



# REVISTA DEBATES

## Corruption, political culture and negative social capital in Brazil

*Corrupção, cultura política e capital social negativo no Brasil*

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### Abstract

One of the problems in strengthening Brazilian democracy has been the endurance of continued corruption on the part of state officials. The result has been the institutionalization of a political culture, which shows a growing alienation, and apathy of citizens regarding politics. This behavior has its origins in citizens' perception that the state and public authorities cannot be trusted producing an inertial democracy with low stocks of social capital. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between corruption practices by state authorities and the structuring of a defective political culture in Brazil. The working hypothesis is that serious cases of institutionalized corruption are possible due to invisible social ties created among public authorities, producing social capital of a negative nature, which constraints the effective advancements in Brazilian democracy.

### Keywords

Corruption; Brazil; Political Culture; Negative Social Capital.

### Resumo

Um dos problemas no fortalecimento da democracia brasileira é a continuada corrupção de gestores públicos e políticos. O resultado se manifesta na institucionalização de uma cultura política que mostra uma crescente alienação e apatia dos cidadãos em relação à política. Esse comportamento tem sua origem na percepção dos cidadãos de que as autoridades públicas não podem ser confiadas, produzindo uma democracia inercial com baixos níveis de capital social. O objetivo deste trabalho é examinar a relação entre as práticas de corrupção pelas autoridades eleitas com a estruturação de uma cultura política defeituosa no Brasil. A hipótese de trabalho é de que casos graves de corrupção institucionalizada são possíveis em virtude dos laços sociais invisíveis criados entre as autoridades públicas. Neste sentido, o capital social, de natureza negativa constringe avanços substantivos na democracia brasileira.

### Palavras-chave

Corrupção; Brasil; Cultura Política; Capital Social Negativo.

## Introduction

When Brazilian politics is analyzed, the word corruption invariably emerges as a relevant factor. According to the Corruption Index of International Transparency, Brazil ranked from 2012 to 2014 in the 69th position out of 175 countries (TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL, 2014). It is not surprising then that corruption and politics directly correlate, influencing government performance and consequently eroding democratic principles and aggravating the chronic problems of poverty and social inequality. Research (LATINOBARÓMETRO, 2005-2010) has consistently shown that Brazilians believe that governments are unresponsive to their needs and they frequently hold politics and politicians in low esteem. Thus, distrust in government and politicians are prominent. This situation has placed the theme of unveiling citizen's attitudes and behavior related to public official's practice of corruption as a priority in the agenda of political scientists. Corruption can foster a "culture of distrust" that diminishes confidence in political institutions, encourages harsher evaluations of the performance of the political system and makes citizens less trusting of civil servants (BLAIS, GIDENGIL and KILIBARDA, 2014). This context leads me to formulate the following research question: is institutional corruption a permanent component of Brazilian political culture, and how it affects the attitudes and behavior of citizens towards democracy and politics?

Specifically, I analyze citizen's political perceptions of corruption, their trust in political institutions and the satisfaction with democracy performance. The objective is to assess if these perceptions influence the type of social capital that materializes. I believe that citizen's perception of corruption, in countries such as Brazil, might explain democratic backwardness or the institutionalization of an inertial democracy, which presents an asymmetry between formal democratic advancements and stagnation in political development and the delay in strengthening an assertive political culture (DALTON and WELZEL, 2015). I postulate that historical-structural factors produced an indifferent political culture in Brazil permitting the institutionalization of harmful factors that promote the practice of corruption and produce negative social capital among state authorities.

This paper utilizes descriptive statistics from surveys collected by several sources such as *Corrupciometro* (INEA, 2005), and *Latino Barometer* in 2009. I intend to contribute to the literature by examining the relationship between citizen's perception of corruption and satisfaction or not with democratic performance.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 analyzes how corruption is defined. Section 2 discusses the theoretical bases of political culture and its relation to

democratic construction process. Section 3 contextualizes corruption to the Brazilian case, highlighting the structural-historical legacies that discouraged citizen's political involvement producing a passive, hybrid and indifferent political culture. Section 4 presents the conclusions.

