 years. Marengo (2000) notes the decreasing percentage of first-term deputies with previous political experience of more than 15 years in the elections between 1986 and 1994, but does not take into consideration that this is to a large extent compensated by the increase in the percentage of those with 5-to-15 years of such experience. The percentage of freshmen deputies with previous political experience of four years or less only climbed above the 31-42% range in the three first elections carried out after the return to democracy and fell back into this range in the last year analyzed by Marengo (2000). The fact remains that since 1946, (i) roughly 60% or more of Brazilian

Table 4. Last public office before election to the Chamber
(% of total first-mandate deputies)

Legislature	Election Year	Mandate	None	Town Councilor	Mayor	Adm*	State Rep**
38th	1945	1946 - 1951	31.3	2.6	12.9	36.9	12.2
39th	1950	1951 - 1955	15.3	6.5	7.5	28.4	38.8
40th	1954	1955 - 1959	17.7	2.3	9.9	34.9	31.9
41st	1958	1959 - 1963	22.7	5.6	6.3	31.2	31.2
42nd	1962	1963 - 1967	29.3	2.8	7.9	26.9	30.3
43rd	1966	1967 - 1971	29.1	3.8	4.9	23.1	33.0
44th	1970	1971 - 1975	18.9	7.7	9.1	26.3	35.7
45th	1974	1975 - 1979	27.1	6.5	5.2	14.9	42.6
46th	1978	1979 - 1983	30.3	6.2	14.4	17.0	30.8
47th	1982	1983 - 1987	27.5	4.4	12.2	22.7	30.6
48th	1986	1987 - 1991	30.0	23.3	17.8	27.0	26.7
49th	1990	1991 - 1995	29.3	20.5	10.6	24.6	24.2
50th	1994	1995 - 1999	30.9	11.6	17.0	10.0	28.6
51st	1998	1999 - 2003	21.4	18.9	12.9	20.9	23.4

Source: Marengo (2000)
* State or federal administrative career
**State deputy

Graph 4. Last public office before election to the Chamber 1945-1998
(% of total first-mandate deputies)



freshmen deputies arrive in the Chamber with more than five years of political experience; and (ii) the data for the whole period simply do not identify a long-range tendency to elect more freshmen deputies with less previous political experience, nor do they show that such an increase is due to lateral recruitment.

Another important point that must be taken into consideration is that first-term deputies are not inexperienced politicians. On the contrary, **Table 5/Graph 5** shows that a high percentage of them have a record of political experience, either in

executive or legislative positions, at not only municipal and state level, but in some cases even at the national level. **Graph 5** shows clearly that this percentage has climbed from 48-60% in the first democratic period (and 43-56% during the military regime) to 67-73% since the early 1990s. In short, today less than 30% of first-term deputies are inexperienced politicians.

The combination of a falling percentage of first-term deputies with an also falling percentage of inexperienced politicians among them has resulted in a severe reduction of deputies with no pre-

Table 5. First-mandate Deputies with Previous Political Experience
(% of total first-mandate deputies)

Legislature	Mandate	First-mandate Deputies	With Previous Political Experience
38th	1946 - 1951	308 (100%)	146 (48%)
39th	1951 - 1955	257 (100%)	154 (60%)
40th	1955 - 1959	230 (100%)	121 (53%)
41st	1959 - 1963	210 (100%)	118 (57%)
42nd	1963 - 1967	299 (100%)	141 (49%)
43rd	1967 - 1971	182 (100%)	079 (43%)
44th	1971 - 1975	149 (100%)	083 (56%)
45th	1975 - 1979	178 (100%)	097 (55%)
46th	1979 - 1983	230 (100%)	102 (45%)
47th	1983 - 1987	269 (100%)	114 (43%)
48th	1987 - 1991	339 (100%)	178 (53%)
49th	1991 - 1995	334 (100%)	221 (67%)
50th	1995 - 1999	309 (100%)	218 (71%)
51st	1999 - 2003	238 (100%)	163 (69%)
52nd	2003 - 2007	212 (100%)	152 (72%)
53rd	2007 - 2011	207 (100%)	151 (73%)

Source: <http://www.camara.gov.br>

Graph 5. First-mandate Deputies with previous political experience
(% of total first-mandate deputies)



vious political experience. **Table 6/Graph 6** shows that, compared to the total number of deputies serving in each legislature, the percentage of inexperienced politicians fell from 19-27% in the elections from 1950 to 1986 to only 10-11% in the last three elections examined. This is undoubtedly a clear index of the increasing professionalization of Brazilian federal deputies. It is also a recent phenomenon, which is apparently due to the new constitutional rules established in 1988, as well as to the political circumstances that have prevailed since then.

