

Governo, Políticas Públicas e Elites Políticas nos Estados Brasileiros

(Celina Souza e Paulo Fábio Dantas Neto, orgs. Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2006.)

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The collection titled *Governo, Políticas Públicas e Elites Políticas nos Estados Brasileiros* (Government, Public Policies and Political Elites in the Brazilian States), organized by Celina Souza and Paulo Fábio Dantas Neto, of the Federal University of Bahia, is a landmark in the welcome, but still incipient, process of decentring of Brazilian political science. I say this because the nine studies compiled promote significant displacements in relation to three of the guiding axes of Brazilian politicology, those being the thematic, the methodological and the spatial axes.

With regards to the thematic axis, the book in question, by focusing on government structures, public policies and the role of political elites in several Brazilian states, carries out a significant “correction of course” in relation to the still predominant emphasis on institutions, processes and players of the federal and municipal levels. If, on the one hand, the country’s academic researchers have only recently turned their attention to the ongoing processes of de-fragmentation of public administration in Brazil — following through on the perception of the limitations and perversities of the autarchic and predatory municipalism —, which led to more consistent inter-municipal cooperation and to a revaluing of regional planning, on the other, the state sphere remains seriously neglected, even considering the well-known exceptions that seem only to confirm the rule.

As for the methodological issue in Brazilian political science, or its “heel”, so sharply pointed out by Soares (2005), the book reviewed here promotes a second displacement

that is worthy of note. This is so due to the following: the centrality that empirical research has in it; its methodological sophistication and plurality; and the valuing of quantitative methods. These characteristics signal a certain sidelining of the essayist tendency that has marked the studies of the field in this country. It is also worth pointing out that six out of the nine pieces presented are comparative studies, which adds value to the collection and demonstrates the potential of a perspective and a method that remain marginal in Brazilian political science.

Lastly, the book in question carries out a third healthy displacement, related to the spatial question, which unfolds in two aspects, those being: the institutional affiliation of the authors of the studies and the units of the federation under analysis. The nine chapters of the collection are authored by researchers linked to teaching and research institutions in five different Brazilian states and by two US researchers. Of the seven Brazilian authors, only two are based in the Southeast of the country. With regards to the second aspect of this significant spatial displacement, some other important observations are called for. Firstly, it is worth noting that just one of the pieces analyses all 27 Brazilian states, while another chapter, the first, discusses the issue of decentralization and of intergovernmental relations, comparing the Brazilian experience with those of Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. As for the other seven chapters, it is worth highlighting the fact that the ten states addressed are distributed throughout the country's five regions. Bahia is researched, comparatively or not, in four pieces, Ceará in three, Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul in two, and Piauí, Tocantins, the Distrito Federal, São Paulo and Paraná in one. It is also noteworthy that there is no specific study on the state of Rio de Janeiro, and that São Paulo is dealt with in only one study, which compares seven states of the federation. Hence, such spatial displacements are evidence of an important decentring in relation to the traditional economic — but also academic — predominance of the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis.

Having stressed the book's decentring effect, now it is time to present its structure and to evaluate, with the necessary brevity, each of its chapters. The nine studies that make up the book are organized in three sections. The first, containing a single piece, is devoted to the discussion of intergovernmental relations. The second, titled "Public Policies", is made up of five studies geared to the analysis of relations between politics and social spending in the states of the Brazilian federation, to the evaluation of relations between state electoral coalitions and fiscal adjustment, to the policy of reforming school management in some Brazilian states and to the horizontal coordination efforts in the administration of two of the South region's states. The third section, which harbours the last three chapters, deals with state political elites. The following themes are focused: voters' preferences and incentives to state legislators; "carlismo" in Bahia; and parties, elections and "tassismo" in Ceará.

The book's first chapter, by Tulia G. Falletti of the University of Pennsylvania, has the following title: "Effects of decentralization on intergovernmental relations: Brazil in comparative perspective". The Brazilian experience is contrasted with those of Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. The argument developed by the author is that the impact of decentralizing reforms, with regards to the distribution of power between national and subnational governments, depends on the order in which the administrative, fiscal and political reforms take place. It is argued that the differential impact observed in the countries analysed does not depend on long-term structural and institutional legacies — such as, for example, having a federal or unitary system, the degree of centralization of the political parties or the initial conditions of the structures that organize intergovernmental relations —, but is more closely associated with the process and sequence of decentralizing reforms. By using a series of variables relating to the degree of decentralization and to the evolution of the balance of power in the four countries analysed, referent to the periods before and after the reforms, and testing and discarding three alternative explanations, the author presents us with her "sequential theory of decentralization", stressing that "one must not assume that decentralization always increases the power of subnational governments" (p. 36). She demonstrates that "a decentralizing process (like the Brazilian) that begins with political decentralization, continues with fiscal decentralization and ends with administrative decentralization, gives powers to the subnational governments. This occurs regardless of the type of government, of the initial conditions of the intergovernmental institutional structures and also, to a large extent, regardless of the loyalty of parliamentarians to the party structure" (p. 51).

