

## Introduction

Virtually all legislative theory rests upon the assumption that politicians are driven by the desire to win repeated reelection. Indeed, because it is so often taken at face value, John Carey recently noted that the reelection assumption “has reached near axiomatic status” (1994, 127) among political scientists. It is important to understand that this assumption implies not only that legislators direct their energies toward ensuring repeated reelection, but that they usually succeed in their efforts. All else equal, we expect little legislative turnover in systems where the reelection assumption holds.

At first glance, Brazil appears to be a case that confirms this assumption’s validity. As in the United States, Brazilian incumbents do not require national party leaders’ approval to run for reelection. Moreover, Brazil’s electoral laws actually *encourage* incumbency. Incumbents do not have to battle to win renomination, because a “birthright candidate” (*candidato nato*) law automatically places their names on the next election’s ballot (until 2002). Given this institutional backdrop as well as the idea’s intuitive plausibility, several scholars have employed the reelection assumption to explain important aspects of Brazilian – and comparative – politics (e.g., Ames 1987, 1995a; Geddes 1994).<sup>1</sup>

Yet upon closer examination Brazil turns out to be a particularly perplexing case. Although its electoral laws encourage incumbency, in contrast to the United States (where turnover in the House is less than 10 percent with each election) turnover in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has consistently exceeded 50 percent.<sup>2</sup> A turnover rate this high appears to contradict the fundamental expectation of the reelection assumption – low turnover – and

<sup>1</sup> Other comparativists who have employed the reelection assumption include Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987); Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1993); and Epstein et al. (1997).

<sup>2</sup> In democratic elections. About two-third run with each election, and of those, about two-third win. I explain why *both* the rates of running and winning are both important to the reelection assumption in Chapter 2.

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as a result such an assumption may not make much sense when applied to Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, in this book I argue that while Brazilian deputies can run for reelection and are even institutionally encouraged to do so, they confound political scientists' expectations and do not aim to build careers within the Chamber of Deputies, nor are they primarily interested in rising through the ranks of a national party. Instead, incumbent deputies exhibit a particular form of "progressive" political ambition: following a relatively short stint in the Chamber, they seek to continue their career outside the Chamber, particularly in state and/or municipal politics.

Scholars have employed the reelection assumption to explain the development of legislative institutions, the process of policy choice, and of course legislators' efforts to advance their own careers. Indeed, because scholars have applied the reelection assumption to Brazil, we already have a set of predictions about legislative behavior in that country that can be tested against competing hypotheses. For example, the reelection assumption generates the prediction that legislators seek access to "pork-barrel" goods in order to secure reelection. In contrast, a different motivational assumption might suggest that deputies engage in pork-barreling precisely to *leave* the legislature, in order to improve their chances of winning an extralegislative position.

The validity and thus utility of a methodologically individualist assumption depends on both its descriptive and predictive accuracy. The purpose of this book is not only to show that the reelection assumption has been incorrectly applied to Brazil – and by implication potentially elsewhere – but also to provide rational choice approaches in comparative politics with more solid theoretical support. By showing how a more nuanced understanding of political ambition can enhance our ability to explain electoral and policy processes and institutional dynamics in Brazil, this book should also encourage research on the consequences of different political career structures in comparative politics.<sup>4</sup>

Doing so requires a more sophisticated understanding of political ambition than we currently possess. Most countries do not restrict reelection, yet scholars have yet to explore the consequences of political ambition in a country like Brazil, where reelection is allowed or even encouraged but may

<sup>3</sup> Ames (e.g., 2001, 141–2) agrees that Brazilian deputies do not seek long-term legislative careers, but his analysis of pork-barreling, for example, (see Ames 1995a or 2001, 93–7) explores deputies' efforts to win reelection. See my analysis in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>4</sup> Schlesinger (1966) pioneered research into the sources and consequences of political ambition. Black (1972) and Rohde (1979) formalized the approach in terms of utility maximization. All three focused on political offices in the United States. Likewise, Schlesinger (1991) demonstrated how the theory of ambition can be used to explain the nature of political parties in the United States.

