Building State Capacity and Executive Governance: the case of center of government framework[1]

Pedro Cavalcante, PhD
Institute of Applied Economics Research

Ricardo Karam, PhD
Institute of Applied Economics Research

Introduction

The paper's main goal is to analyze the framework of the center of government (CoG) in the Brazilian executive branch in order to explore how and why it has changed in the last two decades (1995-2014). In doing so, the inquiry helps to advance in understanding not only in how it has evolved, during the recent democratic period in Brazil, but also the possible reasons that can explain crucial changes in the center of government's framework and performance.

The center of government, in general terms, is the support structure for the highest level of the executive branch that is seen as the steering wheel of government, responsible for driving forward its priority objectives in a coherent way. Unlike line ministries and other agencies, CoG normally does not delivery services nor focus on a specific policy sector; rather, it carries out the coordination and monitoring functions for the entire government, playing an instrumental role in facilitating all government work. The role of the centre of government is closely linked to the role of the executive branch itself. This support structure is there to ensure that government decisions, subsequently, the positive results of any government and the implementation of its agenda depend on the CoG achieving this objective.

Governments, in general, are facing a set of critical policy challenges that include constant economic, political, social and technological changes in a more globalized and networked world, constrained by rising citizen expectations on improvements in delivery of public services, multidimensional problems and tight budgets. In that sense, the CoG exercises its main tasks (strategic management, monitoring and improving performance, coordinating policy, managing the politics of policies and communication) in order to ensure coherent responses to this complex scenario.

Strengthening the center of government framework and functions, then, maybe seen as a strategy to build state capacity, understood as a catalyst for desirable economic

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and social outcomes. In that sense, state capacity is as a source of government fortification, shaping the policymaking and its final impacts (Cingolani, Thomson e Crombrugghe, 2015).

Given its key role to understand how the executive governance functions and, consequently, its policy outputs, the interest among policymakers, practitioners, and scholars has grown. Even though its importance is universal, encompassing both parliamentary and presidential systems, there is still limited research and evidence regarding the work and the impact of CoGs, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

In Brazil, constituent aspects of the political-institutional environment, such as coalition presidentialism, federalism, multi-party system, highly decentralized policy implementation, new regulatory agencies and empowerment of internal and external control system, generate a centrifugal effect that challenges the president's capacity to coordinate his/her cabinet and to achieve a proper political articulation with key stakeholders inside and outside government. After 1988 Federal Constitution, social participation in the policymaking has become mandatory which is definitely an additional complicating factor to the executive governance, within a democratization process characterized by increasing social rights demands.

Considering the importance of CoG to the executive branch and the complexity of the Brazilian institutional environment, the paper explores the changes in its formal structure from 1995-2014, grounded both in the narrow and extended definitions of CoG. Subsequently, the inquiry analyzes the deliberated strategy of the center of government's framework growth pursuing policy inclusiveness and for legitimacy after the Labor Party's administration (2003-2014).

Addressing to this original subject, we strongly believe that the exploratory research may contribute to the understanding of the executive branch's performance in implementing its political and policy agenda and, hence, facing the need for optimize government legitimacy and democratic institutions, in continuous process of consolidation. The inquiry is an effort to explain how the executive governance, in a particular country such as Brazil, functions. In this sense, it provides theoretical and empirical-based insights to face the problem of legitimacy, which, after all, can act as a brake on the ability to govern effectively. The ability of the President to rebuild state capacity, in a worldwide scenario of skepticism, resistance and opposition, walks in parallel with the performance of its center of government.

Besides this brief introduction, the paper is organized in other three sections. Next, we discuss the current literature about center of government, internationally and in Brazil. The third section, the empirical analyzes are presented, beginning with the structure description and followed by the participatory policies. Lastly, the inquiry presents the final remarks and the further research agenda.

Center of Government: what is it and why to study it?

An increasingly prominent subject in political science and public administration fields is the center for government, also known as core executive, centre of government, presidential center, executive governance, among others.

The CoG comprises structural and functional definitions. In both cases it consists on a set of agencies and/or people that, by strategic coordination, work ensuring that the government performance as a whole follows the political directives of the president or prime ministers. Put simply, it seeks to achieve the major goals defined by the Chief Executive and his support base. Some metaphors, such as the engine, the central nervous system or the architect of government decision-making, attempt to synthesize the roles the Executive's highest authority and facilitator of the government functions. While the President or the Prime Minister has his agenda dominated by ordinary events and often daily crises, CoG roles regard keeping the government coherence.