### **Defining corruption**

In the last decades, the word “disaffected democracies” both in new and old democracies has gained visibility (PHARR and PUTNAM, 2000). In these types of democracies trust in government and political institutions has eroded. Citizens increasingly have come to believe that governments are unresponsive to their needs generating hostile and disaffected evaluations of government officials' political performance. This perception has fostered a culture of distrust and generated a democratic malaise, aggravated by the perception of government-institutionalized corruption.

The damaging effects of corruption on the development of an effective democracy are widely known. Most studies about corruption point out the severe impact in the implementation of public policy (ROSE-ACKERMAN, 1999; TANZI and DAVOODI, 1998), and from the point of view of democracy, the decreasing citizens' trust in public institutions, politicians and political parties (VAN DER MEER, 2010; SCHWARZ-BLUM, 2006), and ultimately their support for democracy (SELIGSON, 2002; MOISÉS, 2010).

The World Bank has defined corruption in relation “to public officials' abuse for private benefits”. For the Transparency Institute, corruption refers to the “bad use of power directed to obtain private benefits”. Despite eventual supposed benefits of corruption on improving bureaucratic efficiency, presently the practice of corruption is widely believed to be inimical to an environment facilitating self-sustaining growth and development (DREHER and HERZFELD, 2008).

From a functional point of view, corruption affect social, political and economic relations of a given society, acting as a substitute for political participation. Political corruption is a secret practice of a national network, which has specific visibilities. The secrecy allows the arbitrarily deviation of the monopoly of legitimate violence to the use of power, for private benefits. In this sense, sometimes corruption is considered as something normal because it guarantees a free game, necessary for societies' good functioning.

From an ethical point of view, political elites create their own ethics code based on their ideology that promotes “loyalty” and “solidarity” among them, in other words, negative social capital. This type of social capital undermines the

prospects of the institutionalization of a substantive democracy at the same speed that formal democratic advances have experienced. Thus, the corollaries of political corruption materialize in: (1) benefits for the network members; (2) a growing distance between the elites and citizens; (3) the emergence of personal scape goats that assume individually the culpability of acts of corruption that refer to the whole system, and (4) a pact of silence shared by everyone and necessary for the system's preservation.

Thus, from the perspective of social capital, both in the positive and negative dimension the effects are relevant and deserve scrutiny. From the negative point of view, it promotes institutionalized corruption, providing the basis for opportunistic behavior/corruption to occur, while from a positive dimension, trust and reciprocity are central elements for combating the "free rider" problem (WARREN, 2001).

The ethics of corruption include illegal actions that are in the threshold of being legal and legitimate for they have apparently consistent justifications. These activities refer to public price bidding, constructions, and social and industrial projects and, the use of public resources to achieve majorities in Congress in the name of governability.

When corruption is analyzed from an economic point of view, the premise has been that political and generalized trust are achieved when high levels of development are present because these factors diminish corruption practices (USLANER, 2004). Thus, political systems that have a consolidated democracy have mechanisms that hold politicians accountable for corrupt behavior, mainly through a set of checks and balances among branches of government, law enforcement, and voting in elections. In this sense, accountability brings positive benefits for the control of corruption. In the case of Brazil, however, political liberalization according to some authors (WEYLAND, 1998; WHITEHEAD, 2000) has not reduced significantly corruption; instead, new forms of corruption have sprung up.

Some studies argue that corruption is highly damaging for democracy and has negative effects on the economy and diminishes citizens support for democracy (BOOTH and SELIGSON, 2009; CARLIN *et al.*, 2013), it generates clientelistic relationships (NINO, 1992) and affects society's social morale (ESTÉVEZ, 2005). For Nye (1990, p.963) "corruption is the behavior of public officials that deviates from normal responsibilities based upon private reasons (family and friends) of a financial nature or upgrading of social status". According to Suárez, Jabbaz e Isuani (2001) corruption presupposes the existence of a network of actors and organizations that operate at different levels, establishing transactional processes that imply some type of transgressor attitude and a pact of silence, in other words, the phenomenon of

corruption becomes naturalized as a “normal way of doing things” in society, institutions and organizations.

