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Presidentialism in the Southern Cone. A Framework for Analysis

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Presidentialism in the Southern Cone. A Framework for Analysis*

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Presidentialism has been long defined as a regime type based on the principle of separation of power. However, actual presidential systems have most of the times performed on a very different basis, closer to concentration rather than separation of power. This is especially the case in most Latin American countries. Ever since Simón Bolívar asserted, as early as 1826, that "the new states of America… need kings with the title of President" (Sondrol 1990: 426), the region has been identified by its propensity towards the accumulation of power in the top executive offices. *Hyper-presidentialism*, as this phenomenon came to be called, is at odds with the original concept of presidentialism. I contend that this contradiction has not been satisfactorily tackled yet; as a consequence, both observers and practitioners lack an analytical framework able to cope with differences inner to the so-called presidential regimes.

The mismatch between concept and practice could be solved through either adopting a different definition of presidentialism or dismissing the empirical evidence as wrong. As the first choice seems more reasonable, I will start by adopting a restricted definition of presidentialism and advancing a typology of democratic regimes, just to thereafter apply it to the two largest South American countries: Argentina and Brazil. I will subsequently locate each of these countries in a rank order developed throughout the article, and conclude by drawing some broader implications of the proposed framework for both the theory and practice of presidential government.

Theoretical framework

Concentration and separation of power

Institutional structures are important for the decisional characteristics that may accompany them –e.g. the multiplication of veto points (Weaver and Rockman 1993b: 62). The different shapes that an institutional arrangement may take are called political regimes, i.e.

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the set of rules that establish the way in which decision-makers are chosen and public decisions are taken. In this paper I deal exclusively with democratic regimes, as referred to by Dahl (1989) when defining *polyarchy*.

Linz and Valenzuela argue that "the most important difference among democratic regimes concerns the generation and accountability of executive authority" (Linz and Valenzuela 1994: x). Generation and accountability of executive authority are different categories, although both are interconnected within the overall system they are embedded in. There are several ways of organizing the access to, and control of, executive power. The most widely used category to account for such ways is that which runs from the fusion (or concentration) to the separation of power.

Although the axis fusion/separation of power is seen as the crucial issue in distinguishing between democratic regimes, the most widely used empirical category focuses on the presidential/parliamentary dichotomy. This is so because it favors an institutional approach, what increases the potentiality for operationalization, measurement and, thus, comparison. Rockman (1997a: 60) downplays the latter category by arguing that "the reality is that the distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems masks a far more vital distinction, namely the capacity to concentrate or diffuse power." However, irrespective of how much one duet may mask the other, they are not the same thing –nor is one less 'vital' than the other. The difference between the pairs *presidentialism/parliamentarism* and *concentration/diffusion* is still significant. The choice of highlighting the former dichotomy stems –albeit not only— from methodological considerations. As Riggs (1994: 75) points out, "comparison of political institutions should begin with basic regime types, the constitutional principles that determine how a government is organized." The degree of concentration of power, instead, is also determined by political practices and informal institutionalization (O'Donnell 1996) rather than by formal-legal, i.e. constitutional design.

Concentration of power is not equivalent to stability in power.[1] Whereas the latter may be clearly established by the constitution, the former is usually a function of the prevailing correlation of forces and historical practices. Moreover, one does not necessary entail the other. A confusion between these attributes is however frequent, as in the example from the

[1] I do not deal here with the classic issue of democratic stability but take democracy for granted –as the only game in town. Therefore, by *stability* I mean the governments' –not the regimes'— capacity to survival.

literature on party government that follows. Katz (1987) classifies party government into three types: bipolar, coalitional, and dominant. The first is claimed to be more stable: "governments in bipolar systems are more secure. The legitimacy of the government, which flows directly from its electoral success, is high; no other government could have been formed on the basis of those election results… Cabinet crises, which only can occur as a result of disunity within the current majority, are infrequent. Governments are able to consider reasonably long term plans with some confidence that they will be in office long enough to implement them" (Katz 1987: 13). Still another characteristic is that, when political crises do anyway occur, "recourse is likely to be had to a new election" (Katz 1987: 14). Such a situation is said to have had place in the 1974 British crisis, and likewise "the immediate response of a French President of the Republic facing a hostile national assembly is to call for new elections" (Katz 1987: 14). However, as cohabitation periods after 1986 have shown, this is no longer the case. By the same token, Margaret Thatcher's resignation in Britain and her replacement by John Major took place without any election being called. Both national cases eloquently display how, notwithstanding their embeddedness within a 'bipolar party government' form, even the strongest leaderships are not guaranteed stability in a parliamentary context.[2] Their presidential counterparts, on the other hand, enjoy a different situation.

Presidentialism and parliamentarism

Departing from the pathbreaking works by Linz (1990a, 1990b) and Lijphart (1991, 1992), Von Mettenheim appeals to a minimal definition strategy of presidentialism, stating that "the central characteristic of presidential government is the separate election of the executive and the legislature for fixed terms" (von Mettenheim 1997b: 2). This strategy contrasts with others that stress the direct election of executives, while underestimating the separation of power. This definition coincides with Charles Jones's (1997) and applies mainly to the United States.

Riggs (1994: 76) goes a step further, as he considers separation of power not as the main feature of presidentialism but as a result of a single rule: the fixed term of the president. *Separationism*, therefore, is a consequence of presidentialist design instead of its essence. Such claim opens way to another possibility: that a presidential regime might not be

[2] Cheibub (1998*) presents extensive statistical evidence that supports this case. According to his data, covering twenty one industrialized parliamentary democracies from 1946 to 1995, 163 out of 291 (56%) prime ministers observed during such period changed without an election taking place.

separationist in practice! Since separationism is visualized as a practical consequence, not as a rule, it is conceivable that a *concentrationist* presidentialism may develop under certain conditions. I will argue that this possibility, for long time overlooked, actually takes place in Latin America.[3] The concentrationist subtype of presidentialism would also bridge the 'philosophical contradiction' between presidential government and separation of power highlighted by Lijphart, namely that a "unipersonal president means the concentration of power *within* the executive –the very opposite of limited and shared power" (Lijphart 1992: 4, original emphasis).