This is not a new phenomenon of the contemporary States, since for more than a century governments have sought to delegate responsibility for coordinating and guiding the priority agenda in Anglo-Saxon, parliamentarian or presidential countries, as in American Latin nations (House of Commons Library, 2005; Relyea, 2008; Bonvecchi and Scartascini, 2011). Institutions that support chiefs of government and coordinate governmental policies refer back to the beginning of the last century in the United Kingdom with the Cabinet Office (1916) and in the United States with the Executive Office of the President (EOP), established by President Franklin Roosevelt in the late 1930s. The latter was created as Roosevelt's strategy to maintain full political control over his bureaucracy with direct access to key information (Neustadt, 1960). Years later, the framework began to be replicated by the Latin American nations (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a).

First, it is worth emphasizing the relevance of the issue to political science and public administration in the current context. The literature has advanced in highlighting center of government as a gear to effective governance. In other words, the activators of the valorization movement and, consequently, the increasing research on the subject can be summarized as follows:

> • Prevalence of transverse, multidimensional and uncertain problems (wicked problems);
>
> • Governments need to overcome the undesirable consequences of New Public Management (NPM) in terms of fragmentation and lack of coordination towards integrated and holistic management (*whole-of-government*);
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> • Increasing expectations for improvements in high quality delivery services to citizens, in the context of transparent government, strengthening of the State-society relationship, budget constraints and constant technological changes.

In general, it is observed that the subject, although not new in the structure of contemporary states, still lacks systematic and scientifically valid investigation in several fronts (Elgie, 2011; Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013b). According to Bonvecchi and Scartascini (2011) and Alessandro *et al.* (2013b), in Latin America, the paucity is even more noticeable in researches on topics related to CoG's structure and performance, especially when compared to the studies on the US presidency.

In Brazil, basic aspects of the political-institutional environment, such as coalition presidentialism, federalism, the fragmented multi-party system, the implementation of highly decentralized policies, the new regulatory agencies, and the empowerment of the internal and external control system generate a centrifugal effect that further challenges the President's ability to coordinate his cabinet and achieve proper policy articulation with key stakeholders inside and outside the government.

After the Federal Constitution of 1988, social participation in the formulation of policies became mandatory, which is an additional difficulty for executive governance, within a process of openness and democratization characterized by growing demands and scarce resources. The new obligations assumed by the state from the universalization of some social rights after 1988 led to the creation of new State structure, generating the need for greater intersectional coordination in order to deal with the policies, plans and programs proliferation that are not articulated and sometimes overlap.

As an additional barrier is the traditional form of departmental performance of the Brazilian State, highly specialized and absent of institutionalized spaces capable of promoting the effective alignment strategy of the public administration as a whole. Such limitations are also clashing with the cross-cutting nature of several of the problems afflicting contemporary society, as well as with new models of governance of public policies no longer entirely borne by hierarchical bureaucratic structures under exclusive public control, but implemented through networks of policies in which the central government combines its efforts with a set of other state-owned organizations and private actors, expanding the importance of structures capable of providing strategic direction and action unity.

Although these dilemmas put Brazil as a rather auspicious case for investigating the CoG framework and functioning, theoretical and empirically validated knowledge is an exception rather than the rule. From a substantive point of view, the main problem in this field is that the studies deal with CoG in a subsidiary way, usually focusing solely on the center's functions alone and without a concern to characterize it. So there is a long way to go in order to expand the understanding of nature, operation and possible results from the CdG's performance.

Center of Government's Approaches

Coexisting major currents have been studying the phenomenon. The first, based on political science, is concerned with understanding power relations within the so-called Core Executive (UK) and the Presidential Center (USA). The other approach, more influenced by public administration, analyzes how the center of government functions and what dimensions can be improved towards a better governance structure, within a more prescriptive and normative position.

The first approach is based on the seminal study of Rhodes and Dunleavy (1990), whose focus was the historical controversy over who actually had the power to ruel in the United Kingdom. The authors coined an expression that became a reference in the debates of center of government - *Core Executive* (CE). Despite the existence of a number of previous studies that attempted to deepen the understanding of the British government, the study proposed the new concept to reinforce its essentially functional constitutive dimension: "*all organizations and structures whose primary function is to bring together and integrate central government policies or ultimately arbitrate within the Executive branch the internal conflicts of the governmental machine* (Rhodes and Dunleavy 1990: 4)".

Subsequently, these authors explored some of their original insights and introduced new elements to the discussion. In addressing the fragmentation-coordination binomial in central government, Rhodes (1995) emphasized that not all political authority centers make decisions on the policymaking. *the Executive*, are part of the Core Executive, as are not all the organs that exercise coordinating functions are necessarily allocated in the structure close to the chief executive, in the case of departments such as treasury, foreign affairs and justice.