Furthermore, Elster (1989), Thompson (1995) e Rose-Ackerman (2001) have developed studies that consider corruption an element that breaks the connection between collective action and citizen’s power, in order to influence collective decisions through the debate and the vote, central elements of democracy. Corruption creates, therefore, deficiencies in public services, not only in the form of tax evasion but by the substitution of public activities for those actions that involve material gains derived from this practice. In this perspective, corruption undermines the constitution of a culture of democracy because people tend to develop attitudes of distrust of public officials and core political institutions. Citizens have become aware that corruption withdraws resources from economic growth and policies to improve people’s quality of life through the abuse of public power to obtain personal gains (NYE, 1967).

Power abuses and, consequently of citizen’s trust to obtain private rewards, materializes in varied forms beyond the monetary dimension. Corruption can materialize in practices of nepotism, clientelism, favoring specific groups and individuals in cases of conflict of interests, frauds and, above all, the “state’s capture”. This latter point refers to an action that occurs when interest groups in a political system literally assume the control of the state, privileging private interests in detriment of public interest.

Corruption can also appear in the designing of public policies and involve the violation of second order routines (non-written guidelines that determine how politicians should take just, egalitarian and impartial decisions). It can also take place in a bureaucratic context, which involves political policies implementation, and refers to the violation of first order norms (written rules and laws that are the result of the failure of the decision process of politicians) (WARREN, 2004).

At the level of society, corruption emerges and becomes naturalized as a result of institutionalized political corruption. Both in the political context and in the societal case, corruption materializes in the form of extortion, frauds, nepotism and favoring practices that occur within organizations that are independent of government control. In sum, corruption is a complex concept that incorporates a varied set of conducts that occur in different contexts within the state and society. What is common in the practice of corruption is the distortion or violation of established norms and rules socially accepted that guide public officials and citizen’s behavior.

However, Warren (2004) when comparing to other political pathologies such as political violence, authoritarianism, political stagnation and oppression, considers political corruption to be the lesser evil. This perception probably explains why democratic theory has dedicated reduced attention to this theme. In fact some authors have suggested that some corruption is inherent to democracy and have a positive impact because reduces the transaction costs, bureaucratic inefficiencies and, in a general sense, “makes things happen” (HUNTINGTON, 1968, p. 59; LEYS, 1965). I disagree of those assessments, especially when the developing economies are studied. The main question in these countries is not whether corruption is a lesser evil compared with other pathologies, but what social investment can be achieved with public resources withdrawn through corruption.

Whether corruption is evaluated in a positive or negative direction, I argue that the consequences are negative in the structuring of a democratic political culture in Brazil. The first evidence that I utilize in the next section is of a historical-cultural nature.

### **Political culture and democracy**

The central concept that guides this article is that the type of political culture that materializes in a society derives from citizen’s perception of corruption. How people view politics influence their insertion in political issues and their orientations and beliefs about politics and political institutions. The main reference of this approach is Almond and Verba (1963) *The civic culture*. In their survey study of five nations, which served as the basis of political culture analysis, they defined political culture as the process through which citizen’s political orientations and attitudes are structured. For them, the emergence of a new political culture permeated by political participation can manifest either as democratic or authoritarian regimes (ALMOND and VERBA, 1963). In this dichotomy, the democratic state offers the citizens the opportunity of making part of the decision making process, whereas in an authoritarian situation citizens are seen as mere “participant subjects”. In this sense, the democratic model requires more than the mere existence of formal institutions, because these same institutions are present in totalitarian regimes. The difference between a democratic and authoritarian regime is that the former requires a democratic political culture (ALMOND and VERBA, 1963). The authors point out that political culture establishes links with historical factors of a political system, which generate specific characteristics that influence attitudinal and behavioral political predispositions of citizens.

Almond and Verba elaborate, in this perspective, a classification of citizens' political orientations, dividing them, for analytical purposes, in three types: (a) cognitive; (b) affective and (c) evaluative. Besides the authors call attention to the fact that political self-esteem, that is a self-evaluation about the relevance that citizens believe they have in the scenario of politics, interferes in political attitudinal and behavioral predispositions: as this self-esteem increases, the more interested and will to participate in politics (ALMOND and VERBA, 1963). This premise points out to the role of subjective political efficacy, in which people manifest their perception about whether they consider worth getting involved in politics. Political efficacy refers to the sentiment that people have that their political representatives "listen" to their demands and are responsive to them, stimulating them to become active participants in the political process.