Local politics: now an important path to the chamber of deputies

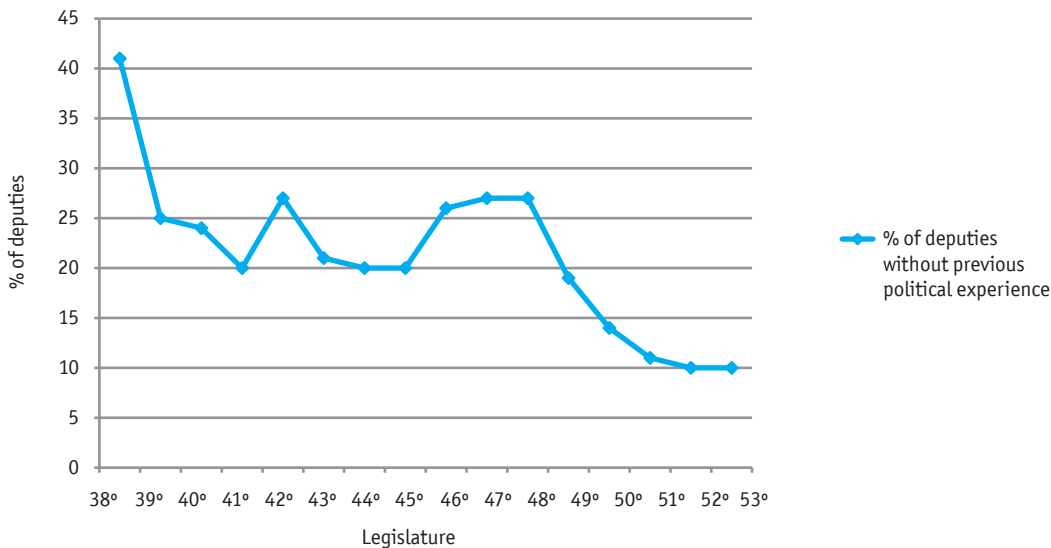
Marenco (2000) also observes that, comparing the recent democratic period (from 1986 to the present day) with the previous one (from 1946 to 1966), there has been a considerable increase in the percentage of freshmen deputies in the Chamber having previous experience exclusively in local politics, as mayors or town council members. The average for the more recent period is 33.2%, almost triple that of the previous one, which is 12.2%. In contrast to this extraor-

Table 6. % of Deputies Without Previous Political Experience (% of total deputies)

Legislature	First-mandate deputies as % of total deputies	Without previous political experience	
		% of first-mandate deputies	% of total deputies
38th	78	52	41
39th	64	40	26
40th	50	47	24
41st	45	43	19
42nd	47	51	24
43rd	47	57	27
44th	44	44	19
45th	44	45	20
46th	47	55	26
47th	47	57	27
48th	57	47	27
49th	56	33	18
50th	50	29	15
51st	37	31	11
52nd	37	28	10
53rd	39	27	11

Source: <http://www.camara.gov.br>

Graph 6. Total of Deputies’ Previous Political Experience (% of total deputies)



dinary increase, the percentage of freshmen deputies coming from state or federal administrative positions, plus those who were state deputies, has fallen, from the first to the present democratic period, from 59.8% to 46.4%. It is also interesting to note the drastic change which has taken place since 1946 in the proportion of freshmen deputies who come directly from town councils, relative to those who came from state assemblies. In the first democratic period, this proportion shows an average of 11% of the total for these two categories of freshmen deputies; in the military regime, this percentage increases slightly, to 15%; but in the return to democracy since 1986, it shoots up to 42%.