Three complementary though distinct phases could be identified in the Rhodes studies between 1990 and 2010, argues Elgie, since the different foci of analysis do not prevent a cumulative, consistent and synergistic advance of the reflections developed over two decades. Respectively, alternating in emphasis, we would find the contingent and transitory question of power resources, arising from internal and external variables and being used in successive and overlapping games; the hollowing out of the state and the fragmentary potential of this process; and the interpretative approach, in which the emphasis would shift from organizations to individuals, valuing personal views and considering the impact of idiosyncrasies on the configuration and reconfiguration of networks. Among the merits of the CE approach, Elgie points out, is the possibility of international comparative studies in which issues associated with the exercise of power could be combined with research into the structures, mechanisms and Relations with other actors, which would highlight their functional role in the management of public policies.

The studies by Walcott and Hult (1987), Hult (2003), Hult and Walcott (2011) and Cohen and Hult (2012) show that there is more knowledge about how presidents organize their staff (which in this case we can consider as an integral part of the CdG) than how these arrangements affect the decision-making process. These authors focused their analysis on the composition of the presidential team (analyzing the profile of the individuals that comprise it) and on the structure of the main organs of the presidency and how it increased in size over time. The main conclusions of these authors are that the performance of the chief executive, that is, his ability to govern, demands the challenge of the organization and internal governance that calls the CdG.

In short, the tradition of political science focuses on the study of power, emphasizing how the heads of the executive branch use these apparatuses to centralize policy formulation and exercise full control of the government. In the second strand, adopted by the international agencies and guiding the related technical cooperation, the emphasis would be on improving the performance of the government as a whole, by guaranteeing internal coherence, strategic direction and focus on results. The dialogue between them is still limited and the way they define and analyze the effects of the CdG is not very convergent. However, this is not necessarily a result of tension between the lines, but rather due to the embryonic character of this literature.

On the other hand, another current of the literature presents more instrumental concerns with descriptive-exploratory empirical analyzes and, especially, with prescriptive-normative emphasis aimed at increasing the cohesion and coherence of central and local governments. One important point involves a certain consensus in the literature that the configurations and functioning of Government Centers tend to have variations as a rule and not as an exception. This literature tends to use the term Center of Government or CdG.

Regarding the conceptualization of the phenomenon, the literature nowadays classifies CdGs based on structure and functions, also classified as narrow and expanded definition (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a). The first is based on the position of the organ in the structure of the Executive, that is, it is part of the Center of Government those institutions or units that directly and exclusively support the head of government and are usually located in the official structure of the Presidency or the Prime Minister. In turn, the functional or expanded perspective includes all executive institutions that carry out cross-cutting and government integration activities. In other words, besides the units located in the structure of the head of government, the CdG also incorporates bodies that act in coordination, monitoring, political articulation, among others (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a, OCDE, 2014, IADB, 2014).

The second definition predominates in the field of study, especially, to facilitate comparative analyzes, as well as more positive and less normative approaches of the phenomenon. Despite the diversity of conceptualizations, the units that make up the

center or center of government are not dedicated exclusively to the delivery of public services (IDB, 2014). They can exercise finalist assignments, however, they must also have a second role related to intersectional issues and coordination and monitoring functions. In this context, the ministry of finance or finance, for example, although it performs public service delivery roles, also acts in these aforementioned functions, and thus tends to be part of the Government Centers.

The functions of the Center of Government are heterogeneous among them, although, it is possible to observe certain convergence in the definition of the main functions exercised. Are they:

    i. Coordination of public policies (leadership and inter-ministerial coordination in strategic and cross-cutting themes);

    ii. Political coordination (policy management of public policies);

    iii. Strategic planning (translation of electoral platform into government programs);

    iv. Monitoring performance (monitoring of priorities and intervention for improvement);

    v. Communication (producing narrative consistent with government and responsiveness to the public).

The structuring of the Center of Government to perform the standard functions tends to be broadened, which does not necessarily mean that each unit acts exclusively and individually in a function. According to Peters et al. (2000), at the end of last century, the CdGs underwent processes of expansion in terms of size, functions and level of influence. These changes also, according to the authors, occurred in parallel to the constant politicization of the officials of the centers of government, that is to say, increase of the percentage of political indications. However, this argument is not consensual in the literature.

Finally, another dimension that affects the configuration and functioning of government centers, and hence the way the executive makes policymaking decisions, involves the management style of the President or Prime Minister (Pfiffner, 2005). The literature argues that three styles are predominant: competitive; Collegiate and; Hierarchical or formal (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a). It should be noted, however, that there is no better style among them. The CdG staff must be prepared to deal with possible routine contingencies. In practice, all styles have pros and cons and change according to the conditions that determine the information costs.