Directing this analysis to the Brazilian case, it can be noted that a relatively consolidated democratic regime in the poliarchic sense coexists with democratic instability and high levels of social inequality. The population faces material deficits, such as poverty, wage inequalities and wealth concentration, unemployment and serious gaps in health assistance, as well as the increasing rate of violence and insecurity. These problems signals that formal procedures, although necessities have not been sufficient to resolve citizens essential material problems, which, instead tend to worsen. In this scenario the distance between state and society creates a vicious cycle that provide the spaces for the emergence of corrupt political practices at all levels of society. This does not suggest that norms, laws and procedures are not relevant. Institutions are indispensable and central for a democratic system; however, it is imperative that a participant political culture also be present. In this way, it must be highlighted the need to understand how the practice of corruption undermines democratic principles. How to institutionalize a culture guided by republican principles in a society characterized by authoritarian enclaves and a historical legacy that tends to weaken the relationship between state and society, is one of the main challenges of Brazilian democratic construction.

### **Historical-structural roots of corruption in Brazil**

Most studies in Brazil point out the historical culture of corruption as being responsible for the recurrence of these practices. Although, other factors are also relevant to understand institutionalized corruption, I believe that in order to evaluate the reasons that produce corruption in Brazil is compelling to identify the historical legacies that contributed to generate a political culture that has naturalized this

practice. Some obvious mechanisms such as culture or legal traditions are likely to predict corruption directly in societies politically unstable, such as Brazil.

Brazilian historical formation, in terms of state and citizenship formation, created a gradual indifference and apathy of the population regarding politics in general. This process was identified by Carvalho (1996) as a process of institutionalization of a state-citizenship (*estadania*), which refers to the primacy of the state in the structuring civil society's social life, contrary to the society structuring the state as in the European experience.

The primacy of the state in society's organization, since the colonial period, was marked by a strong patrimonialistic public administration, transforming government organization in something "more of a good to be explored", rather than a functional structure oriented to benefit the public interest" (PAES DE PAULA, 2005, p. 106). This situation extended from the period of the Empire until the Old Republic (1889-1930).

For the historian José Murilo de Carvalho (1996) this period marked the advancement of the state in the direction of co-opting and regulating society, seeking to rationalize bureaucratize and establish secular social relations, underestimating popular manifestations. Therefore, the initiatives of the state to regulate social relations and establishing social control in this period circumscribed to military enlistment and civil registering. This regulation, according to Carvalho provided the formatting of a citizenship "from top to bottom" with the predominance of a political culture of the subject type, that is, a political system in which people interact, but those interactions do not produce political efficacy nor do they stimulate political participation. In this context, the emergence of a "negative citizenship" prospers. Through the initiative of the state, citizenship extended to citizens; however, this citizenship was oriented to increase the control of the life of the "new citizens".

In the 1930's, the concept of citizenship was associated to the incorporation of social and working rights conceded by Getúlio Vargas government. For Santos (1979), this established a Brazilian citizenship as a regulated citizenship, not based on political values, but rather in a system of occupational stratification, in other words, all the members of a community that are localized in any of the occupations recognized and defined in law (SANTOS, 1979, p. 75).

Insofar as political parties are concerned, they did not construct a national identification system, rather it became an elite *affair*. The state created, simultaneously, a regulated citizenship and political parties associated to the state more than to society. In this sense, the Vargas government transformed the



opposition party – União Democrática Nacional – in a liberal party, and the *coup d'état* of 1964, demonstrated the intention of affirming the primacy of the state over society, which strengthened the characteristics of an authoritarian and elitist political culture. This historical process, therefore, fostered the separation between the state and the citizen, identified by Motta (2007) as the “we – them” syndrome, where significant segments of society see their public representatives as belonging to another type of class.