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not be legislators' primary goal.<sup>5</sup> As a result, political scientists are poorly equipped to provide theoretical insight about legislators' decisions, legislative politics and process, and executive-legislative relations in many political systems. Careful exploration of the structure and consequences of political ambition in comparative perspective will begin to fill this gap and encourage further development of rational-choice analyses in political science.

## THE PROJECT: LINKING AMBITION AND FEDERALISM IN BRAZIL

Ambition shapes political behavior, but politicians do not operate in an institutional vacuum. Political institutions structure actors' behavior by shaping their self-perception, relative power, and strategies. To understand why the reelection assumption inadequately describes and explains Brazilian politics (and why it might also not apply elsewhere), I focus not only on the "micro" politics of legislators' ambitions but also take into account how Brazil's institutions shape the "political opportunity structure" (Schelsinger 1966, 11).<sup>6</sup> This requires a careful look at the institutions of federalism, which shape political ambition and strengthen state-based interests in Brazilian national politics.

Scholars have yet to fully focus on how federalism affects legislative behavior in Brazil and thus how federalism affects national-level political dynamics. In Brazil, federalism "matters" because its historical development and institutional configuration shape politicians' career strategies. These constraints and incentives in turn affect how politicians act while serving in the national legislature. In short, federalism shapes political ambition, and the consequences of ambition drive broader political processes.<sup>7</sup>

We can begin to understand the link between federalism and ambition in Brazil by considering the most basic tenet of ambition theory, that ambitious politicians pay close attention to the interests of those who may affect their career prospects. In this way, ambitious legislators may ignore their current vote bases in an attempt to appease potential future supporters (Schlesinger 1966, 5). This need to appeal to future supporters helps explain the link between federalism, ambition, and congressional politics in Brazil.

For example, we do not typically think that *state*-based pressures particularly motivate U.S. House members. Institutional contrasts between Brazil

<sup>5</sup> Carey's (1996) important work explored the consequences of limiting or prohibiting reelection.

<sup>6</sup> My research thus falls under the rubric of "rational choice institutionalism," with a strong dose of "historical institutionalism." See Tsebelis (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Numerous scholars, especially Victor Nunes Leal (1975), have shown how state-level actors influenced local politics (and vice versa), but few scholars have emphasized how state-based politics can also influence national politics. The best treatment of this subject is Abrucio (1998).

and the United States shed some light on why this is the case. In the United States, Representatives are seated in one of 435 single-member districts. Apportioning districts generates real-world political battles, but at base House districts spring from mapmakers' imaginations: they have no institutional existence of their own and do not conform to the boundaries of any other government institution (except in states with only one representative). Consequently, House members represent, institutionally, nothing more and nothing less than their district. Simplifying for the sake of argument, this means that they represent the interests that exist and organize pressure, or come to organize pressure, within their district.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, members of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies are nominated and elected in at-large multimember constituencies that conform to state boundaries. This injects the nature of representation in the Chamber with an institutional dynamic found more commonly in upper chambers of federal systems, where senators are often elected in districts that conform to state or provincial boundaries. Furthermore, unlike in the United States, in Brazil state-level party leaders play an important role in determining the nominations for federal deputy. Thus, while many if not most successful Brazilian politicians depend on local municipal-level networks to start a political career, a politician who seeks election to the Chamber of Deputies enters a state-level game, and a politician who wins election as deputy does not simply represent an institutionally disembodied U.S.-style district. He or she represents a state. Thus, all deputies represent the interests that exist and organize pressure within their states.

State-based political pressures affect deputies' behavior in three ways. First, many deputies actively seek political positions in state government – before, during, and after serving in the Chamber. Given this desire, while serving as legislators deputies act to promote their own careers by currying favor with state-government officials and by cultivating political clienteles who will help them *leave* the Chamber for a state-level position. In this way, as I will explain in the chapters that follow, political ambition tends to favor state-based political interests and actors in Congress.