Therefore, in both approaches - Core Executive and Center of Government - conceptualization involves the functions, mainly, of coordination and integration of some organs and structures. However, the first is centered on analyzing the relationships of internal powers in the CdG and between it and the rest of the govern, while the latter is concerned with and understanding of how these functions are effectively operationalized.

In spite of a relative consensus on the reasons that make the study of the subject important in the present day, another evident observation is the absence of theoretical dialogue, mainly between the currents of center of the executive and center of government, as well as methodological and analytical convergences between the works. Although the starting diagnosis from the instrumental perspective presents similarities with the Core Executive paradigm, sharing some assumptions and assumptions, there is disconnection when examining the priorities and methodological options for a research agenda.

Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning another theoretical side of which American political science has been focusing on the last decade. Presidential studies, especially the institutional presidency that commonly explores the consequences of institutional processes, transaction costs and control, have also focused on residual decision rights, limited rationality and monitoring of government actions and policies, and how the Executive chief coordinates this process.

The Brazilian Literature

In spite of the growing interest in the subject, including Latin America, generally, the center of government studies in Brazil is under developed, as well as in the region as a whole. Moreover, the literature is characterized by the diversity of approaches and issues that, although correlated, are not well linked. This variety is also found regarding the methodological strategies that, to a large extent, predominate qualitative and descriptive-exploratory analyzes and fewer explanatory-causal studies. It also worth to mention that the paucity of the quantitative approach is, mostly, due to the difficulty of accessing the information and data of the Presidency.

Considering the functional perspective of the CoG, the only role that has effectively investigated in the recent decades is related to political coordination, especially with the focus on Executive and Legislative relationship (Amorim Neto, 2004; Figueiredo and Limongi, 2006).

If, on the one hand, these studies deal with an important aspect of the government's political coordination, few works are aimed at understanding how coordination works within the Executive, let alone mention the CoG as an important structure in the process. The hegemonic approach is restricted to the analysis of the

relationship between the powers based on the assumption of uniqueness of the Executive, as well as the prioritization of the procedures of the projects in the congressional arena. The approach, therefore, ignores two crucial dimensions: i) the process of coordination and negotiation within the executive, which is notoriously fraught with ambiguities and conflicts of interest; ii) the relationship with civil society within the scope of the government center that also demands strategies for the articulation of preferences among these actors.

Among the efforts to analyze political coordination in addition to the congressional action, some papers bring interesting contributions, even though in many cases they do not mention the phenomenon of center of government explicitly, such as the article by Batista (2013) that seeks to map under what conditions the head of the executive, regarding the production of legislative initiatives, delegates to the ministers or centralizes the decision-making process in the presidency. Lameirão (2015) analyzes the structures and competencies of the Presidency of the Republic, with emphasis on the Civil House, during the governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to understand the functioning of governmental political coordination.

The study by Vieira (2014) addresses the centralization of ministries in the structure of the Presidency, assuming that in situations of political heterogeneity of the executive support coalition, that is, a probable scenario of more conflicts between presidents and ministers, the greater the tendency to be the chances of centralization of public bodies in the Presidency of the Republic. In an effort to portray how the Center of Government is structured in Brazil, Rennó (2013) shows that the configuration includes several institutions, multiple advisory councils on sector policies, secretariats that perform the typical functions of CdG (strategic planning, communications, political support, etc.), secretariats that focus on specific or cross-cutting issues and secretariats that interact with civil society organizations (human rights, gender, racial equality, among others).

Santos (2006), focusing on the Civil House, analyzes the roles of government coordination and monitoring of government action, as well as the historical evolution of the organization of the Presidency of the Republic. Silva (2015) focuses on the role of the Civil House, organization and functioning during two terms of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). With emphasis on coordination and monitoring of government policies and actions, the work seeks to respond because the Civil House prioritizes the monitoring and control of some policies. In the sphere of political coordination with civil society, Santos and Gugliano (2014) analyze the effectiveness of the Economic and Social Development Council (CDES), created in 2003, at the beginning of the Lula administration, as the main strategy for dialogue with strategic social sectors.

Probably the most specific analysis on the functioning of the center of government in the federal Executive is the study of Francisco Gaetani (2011) that

addresses the variations in the mandates of Cardoso and Lula. In 2014, the IDB published some considerations on the experience of the state of Pernambuco related to the strengthening of the CdG, begun in 2007. The case of Minas Gerais was also the object of evaluations of some recent works, such as those of Coelho (2013) and Braga et al. (2013). As in Pernambuco, efforts for strategic alignment and focus on results and concrete deliveries were the most promising initiatives detected, leaving as legacy organizational models more committed to structural changes in public administration, seeking to replace procedural culture by focusing on results.