These historical aspects of the relationship between state and society in the Brazilian political system generated a dynamic where political and social rights were “conceded” by the state, and not conquered by the citizens. The relationships between the people and the power holders throughout history shows a permanent subordination of citizens to the state excess of authoritarianism. These characteristics have produced among state officials a sense of impunity with practices of corruption in public administration, and a sense in society that nothing can be done about it. The consequence was the institutionalization of a state that is formally democratic, but socially stagnated, constraining citizen’s civic empowerment. Thus, citizenship evolution in Brazil follows a contrary direction than the one suggested by Marshall (1967), which postulates that citizenship construction based on the chronological order: civil rights, political rights and social rights. In the Brazilian case, according to Carvalho (2001) citizenship constituted “from the top to bottom”. In the same direction for Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1969), there exists in the genesis of Brazilian culture the roots of a state patrimonialism, which generates the figure of the Brazilian cordial man that is incapable of distinguishing between the private and public interest.

Under these circumstances, the history of Brazilian political culture marked by patrimonialism and individualism obstructed the differentiation between public and private spheres, facilitating corruption practices within and without public institutions. Oliveira Vianna (1982) argues that Brazilian population political formation resulted of the influence of the Portuguese Metropolis and not by people’s free choice to aggregate. The first villages created by a central power with characteristics of a family environment and not by a sense of public collectivity emerged. What prevailed were the political clans that Vianna defined as small groups of individuals (aristocratic and dominant elite) that influenced life’s practical decisions based upon particular interests.

For anthropologist Roberto Da Matta (1997), in order to comprehend Brazilian reality is important to utilize two sociological categories “the house” and “the street”. These categories go beyond the place of designation; rather they

constitute moral entities, social spheres of action. The house becomes the stage for the more feudal powerful families that command pieces of society and are the true protagonists of Brazilian social history. Da Matta's suggests that the perception of public officials and the political elite of the state as an extension of the house or a "big family", where obeying hierarchy to the "family leader" prevails making public life an extension of the house. Thus, creating an illusion of the presence of honesty of purposes, and specially a compromise with the people (p. 10).

Da Matta further argues that the existence of a differentiated order system that constructs and reconstructs Brazilian social experience, takes into account that, within the house, anything is possible, which is not the case for the street. In the house context, our presence is called for. This is not possible in the context of the street that is why Da Matta defines individuals as super citizens. The individuals in a negative sense are "sub citizens", because in the context of the street are anonymous and submitted to authorities and do not possess voice. The behavior in the street is of disrespect, because everything that stays outside the house is a government problem. (DA MATTA, 1997, p. 12).

Dealing with the public space as something private is a historical trace of Brazilian colonial inheritance. This affected the political culture because institutionalized the practice of corruption that took place, for example, in 1981, having Paulo Maluf governor of São Paulo as the central figure of this scandal (BARROS JR., 1982).

The recurrent cases of corruption reflect the instable environment of Brazilian society, which unveil gradually the permissiveness, irresponsibility, government's official's impunity and the passivity of the governed (BARROS JR., 1982, p. 9). Above all, these cases reveal the ethics of impunity of the criminal when a crime is committed supported by economic and political power and that the Brazilian society has naturalized.

In an analysis of Brazilian corruption, Dickson M. Grae (1986), identified in President Geisel's government a famous case of corruption in 1976, known as "the Saraiva Report". Grae describes the disappointment of the nation with the military government insofar as corruption and subversion control were concerned. During this period both corruption and suppression affected public and private political liberties (GRAEL, 1986, p. 9). The "Saraiva Report" publicized the accusations of Francisco Pinto in 1978, a lawyer that utilized a report sent by Coronel Raimundo Saraiva Martins, ex-military attaché in France. In this report, the lawyer accused the ex-ambassador of Brazil in Paris, Delfim Neto, of receiving bribes from transactions between the Brazilian government and French suppliers. After those accusations, the

Ministry of the Army refused to install an Inquiry Parliamentary Commission that would allow everyone to have access to the documents sent by the ex-diplomatic attaché, and according to Graef the case was not clearly explained. In sum, the “Delfim-Saraiva” case revealed a historical moment of corruption in which the military government arbitrarily and in an authoritarian manner denied the nation the right to information of facts related to corruption at the official level (GRAEF, 1986, p. 24).