Many authors have acknowledged the differences between the existing presidential regimes. Nohlen and Fernández (1998: 24), for instance, have advanced four subtypes of presidentialism: "*[1]…reforzado, [2]…puro, [3]…atenuado y [4]…parlamentarizado*" determined by purely constitutional considerations. More refined typologies for assessing presidential power have been advanced by Shugart and Carey (1992) and Shugart and Mainwaring (1997). Whereas the former is more comprehensive in accounting for regime types other than sheer presidentialism,[4] the latter is especially devised to cope with presidential regimes. Moreover, it focuses particularly on Latin America.

Shugart and Carey appraise presidential capacities as composed of two sets of properties: legislative and non-legislative powers. In turn, the latter are further divided into two subsets: separate survival from the assembly and control over the cabinet. So-called presidential regimes are characterized by separate survival and full control over appointment and dismissal of ministers, whereas hybrid and mixed types –president-parliamentary, premier-presidential, and assembly-independent— lack of at least one of these characteristics. Except for Bolivia and Peru, the authors include every *presidential* regime –understood as that in which the heads of state and government coincide in the same person— within the broad *presidential* category –i.e. as regimes that feature an official called *president*. It, thereby, goes from the USA to Nigeria, passing through the Philippines and all Latin American countries –even Cuba! Such an encompassing typology renders itself of little use when it comes to distinguishing between full-fledged presidential regimes.

[3] Cheibub and Limongi (2000), in a recent paper, explore a similar proposition chiefly focusing on Brazil. They call it 'centralized decision-making' instead of 'concentrationism,' but the argument holds.

[4] This framework is so comprehensive that it includes every regime type whose chief of state is called *president*, irrespective of his or her real powers –thus including many parliamentary systems.

Shugart and Mainwaring offer a more suitable taxonomy for the purposes followed here. They differentiate between constitutional and partisan powers of presidents. The former are made up of three legislative powers: legislative initiative, decree power, and veto power, to which they add a fourth, namely, agenda-setting. While veto power is a typically reactive attribute, the other three pave the way to proactive presidential intervention. Partisan powers, on the other hand, depend on both the number of parties (broadly speaking, the party system) and party discipline (relative to party structure and organization, but also to institutional determinants). Accordingly, the size of the presidential party –or coalition— in Congress,[5] the fragmentation and polarization of the party system, and the degree of party discipline strongly condition the capacity of the president to push ahead his or her agenda.

In spite of all their valuable contributions, these typologies present some significant drawbacks. Some are rather reductionist in comparing presidentialism and parliamentarism, usually generalizing the former from the American case and overlooking differences between presidential regimes (Linz and Valenzuela 1994; Rockman 1997a; Tsebelis 1995). Others are deeper but narrower, mainly concentrating on the differences within either type without providing a broader framework of comparison between types (Shugart and Mainwaring 1997). Moreover, most theories strongly focus on political structures and capabilities – whether constitutional or partisan— while neglecting effective performance, therefore missing the impact that factors such as informal institutions and interest intermediation have upon the overall regime operation.[6]

The typology I am advancing attempts to address the mentioned shortcomings. In the first place, it takes into consideration informal institutions and sub-regime working mechanisms, in addition to formal institutions and party politics. Second, it does not just offer a continuum along which presidential regimes can be ordered according to the president's power, but a parsimonious typology that allows for comparison with parliamentary regimes as well. Within this framework, the claim that "the U.S. system does not stand out from all parliamentary systems in its pattern of capabilities, but rather tends to cluster with coalitional systems on many of those capabilities" (Weaver and Rockman 1993c: 460) acquires greater sense.

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[5] In a still exploratory research, Altman (2000) argues that the number of effective opposition parties is more significant than the size of governing parties to account for coalition formation and survival.

[6] Carey and Shugart (1998) and Eaton (2000), for example, have highlighted some differences between presidential regimes such as the eventual delegation of powers by the legislature to the president, and the degree to which internal congressional institutions are developed. These are crucial matters, and will be dealt with below through the case analyses.

To make my case, I depart from the fact that "both parliamentary and presidential systems are generic types that conceal a great deal of variation in the extent to which they concentrate or disperse power" (Rockman 1997a: 25). Consequently, "the extent to which power is concentrated or diffused… appears to be a dimension relatively independent of whether the system is parliamentary or presidential" (Rockman 1997a: 27). In Table 1 this *independent dimension* finds its place.[7] As strange as it may seem, the *concentrationist presidency* has tended to present itself as a coalitional executive, at least in South America (Deheza 1997; Amorim Neto 1998). This occurrence resembles the coalitional parliamentarism cell at the opposite corner rather than the American model of presidentialism. However, as will be examined later, it would be a mistake to assume that the presence of coalition governments has reduced the paramount capacities of the executive *vis-à-vis* other key institutions and actors.

Table 1
Typology of democratic regimes regarding executive format

		Real concentration of power	
Head of government		Executive concentration	Equilibrium executive-legislative
Fixed term	Yes (presidentialism)	Concentrationist Presidency (Argentina) [a]	Separationist Presidency (USA) [b]
	No (parliamentarism)	Cabinet Government (UK) [c]	Coalitional Parliamentarism (Italy) [d]

NB: each cell label defines an ideal type, the countries between brackets being the closest case to each ideal type. Most Latin American countries would cluster just behind Argentina, while many Western European countries would rather rank near Italy.

In addition to the characteristics proper to the presidential type, the *concentrationist* subtype also involves the reduction of veto points, thus potentially increasing the capacity for individual initiative, rapid response, and executive-driven decision-making. These characteristics are more likely to be effective in certain policy-areas than in others, depending on a set of diverse variables. Blondel and Cotta (1996), for example, underline three cases in which government –the executive— acquires greater autonomy with respect to the supporting parties: emergencies, technical cases, and implementation. Also regarding foreign policy,

[7] Although this four-cell grouping roughly coincides with Lijphart's (1995), his second category considers the electoral system –whereby the assembly is elected— instead of the degree of power concentrated in the presidency. Hence, his resulting table equates Latin American presidentialism with Western European parliamentarism, which is at odds with the point made here.

presidents tend to enjoy greater room for maneuver from both institutional and political constraints. As Schlesinger (1974: 279) has underlined, even in a separationist presidentialism such as the American, "it was from foreign policy that the imperial Presidency drew its initial momentum."