The second part of the collection, devoted to "public policies", is opened by the only piece covering all 27 Brazilian states. The study by Natália G. D. Sátyro, a political science Ph.D. student at IUPERJ, is titled "Politics in the Brazilian states and social spending: a time series analysis with a transversal perspective: 1987 to 2002". The main aim of the investigation is to explain the variability of social spending in the four state administrations that followed re-democratization on the basis of a politico-institutional approach that highlights the following variables: number of effective parties; the winning alliance's percentage of votes in the first round and of seats in the state assembly; political ideology; relations of the state winning alliance with the winning alliance at federal government level; and the legacy of previous policies. The conclusions, which go against traditional hypotheses, suggest the "low expressiveness of the prediction capacity of the indicators of politics used, as well as (...) the explanatory fragility of the political factors in defining the social spending of the Brazilian states in the period analysed" (p. 58).

The third chapter, by Celina Souza, has the following title: "State political institutions in a federative context: electoral coalitions and fiscal adjustment". The piece seeks to

understand the reasons that led the Brazilian states to adopt the federal policy of fiscal adjustment, highlighting how this process took place and the impacts of such a policy on the “electoral results from the territorial point of view and from the point of view of the socio-economic characteristics of the voters’ municipalities” (p. 91). The study is interested in checking whether the adoption of restrictive spending policies had an impact on electoral results or not, from the territorial point of view. Of the twelve Brazilian states where there was a fiscal adjustment followed by an election victory, three were chosen to be investigated in depth: Bahia, Ceará and Paraná. The selection prioritised the similarities over the differences between these states, which are considered “examples of successful fiscal adjustments”. It is demonstrated that in these three states the territorial base of support for the governors who took it upon themselves to promote the fiscal adjustment was not altered. Hence, she develops the argument that in the states, the electoral and public policy dynamics are not restricted to the clientelistic logic, conjugating distinct grammars beyond the traditional politics and the predatory federalism. She concludes that “state politics has given space to the adoption of new public policies, including some seen as contrary to short-term political calculation, both on the part of voters and of rulers” (p. 123).

Chapters four and five analyse the reform of school management in some Brazilian states. The first, by André Borges of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, compares this process in Bahia, Ceará and Minas Gerais, while the second, by Carlos Vasconcelos Rocha, of the Catholic University of Minas Gerais, discusses exclusively the experience of the state of Minas Gerais.

The piece by André Borges seeks to understand the variation in institutional choices made by state governments in relation to educational reform. By pointing out some of the limitations of institutional explanations, he argues that the change in the traditional policy of appointment of head teachers (principals) occurred in states in which competition within the political elites intensified significantly from re-democratization onwards. Elite fragmentation (such as in the cases of Ceará and Minas Gerais, in contrast with Bahia) arguably produced incentives to the renewal of education policies and to institutional change, since reformist segments sought to find support among civil society players with the aim of buttressing themselves politically and legitimating government policies more effectively. The explanation is tested against two rival hypotheses: (a) that according to which “decentralization leads to the institutionalization of social participation and to an increase in governmental accountability in those cases in which a highly organized and mobilized civil society demands such changes”; and (b) that which “suggests that the social, economic and demographic structures have an impact on relations between politicians and their voters, generating distinct styles of party politics and legislative behaviour and, by extension, public policy results that are also distinct” (pp. 129-130).

The chapter by Carlos Vasconcelos Rocha is titled “Politics and institutional change: the reform of public education in Minas Gerais”. The aim is to “unveil the logic of the power game that makes possible the decentralization of the Minas Gerais public education system” (p. 162), in a process initiated in the state in the late 1970s and completed in 1991. He argues that the institutional change in question, which sought to grant administrative, financial and pedagogical autonomy to schools, results from a variety of factors, such as: the convergence of actions by several groups that opposed clientelistic and patrimonialist practices; specific interest groups’ ability to put pressure, based on the differential impact of the rules that regulate political competition, which limit or increase their success rate; the “existence of clear ideas about the fundamentals of the reform”; the democratization of political institutions; and the changes that occurred at the international level.

