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Brazil: The Road to Democracy

ELISA P. REIS AND FERNANDO LIMA NETO

BOOKS REVIEWED

Ranulfo Melo, Carlos and Alcántara Sáez, Manuel, eds (2007). *A Democracia Brasileira: Balanço e Perspectivas para o Século 21* [Brazilian Democracy: Performance and Prospects for the 21st Century]. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.

Boschi, Renato and Diniz, Eli (2007). *A Difícil Rota do Desenvolvimento* [The Difficult Path to Development]. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.

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• Participation • Economic policy • Market changes • Development strategies • Post-neoliberal stage

In the last 25 years, the democratic issue has dominated the agenda of Brazilian political science. After two decades of military rule and past frustrations in democratizing the political order, the successes and failures of the ongoing democratic experience have mobilized the attention of scholars and policy-oriented analysts. Many of the publications on the subject have not had a long lasting impact, being too centered on transient contextual factors. This is not the case for the books that we examine here. We look at two publications that contribute from distinctive angles to a clearer understanding of diverse aspects of Brazilian politics. The first publication is the volume edited by Ranulfo Melo and Alcántara Sáez, which provides a broad overview of the performance of democracy in the country. The interplay among the powers, the party system, electoral behavior, and new forms of participation are some of the many dimensions under scrutiny. The second book under consideration is an appraisal of the new terms of interaction between the State and market in the process of consolidation. Renato Boschi and Eli Diniz focus on the new model under construction, one that takes the country away from the classic state-led growth model inaugurated in the 1930s, as well as from the neoliberal one that later became the “cooking” recipe advertised for the developing world.

Brazilian Democracy: Performance and Prospects for the 21st Century, the book edited by Ranulfo Melo and Alcántara Sáez, focuses on several issues, and the conclusions the authors reach may occasionally even be in disagreement with each other. Yet, its unity is somehow granted for two reasons. First, one big question permeates every single chapter: has democracy made long lasting progress in Brazil since the end of the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985? Second, throughout the almost five hundred pages there seems to be a consensus that, despite the many remaining problems and the huge challenges that lie ahead, there is room for some optimism. Here and there, one author may suggest a gloomy prospect, but, all in all, if a general conclusion can be reached, it is that democracy now has deeper roots than it has ever had. But this is not the only optimistic conclusion one may draw from reading the book. While the discussion is centered on one particular country's experience, even people not particularly interested in Latin American politics will probably be attracted by the theoretical analytical instruments used, due to the generality of the questions debated and their usefulness for comparative analysis.

The first part of the book is dedicated to historical analyses that prepare the ground for the two subsequent ones. The opening chapter by Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida uses macro lenses to look at both the basic processes of the state-building enterprise and the institutional choices that set the parameters of the federation and that somehow persist to this day. In her view, despite the rhetoric about a pendulum-like movement between centralization and decentralization, what one actually observes is the continuous preponderance of centralism, a trend that was not reversed even in the heyday of neoliberalism. Thus, she concludes that the democratization process did advance a new model of cooperation among the Union, the states, and municipalities, without, however, moving toward the decentralized ideal that inspired the drafting of the 1988 Constitution.

Chapter 2 by Fabiano Santos focuses on the period that preceded the 1964 military coup, starting from an analysis of the 1946 Constitution, which regulated the democratic game. He then looks at four aspects: the relationships between the executive and legislative powers; the organization of Congress; party behavior; and political career patterns. The analysis of the period that preceded the twenty-one years of military dictatorship sheds light on the roots of today's democratic institutions.

In Chapter 3, André Marengo examines the process of transition itself from a dictatorial to a democratic regime. The author challenges the mainstream literature on democratic transitions, claiming that the slow, controlled process of redemocratization experienced by Brazil took its toll to the extent that it delayed the chances of any of the democratic parties becoming the executive party, and contributed to the creation of conditions for the political resurgence of right-wing authoritarian forces.

The book's second and largest part focuses on the characteristics of the present political system, so as to evaluate its democratic performance. It opens with a chapter that examines the institutional apparatus confronting the recurring discussion about the relationship between political and social democracy. The authors (Fátima Anastasia, Mônica Mata Machado de Castro, and Felipe Nunes) take 1988, the year of the enactment of the new Constitution, as the departure point of their analysis. First, they look at the economic, social, and demographic changes that have taken place in the last two decades. Next, they look at the institutional

changes that have occurred in the same period, reshaping the decision-making process. This lays the groundwork for an assessment of the changes that have altered the role of the State and its patterns of interaction with both civil society and the market as the neoliberal agenda has been implemented. Once these three analytical steps have been taken, the authors then proceed to evaluate to what extent political and social democracy have experienced convergence and divergence. Their conclusions point to a restrained optimism. They conclude that progress has been made on two fronts, the political and the social. Yet, they argue, given the resilient social inequality that characterizes Brazilian society, much remains to be done to enable the lower echelons to take full advantage of citizenship rights. And they see no way of speeding up the process, except by proceeding to political engineering so as to reduce the deficit of representation and accountability. Political reforms remain the order of the day if democracy is to make further progress.