Beyond their differentiated performance across issue areas, concentration and diffusion of power also impact diversely upon general governmental capacities. As Weaver and Rockman (1993c: 454) have stated, "those arrangements that concentrate power… tend to perform better at the steering tasks of government than those that diffuse power." Concentration of power is seen as more able to deal with active *policy-making*; whereas, its diffusion is more closely related to *maintenance* –stick to commitments— and *political* –wide representation and social peace— capacities (Rockman 1997b). The application of these propositions to Latin America may well be a fruitful endeavor: when the region was suffering from regime instability and lack of legitimacy, concentrated presidencies were unable both to solve social conflicts and to persist. Once historical causes of conflict had receded –whatever the reasons had been— and new challenges for governance had to be faced, *steering capacity* (effective decision making) developed an increasing importance –sometimes even more remarkable than *political capacity* (legitimate representation).

Evaluating concentrationist presidentialism: veto points and veto players

To assess the degree of concentration/diffusion of power I will use the veto player theory and the agenda setter approach (Tsebelis 1994, 1995, 1999). According to the former, "a *veto player* is an individual or collective actor whose agreement (by majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change in policy" (Tsebelis 1995: 301). Such analysis leads to the conclusion "that the policy stability of a political system [*i.e. the preservation of the status quo*] increases when the number of veto player increases, when their congruence decreases and when their cohesion increases" (Tsebelis 1995: 322). This is so since "a significant policy change has to be approved by all veto players, and it will be more difficult to achieve the larger the number of veto players, … the greater the ideological distance among them", and the less cohesive they are (Tsebelis 1999: 593). There are two main categories of veto players: institutional and partisan.[8] While the former are typical of presidentialism –via the

[8] Tsebelis also recognizes other categories of institutional and *de facto* veto players, such as "courts, super majorities, referendums, corporatist structures of decision making, local governments and other institutional devices" (Tsebelis 1995: 323).

separation of power principle— and multicameralism –usually due to federalism—, the latter would be typical of parliamentarism and multipartyism.[9]

Regarding agenda-setting, the property is that "the veto player who has the power to propose will have a significant advantage in policy making" (Tsebelis 1995: 325). Although the theoretical argument is impeccable (see also Tsebelis 1994), its empirical evidence is faulty. Tsebelis claims that "in parliamentary systems the executive (government) controls the agenda, and the legislature (parliament) accepts or rejects proposals, while in presidential systems the legislature makes the proposals and the executive (president) signs or vetoes them" (Tsebelis 1995: 325). The latter claim –even if restricted *with respect to legislation*— is erroneous, the source of the mistake being the generalization of presidentialism features from the single American case –incidentally, as do Weaver and Rockman (1993a).

The main advantage of Tsebelis's formulation is theoretical: it opens the door to cross-institutional comparison, thus adding refined complexity to a simple institutional analysis. The main disadvantage is analytical: it is biased towards parliamentary regimes (see Tsebelis 1999), whether for insufficient data or for inaccuracy in the empirical appraisal of presidentialism. Be that as it may, its main insights are fairly coincident with those advanced here, not the less important of which is the counter-intuitive categorization of Italy and the United States as members of the same grouping (multiple veto players) against the United Kingdom (with only one).

Italy, the US and the UK may well be seen as archetypes of three of the four cells delimited in Table 1 –respectively [d], [b], and [c]. To build up a theoretical ground for cell [a], I draw upon two elements. In the first place, I reinstate a category that Tsebelis dramatically downplayed after having introduced it as a pillar of its model: the veto player cohesion. In the second place, I correct his inaccurate perception of presidentialism as an executive format that intrinsically concedes agenda-setting power to the legislature. Following these steps, the presidential executive emerges as a veto player "with very high cohesion,"[10] which increases its power *vis-à-vis* other veto players. Furthermore, the agenda-setting power with which many constitutions –and political traditions— entitle the president adds still another

[9] Tsebelis's distinction between institutional and partisan veto players remarkably overlaps with Shugart and Mainwaring's constitutional and partisan executive powers. However, while Tsebelis considers constitutional powers as intrinsic to presidentialism and partisan powers to parliamentarism, Shugart and Mainwaring combine both in order to account for different cases within presidential regimes.

[10] Tsebelis himself originally acknowledged this fact (see Tsebelis 1995: 315).

determinant factor to out-power the contrasting veto players. Another question can now be raised: to what extent do the different types of executive format affect governing capabilities?

Presidentialism, due to its usual practice of popular elections for the head of government, has been said to provide additional democratic legitimacy for the system and, hence, for the overall decision-making process. This is so because it offers a more direct mechanism of *vertical accountability*, together with a greater identifiability (visibility) of its top official, than parliamentary regimes. The other advantages advanced by Shugart and Carey –the presence of checks and balances, and the role of arbiter–, however, are not present in every presidential regime: in fact, most Latin American democracies do not have them. In O'Donnell's terms, they lack *horizontal accountability* (O'Donnell 1998). What democratic presidentialism features, regardless of its subtypes, is predictability –based on a fixed term for office that allows relevant social actors to plan their activities over a known timetable. Contrary to some authors' claims (e.g. Lijphart 1992), it is often more difficult to get rid of a president than to dismiss the prime minister of a parliamentary regime. This requires either an election, an impeachment, or a serious disease. On the contrary, even the strongest chief executive in the most concentrated and bipartisan parliamentary regime, Margaret Thatcher, could be ousted without undergoing any of these circumstances. The next section will assess the extent to which the category of *concentrationist presidentialism* fits the cases it is intended to describe.

Presidentialism in Latin America

Table 2 presents Shugart and Mainwaring's typology to assess presidential powers in Latin America. While Argentina is undoubtedly located in the 'strongest' corner (upward right four cells), Brazil –since 1988— appears in one of the 'medium' corners (upward left). None of them is currently located in the 'weakest' corner, where the U.S. would fit if it were to be included in the sample. This typology measures potential power, not actual performance. However, "when observers classify presidents in terms of being 'strong' or 'weak,' they tend to mean presidents' ability to put their own stamp on policy –to get an agenda enacted" (Shugart and Mainwaring 1997: 40). It thus may be that presidents 'outperform' their predicted powers –i.e. they get a better outcome than expected according to the typology. I will argue that this is the case of Brazil, and will elaborate it further in the pertinent section.