Second, although Brazil's use of an open-list proportional representation electoral system infuses legislative elections with a high degree of individualism (Ames 1995a, 2001), a focus on the electoral system draws attention away from the important ways in which state-level factors drive congressional elections. For example, the gubernatorial race influences the congressional campaign in each state to a much greater extent than the presidential race. All politics is not local or individualized in Brazil, nor is it highly

<sup>8</sup> Especially in the pre-Civil War era, state-level pressure did influence U.S. House members (and Senators, of course) to a greater degree. Among other factors, the decline of state-level pressure was a function of the decline of state party machines and of their control over nomination, and the advent of the Australian ballot and of party primaries.

nationalized: deputies' electoral success depends on their insertion into and connections with *state-level* political networks.

Third, in important ways federalism constructs the nature of legislative representation in Brazil. Whatever the direction of their career ambitions, and whatever the nature of their vote bases, deputies face intense pressure to “represent” their state in the Chamber after they win election. For most incumbents (i.e., except those who can rely entirely on “votes of opinion”), state-level actors and dynamics affect their future careers. Incumbent governors in particular possess tremendous powers to affect the contours of politics within their state (Abrucio 1998). Governors may also dominate many of the state's municipalities, which in turn means that “municipal” pressures on deputies may derive from state-level pressures. The importance of state governors over incumbent federal deputies also means that the president often deals directly with governors, not deputies, when doling out politically valuable pork-barrel resources in exchange for support within the legislature. Given the importance of state politics, which I will describe in more detail, deputies willingly respond to pressures from their state's government while they are in the Chamber. This holds even for opposition-party deputies, who fear being painted as “against” the people of their state. Thus, state-level politics plays a key – if sometimes unseen – role in national politics.

#### ON THE PATH – DEPENDENCE OF FEDERALISM IN BRAZILIAN POLITICS

The claim that federalism shapes the nature of political ambition and that this consequently shapes Brazilian national politics is essentially an argument for the path-dependent consequences of Brazilian federalism. While its social and political origins lie in Brazil's colonial (pre-1822) and imperial (1822–89) periods, federalism truly emerged in Brazil in 1889, after the military overthrew a hereditary monarchy. The republican constitution promulgated in 1891 copied a good deal from the U.S. constitution and codified a presidential, federal system of government. The subsequent period has come to be known as the “Politics of the Governors,” because state governors for all intents and purposes dictated the flow of national politics as well as controlled politics within their states.

This period still casts a shadow over Brazilian politics. Despite two lengthy authoritarian and centralizing periods (the second of which only ended in 1985), on many measures Brazil remains one of the most highly decentralized federations in the world. Its degree of political and fiscal decentralization exceeds all other Latin American countries, and rivals or exceeds better-known federal systems such as the United States, Canada, and Germany. Since the “Politics of the Governors” period, territorial and largely nonprogrammatic cleavages have driven Brazilian politics (when competition was allowed, of course). By territorial cleavages I mean that states (e.g., as opposed to regions)

comprise the most salient arenas of political competition. Politicians compete to lead state-level parties, and compete for the votes of their state's residents. Politicians could of course compete for votes according to many other nonspatial political cleavages, such as race, religion, ideology, language, or class, but throughout Brazilian history they have not for the most part. Despite tremendous socioeconomic transformations and a number of regime changes over the last century, state-based politics still greatly influences Brazilian national politics.

Although scholars have paid significant attention to certain continuities in Brazilian history since the end of the "Politics of the Governors" era in 1930 (e.g., the strength of the national executive branch and the tenacity of the local economic and political elite) we know relatively little about how federalism may have limited centralization during either Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo* regime (1930–45) or the 1964–85 military regime.<sup>9</sup> Still, scholars of contemporary Brazil increasingly recognize that federalism merits serious theoretical and empirical investigation. The most important recent works are Frances Hagopian's *Traditional Politics and Regime Change in Brazil* (1996), which explores the interaction between the centralizing direction of the 1964–85 military regime and the state-based organization of Brazil's traditional political elite, and Fernando Abrucio's *Os Barões da Federação* (The Barons of the Federation) (1998), which explains the power of state governors to influence contemporary Brazilian national politics. Other analysts, including Abranches (1993), Ames (2001), Camargo (1993), Lima Jr. (1997), Mainwaring (1999), Montero (2000), Selcher (1998), and Souza (1994, 1996) have also brought federalism to the fore. The main purpose of this book is to build on this research by linking the recognized importance of Brazilian federalism to an understanding of how ambition shapes Brazilian congressional politics and executive-legislative relations. Indeed, I claim that the link between ambition and federalism is a necessary ingredient to explaining important aspects of policy and process in Brazil.