Although recognizing that purely local political experience is not enough to characterize a politician as inexperienced, Marengo (2000) adds the freshmen deputies with such a background to those with no previous political office and concludes that half or more of the newcomers into the Chamber had managed to “subvert the *cursus honorum* that defines a conventional political career” (Marengo, 2000, p. 99). But this fact simply reflects the intense urbanization of the Brazilian population in the second half of the twentieth century and just means that, in present-day Brazil, a mandate as a town councilor has grown in importance, compared to a mandate in the state assembly, as a path to the national Chamber of Deputies.

**The brazilian chamber of deputies:
not that different from the U.S. House
of representatives**

Samuels (2003) states that “the structure of political careers in contemporary Brazil resembles in important ways the political career ladder in the early nineteenth-century United States” and that this fact “broadens our understanding of how federalism can influence national politics in cross-sectional perspective” (Samuels 2000, Pp. 7-8). He argues that “the key to why the opportunity structure in Brazil has not changed so that congressional careers are relatively more important lies both in the persistence of federalism as a defining political cleavage and in the lack of clear nationalized political partisan cleavages” (Samuels 2000, p. 32). By “the persistence of federalism as a defining political cleavage,” the author is probably referring to the importance of local and state politics for political careers in Brazil. But “the lack of clear nationalized partisan political cleavages” in this country is something very difficult to defend in the face of the history and performance of right and left-leaning Brazilian political parties. In any case, the differences between the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and the US House of Representatives are very easily exaggerated.

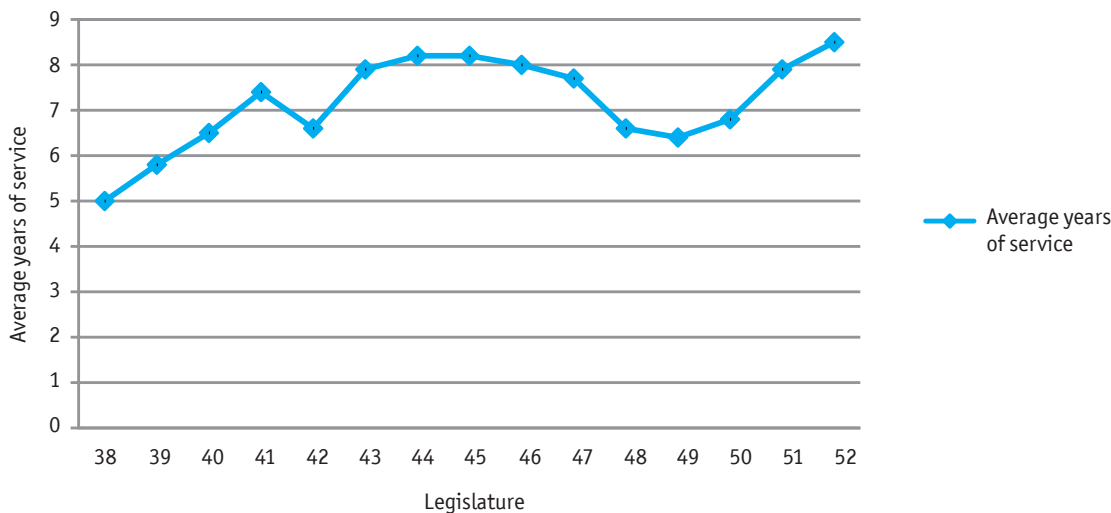
Table 7/Graph 7 show that the average number of years served by Brazilian federal deputies climbed stea-

Table 7. Deputies’ average years of service

Legislature	Election Year	Mandate	Average years served
38th	1945	1946 - 1951	5,0
39th	1950	1951 - 1955	5.8
40th	1954	1955 - 1959	6.5
41st	1958	1959 - 1963	7.4
42nd	1962	1963 - 1967	6.6
43rd	1966	1967 - 1971	7.9
44th	1970	1971 - 1975	8.2
45th	1974	1975 - 1979	8.2
46th	1978	1979 - 1983	8.0
47th	1982	1983 - 1987	7.7
48th	1986	1987 - 1991	6.6
49th	1990	1991 - 1995	6.4
50th	1994	1995 - 1999	6.8
51st	1998	1999 - 2003	7.9
52nd	2002	2003 - 2007	8.5