Center of Government in Brazil - changes and participatory policy

In this section, the paper is dedicated to fill the literature gap, contributing to the understanding of the changes in the CoG patterns, based on its structural evolution and its determinants. For this, the section, first, focuses on analyzing the center of government's changes and; then, on the pursuing of legitimacy through participatory policies.

The CoG changes

How has the Brazilian federal CoG evolved during the recent democratic period? As already mentioned in the previous section, center of government can be classified in two ways: the narrow and the extended perspectives (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a). The first, also called structural refers to those units that are part of the presidency structure or the prime minister's office and work directly and exclusively to support the head of government. On the other hand, the second, also known as the functional definition, is more comprehensive in the extent that includes units outside the presidency structure, nonetheless also perform typical center of government's functions such as coordination, monitoring, political articulation, among others (Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013a, OECD, 2014, IADB, 2014).

The most appropriated way to analyze CoG's evolution is based on this first definition, since the other center of government units outside the presidency are the ministries of planning and finance. So, table 1 below details the CoG composition's changes in Brazil, divided by presidential terms, types of CoG's ministries and totals.

Table 1 – Center of Government Structures (1995-2014)

	Coordination	Advisory	Delivery Units	Center of Government (Total)	Cabinet (Total)	Councils*
Cardoso I	5	3	0	8	29	3
Cardoso II	8	1	1	10	27	3
Da Silva I	9	1	4	14	35	8
Da Silva II	9	1	5	15	37	8
Rouseff	9	1	6	16	39	9

* Besides the councils, it also includes units without minister's status (Chief of Staff and Special Advisory) in the Presidency structure.

Source: Brazilian Presidency (www.planalto.gov.br).

It is possible to observe an increasing process of new units' creation within the the center of government. On one hand, during Cardoso's first administration, the CoG consisted of eleven units, however, with eight ministries and three councils. Since then, this structure has significantly changed quantitative and the differences of the units profile.

In the Cardoso second term, there was a strengthening of the coordination dimension in comparison to the types of units, as well as the introduction of a specific secretariat for policy delivery - urban development. However, the main changes in the center of government occurred after the presidential turnover, i.e., the winning elections of the Workers' Party (PT) and the consequent governments of Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rouseff (2011-2014).

Unlike the previous administrations, PT constituted a typical left-wing party, but both the elections coalition and its expanded versions during the three terms analyzed allied parties varies also from the center to more rightist on the ideological spectrum. This turnover in the presidency marked for the the first time a leftist party rulling the federal government in Brazil. Logically, this fact has brought several changes in the configuration of the center of government.

The first and most notorious was the increase of ministries in the CoG that doubled between Cardoso's first term (11) and the average of the Labor's governments (23). The same occured regarding the ministerial cabinet composition, because the number of ministers in the Cardoso government was 29 and 27 and went up to thirty seven (37) with Da Silva and thirty-nine (39) during Rouseff administration.

Although there has been an increase of units over time, its proportion is well below that identified in the presidency structure. An explanation for the two phenomena is related to the characteristic of the Executive coalition. While, on the one hand,

Cardoso administration was composed of five parties with high ideological convergence of center-right. On the other hand, the PT's supporting coalition, as already mentioned, was not only quantitatively bigger, on average, around ten (10) parties, but also quite heterogeneous in ideological terms. Figure 1 below depicts the ideological distance between the most extreme parties of the five government coalitions. The values are the difference from the two most extreme party's ideology indexes, measured by the Brazilian Legislative Surveys that examines the traditional left-right scale based on preferences concerning the fundamental economic model. Supposedly the indexes vary from 0 to 10, however, in practice; they have been ranged from 1.1 to 8.89 in the last decades (Zucco, 2014).

. Indeed, the number of ministerial portfolios grew to accommodate this diversification of their leaders and, above all, the expansion of the core of government and its functions was seen as crucial to improving coordination and control over the ministries.

Figure 1 – The Presidential Coalitions' Ideology Distance
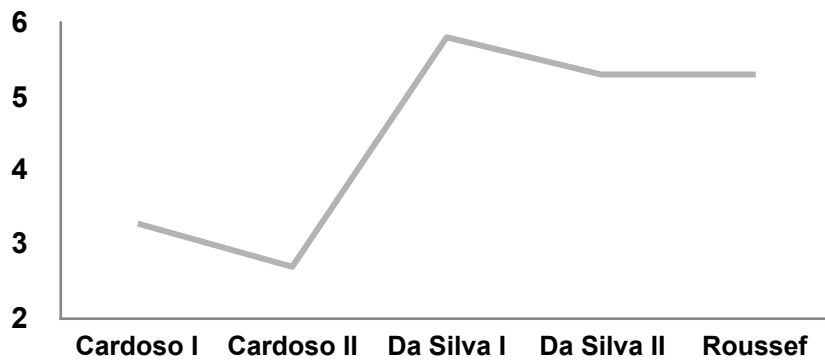
Source: Adapted from Zucco (2014).