Table 2
Relationship between presidents' constitutional and partisan powers in Latin America

Constitutional powers over legislation	Presidents' partisan powers			
	Very low	Medium low	Medium high	Very high
Potentially dominant	Chile (1989) Ecuador	Colombia (1968	Argentina	
Proactive	Brazil (1988)	Colombia (1991) Peru		
Reactive	Brazil (1946) Chile (1925)	Bolivia	El Salvador Uruguay	Dominican Rep.
Potentially marginal			Costa Rica Paraguay (1991) Venezuela	Honduras Mexico Nicaragua

SOURCE: Mainwaring and Shugart 1997b: 432.

If it is correct to affirm that presidential performance is affected by party configuration, the reverse is also true. Presidential design is likely to have an impact on the number of parties by changing the relative importance of other institutional determinants. As Mainwaring and Shugart (1997b: 417-8) point out, "although magnitude has been termed the 'decisive' factor in determining the number of parties…, the data sets on which such conclusions have been based have overwhelmingly consisted of parliamentary systems. In presidential systems the importance of the presidency serves to reduce the number of parties, at least when the president is not elected by majority runoff and elections are concurrent. Thus, the special features of presidentialism override the impact of magnitude." However, they would "not characterize magnitude as irrelevant in presidential systems –just less important than the electoral cycle and the means of electing the president, and also less important than the presence or absence of party lists" (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997b: 418). Concurrent elections and presidential plurality rule are, therefore, paramount factors in increasing the partisan powers of the president.

Presidential cabinets also deserve examination, although their relevance is much narrower than in parliamentary systems. It has been accepted, at least since the Roosevelt administrations in the U.S., that cabinet members are no longer the main assistants to the president. They have been displaced by other organizations such as the Executive Office of the President, especially the White House Office (Milkis 1993). Their members neither respond to parties nor to pressure groups, but only to presidential confidence. Neither do they need congressional approval. South American cabinets, by contrast, usually reflect the electoral and

partisan distribution of power (Deheza 1997). However, formal representation should not conceal the fact that, frequently, ministers are appointed and dismissed in accordance with the will of the president.

On top of constitutional –as regards law-making— and partisan constraints, presidential power may also face another mighty institutional constraint: federalism. The literature recognizes three main forms of organizing territorial politics in a federal way: the American, Canadian and German models (Scharpf 1988; Katz 1999).[11] Argentine and Brazilian federalism resemble the American model more than any of the others, since neither the Argentine provinces nor the Brazilian states participate as such in national policy-making. Nor do they implement policies decided at that level. In contrast, responsibilities are divided by policy areas, and federal and subnational governments carry them out autonomously from one another. The primary characteristic of federalism is "a guaranteed division of power between the central government and regional governments. The secondary characteristics are strong bicameralism, a rigid constitution, and strong judicial review" (Lijphart 1999: 4).[12] I will show later on that the only of these characteristics at work in Argentina has been strong bicameralism –and, to a lesser extent, division of powers. Brazil, on the other hand, has turned out to be much more strongly federal.

An additional feature often runs parallel to federalism: the degree of independence or autonomy of central banks (Lijphart 1999). Such independence has not been the case in Argentina or in Brazil throughout the 1980s. Lijphart (1999: 233) claims that "central banks that are subservient to the executive fit the concentrated-power logic of majoritarian democracy." In the index developed by Cukierman, Webb, and Neyapti (1992: 380-81), Argentina and Brazil are ranked at the bottom of a scale that measures central bank

[11] In the American model, members of the Second Chamber (the Senate) represent the electorate *cum* individuals of their respective states; they do not represent the corporate interests of the government of their respective state. Canadian federalism, unlike the American, does not stem from original constitutional provisions but has grown out of historical practice. Besides, although the provinces do not empower their representatives with an indivisible mandate, they keep a crucial veto power since unanimity among provincial governments is required to approve amendments to the constitution –in contrast to the three-fourths majority required in the United States. Finally, German federalism differs from the previous types in that it endows the Länder with competence over national policy-making. While the federal level –in which the Länder are represented *as such* in the Second Chamber (*Bundesrat*)— legislates, administration falls under the states' jurisdiction. *Politikverflechtung*, as it has come to be known –or interlocking politics— furthermore refers to the "horizontal and vertical linkages among state and non-state actors on the regional and national levels" (Risse-Kappen 1996: 61). It entails the direct involvement of the Länder in the federal process of government.

[12] It is worth remarking that I am not dealing here with federalism as a way of organizing ethnic communities but territorial units (see Linz 1999).

independence in seventy one countries. In contrast, the U.S. is at the top of the ranking together with other strongly federal countries such as Germany and Switzerland. This contrast partially accounts for the inclusion of Argentina and Brazil within the 'centralized federalism' category defined by Lijphart. Although both countries have conceded an increasing independence to their central banks throughout the 1990s, just a decade ago presidents still held paramount authority over monetary policy.

It would be misleading, however, to limit the analysis of South American presidentialism only to its institutional connections. Von Mettenheim and Rockman (1997: 239) point that, while presidentialism "provides a forum for executive leadership to rise above the hurly-burly of particularistic interests, this form of government also normally requires that executives come to terms, at least partially, with the claims of these interests, which are often articulated in the legislative arena." *Often* is not *always*, though; in South America, large interest groups have seldom been represented in the legislative arena. Instead, corporatist pressures and 'praetorian' interventions have frequently been directed to the executive in search of response (Huntington 1968; Collier and Collier 1991). Such a situation increases the number of contingent, usually not institutional, players while reducing the veto power of each – as a consequence of greater dispersion. The executive, on the contrary, remains a single, unified site of power –whereas the state apparatus has frequently been colonized by social groups. To be sure, this picture became true only once democracy was re-established and the stability of constitutional presidents guaranteed. As the next sections testify, since that moment interest pluralism has increased over time, and so has executive power in both Argentina and Brazil.

Case analysis: Argentina

Constitutional powers

As in every presidential regime established during the 19th century, the Argentine constitution was a replica of the American. However, its Founding Fathers decided to increase presidential powers in order to empower the chief executive with the capacities necessary to drive the process of socio-economic development (Botana 1977; Mayer and Gaete 1998). The president was thus entitled to initiate legislation, remove or suspend provincial governments (*intervención federal*), and declare a state of siege (*estado de sitio*). Added to the development of extra-constitutional practices–such as the iterated *coups d'état* and the

recurrent state of emergency from 1930 onwards—, these institutional features led to the progressive strengthening of the executive office.