Source: <http://www.camara.gov.br>

Graph 7. Deputies' average years of service (% of total deputies)



dily since 1945, from 5.0 years for the deputies elected in 1945 to 8.5 years for those elected in 2002. It is interesting to compare the average time served by Brazilian federal deputies with that of American representatives. Polsby (1968) shows that in the 1949-63 period, US representatives served an average of 5.5 terms, whereas Brazilian deputies today serve an average of 2.2 mandates. But the US representatives' term is two years, while the Brazilian deputies' serve four-year terms. Therefore, measured in years, a US representative serves an average of 11 years, while a Brazilian deputy serves an average that now reaches 8.5 years. So the average served by a US representative has been reduced from 120% above the Brazilian one to only 30%. In this respect, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies is becoming not very different from the US House of Representatives.

Another meaningful comparison of these two legislative bodies may be based on the level of their members' remuneration and their total expenses. Unfortunately, this must be restricted to the 1995-2007 period, because there are no data available on the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies for the preceding years. From 1995 to 2007, total expenses by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies more than quadrupled, from R\$ 675 to R\$ 3,143 million. In the same period, personnel expenses more than quintupled, from R\$ 526 to R\$ 2,556 million; current expenses more than quadrupled, from R\$ 129 to R\$ 543 million; and investments a little more than doubled, from R\$ 21 to R\$ 43 million. Correcting for inflation, the Chamber approximately doubled its total expenses, that is, increased them by 190-230%, depending on the price index used for this correction. In the same period, the US House of Representatives increased total expenses – including personnel and current expenses, but excluding investments – by 57%, from US\$ 728 to US\$ 1,144 million. Correcting for inflation, this increase is reduced to 16%.

How do these numbers compare, when measured in dollars – in total and per legislator? As shown in **Table 8/Graph 8**, total expenses by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, translated into dollars at the

average current exchange rate for each year, result in US\$ 713 million for 1995 and US\$ 1,736 for 2007. However, this last figure is certainly distorted by the undisputedly overvalued average exchange rate of the Brazilian real in 2007, which reached R\$ 1.786/US\$. If a reasonable correction is made, by using the average exchange rate of the real in the preceding year, which was R\$2.149/US\$ (much closer to an estimated equilibrium exchange rate), total 2007 expenses by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies come down to US\$ 1,442 million. Even so, this remains 26% above that of the US House of Representatives.

Table 9/Graph 9 show the total expenses in dollars for the two legislative bodies divided by their number of members – 513 for the Brazilian Chamber and 435 for the US House. These show that the Brazilian Chamber's total expenses (excluding investments) per deputy moved from US\$ 1.39 to US\$ 3.38 million per deputy, passing from 17% below to 29% above that of the US House. This comparison alone does not allow any further judgment on the comparative performance of these two legislative bodies, but it does allow the conclusion that, as far as this criterion may be used, there is very little difference between them: both are on a comparable level of professionalization.

In conclusion

In modern representative democracies, where voting rights are practically universal and the choice of legislators and governing executives is the object of periodic elections, this is certainly the case. As argued in Weber (1995), without professional politicians able to live not only 'for politics' but also 'from politics', any political system will degenerate into an indefensible plutocracy. Credible arguments, as well as considerable empirical evidence, justify political professionalization.