The next chapter, by Argelina Cheibub Figueiredo and Fernando Limongi, also sets out to assess institutional performance, but in order to do so they compare the present day democratic regime with its predecessor, which lasted from 1946 to 1964. Comparing the two periods, they argue, provides a rare opportunity to evaluate the impact of institutional variables upon governmental performance and legislative behavior. By looking at specific variations between the constitutional rules that prevailed then and now, they are able to make insightful inferences, bringing into question long established beliefs about the effective role of the legislative branch and its relation to the executive, as well as about the nature of the party system. Thus, for example, their data analysis allows them to conclude that party allegiance is much more relevant than is usually claimed by specialists, and the personal characteristics of the executive leader much less relevant than party agreements and coalitions. In their conclusions, they point out that the usual claim that Brazilian political institutions are inadequate to further democratic rule is misleading. There are no institutional obstacles to executive action, they conclude, and the difficulties the executive power finds in governing are the normal consequence of the agreements and disagreements that characterize party behavior in any democracy.

In a chapter entitled "The Structure and Functioning of the Deputy Chamber," Magna Inácio concludes, through a detailed empirical analysis, that to understand the functioning of the House one has to look primarily at party dynamics. Another aspect examined in the second part of the book is the 1988 Constitution and its alleged negative consequences for efficiency and governability. Marcus Melo argues that, notwithstanding frequent accusations, constitutional variables are not responsible for blocking political reforms in Brazil.

The issue of the party system is taken up by Ranulfo Melo, who goes a long way back to examine how party life has evolved before looking at the present profile. His conclusion is that significant progress has been made, but there is still plenty of room to introduce changes that would enable the party system to enhance its performance so as to strengthen democratic politics. In this second section of the book, dedicated to examining the current dimensions of the democratic issue in Brazil, the reader also has the opportunity to learn about the present role of the State in the process of economic development in the chapter by Boschi. As in the book by Boschi and Diniz to be discussed below, Boschi demonstrates that, even in the heyday of neoliberalism, the Brazilian state never really

gave up its historical role as the key actor in the economic arena. Even though the developmental ideology is no longer hegemonic, the state tradition has left deep marks in Brazilian economic life, and authority criteria are important in market dynamics.

The remaining two chapters in Part 2 look not at state actors but rather at societal forces. The chapter by Wendy Hunter and Timothy Power examines what brought about President Lula's electoral success in 2006 when, despite the political scandals that plagued his first term, he was re-elected with a big margin over his opponent. Looking at his previous electoral performance, the authors seek to identify who the new voters were that he gained when re-elected. In particular, they look for explanations for the non-impact of the big corruption scandals that extended to Lula's party. The explanations they find through an examination of the empirical data run along common sense assumptions: lack of information and economic deprivation, particularly among lower class voters in the poor northeastern areas, on the one hand, and the government use of targeted social policies, on the other, seem to be behind the insensitivity to the political scandals involving Lula's party. The popularity of the president is credited to several factors: his clear detachment from his party, his incredible personal history, the personalism typical of presidential systems, his successful cash transfer program, and his measures to increase lower salaries. In conclusion, they contend that social policy plays an important role in Brazil's electoral disputes, with poorer voters opting for candidates that offer them immediate socioeconomic benefits.

Voting is also the concern of Rachel Meneghello, who focuses on the electoral system as such and its relationships with the party system. After briefly summarizing the dynamics of Brazil's electoral system from 1945 to 1985, she sets about examining electoral behavior from 1985 onward. She concludes that, in general, voting in the country reflects the cleavages between the city and the countryside, and the redefinitions such cleavages have experienced. She states that presidential elections particularly express the changes experienced, changes that have in fact contributed to a new voting profile, as the 2006 contest makes clear. She shows that while the levels of education and family income remain the major variables affecting Brazilians' electoral choices, Lula's first term performance in social policy contributed to an alteration of the spatial and social distribution of voting preferences nationwide.

