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Conclusion

This issue of the JLS analyzed the wider representative role of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, in contemporary Brazil. It sought to present its history and discuss the operation of this legislative house, clarifying its role as a decision-maker on public policy and as a promoter of the interaction between the political system and citizens.

The issues

The two key issues that structure the collection relate to the role of the Chamber of Deputies in the development of public policies and in the promotion of interaction between the political system and citizens. We questioned both the effective performance of said roles and the conditions in which these activities are performed, emphasizing the internal structure of the Chamber of Deputies and its capacity to promote these actions.

Both issues are, in fact, consequences of the basic problem related to democracy and representation. Brazil, a country with a political history punctuated by several institutional ruptures and periodical suppressions of representative democracy, has built a Chamber of Deputies that is a consequence of this process (since it faces the fragility of the partisan system and of the democratic values and practices). However, the institution seeks to also become an influence in the political system as a whole, especially in political communication actions.

The theoretical basis of Polsby (1975) makes sense in this case, since it allows for both an articulation of the role of a policy-maker (in the Transformative Legislative role) and a role of political communication with the citizens (in the Arena Legislative role). It is also important to emphasize that Polsby's perspective enlightens the internal organization of the Legislative branch, which, in the case of Brazil, is crucial due to the sheer size of these structures and the role they perform in the dynamics of the activities of the Chamber of Deputies¹.

We also would like to highlight the diversity of theoretical and empirical perspectives about the legislature presented in this volume, a result of the different

¹ The data and reality discussed in this collection are prior to 2016 and the internal unfolding of the political crisis experienced by the country throughout the last 12 months. Thus, we were not concerned with analyzing the changes that the structure went through during this boisterous period, neither the consequences these changes may exert on the legislative process as a whole. An exception to this was the chapter authored by PINTO, which approached some of these transformations, even though it did so through a more general point-of-view for the Brazilian political system as a whole.

backgrounds of the authors, the different disciplines used for reflection (History, Political Science, Sociology, Business Administration, Communication, among others), and also of different methodologies adopted to analyze the legislative phenomenon. If the historical dimension of the political role of the Brazilian Congress might lead us to a pessimistic vision of the power of the parliamentary institution over the political process, as presented by Pinto and Sathler et al.; on the other hand, the empirical analysis of the activities linked to educational policies and health funding by Gomes and Martins or of the resistance of the environmentalist core, as demonstrated by Schneider and Marques, as well as a greater involvement with the communication role, transforms the contemporary relationship between the Executive and Legislative Branches of power in Brazil into a picture in several shades of grey.

Answers and unfolding

The historical past and the contemporary configuration of the Chamber of Deputies point to a process of growing importance of the Legislative Branch, a characteristic that is consistent with the evolution of the Brazilian Democracy, which, currently, is in its longest period of existence. Democratic life strengthens the Legislative Branch, which has been growing in influence in the making of policies and in a greater interaction with society.

Active, reactive, collaborative and innovative, in the terms put forth by Ferri and Rodrigues, the Brazilian Parliament has undergone an evolution process throughout the years, due to the growing complexity of the internal structure and of the roles performed within the political system. This complexity can be expressed in the difficulty of positioning it in the spectrum created by Polsby between the Transformative and Arena types of Legislature. In fact, from the theoretical and empirical perspectives we adopted, the Brazilian Congress can be characterized more as a transformative one or more typically a political arena, in different moments of its history.

The conclusions to which the articles of this special issue of the JLS reach two fronts. The first one is that the organizational structure of the Chamber of Deputies is substantial, in terms of financial and human resources, and is oriented towards performing some roles almost in place of what is expected of the actions of parliamentarians. This introduces important questions regarding legitimacy of political decision-making, as it is the parliamentarian who is elected, rather than the official; these questions are particularly important in a political system that has undergone a

number of transitions between autocratic and democratic systems. The institutional involvement of the Chamber in activities for communication with the society is significant, both in a journalistic aspect and in the interaction within the legislative process. This ample structure is, moreover, supportive to the individual careers of the parliamentarians. This happens both because of the exposure the deputies receive within the actions of the Chamber of Deputies and the direct support to their individual careers with support staff, office space, and resources for communication activities with voters (transportation, mail, telephone, websites, etc., all of this being covered by the State).

The second conclusion, about the process of creation of public policies and also about the governance abilities of the Chamber of Deputies is that it is in a medium place of influence, in which the great player is the Executive Branch. This medium placement, however, should still be considered under a historical perspective, according to what Pinto and Sathler et al. show. During the Republic, for two extensive periods, the Legislative Branch was suppressed from the public arena as a relevant actor. During the Vargas dictatorship (1937-45), the National Congress simply did not operate. During the Military Dictatorship (1964-85), the Congress was kept in operation; however, it was destitute of many its prerogatives (Packenham [1970] 1990). The current democratic period, which completed 30 years in 2015 (if we mark its beginning with the election of the first civilian after the military regime in 1985), is characterized as a relatively new process of interaction between the Legislative and Executive branches, and it seems to stimulate and strengthen the representative institution.

We can discern that the Chamber of Deputies has been moving towards new means of interaction. On one hand, its organizational capacities have grown with time, as stated by Sathler, Braga and Miranda. On the other hand, the manner of the relationship between the Legislative and Executive Branches, especially the control of the members, has grown in importance in the public debate.

We can also see greater concerns about the Legislative Branch emerging from society, since some public debates, which are impossible to solve under the coordination of the Executive Branch, have lent some vigor to the Legislative Branch and given it more importance in the public debate. For example, the issues of education, health and environment, treated in this compilation, are themes of growing importance amongst voters and public opinion – and even within the Executive Branch, the key agenda-setter, they are not consensual in many cases, a characteristic that adds value to the legislative debate.

When considering the structure of the Brazilian legislature from an internal and historical perspective, as well as its roles in the political system and its *raison-d'être*, this special issue allows the reader to raise a hypothesis that is just mentioned in the texts. If the criticism of the Legislative made by society appears as a practically omnipresent characteristic of democracies, the Brazilian case demonstrates that this criticism have generated structural/organizational responses to political/behavioral issues. That is, the legislative augments its size, its bureaucratic structure - which are often created and managed by the House administrative body –that increase or replace roles that could or should be performed by the parliamentarians themselves in the traditional representation contexts (partisan and electoral activities). As examples present in this volume are the communication and approximation activities between parliamentarians and citizens, to which the House expends a considerable managerial and financial effort.

In this sense, autonomy of the legislature for policy-making and promotion of the interaction between the political system and citizens are not exclusive goals in complex and diverse contemporary societies such as Brazil. The contact with society and the engagement of the citizens with the Parliament may be irreversible, not only due to the efforts exerted by the legislative bureaucracy to open channels for interaction, as shown by Barros et al. and Ferri & Rodrigues, but much more due to the social demand itself for transparency and accountability. Thus, the dimensions presented by Polsby, despite their relevance, must exist combined.

How the political actors – representatives and citizens – will deal with these new configurations and institutional possibilities in Brazil is a subject for more research and reflection on the part of those interested in the improvement of democratic regimes and legislatures.

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