Existing theories of institutionalization and professionalization, developed on the basis of the obser-

Table 8. Budget: US House of Representatives x Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (U\$)

Year	Brazilian Chamber of Deputies		USA House of Representatives	
	R\$ *	Exchange rate	US\$	US\$
1995	654,240,535	0.9174	713,146,430	728,468,000
1996	784,999,479	1.0051	781,016,296	671,061,000
1997	1,024,251,164	1.0780	950,140,226	683,831,000
1998	1,029,541,033	1.1606	887,076,541	708,738,000
1999	1,179,566,846	1.8147	650,006,528	740,344,000
2000	1,193,499,596	1.8302	652,114,302	757,993,000
2001	1,436,787,881	2.3504	611,295,048	829,735,000
2002	1,706,389,832	2.9212	584,140,022	919,762,000
2003	1,981,287,456	3.0783	643,630,399	960,871,000
2004	2,221,534,655	3.0751	722,426,801	1,008,479,000
2005	2,437,610,276	2.7032	901,749,880	1,079,354,000
2006	2,920,734,583	2.1499	1,358,544,390	1,127,817,000
2007	3,099,926,671	1.7860	1,735,681,227	1,144,486,000
2007'	3,099,926,671	2.1499	1,441,893,423	1,144,486,000

source: <http://www2.camara.gov.br/orcamentobrasil/orcamentouniao>
<http://thomas.loc.gov>
<http://www.conjunturaeconomica.com.br>
*general expenses +other current expenses (less investments) in R\$ 2007': 2007 expenses translated into US\$ at 2006 exchange rate

Graph 8. Budget: US House of Representatives x Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (U\$)

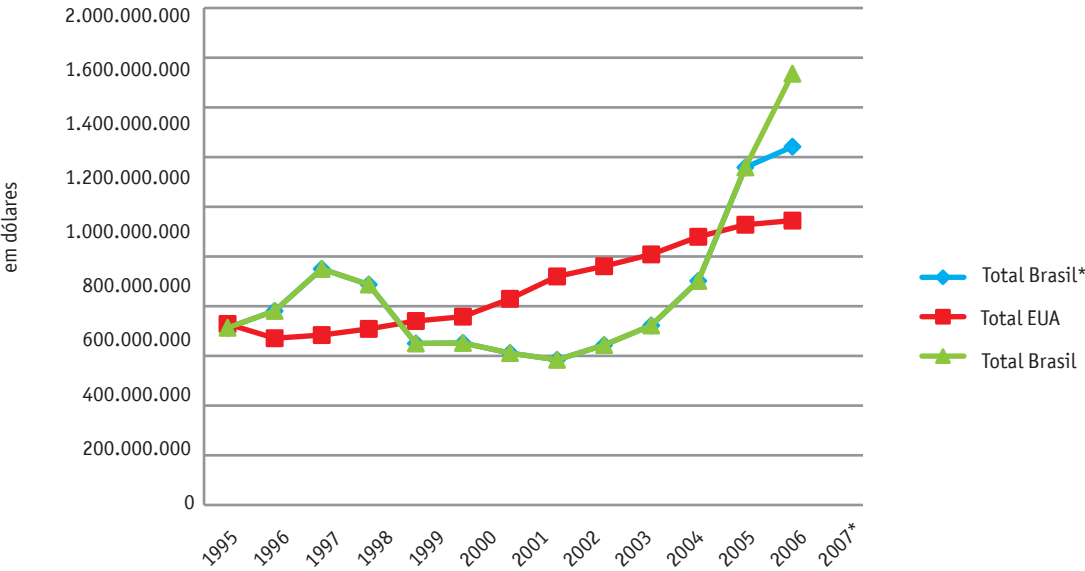


Table 9. Total Expenses
USA House of Representatives x Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (US\$ per member)

Year	USA Total	Brazil Total	EUA* per representative	Brasil** per deputy
1995	728,468,000	713,146,430	1,674,639	1,390,148
1996	671,061,000	781,016,295	1,542,669	1,522,448
1997	683,831,000	950,140,226	1,572,025	1,852,125
1998	708,738,000	887,076,540	1,629,283	1,729,194
1999	740,344,000	650,006,527	1,701,940	1,267,069
2000	757,993,000	652,114,302	1,742,513	1,271,177
2001	829,735,000	611,295,048	1,907,437	1,191,608
2002	919,762,000	584,140,021	2,114,395	1,138,674
2003	960,871,000	643,630,398	2,208,889	1,254,640
2004	1,008,479,000	722,426,800	2,318,343	1,408,239
2005	1,079,354,000	901,749,880	2,481,274	1,757,797
2006	1,127,817,000	1,358,544,389	2,592,683	2,648,234
2007	1,144,486,000	1,735,681,226	2,631,002	3,383,394
2007'	1,144,486,000	1,441,893,423	2,631,002	2,810,708