During the fifty three years running from 1930 to 1983, Congress was at work only during thirty one years. The executive and judicial branches did not cease to exist as institutions and managed to preserve a legal[13] and working continuity. Although each military take-over entailed the removal of the president, his cabinet ministers and, usually, all judges of the Supreme Court, the number of ministers and justices was kept the same. This *rutina golpista* induced an extra-constitutional increase of the already strong constitutional powers of the presidency, since it amounted to a tighter control of the administration while simultaneously preventing the legislature from institutionalizing any effective supervision –by banning elections and closing Congress. Even limiting the analysis to constitutionally endowed powers, the paramount role historically played by the presidency led Carlos Nino (1992) to label Argentine political system as hyper-presidentialist. Ironically, presidential powers had not yet achieved their maximum score when Nino coined this sometimes abused category.

It was only after 1989 that Menem's extensive use of decree power "transformed the Argentine president's legislative powers from being 'reactive' to being 'potentially dominant'," whereas "the constitution-based classification… correctly labels the Argentine system as 'reactive'" (Jones 1997: 288). Such a mismatch between *de jure* and *de facto* presidential powers was bridged shortly later. As two analysts have pointed out, "President Carlos Saul Menem's tenure, which began in 1989 and [was] characterized by an increasing concentration of power in the executive branch, consummated in the adoption of a new constitution in 1994" (Ferreira Rubio and Goretti 1998: 33). Decree authority, hitherto delegated or usurped, gained strength and legitimacy through constitutionalization. This event crowned the historical process of strengthening the power of the presidency.

Partisan powers

Regarding the Argentine party system, not only its nature but also its very existence have long been called into question (Cavarozzi 1984; De Riz 1986). De Riz supported such a claim on the basis that parties never considered each other as legitimate parts of the same competitive arena, but adopted strategies aimed at excluding each other. Cavarozzi, in turn, agreed about the weakness of the party system, yet he argued that it coexisted with a strong

[13] The decree-laws (*decretos-leyes*) issued by the military rulers would be numbered following the regular legislative sequence and later recognized as constitutionally valid by the Supreme Court.

identification of social groups around parties. More recently, however, Mainwaring and Scully (1995) have classified the Argentine party system as an institutionalized one, according to four criteria: (a) regularity in the patterns of party competition, (b) stability of party roots in society, (c) perceived legitimacy of parties as means of determining who governs, and (d) solidity of party organization. Within this frame, Mark Jones (1997) has not drawn on Catterberg's (1989) simplified category of two-party system but rather on Grossi and Gritti's (1989: 53) innovative concept of a "*sistema a doble partido con intención dominante*." Accordingly, he described Argentina as having a "two-party-dominant system." McGuire (1995: 226), in turn, strictly applies Sartori's typology to argue that "Argentina would fall somewhere between the 'moderate multiparty' and the 'two-party type'," while recognizing some particularities regarding strong subcultural –rather than ideological— polarization.

Regarding the effective number of parties and party discipline, Argentina displayed between 1983 and 1989 an average of 2.5 for the former and a qualification from moderate to high level for the latter (McGuire 1995; Jones 1997). By year 2000, the level of party discipline has not changed, but the effective number of parties has slightly increased with the emergence of the *Frente por un País Solidario* (FREPASO, with a center-left orientation). For the first time since mass politics was introduced in 1912, a genuine coalition has been governing since 1999, yet the dynamics of party competence remain bipolar. It is thus necessary to illuminate the process by which presidential rule and congressional activity have accommodated to one another.

According to Mustapic (2000), executive-legislative relation in Argentina should be constitutionally and historically understood as role-complementary, under the rubrique: "*liderazgo presidencial, fiscalización parlamentaria*." She calls into question M. Jones's figures for party discipline, and argues that parliamentary discipline was not a given but was produced by the congressional process. Her figures slightly vary from government to opposition and from the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR, a center party) to the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ, or Peronist party) –showing more discipline in the former case of each dyad. Nonetheless, she recognizes that presidents have been relatively successful in carrying forward their agendas, and this tempers the significance of potential party indiscipline. Bipartisan competition and informal rules give priority to presidential legislative initiatives, which –unlike Brazil and Chile— lack any constitutional preference. Mustapic concludes by recognizing that presidential preeminence holds as far as general policies are concerned, while affirming its

compatibility with a large room for maneuver by legislators to respond autonomously to their constituencies respecting particular issues –thus, limiting presidential leadership to a lesser degree.

As for the cabinet, ministers are not formally part of the executive power (Argentine Constitution, arts. 94-99). They are advisers to the president and are appointed and dismissed by him or her, to whom they respond by their actions. The cabinet does not exist as a collective body, although the 1994 reform created the figure of a Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers, who is appointed by the president but may be dismissed by an absolute majority of each chamber. This office is too recent to assess its performance, but thus far it does not seem to have changed the position of the president as *primus solus* —nor is this likely to occur in the short run.

Federalism and other features

Jones (1997: 290) has pointed that, "between 1983 and 1994 the combination of three (under Alfonsín) then five (under Menem) principal partisan and institutional factors made the Argentine president extremely powerful: (1) a large and relatively well-disciplined partisan legislative contingent, (2) the federal government's strong position vis-à-vis the provinces, (3) strong veto and partial veto powers, (4) the ability to issue decrees of urgent necessity (Menem), and (5) a co-opted Supreme Court (Menem)." The first part of this section will consider factors two and five, since the others were previously examined.

In Argentina, the federal government has historically been much stronger than the provincial ones. Although it is ranked as the second most federal country in South America, Argentine figures for central government revenues *vis-à-vis* the provinces are much higher than those of Brazil –also government expenditure is slightly higher (Garman, Haggard and Willis 1999). The limited autonomy of the provincial governments has become a crucial factor in strengthening presidential powers (Jones 1997). Furthermore, the 1994 constitutional reform that opened the possibility of presidential re-election also undermined the political power hitherto held by the provinces.[14] While some analysts, such as Jones, consider that the reform could reduce the zone of presidential discretion in the future, this has not occurred during Menem's second period.

[14] The reform went as far as to change the rules for electing the president. The new system establishes a popular and direct election, what greatly dilutes the power previously yielded by the provinces through their overrepresentation in the electoral college intended to elect the president.