#### ON THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING AMBITION IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Brazil teaches us that close attention to the structure and consequences of political careers can provide substantial analytical leverage into a wealth of questions of interest to political scientists – leverage that existing theories of legislative behavior cannot provide. In this way, my findings point toward a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of political ambition in comparative politics. Presently, the reelection assumption serves as the key element in nearly all legislative theory. It has been used to explain important

<sup>9</sup> On these historical periods, see Medeiros (1986), Abrucio (1998) Chapter 2, Lima Jr. (1983), Camargo (1993), Love (1993), Campello de Souza (1994), and especially Pandolfi (1999).

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aspects of democratic politics in the United States and elsewhere, including the evolution of legislative norms and institutions (e.g., Polsby 1968, Epstein et al. 1997); why legislators' take certain policy positions on any number of policy issues (e.g., Arnold 1990); how legislators decide to divvy up "pork-barrel" goods (e.g., Weingast 1979; Bickers and Stein 1994; Ames 1995b); and the emergence of legislative parties (e.g., Schlesinger 1991; Rohde 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993).

A broader approach to the study of political ambition will reveal variations in legislator goals, which in turn will allow for construction of better-specified comparative rational-choice institutionalist theories on issues such as those mentioned previously. For example, in many countries where reelection is allowed but where turnover is relatively high, including several other Latin American systems (see e.g., Morgenstern 2002), we still lack a way to understand the *consequences* of different political career structures. By placing the Brazilian experience in comparative perspective, this book contributes to these important lines of research.

Furthermore, this book highlights the potentially critical role that subnational actors and institutions play in shaping legislators' career strategies, and thus in shaping national politics. In recent years comparativists have increasingly focused on the impact of federalism on party systems (e.g., Ordeshook 1996; Jones 1997); fiscal resource distribution (e.g., Rodden 1998, Oates 1999); economic growth (e.g., Weingast 1995); economic reform programs (e.g., Gibson 1997); decentralization and intergovernmental relations (e.g., Willis et al. 1998; Solnick 1999; Treisman 1999); and democratic transitions and consolidation broadly considered (Stepan 1997).

When scholars talk about how federalism affects national policy, they typically focus on how subnational governments articulate their interests in the *upper* chamber of the legislature. This book develops a new way to understand the impact of federalism, by showing how members of a *lower* chamber act to reinforce federalism. By showing how federalism affects the career goals, electoral strategies, and legislative behavior of Brazilian federal deputies, this book expands our understanding of the way in which federalism may affect both policy and process in comparative perspective.

Finally, my exploration of the consequences of political ambition in contemporary Brazil can also inform emerging work on the evolution of the incentive structure in the contemporary U.S. House. As I will argue, the structure of political careers in contemporary Brazil resembles in important ways the political career ladder in the early nineteenth-century United States, before the emergence of the "textbook" post-World War II House (Price 1971, 1975, 1977; Kernell n.d.(a), n.d.(b), 1977). For scholars of the U.S. Congress, the question is now "how did we get here, from there?" Given that Brazil is also "there" in a way, exploring the Brazilian case has the potential to teach us something quite interesting about the dynamics of the early U.S. Congress.



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In sum, by positing and testing alternative hypotheses regarding the consequences of political ambition, this book not only provides significant insight into the Brazilian case but also contributes to the development of legislative theory in comparative politics and broadens our understanding of how federalism can influence national politics in cross-national perspective.

#### OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

This book is organized into three sections. Section 1 focuses on the first way in which subnational politics affects national politics in Brazil – through deputies' own career ambitions. In Chapter 1 I present a general framework for analyzing the structure of political careers. Then I build upon my basic hypothesis that political ambition in Brazil focuses on the state and local level. Using data from Brazilian legislative elections from 1945–98,<sup>10</sup> in Chapter 2 I present evidence that Brazilian politicians rarely build political careers within the Chamber of Deputies. In addition, I explain the absence of seniority norms in the Chamber as both a cause and a consequence of the low demand for a long-term career in the Chamber – the opposite of the argument that scholars have made for the presence of seniority norms in the U.S. House.