source: <http://www2.camara.gov.br/orcamentobrasil/orcamentouniao>

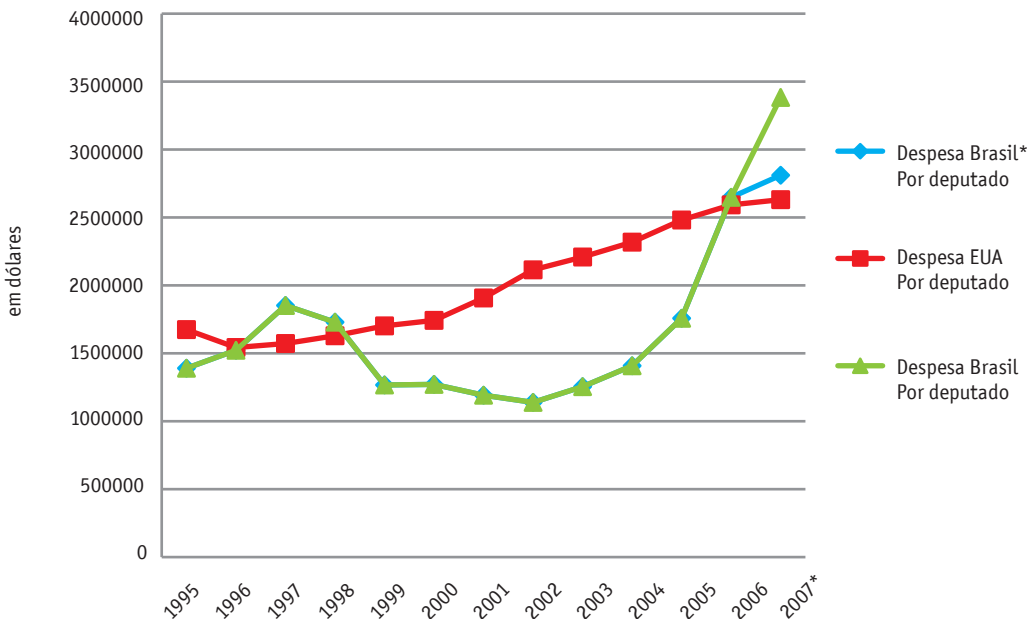
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2007' with 2006 exchange rate

** divided by total number of deputies: 513

* divided by total number of representatives: 435

Graph 9. Budget: US House of Representatives x Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (US\$ per member)



vation of the House of Representatives and state assemblies in the United States, do not serve to explain the evolution and working practices of other nations’ legislative bodies. The theory of institutionalization developed in Polsby (1968) describes the evolution of the US House of Representatives but does not resist the critique in Hibbing (1999) and fails to provide for exogenous factors that may explain why it has taken its specific path and why other national legislative bodies have followed different ones. The theory of professionalization proposed in Black (1970) defines professionalization as the assimilation of certain standards and values

but does not specify which they might be. The concept of professionalization used by Squire (1988a) serves as a measurement criterion that is useful in the comparative analysis of the US state assemblies but is also incapable of explaining the evolution of other countries’ state and national legislative bodies.

A new approach is gaining ground, based on Schlesinger’s theory of ambition and a decomposition of the structure of political opportunities associated with each political system³. This structure may be altered when professional politicians even-

tually constitute a political class capable of molding institutions in order to enhance their chances of staying in the political business and improving their careers, within the limits set by constitutional rules and public opinion. Viewed from this approach, the behavior of Brazilian politicians, in their pursuit of political careers in their performance in the Chamber of Deputies, is very clearly explained.

The existing literature makes it clear that, as the Cardoso and Lula administrations opted to form such coalitions, the Chamber of Deputies rapidly coalesced into party blocs better able to bargain with the all-powerful President for their support. This also gave members of the Chamber a convenient way of signaling to their constituencies their position vis-à-vis important national issues. At the same time, the Chamber adopted rules for committee work and leadership better suited to further their members' ambitions. The result has been undoubtedly positive for the Brazilian electorate, with governability assured, but presidential bills modified to please substantial majorities, and no repressive laws approved.