Analyzing the submission of the Supreme Court to the executive, Larkins (1998) considers that it is by reason of the 'delegative' features of Argentine democracy. Following O'Donnell, he claims that the lack of impartiality of most judges, along with the broad institutional scope of their authority, is due to the characteristics of such type of presidential regime. On the contrary, it could be argued that Menem's control over the judiciary was built upon institutional measures, quite similar to those attempted by Franklin Roosevelt and later American presidents to enlarge the Court in order to prevent it from blocking their policies. It is true, however, that the subordination of the Court's judges to the executive was apparent during Menem's presidency; yet this was due to the economic emergency, and to the perception that the president was the only one able to face it. The best proof that subordination is not an enduring regime feature is that President De la Rúa, when elected in 1999, managed to govern with the same composition of the Court and did not even attempt to change its members.

As for the use of complementary mechanisms in order to foster the participation of other social actors, such as socio-economic concertation, Argentina's democracy has exhibited a poor record. Haggard and Kaufman (1995: 341) have pointed out, as a general rule, that "the organizational weakness of the relevant players, including both interest groups and parties," makes concertation very difficult –thus increasing the room for the executive to decide alone. In Argentina, organizational weakness and pluralism were more evident regarding interest groups–especially on the business side—, while in Brazil it was the parties that were highly fragmented and organizationally weak.

Throughout the 1980s and especially the 1990s, the pluralism of organized business interests increased (Acuña 1995, 1998) and trade unions became progressively weaker and more fragmented. Pluralist concertation failed during Alfonsín's tenure (Portantiero 1987) and was informally achieved during Menem's (Etchemendy and Palermo 1998). Argentina's so-called 'corporatism' has evolved into a pluralist system of oligopolistic lobbying, rather than either a traditional or a neo-corporatist system (Ducatenzeiler 1990). Since the executive is always the strongest power site, it is also the priority target for interest groups –unlike the U.S., where Congress and its committees offer attractive sites for exerting influence.

Case analysis: Brazil

Constitutional powers

The concentration of power in the Brazilian presidency is also rooted in the 19th century. As heir to an empire, the successive Brazilian Republics since 1889 were historically marked by the central role of the head of government relative to the legislature. However, this supremacy was not always absolute with regard to the federal units of the country: the states. Some specialists have even argued that federalism, not the traditional organization inherited from the empire, is the foundations of the Brazilian institutional matrix. Teixeira Neves de Pinho Tavares (1997: 14), for instance, argues that "*é fato notório que a grande movimentação política ocorrida no fim do Império teve uma conotação muito mais federalista do que, propriamente, presidencialista… Sendo federativa a escolha política, a opção presidencialista foi dela corolário*."[15]

Just as in Argentina, Brazilian political history passed a watershed in 1930. The ascent of Getúlio Vargas to the presidency led to a populist, direct relation between the state and most social actors, in a country that –unlike Argentina— had not yet developed a structured civic society. The ephemeral *Estado Novo*, whose institutional arrangements were left undismantled by the governments of 1946-64 (Stepan 1989), and much later the bureaucratic authoritarian regime between 1964 and 1985 (O'Donnell 1973; Skidmore 1989), contributed to centralizing power simultaneously in the state and, within the state, in the executive –as happened in most of the Southern Cone. However, when compared to similar dictatorships at the same time (e.g. Argentina, Uruguay, Greece, Spain and Portugal), Brazilian military rule featured a striking exceptionality: the coexistence of an authoritarian, non-elected executive with a working –albeit weak— Congress and indirect popular, local elections. However controlled the latter were, these institutions would condition the democratization process and its institutional aftermath.

The continuity of congressional activity was parallel, during the military rule, to the survival of traditional elites (Hagopian 1996). Congress was a channel that allowed rural landowners to keep alive patronage and intimidation practices, which their representatives safeguarded giving the national assembly a particularistic stand. The slow liberalization process

[15] "It is a known fact that political actions that took place by the end of the Empire had a more federalist than presidentialist connotation… Having chosen federalism as the first political option, the presidentialist option was but a corollary" (author's translation).

set off in 1974 led finally to the indirect, parliamentary election of Tancredo Neves in 1985, a popular politician who might also have won a direct election. However, Tancredo's sudden death before his inauguration left José Sarney, a conservative politician, elected vice-president as the factotum of the democratization process. The reform of the constitution was soon seen by most political actors as a necessary device for drawing a clear distinction with the past.

The constitutional reform of 1988 granted Brazilian presidents the strongest institutional autonomy in Latin America (Shugart and Carey 1992: 155; Shugart and Mainwaring 1997; Deheza 1997).[16] This autonomy comprises both proactive and reactive powers, and provides the executive with more resources than the previous constitution did (although the latter also established solid presidential powers). The president is allowed to enact legislation alone (*medidas provisórias com força de lei*) *"em caso de relevância e urgência*" (art. 62 of the Constitution). As Power (1999) sustains, the 'transplant' of the Italian *provvedimenti provvisori* from a parliamentary to a presidential arrangement virtually left the assembly without resources to control the executive. The president also holds exclusive prerogatives concerning the initiation of budget and taxation legislation, and has the right to demand urgency procedures in bringing bills up for a vote (Mainwaring 1997; Power 1999; Figueiredo and Limongi 2000). As observed by Tavares (1998: 271), *"o resultado líquido consiste em que o espaço de poder do presidente nesta matéria torna-se praticamente ilimitado*."[17]

Power (1999: 222) highlights the continuity of the Brazilian political tradition according to which "the executive acts and the legislature reacts." The impeachment that led to the conviction of Collor de Mello must be considered an aberration rather than a systemic change. During the democratic period that began in 1985, "executives took what was already a broad delegation and tried to expand it further" with ample success (Power 1999: 224). Having reviewed in this section the constitutional basis of such a broad delegation, let me now turn to the partisan determinants of its further expansion.

[16] As far as legislative powers regard, it was only surpassed by the Chilean presidency under the 1925 Constitution.

[17] "The result is a jurisdiction in which the power of the president becomes virtually unlimited" (author's translation).

Partisan powers

The Brazilian party system has been classified as "inchoate," due to its almost zero degree of institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Mainwaring (1995: 354) goes as far as to argue that Brazil "may be a unique case of party underdevelopment in the world," since its parties are identified by "their fragility, their ephemeral character, their week roots in society, and the autonomy politicians of the catch-all parties enjoy with respect to their parties." Moreover, the fragmentation of the party system has soared since the inauguration of the New Republic, increasing the effective number of legislative parties from 3.2 in 1985 to 6.9 in 1997 –and peaking at a striking 9.4 in 1992 (Amorim Neto 1998: 101). Polarization, on the other hand, was not meaningful in traditional ideological terms. It has though been moderately significant since the first presidential ballottage took place in 1990, when Collor de Mello defeated labor leader Lula, and during the former's following tenure until his impeachment.