While continuing on the structural perspective, the number of delivery units also increased. In the first Da Silva's government, these ministries were related to the leftist party agenda (gender, race and human rights) and another small Secretary of Fisheries. During Roussef administration, the formers remained in the CoG framework, however, she also stablised other three delivery units considered economically strategic (ports, civil aviation and micro enterprises and small businesses). In sum, the left-wing agenda pattern was preserved, nevertheless, more room in the center of government were created to other prioritized issues within a more centralized framework than the previous administrations.

Regarding the CoG's instrumental definition as a unit that does not dedicate itself exclusively to the delivery of public services (IDB, 2014), but also to develop the crucial functions discussed in the earlier section (policy and politics coordination, strategic planning, performance management and communication), the Brazilian center

of government includes two other key units: the Ministries of Finance and of Planning/ Budget. While the former historically holds the coordination of the tax collection and the treasury management, i.e., revenues and expenditures. The latter is also responsible for coordinating, planning, and monitoring the major government structuring systems, such as budgeting information, human resource management, procurement and logistics, among others.

In addition, during the Roussef government, two strategic and prioritized agendas for the Executive branch had their decision locus outside the presidency structure, which does not mean that they were outside of the center of government. In practice, the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) and the Brazil without Misery (BSM) condensed a comprehensive set of infrastructure and social policies, respectively, which follow the whole-of-government approach. These programs coordination during Roussef administration was in charge of the Ministries of Planning (PAC) and of Social Development, in this case, supposedly it would not be part of the CoG within the two approaches analyzed.

The role of the Brazilian CdG in the policy legitimacy and effectiveness

The exhaustion of the authoritarian regime installed after the military coup of 1964 is a decisive milestone in the promulgation of the new Federal Constitutional in 1988, not by chance hailed as the Citizen Constitution. With it, there is intense expectation in society about the reversal of social inequalities deepened by the authoritarian modernization in the previous historical period. The exercise of political rights is perceived as a determinant for a fairer development project and participation is expanded not only by voting, but also by the entrance of new social actors, who are not so new. More than the reconstruction of democracy, the goal was the achievement of full and not just formal citizenship. The argument involved the rupture with the previous pattern of exclusionary development. To do so, the only possible way was grounded on the implementation of innovative and redistributive public policies, under the leadership of a sovereign and essentially democratic State.

But the consolidation of the various advances depended on facing the economic crisis aggravated by the "lost decade" in the 1980s. The country haven't universalized rights and consolidated its democracy in a moment of economic growth and stability, and the welfare state arrived when the ideals of cohesion and solidarity lose space around the world amid pro-market reforms. In the case of Brazil, constitutive aspects of the political-institutional environment, such as the coalition presidentialism, policy decentralization, recent creation of regulatory agencies, privatizations and the empowerment of internal and external control units represented elements with high centrifugal potential, both for challenging the political articulation and for fragmenting the administrative performance of the federal government. With the enactment of the

1988 Constitution, there is now a legal provision for social participation in the policymaking, an additional ingredient in the set of challenges for the Brazilian State, within the framework of a redemocratization process marked by the amplification of demands for social rights.

It is relatively consensual among scholars on the social participation that Brazil has been experiencing a gradual and continuous process of institutional improvement, especially in channels and instruments of government-society interaction as regards to the policy design and implementation. According to Avritzer (2009), it is a set of essential changes in the ways of exchange between the State and society. The process of constitution, dissemination and operation of participatory institutions in the deliberation of policies is emphasized, taking the form of sectoral councils, conferences, audiences, budgeting, among others.

Although this evolution can be considered a natural since the rules established since 1988, which is why some authors refer to the existence of a *system of participation* supported by specific regulations, organizations and dynamics, it is undeniable that the period between 2003 and 2015 has witnessed a intense expansion of this process.

The social foundations of the center-left coalition that has ascended to power since President Da Silva's first election have exerted strong pressure to influence the governmental agenda and decision-making process over a wide range of policies. In fact, it is possible to note that the center of the Executive branch is structured to accommodate the new dynamics that have begun to guide the relationship between the federal government and civil society. Such measures, which include (re)creating specific structures, strengthening existing ones, and delegating responsibilities to senior government officials to act as interlocutors with social movements and organized social groups, make possible the expressive growth of instances of participation, discussion spaces and dialogue events that mark the launch of major federal policies, plans and programs.