The last chapter of Part 2, by Leonardo Avritzer, discusses the vitalization of civil society that has taken place under democratization. He comments on the associational expansion that has taken place since the 1980s, stressing that local councils and the participatory budget are of most relevance to such organizations in the democratic process. Looking at areas such as health, the protection of children and youths, social assistance, and urban problems, he concludes that, while the performance of civil society associations varies significantly along regional lines and in terms of issue areas, the general balance is quite positive in that the gap between participation and representation is becoming smaller. However, if it is true that civil associations have contributed to strengthening democracy in Brazil's recent history, it is also true that it is mainly at the local level that such a contribution has taken place, while no significant change has been observed at the federal level.

In Part 3, there are two chapters that discuss the prospects for the Brazilian democratization experience and present aspects of general applicability as well.

Lucio Renno's chapter focuses on the incentives for and obstacles to political reforms. Taking as a theoretical presupposition that reforms are problematic multidimensional processes, he looks at the attempts at institutional reform that have taken place in Brazil since the mid-1990s. His empirical analysis is used to elaborate a model that makes evident that, in democratic regimes, the emergence of a consensus about the need for reform is not very likely, not to mention a consensus about what kind of change. The chapter by Fabio Wanderley Reis tackles the dilemmas that democracy faces in the country based upon the perpetual tensions between its' social and political dimensions. Regarding institutionalization as the crucial task of democratization, the author proceeds to an evaluation of the successes attained and the risks that still lie ahead in institutionalizing a solid democratic order. The tone is one of reserved optimism, which, in fact, pervades the whole volume. The group of political scientists that contribute to this volume on the performance and prospects for democracy in Brazil agree that significant progress has been made; yet they also seem to agree that the tasks that lie ahead are many, and not easy ones.

Cautious optimism is also the tone of the book by Boschi and Diniz, *The Difficult Path to Development*, on the changing relationships between the State and the market. To grasp the nature of the new ties between politics and economics, they look at the development strategies Brazil has adopted in recent decades. They observe that the controversy between economic growth and financial stability which mobilized the country is giving way here, and indeed everywhere, to a new understanding of the equation. This ideological change signals a new stage in the trajectory of world capitalism. Adopting a political economy perspective, the authors also seek to identify ways to make market processes more compatible with social democracy. Claiming that new forms of articulation between the State and market resources are emerging everywhere, they have foreseen clearly what the global economic crisis is now making much more visible. In the particular case of Brazil, the authors see the turn away from state capitalism, on the one side, and from neoliberalism, on the other, as a positive indication that the country will be able not only to achieve sustained economic growth but also to make political democracy more convergent with social justice.

The main task of this new agenda is to enforce state developmentalist policies committed to promoting both social equality and economic stability. If there is no single road to the development of capitalist societies, if historical contingencies constrain political processes and their consequences, there is no reason to argue that state intervention and the free market are either/or principles in the conduct of political and economic matters. The decline of neoliberal policies around the world strengthens the links between globalization and national states, reinforcing the thesis that a capable and effective state ensures the growth of market economies in a globalized context.

The course of this "post-neoliberal" stage is being defined daily through the various processes and choices that take place all over the world, where social actors make use of specific measures in the light of their past trajectories to control the meaning and direction of change. Singularities apart, a common purpose exists, namely the effort to reconsider the economic development issue in a global context. Boschi and Diniz provide a detailed historical analysis of the relationships between the two main agents of this change in Brazil: the government and the business sector. The authors look at the interaction between the

State and the market, first in the 1990s, during the construction of the neoliberal consensus, and then in the ongoing period, when a post-neoliberal agenda for capitalist development is emerging. The governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–2002) and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003 to the present) display significant transformations in the way the State and interest groups interact. Boschi and Diniz examine with surgical precision the sequence of discrete events that characterize each one of these governments. Looking at the industrial business sector as a political actor, their book analyzes changes in its associations, forms of interest representation, and collective action.

Under authoritarian governments, when the model employed was the national developmental model, the executive sphere was the main forum for exchanges between the State and interest groups. In the mid-1980s, however, the gravitational center for the initiatives of organized interests in Brazil began to move from the executive to the legislative sphere, reflecting progress in the redemocratization process. In the course of the 1990s, the congressional arena gained preeminence. Indeed, Congress became the prime locus for the legitimate exercise of pressure and influence by private groups. Nevertheless, during the same decade, the technocratic style of policy-making which characterized the Collor and Cardoso terms led to the dismantling of formal channels of articulation between the State and the private sector. In practice this meant the end of the corporate bodies that had been active within the state bureaucracy since the 1930s. The weakening of the business sector inside the executive structure and the disempowerment of trade unions were clear signs of the growing distance between the State and society that characterized the period of neoliberal reforms. It was as if the market was now expected to discard its previous political webs inside government. While in the past the market benefited from protection mechanisms, now business interests have to play competitive politics.