Regarding the actor level rather than the systemic one, Mainwaring (1990: 5) has pointed out that "the extremely loose nature of Brazilian parties has added to the problems caused by the permanent minority situation of Presidents' parties. Presidents could not even count on the support of their own parties, much less that of the other parties that had helped elect them." Although Mainwaring's claim is coincident with a number of scholarly analyses –among them, those by Sartori (1994) and Linz and Valenzuela (1994)— and has become common knowledge, recent investigations by Figueiredo and Limongi (2000) strongly questions it. They show that party discipline is actually high in the Brazilian Congress –about 85.6% for the presidential coalition.[18] Due to institutional variables, "party discipline is enforced in the legislative arena" (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000: 152) –just as Mustapic argues for the Argentine case. In other words, "variables internal to the decision-making process neutralize the effects predicted by the emphasis on the systems of representation and government" (Figueiredo 2000: 20).

The combination of presidentialism with multipartism has usually been thought to be problematic for democratic stability and governability (Mainwaring 1993). However, this combination has become both predominant and sustainable all over Latin America. The problem has been apparently overcome through the expedient of governmental coalitions.

[18] Analyzing the registered roll calls between 1989 and 1998, they find that party discipline has ranged from 85.0% –for the PMDB— through 98.4% –for the PT. Such figures convey a much higher degree of party discipline than ever previewed before (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000: 159).

Coalition government is one of the resources that presidents have in a multiparty system to build support in the Congress (Abranches 1988; Deheza 1997; Mainwaring 1997; Chasquetti 2000; Figueiredo and Limongi 2000). However, coalition government in a presidential system is not identical with a parliamentary coalition: in Brazil, "*por decisão solitaria, o presidente compõe ou recompõe o ministério. E precisamente porque a Presidência se define como una entidade extrapartidária o superpartidária, os partidos e seus representantes parlamentares não se consideram, em regra, vinculados ao presidente nem responsáveis por seu governo*"[19] (Tavares 1998: 261). This phenomenon led Abranches (1988) to define Brazilian presidentialism as "*imperial*," while simultaneously –not contradictorily— labelling it "*presidencialismo de coalição*." In this kind of 'coalitional presidentialism,' the president becomes at the same time the 'arbiter' and the 'target' of divergences between the parties – and, eventually, between the regions— making up the coalition. As Ames (1995: 333) points out in an in-depth study, "because in Brazil the executive controls most pork-barrel programs, good relations with the president are a must."

Mainwaring (1997: 75-80) has enumerated how "a multiparty government in a parliamentary system differs in three ways from a multiparty presidential government. First, presidents are generally freer to dismiss ministers and rearrange the cabinet than prime ministers are… Second, (in parliamentary systems) individual legislators are more or less bound to support the government unless their party decides to drop out of the governmental alliance… Third, (in parliamentary systems) the parties themselves are co-responsible for governing". Presidential coalitions are more unstable, less 'fair', and less 'binding' –both for the president and for each participating party— than their parliamentary counterparts (Chasquetti 1998; Amorim 1998; Altman 2000). This is so because, while the latter depend basically on institutional rules, the former depend on a combination of institutional rules and agent behavior.

Mainwaring (1997: 80) reasonably claims that "regardless of the system of government, party indiscipline is inimical to stable coalition building." However, Figueiredo and Limongi's new data about the high levels of party discipline show that presidential coalitions have effectively supported presidential initiatives. Such support was fostered by (and not

[19] "The President alone nominates and reshuffles his cabinet. It is precisely because the presidency is defined as extra-partisan or supra-partisan that parties and legislators do not consider themselves linked to the president nor responsible for his government" (author's translation).

despite of) presidential legislative powers, which the president utilized in order not to circumvent but to control the legislative process. With regard to the executive structure, the president performs the pivotal role and usually keeps a positively disproportional share of the cabinet and the most significant ministries, either for his party or for technicians that respond solely to him (Deheza 1997; Altman 2000). By these means, Brazilian presidents have developed along the last decade a cooperative rather than a conflictive strategy *vis-à-vis* Congress. Mainwaring (1997: 74) has even argued that "the breadth of the parties represented in the cabinet obeyed a logic closer to consociational than majoritarian democracy." Nevertheless, presidents have not resigned their preeminent attributions. As Figueiredo and Limongi (2000: 168) shows, "in Brazil the president controls the legislative agenda." This contradicts Tsebelis's case concerning presidentialism, but coincides with the argument advanced here.

An eloquent circumstance that illuminates the potency of Brazilian executive is the repeated instance of a president who, not having been elected as such but as vice-president, was still able to endure and finish the constitutional period without major inconvenience. Although both José Sarney and Itamar Franco[20] lacked popular support and an automatic majority in the Congress, they could perform their constitutionally prescribed tasks in a regular way. Their situation somewhat resembled Gerald Ford's, although American democracy was never thought to be endangered by a constitutional procedure that, in most Latin American cases, was previously deemed much more hazardous.

In Brazil, ministers are part of the executive power as in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Deheza 1997). Two cabinet posts are usually considered the strongest: Finance and Foreign Affairs. Whereas the former has taken the lead regarding Brazilian economic reforms (and they have been many along the last fifteen years), the latter is the head of perhaps the most efficient bureaucracy in Brazil and the continent: Itamaraty –as the Brazilian Foreign Ministry is known. In contrast with the zigzagging Argentine foreign policy, Brazil has defined a foreign policy direction since the early 1970s and has not failed to meet it. Whether under military or civilian rule, the predictability of Brazil's international stance –albeit not its rigid definition of interests— has become a given.

[20] Unlike Altman (2000), I do not see Franco as a caretaker but as a full-fledged constitutional president. His position was in no institutional sense inferior to that of Sarney after Tancredo's decease. Moreover, it was during his administration that the ambitious –and successful— economic plan of Minister Cardoso was launched.

The link between cabinet stability and executive success may be inferred from the list of policy areas that Mainwaring (1997: 99/101) offers to show the degree to what presidents were unable to implement their preferred policies between 1985 and 1994. The inability of presidents was basically limited to socio-economic areas and even this has progressively changed since then.