In the beginning of the 1990’s, the most notorious case of corruption and that was responsible for the impeachment of the ex-president Fernando Collor de Mello occurred. However, this case is somewhat out of the historical pattern characterized by the non-punishment of the involved in cases of corruption. The *impeachment* occurred because of a combination of a weak coalition in the support for Collor and by the strong hostility of a significant segment of the population by the tentative of implementing a political reform by imposition.

In 2005, the case that generated global repercussion and became known as the *mensalão* (illegal monthly side-payments from the executive’s office to legislators), occurred in President Lula’s government. This scandal produced a more negative effect, because it came from the Worker’s Party regular members, whom when in the opposition always defended a government conduct of ethics and condemned corruption practices of the “old politics”.

More recently, the case known as the *Lava Jato* (deviation of resources from the main national petroleum company – PETROBRAS – for paying bribes to politicians in order to secure contracts within the realm of the politicians concerned) produced a national commotion. The investigation has advanced and produced for the first time in Brazil, a series of arrests and jailing of public figures and CEO of private construction companies. They were also required to return public resources obtained illegally from bribes and embezzlement. This case, however, is far from over and could have serious repercussions in the political and economic stability of the country.

Taylor (2010) affirms that corruption remains as one of the main problems of Brazil, because it affects not only the economy performance, but also the level of institutional trust. These cases of corruption lend credibility to the argument of Taylor (2010) whom argues that corruption in Brazil take place in all levels of government. The evidence to corroborate this affirmation are numerous. Whereas in the beginning of the 1990’s a group of bureaucrats deviated approximately 3 billion dollars from the social security system, more recently was discovered the

disappearance of 1 million dollars from the Federal Police in Rio de Janeiro (TAYLOR, 2010).

Corruption also is entrenched in the Brazilian state at the individual level of the bureaucracy. Despite the lower scale of this type of corruption, it has grave consequences for Brazilian democracy. The case of the Chinese-Brazilian Law Kin Chong, arrested in 2007 because of a scheme of contraband of electronic devices facilitated by the police, is a good example of this type of corruption (TAYLOR, 2010).

Deserves attention also the fact that the patterns of corruption are not constant because some bureaucratic sectors are more susceptible to this practice. The more common involvements are extortion (soliciting of bribes), nepotism (hiring relatives for public posts), and also by the suspect relationships with the private sector that donates financial resources not accountable, and that is known as “caixa 2” (the use of resources which origin is not known) for electoral campaigns. The practitioners of this type of corruption consider this action as a rational practice, as a survival strategy in an environment in which competition with those that practice bribes and evade taxes becomes impracticable. These practices naturalized what has become known as the “*jeitinho brasileiro*” (the Brazilian way of doing things).

Corruption also has effects of economic and political nature. The economic effects are of a significant magnitude, directly or indirectly, because it involves the deviation of resources from strategic social areas such as education, security, health, housing and social inequality. From the political arena perspective, the effects manifest in the form of a negative perception of citizens of politics and political institutions, materialized in cynicism, indifference and the gradual reciprocal distancing between state and society. In this manner, it reinforces the deleterious traditional political practices such as the *jeitinho*, and the use of the political institutions for private benefits. One of the phrases that became popular in Brazil refers to the idea that “rouba, mas faz”, that is, that it is all right to vote for candidates “that steal but make things happen”. Another informal manner of accepting corruption in Brazil is through the “Gerson Law” (Lei de Gerson), based on the principle that taking advantage of everything is permissible (TAYLOR, 2010).

The results of these historical traces were empirically shown by the research of the Latin American Anti-Corruption Institute (INEA, 2005), which indicated that Brazil was the only country considered as having pernicious corruption in political parties. This type of corruption of social perniciousness imply high costs and damages to the country’s development, affecting especially the social morale and the civic duties of social life (INEA, 2005, p. 3). In a scale from 1 to 11, where 1 means the

absence of corruption and 11 refers to pernicious corruption, Brazil was classified as 9 (normative corruption), 10 (administrative corruption) and 11 in pernicious corruption (the total sum of normative and administrative corruption). All these types of corruption affect negatively the political culture of the country.