The first Cardoso term (1994–8) was famous for the successful implementation of an economic stability plan (Plano Real) that tamed hyperinflation. It was during this period that a consensus was built among Brazilian business elites in favor of neoliberalism. The major business associations, such as the Federation of São Paulo State Industries (FIESP) and the National Confederation of Industry (CNI), strongly backed the process of production restructuring, favoring indiscriminate free trade, privatization of state-owned firms, the elimination of export subsidies, and growing internationalization of the economy. Previously, during the 1980s, financial instability and economic stagnation had inhibited development debates. Instead, efforts converged without success around initiatives to curb inflation and achieve fiscal balance. Economic stability gave Cardoso enough political capital to ensure his re-election in 1998 with massive support from the business sector. Governability was firmly tied to reaching financial stability, on the one hand, and to rigid fiscal control of economic policy, on the other.

However, if economic stability succeeded in freeing the government administration from domestic problems, it was not sufficient to improve the country's economic performance in the international arena. Controlling inflation was not enough to overcome the obstacles to resuming economic growth rates comparable with those of the military dictatorship period. Under these circumstances, early in his second mandate, major cracks appeared in Cardoso's coalition of support, especially in the business sector. Lack of growth also affected the doctrinal consensus around neoliberalism, which was increasingly blamed for

the lack of vitality in domestic industry so exposed to the excesses of uncontrolled external competition.

Given the dissatisfaction with the results of neoliberal reforms implemented in the Cardoso government, debates on the resumption of economic growth gained momentum. Lula's candidacy in the 2002 elections catalyzed this general dissatisfaction by means of a project of political reconciliation between stability and economic growth. From the outset, Lula's administration adopted a dual position: without giving up some of the neoliberal targets, such as fiscal adjustment and tight monetary control, it opted for explicit policies aimed at fostering industrial growth and reducing social inequality.

The performance of the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) is a recurring case Boschi and Diniz use to show differences between the Cardoso and Lula governments. Whereas under Cardoso the BNDES was a key agency for implementing privatizations, under Lula the BNDES had its role redefined as an agency for promoting the private sector and the development of national industry. Thus already during the first years of the Lula administration we observe that the business sector is moving toward a new coalition framework: instead of being limited to the economic sphere, now the business sector is also in tune with the changed political context which gives it a chance to recover its leading role in the national productive sector. The dialogue is expanding beyond the National Congress and reaching the private sector through the creation of a large number of councils, committees, and agencies to promote industrial development, such as the National Council for Industrial Development (CNDI) and the Brazilian Industrial Development Agency (ABI).

Development promotion under the Lula government is reminiscent of the guidelines set for the state-led growth of the 1980s, yet without state paternalism and in line with the ideological assertion of the primacy of the market over politics. Another key difference is the commitment to promote equality. According to Boschi and Diniz, the relative success of the Lula government, attested to by improvements in Brazil's economic and social indicators, undermines the false polarization between market fundamentalism and state developmentalism that, until recently, fueled the national debate. Development strategies in Lula's era suggest that a new perception of the economic and political functions of the State is emerging. This new conception breaks with old dichotomies and articulates a new political coalition, something like a "post-Washington Consensus." The authors believe that a new stage in the development of capitalism in Brazil is emerging, in which the consensus about the preservation of economic stability no longer requires the abandonment of the struggle to reduce inequality, the affirmation of national autonomy in foreign policy, and the commitment to national economic growth in a globalized scenario.

In our view, the two books we have selected to review provide a good illustration of the current agenda of Brazilian political scientists. The authors we have discussed maintain a close dialogue with the international literature and have produced well-balanced empirical and theoretical efforts, without giving up a deep commitment to furthering the democratic ideal. Loyal to the old Brazilian intellectual tradition, they seem to see social sciences in general, and political science in particular, as contributing to enlightenment regarding the country's political and moral choices. Nevertheless, unlike the traditional research programs prevailing

in the country, nowadays analysts tend to look at the political dilemmas confronting the country as part and parcel of democratic challenges that are global and not peculiar to developing countries. There is great awareness that new patterns of interaction between the State, market, and society are emerging everywhere, putting pressure on institutions, challenging conventional understandings, and suggesting new frameworks for analysis.

Biographical Notes

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