In the social area, Karam (2013) reports that the first major initiative launched by the new elected government - the Fome Zero program - was made possible by the creation of units in the presidency structure - the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security (MESA) and the National Council of Food Security (Consea) -, which were the protagonists in the debate with society and coordination of intra and intergovernmental actions. In the same way, Fonseca (2004) emphasizes the decisive role played by the Chief of Staff (Casa Civil), also in the CoG, in articulation with other powers and levels of government for the design and launch of the most successful social action of the Da Silva government: the Bolsa Família Program (PBF). In the specific case of the PBF, the Casa Civil action substantiated in two coordinating dimensions: the social policy chamber (formulation) and the inter-ministerial working group (operationalization).

The degree of priority given to the dialogue with civil society since Da Silva first term assumes strategic features when it was established that the personal office of the presidency, occupied by a long-time crony - Gilberto Carvalho - performs additional functions of articulation and negotiation with different social sectors, demonstrating that not only the formal/regimental aspects define the composition and performance of the government core. Another indication that legitimacy is a central concern of management is the creation of the Economic and Social Development Council, an area whose primary mission is to move forward in comprehensive arrangement between organized sectors of capital and labor amid mistrust of the productive sector in relation to to the commitment of the new government to the canons of economic stability. The strengthening of the federative articulation, mainly with the municipalities, is another important axis of action of the central government.

But it is the General Secretariat of the presidency (Secretaria Geral) that plays the most relevant and regimentally robust role in relation to social actors and the strengthening of social participation mechanisms. Although the literature already describes a wide range of traditional instruments of consultation and deliberation, such as councils, conferences, commissions, consultations and public hearings, other forms of participation emerge and/or gain space through the active participation of the CdG between 2003 and 2010, in the case of ombudsmen, negotiating tables, forums and participatory national plans.

Data from Ipea (Brazil, 2010: 568) show that, although conferences have become standard practice since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, 80 conferences were promoted by the federal government until 2009, 68% of which were carried out from 2003 onwards. The IPEA document also confirms the inclusion of new themes in the period, as well as the resumption of previously interrupted ones. This movement, which provides more adequate channels of representation of interests in traditional institutions, plays an important role in the structuring of public policy areas, strengthening sectoral councils, establishing guidelines and, in some situations, stimulating the creation of national Policies, in the case of the Single Social Assistance System (Brazil, 2010).

With regard to the institutionalization and functioning of national public policy boards, the strengthening trend can also be observed in the period. According to the criteria adopted by the General Secretariat in its systematization and monitoring efforts, there were 31 active national councils in 2010, with more than 2,7 thousand members or alternate directors. From a longer perspective, considering the performance of the General Secretariat between 2003 and 2014 (already counting the five-year term of Dilma Rousseff's Presidency), it is possible to confirm that the general trend of progress was maintained in the light of the 103 conferences totaled in the period, as well as 420 active ombudsmen within the federal government.

More recent report (Brazil, 2016) confirms the positive outputs of this governmental strategy led by a ministry of the CoG. As shown in the figure 2 below, not only the number of national conferences has substantively grown during he PT's administrations, but also a variety of policy issues discussed in these conferences have deliberately been diversified. On one hand, specific policy themes in institutionalized issues started to have more attention, such as basic education. On the other, new policy issues have been included in the governmental agenda, for instance, the case of youth policy.

Figure 2 – National Conferences and New Policy Issues (1988-2014)
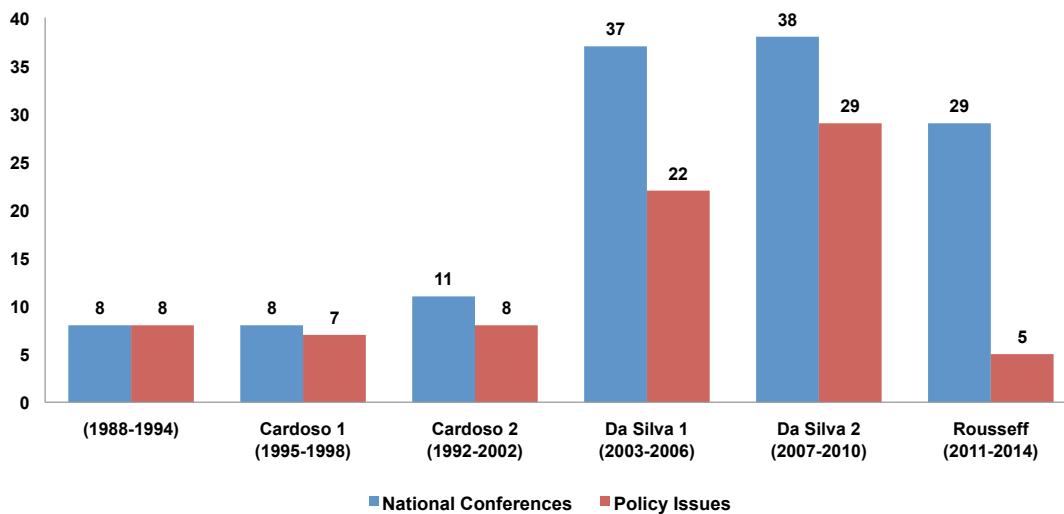
Clearly, the investment in social participation as an essential strategy, led by the center of government, prove how different is the PT's pattern from the previous administration. On average, the amount of national conference has increased three times compared to the other presidents terms and the number conference discussing new or specific policy issues has grown substantively as well.