The view that Brazilian politicians place no great value on building a career in the country's Chamber of Deputies is rebutted by the evolution of the Chamber since 1945. In the three periods when stable rules presided over recruitment of candidates and election to the Chamber, the percentage of deputies aiming at another mandate rapidly reached 80%. It is true that during their mandates, many deputies prefer to aim at obtaining executive positions in their states or in important municipalities, as a path to climb higher in their political careers. But this happens simply because the structure of political opportunities in Brazil is very ample and deputies may pursue such opportunities without any damage to their mandate in the Chamber.

It is perfectly understandable that, in such a system, political careers will involve intense circulation of professional politicians between executive and legislative positions, as well as between the three levels of the federation. Specifically, a parliamentary turnover of approximately 40% should not come as a surprise and certainly not be classified as an 'endemic phenomenon' of the Brazilian political system. On the contrary, it is to be expected as a normal, direct consequence of such ample structure of political opportunities. There is no evidence that this turnover rate is due to what may be defined as 'lateral recruitment'. And there is ample evidence showing that this has in no way impaired the legislative capacity of the Chamber. Actually, there is no evidence of 'lateral recruitment' for candidates to the Chamber of Deputies. What the records show is that the number of inexperienced politicians arriving at the Chamber is growing ever smaller. At present, more than 90% of the freshman deputies show some kind of previous political experience.

Another myth that must be discarded is that the Chamber of Deputies resembles the U.S. House of Representatives in the nineteenth century, at the time politics in that country was based on a so-called 'spoils system'. Polsby (1968) used average time served and remuneration received by its members as indicators of the increasing institutionalization of the House of Representatives. The records show that the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies is getting gradually closer to the US House of Representatives in terms of average years of service, and has overtaken the House in terms of remuneration and total expenses per member. However, it is difficult to see how these two criteria can be used as indicators of either the level of institutionalization reached by the Chamber or the level of professionalization of Brazilian federal deputies.

It would be extremely difficult to argue, from the fact that Brazilian federal deputies are serving longer, that the Chamber is becoming more institutionalized. It is much simpler and credible to suppose that remaining longer in the Chamber presently makes more sense to more deputies, given the structure of political opportunities they face. It would be equally difficult to defend that, because the Chamber's total expenses per deputy have doubled in real terms between 1995 and 2007, Brazilian deputies have become more professional in such a short time. A much more plausible explanation for this fact is that, given the rules and procedures established by the Constitution of 1988, as well as the absence of a negative reaction from the electorate, they have managed to double both their remuneration and the support they receive from the Chamber for performing their job.

It is even more difficult to see how these two criteria could serve for comparison of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies with the US House of Representatives, regarding their levels of institutionalization or professionalization. Is the U.S. House more institutionalized than the Brazilian Chamber because American representatives stay 30% longer in their jobs than Brazilian deputies? Or are Brazilian deputies more professional than American representatives because they get 29% more remuneration and support from their respective legislative bodies? The common sense answer is no. And the most acceptable conclusion seems to be that these two concepts – institutionalization and professionalization – will lead us nowhere. That these results are the consequence of class actions by politicians in defense of their common interests in both countries is a much more credible theory.

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Notas

- 1 Decrees with immediate force of law, but subject to congressional confirmation/amendment.
- 2 Obs: This view may be fiercely disputed. Brazil was born as a unitarian empire, with no provinces or states with any administrative or budgetary autonomy. The political culture inherited from Portugal and developed during the empire still prevails, and not only agrees with greatly centralized powers but also places ultimate responsibility for the solution of even local problems on the national government. Most states and municipalities depend upon the largesse of the federal budget and most politicians depend on the president's enormous powers to dispense patronage. Thus, the Brazilian federation is more an ideal, a work in progress; in practice, it can hardly be classified as one of the most decentralized federations in the world.
- 3 Obs: See Schlesinger (1966), Borchert (2003) and (2004), Pegurier (2009).