Thus, cultural factors and public opinion research assume centrality to understand Brazilian politics, where formal democratic procedures need to be complemented with other mediating mechanisms that give the political system the necessary legitimacy to function well. As a democratic regime faces obstacles in providing efficient answers to the population demands, the tendency in terms of beliefs, attitudes and behavior of people goes in the direction of disappointment, which strengthens the authoritarian nature of public officials. To illustrate this point, data from Latinobarometro in 2009, showed that 61% of Brazilians agreed that the military could intervene in politics to remove a president that does not obey the Constitution. These answers signal a dangerous predisposition of citizens in believing that authoritarian solutions based on force, despite the existence of an institutionalized framework, could resolve economic and social problems in times of crisis (GONZÁLEZ, 2011).

It has become widely accepted that corruption scandals are one of the factors that can generate political distrust (POWER and JAMISON, 2005). In this type of scenario, citizens show low levels of political efficacy and are cynic regarding democracy, compromising its consolidation. Table 1 shows the degree of distrust of Brazilians in political institutions and their satisfaction with democracy's performance, compared with other Latin American countries.

**Table 1** – Distrust of Brazilians in political institutions 1996-2010  
Mean of the period 1996-2010

Country	Congress	Political parties	Government	Local governments	President	Public administration	Judiciary	Democracy	Insatisfaction with democracy
Argentina	75,05	84,72	65,32	67,36	50,69	70,74	76,04	30,90	63,46
Bolivia	74,79	85,64	65,93	66,76	64,56	73,78	74,07	37,55	69,17
Brazil	71,09	81,37	60,41	64,44	57,50	62,82	56,97	49,65	68,77
Colombia	74,47	82,20	59,27	57,40	54,13	66,52	65,86	46,40	69,95
Costa Rica	65,99	78,27	64,19	60,48	60,18	62,96	54,56	34,90	43,34
Chile	63,29	77,85	45,98	54,74	40,28	58,04	67,29	40,05	60,42
Ecuador	84,20	88,54	72,05	66,74	76,37	72,66	81,31	54,00	71,69
Salvador	68,94	75,04	58,78	62,56	59,36	64,10	67,37	58,85	60,07
Guatemala	77,76	82,04	75,04	68,72	72,52	76,98	74,18	53,05	66,76
Honduras	64,88	77,94	67,26	60,90	59,31	73,00	65,49	51,15	61,80
México	70,18	78,23	70,17	69,54	61,73	69,78	73,16	45,85	72,85
Nicaragua	76,90	81,70	72,49	70,86	77,08	77,16	74,04	47,30	66,33
Panama	75,61	77,65	65,16	65,64	62,37	67,68	69,79	38,65	60,76
Paraguai	74,14	80,80	63,35	54,16	70,48	68,34	74,26	61,70	82,79
Peru	80,29	84,35	76,72	72,22	73,98	77,02	82,15	56,00	80,14
Uruguai	51,74	63,10	49,68	43,50	50,96	47,34	47,96	18,85	35,89
Venezuela	61,89	72,94	53,43	57,10	48,60	60,52	61,99	20,45	53,51
América Latina	71,28	79,67	63,38	62,04	60,42	66,60	67,81	43,00	62,50

Source: Latinobarómetro, 1996-2010.

The data from table 1 indicate that distrust of political institutions is a Latin American phenomenon. In the case of Brazil, the most distrusted institutions are political parties (81%), Congress (71%) and government (60%). This finding is not surprising given the historical and cultural context and their impact in the process of a construction of a political culture highly cynic and distrustful of their elected representatives and the institutions that mediate their demands to the state.

In this context, one of the questions that assume centrality refers to the pattern of Brazilians perceptions about corruption. The question utilized was “*how Brazilians perceive the efforts to reduce corruption in the last two years*”.