However, despite the fact that the CdG can play a decisive role in strengthening the mechanisms and instruments for participation and consultation, which are fundamental to legitimizing the process of designing and implementing public policies, it is necessary to emphasize that such action is necessary, but not enough. The supposed consensus obtained from the democratizing directives of the Charter of 1988, responsible for the expansion of social participation verified since then, indicated a break in mid-2014. In proposing the establishment of a National Social Participation Policy (PNPS) and a National Social Participation System (SNPS), with the objectives of strengthening, articulating and integrating spaces for dialogue between the State and society, the government of President Dilma Rousseff in may 2014 was strongly opposed and pressured by conservative sectors with support of the business media and part of the National Congress.

Although the electoral dispute played a catalytic role in the controversial discussion that followed in a environment politically conflictive by the climate of the coming ballot in the polls, it is impossible not to acknowledge the distrust of these sectors against mechanisms of direct democracy. As Alencar and Ribeiro (2014) attest, although the proposed texts represent nothing more than the consolidation of practices already in force for more than 20 years, the opposing arguments emphasized the rhetoric of *subversion of the constitutional* order, under which saw an attempt of *total and absolute scrapping of the Congress*. Although these authors identify a positive facet in the ensuing controversy, because it gives repercussion and visibility to the issue, it is worryingly clear that for large sectors of national political and social life the combination of representative system with mechanisms of direct participation remains a taboo, wasting the opportunity for synergies stemming from the merging of democratic practices of different shades.

Final Remarks

The paper's main goal was to analyze the framework and changes of the center of government (CoG) in the Brazilian Executive branch. The inquiry explored the CoG framework and how it has been modified in the last two decades (1995-2014). In doing so, it helped to advance in understanding not only in how it has evolved, during the recent democratic period in Brazil, but also the possible reasons that can explain crucial changes in the center of government's framework and its strategy of social participation engagement in the policymaking.

The focus on strengthening the center of government as the primary efforts to structure the Executive governance seems to be a worldwide tendency. In the Brazilian case, building this component of the state capacity may be understood as a strategy to deal with a complex and challenging political-institutional environment that not only shapes the policymaking and its outcomes, but also sets up several barriers to coordinate the government agenda.

The inquiry demonstrated that the total number of ministries increased, especially during the Labor Party's administrations (2003-2014). This phenomenon can be interpreted by two ways. First, it was a consequence and, of course, a deliberated decision to deal with the high level of ideological heterogeneity in the president coalitions. In other words, the president expanded and divided the cabinet with other parties representative in Congress, however, he or she centralize in the CoG strategic ministries to control the delegated units. Secondly, the leftist feature of the Labor Party prioritize in the federal government some policy issues historically neglected, such as gender and human rights.

Regarding the social engagement policy, the research demonstrated that the center of government's framework growth pursuing for policy inclusiveness and

legitimacy. Statistics show a steady evolution of practices and instruments of participation between 1988 and 2015, reflected in increasing numbers of groups and segments involved in decision-making processes, as well as qualitative improvement of the institutional environment that regulates this process. This tendency, which has been accentuated since 2003, has led to the belief that it is an irreversible process whose deepening would be natural and inexorable. However, the controversy generated by the government initiative to propose a National Social Participation Policy (PNPS) and a National System of Social Participation (SNPS), in 2014, showed that such consensus would not be as broad or deep as imagined.

For these reasons, the future research agenda on the Brazilian CoG should not deviate from the objective of improving the overall performance of the central Executive. In an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, new challenges arise every day, combining/amplifying traditional problems of the domestic agenda with destabilizing factors of international scale, demanding from the governments a pattern of cohesive and integrated action, a prime factor for guaranteeing legitimacy and strengthening of democratic institutions still in the process of consolidation.

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