In chapters 3 and 4 I provide additional empirical evidence that deputies do not desire a career in the Chamber and that their ambitions are primarily directed at subnational government. Chapter 3 explores what I call “Congressional Hot Seats,” wherein a large number of just-elected deputies take leaves of absence or resign their congressional seats in order to take a position *outside* the Chamber. Similarly, Chapter 4 shows that following a relatively brief stint in Congress, Brazilian deputies typically continue their political careers in state and/or municipal government. In sum, the chapters in Section 1 provide theoretical and empirical support for an alternative to the reelection assumption that highlights the importance of subnational politics for members of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.

Section 2 brings in the second way in which subnational politics drives national politics in Brazil, adding an institutional layer to the logic of political ambition in Section 1. Chapter 5 demonstrates how federalism shapes politicians' electoral strategies, and how this consequently affects executive-legislative relations. I focus on a concept I call the “gubernatorial coattails effect.” In the United States, scholars have long known about the potential importance of presidential coattail effects, which can affect the distribution of seats in the legislature and thus affect the party system more generally (McCormick 1982). When an electorally powerful presidential candidate helps elect members of his party, his subsequent task of constructing a stable

<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 2 I explain why I include the period from 1964–85, when a military government controlled Brazilian politics.



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legislative coalition is made easier. In Chapter 5, I assess the dynamics of presidential elections in Brazil, and argue that presidential coattails are generally weak. As a result, the president cannot use his personal electoral popularity as a tool to influence Congress. In contrast, “gubernatorial coattails” are quite long – in each state. That is, the race for governor shapes congressional candidates’ campaigns. Consequently, gubernatorial coattails explain why state governors influence their state’s congressional delegation, and thus how federalism directly impacts executive-legislative relations in Brazil.

Sections 1 and 2 help explain how federalism affects both the nature of political ambition and electoral politics in Brazil. The two components of this framework – federalism and ambition – also generate numerous hypotheses about legislative behavior and processes. In Section 3, I demonstrate the utility of this framework by exploring the implications of federalism and ambition for the real-world dynamics of congressional politics in Brazil.

Chapter 6 challenges the findings of scholars who claim that Brazilian deputies seek access to “pork-barrel” goods in order to win reelection. My argument about the nature of deputies’ ambitions suggests that deputies’ pork-barreling efforts, through submission of amendments to the yearly budget, ought to provide a highly *uncertain* political return even to those deputies interested in maintaining their seats. I test the relationship between pork and reelection success and find no significant relationship.

Chapter 7 addresses the question that Chapter 6 leaves unanswered: “If access to budgetary pork does not help win reelection, why do Brazilian deputies seek pork?” I argue that deputies seek to strengthen subnational interests (particularly state interests) in the budget process in an attempt to appease those who will influence their future careers and to lay the ground for a run for subnational political office. That is, in contrast to what the reelection assumption predicts, deputies do not seek pork in an attempt to *stay* in Congress; rather, they seek pork to continue their political careers *outside* Congress.

In Chapter 8 I explain the process of fiscal decentralization in Brazil that occurred from 1975 through 1994. I argue that while pressures from states and municipalities are necessary to explain fiscal decentralization, without adding in deputies’ careerist motives any explanation would be insufficient. In Chapter 9 I explore the changes in intergovernmental relations under President Cardoso, 1995–2002. Although some have interpreted Cardoso’s economic reforms as the beginning of a new period of recentralization, I argue that although the central government did bring much-needed coordination to Brazil’s federation, Cardoso’s reforms did not alter the president’s reliance on state governors to drum up legislative support or the state-based nature of elections and political representation in Brazil. This continuity has important implications for the ability of future presidents to maintain or build upon Cardoso’s reforms. The conclusion summarizes my findings and discusses their contribution to the literature.

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SECTION I