**Table 2** – Perception of progress in the reduction of corruption in state institutions in the last two years (2010)

Country	A lot	Some	Little	Nothing
Argentina	2,60%	18,70%	38,00%	40,60%
Bolivia	8,20%	30,50%	37,00%	24,30%
Brazil	6,70%	35,20%	39,80%	18,30%
Chile	5,30%	40,40%	41,20%	13,00%
Colombia	13,10%	35,00%	32,40%	19,50%
Costa Rica	11,10%	31,50%	34,40%	23,00%
Ecuador	5,80%	44,80%	36,10%	13,30%
El Salvador	3,70%	30,50%	43,60%	22,20%
Guatemala	5,80%	14,50%	38,30%	41,50%
Honduras	10,50%	23,00%	30,40%	36,10%
México	5,00%	27,60%	37,70%	29,70%
Nicaragua	14,20%	20,30%	36,00%	29,50%
Panamá	14,30%	40,70%	28,50%	16,60%
Paraguay	6,50%	30,40%	35,50%	27,60%
Peru	1,80%	20,50%	37,30%	40,40%
Uruguay	12,20%	46,50%	27,80%	13,50%
Venezuela	6,60%	31,80%	25,00%	36,60%
América Latina	7,85%	30,70%	35,24%	26,22%

Source: Latinobarometro, 2010.

The data from Table 2 consistent with the theoretical argument and the data presented in Table 1, which suggest that when the levels of distrust are high, so are the efforts to restraint the practice of corruption. Brazilians are not too optimistic about initiatives that seek to reduce corruption, as almost 60% of the interviewed responded that these efforts are too little (40%) or non-existent (18%).

These results are consistent with other studies that established a relationship between corruption and institutional functioning of democracy (POWER and JAMISON, 2005). These studies suggested and were confirmed in this paper that distrust in political institutions affects how citizens evaluate their role in politics and their perception of corruption. This premise suggests that as parties fail in

aggregating and articulating the demands of the population, the vote becomes a type of merchandise disputed in the political market. In this way, the vote loses its representative nature because people choose their representatives based not on institutions of political mediation, but on the figure of the candidate, in other words it institutionalizes personalism (BAQUERO, 1984; FERREIRA, 1984).

In this sense, what is important to remember is that the authoritarian past, not just in Brazil, but also in all of Latin America, has left a legacy that has helped to naturalize the practice of corruption at all levels of the political system. In Brazil citizens perceive corruption as being part of the political and society game, which in my opinion produces a weak political culture and democratic institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The Brazilian State, throughout its history, has structured a vertical, top-down elaborated political structure. Contrary to inclusion of citizens and their interests in its performance, what seems to count are the agreements among elites and pork-barrel alliances, oriented to benefit minority interests. This results, on one hand, by the presence of a vicious circle of political apathy, lack of participation and reduced sense of citizenship and, on the other hand, by the presence of old political practices that compromise democratic principles, strengthening instead relationships based on clientelism, patrimonialism, personalism and uncontrolled self-interested use of public goods.

In this context of institutional weakness and a mutual indifference between civil society and the State, the probability of the actions of new incumbents goes in the direction of repeating corruption practices. There are several incentives to politicians to engage in activities that seek the embezzlement of public resources, and the use of public goods as private means in exchange of votes in search for re-election. Those practices damage severely the legitimacy of democracy, because the citizens trust neither the government nor the institutions. Thus, the citizens become fragile in a world where they go from primary to tertiary relations without strong and effective organizations, capable of channeling collective demands. At the same time, patterns of alienation, apathy and distrust in democracy become institutionalized as they consider the regime as a synonym of corruption.

In a context of that nature, seeking a solid democracy beyond formal procedures requires the development of mechanisms that effectively control and punish corruption practices, whether they originate in the state or society. It has become consensual that democracy should go beyond the formal dimension that is, it should not be only a method of choosing candidates, but an effective component of



constructing a civic political culture. The battle against corruption constitutes a basic element to achieve this type of political culture. This process involves not only public judgments and punishment of corrupt politicians, but also the development of mechanisms that help to create a virtuous circle of citizenship, and participation. These elements could be capable to help with the reorganization of demands of different branches of society and to press public representatives to be more responsible and accountable in public administration and the promotion of positive social capital

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