Closing the second part of the collection, we have the chapter by Soraya Vargas Côrtes, of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, titled “Institutions and state action: horizontal coordination in the state governments of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul: 2003/2006”. It is worth mentioning two singularities of this study: (a) the emphasis on the search for intra-governmental coordination, so-called horizontal coordination, an ever more present concern in Brazilian public administration at the different levels of the federation, but still subject to little investigation by the country’s academic researchers; and (b) the centrality accorded, within the scope of an institutionalist approach, to the different political trajectories of the two governors in question to explain the greater importance placed on horizontal coordination and the fact that it was more successful in Santa Catarina.

The chapter by Scott Desposato of the University of California, San Diego, opens the third and last part of the book, devoted to the analysis of state political elites. His piece is called “Electoral preferences and legislators’ incentives in diverse electoral environments: the case of the Brazilian states”. Recognizing the predominance of the institutionalist perspective in studies on Latin American democracies and their gaps and deficiencies, the author calls upon us to revive the central role played by the voter. Given that the Brazilian states share very similar institutional characteristics, it is considered that they are almost ideal environments for evaluating the impact of the distinct characteristics of voters on the quality and nature of the government. The study, carried out on the basis of a survey with legislators of seven states (Bahia, the Distrito Federal, Piauí, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, São Paulo and Tocantins), aims to analyse voters’ different preferences, as understood by the political elites, and the perceptions of the latter about the demands for different types of public policies. The existence of two significant variations in voters’ preferences is established. “Firstly, the type of goods desired varies according to the demographic conditions, as expected. Legislators who represent poorer areas and rural areas are those who report the existence of pressures for individual goods or private goods.

Legislators who represent more literate voters or voters from more urbanized municipalities are more prone to reporting the existence of pressures for changes in public policies, or for public goods” (p. 231).

The last two chapters of the book are devoted to the evaluation of “carlismo” in Bahia and “tassismo” in Ceará. The first is by Paulo Fábio Dantas Neto of the Federal University of Bahia. In a scrupulously undertaken appraisal of the political trajectory of the recently deceased senator Antônio Carlos Magalhães, the author discusses, from a historical perspective, the impact of the mutual interactions between the state and national politico-institutional dynamics upon the strategies of the political segment led by the former senator. It is a sophisticated reconstitution of the way in which a situation of political domination, inherited from the Brazilian military regime at the state level, produced “carlismo” as a hegemonic movement in Bahia, even after the re-establishment of democracy in the country. It shows how, and by what means, the return of democratic competition, with the changes in institutional rules and in the behaviour of the political players at the federal level, guided the actions of the group led by ACM and the repercussions this had on the political status quo of Bahia. The following periodization is proposed for the trajectory of the “carlista” group: the period of the “first carlismo” (from the late 1960s to the first half of the 1970s, when the group’s action was almost exclusively regional); a period of “Baiano-national carlismo” (from the mid-1970s until the end of the 1990s, when ACM’s national influence prevails, as does that of his son Luís Eduardo Magalhães, towards the end of the period); and, lastly, the more recent period of “post-carlista carlismo”, when the group faces major difficulties, but does not necessarily display signs of decay, though perhaps of concentration in its state redoubt. The hegemony of “carlismo” is reflected upon as a function of the group having become the political protagonist in Bahia of Brazilian conservative modernization. Towards this goal, it put into action an array of political instruments, from the most traditional to multiple forms of the modernizing discourse and practice, and of symbolic mechanisms, in a changing strategy, but always centred on overcoming formal party structures. A unique alchemy, at the service of the “historical aspiration of “carlista” politics: to abolish all contradiction and be the dominant party in a united Bahia” (p. 282).

Lastly, the ninth chapter of the book, written by Filomeno Moraes, of the University of Fortaleza and of the State University of Ceará, discusses the evolution of the political subsystem of the state of Ceará from 1986 to 2002. The period marks the emergence in the state of a political elite linked to Ceará’s industrial corporatism, which, upon becoming hegemonic under the leadership of current senator Tasso Jereissati, eclipses the “cycle of the colonels” in Ceará and creates a much adulated but also harshly criticized “new politics” at the state level. The discussion would have much to gain if — as in the case of the study on “carlismo” in Bahia — the articulations between the state and federal levels had been emphasized.

The expectation is that the decentring process in relation to three of the guiding axes of Brazilian political science promoted by the collection of studies reviewed here will have the desired multiplier effect. After all, with the “municipalist euphoria” that swept the country in the last few decades — with reverberations in academic production — to a certain extent overcome, the recalibration of Brazil’s three-tier federalism returns to the political agenda. This should lead to the appropriate revisions in the research agendas of political scientists as well, not for the country’s political science to be imprisoned by current events, but for it to enhance its contribution to the nation’s political debate.

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