Federalism and other features

The significance of federalism in Brazilian politics is larger than in any other country of the continent. As Tavares (1998: 174) put it, *"foi… o federalismo, e não a república, a idéia força que, associada ao ressentimento do escravismo contrariado, derrubou o Império."*[21] Although Brazilian federalism is *institutional* rather than *contractual* –the latter a feature of the U.S. and Argentina alike— and, therefore, has a constitutional nature instead of a pre-existent one, the indissolubility of the federal state has not been challenged in practice.

The strength of Brazilian federalism becomes apparent when looking at some key figures. For example, it is the only Latin American country in which the share of both total government tax revenue and expenditure are higher at the sub-national level than at the central one (Garman, Haggard and Willis 1999). As a corollary, central government controls less than half of overall public resources. This feature of Brazilian politics, unlike those concerning party system and discipline, clearly has a negative impact on presidential power. Even so, some authors underline the "executive-centric character" of Brazilian federalism to distinguish it from the American one (von Mettenheim 1997c).

In spite of the strength of the Brazilian presidency, especially when compared to separationist ones such as the American, Brazilian federalism is one of the major restrictions to presidential power (Mainwaring and Samuels 2000). Just as strong federalism undermines presidential power, so bureaucratic centralization has contributed to empower the presidency –albeit with legislative assent (Mainwaring 1997). Amorim Neto (1998: 181) affirms that, "given that the Brazilian legislature in particular, and Latin American legislatures in general, are weaker than the American Congress in terms of oversight capacity, a presidential strategy of bureaucratic aggrandizement aiming at bypassing partisan constraints is more likely to succeed in the former countries than in the US." The expansion of and control over the bureaucratic apparatus of the state become other ways for presidents to carry out non-statutory or non-

[21] "It was federalism, not republicanism, the ideal that –along with the resentment of former slave owners— brought down the Empire" (author's translation).

partisan strategies.[22] This process and its consequences were so described by Alimonda (1998: 145-6, my emphasis): "*un perfil de actuación estatal que, al mismo tiempo en que se automutila como estructura y se retira de sus funciones reguladoras, adopta* un estilo decisional altamente centralizado… *Esta centralización… implica inclusive* un refuerzo del predominio del Poder Ejecutivo sobre el Legislativo y el Judicial. *Así, el proceso de Reforma del Estado acaba reforzando vicios tradicionales de la cultura política latinoamericana*."[23]

Recapitulation

To put it succinctly, the already strong constitutional powers of the analyzed presidents have been strengthened lately through constitutional reforms in Argentina (1994) and Brazil (1988 and 1997). Partisan powers, in turn, are remarkably strong in Argentina and, to a lesser degree, in Brazil. Finally, few other relevant veto players are present in Argentina and in Brazil (with the exception of the most powerful Brazilian states). Table 3 displays executive capacities relative to those of other significant veto players.

Table 3
Executive Capacities *vis-à-vis* Other Veto Players in Selected Countries

Veto players	Concentrationist presidency: ideal type	Argentina	Brazil	USA (separationist presidency)	UK (cabinet government)	Italy (coalitional parliament.)
Executive stability	**High**	High	High	High	Medium	Low
Number [a] (significant players*)	**Low**	Low	Medium	High	Low	High
Congruence [b] (other players*)	**High**	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Cohesion [b] (the Executive)	**High**	High	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Cohesion [c] (other players*)	**Low**	Medium	Low	Medium	High	Low

[22] This is also the conclusion arrived to by Milkis (1993) regarding the strategies of the American presidents since the New Deal. However, the American Congress is still much stronger than its Latin American counterparts.

[23] "A mode of state intervention that, while self-damaging as a structure and retiring from its regulation functions, adopts a highly centralized decision-making… This centralization entails the strengthening of the Executive predominance over the Legislature and the Judiciary. The process of state reform ends up by reinforcing traditional vices of Latin American political culture" (author's translation).

Agenda-setting [d] (the Executive)	**High**	High	High	Medium	High	Low

a - Apart from the executive. *Low* ranges from 1 to 2; *medium* from 3 to 4; and *high* from 5 on.
b - By the negative, ideological or value-oriented distance between veto players (higher congruence = closer distance).
c - Internal cohesiveness of veto players (average).
d - Capacity to establish the public agenda and/or to initiate legislation.
* *Other players* refer both to institutional (the assembly, the judiciary, the states or provinces in federal countries) and non-institutional players (parties, interest groups, exceptionally the military as in Chile) as developed in the accompanying text.
NOTE: Criteria concerning categories and country qualification are spelled out throughout the article.

The widespread strengthening of Latin American presidential powers, during the last two decades, was mainly due to the presidents' strategies to manage the economic crisis and conduct structural reforms. Building upon a tradition of already strong executives, many heads of government sought the capacity to formulate and enforce technical measures through confidential planning and circumventing both public and legislative debate. However, when consensus was considered to be necessary, presidents proved usually able to build coalitions in support of their policies.

As the number and consistency of veto players varies across policy areas, so does presidential margin of maneuver. Although strengthened by the economic emergency, presidents enjoyed larger room for autonomous decision-making in foreign as opposed to domestic issues. This was also due to the fact that constitutional provisions were more relaxed and public interest and knowledge farther away from foreign affairs. Since the president is the only politician whose constituency is the whole nation, he is better equipped than Congress to provide the impulse for a policy entailing diffuse benefits and specific costs. This has been the exemplary case of Mercosur every time that economic turmoil put into question its *raison d'être*. For many observers it is clear that Collor "*y Menem alteraron sustantivamente los parámetros de la integración de sus países… Sin duda, los principales actores de esa historia han sido los presidentes de Argentina y Brasil*"[24] (Cavarozzi 1998: 13). Cavarozzi extends his argument to further encompass the two following Brazilian presidents, thus noting how it was the institution that kept playing a role and not its contingent agents. The link between executive format and regional integration has also been explored more recently (Malamud 2000); in a comparative approach to the European Union, Mercosur and the

[24] "Collor and Menem substantively changed the parameters of integration of their countries… Doubtless, the main actors in that story were the presidents of Argentina and Brazil" (author's translation).

Andean Community, the paper analyzes how the shape and progress of integration schemes are dependent on whether the integrating countries are presidentialist or parliamentary.

Both Argentine and Brazilian presidents were blocked from time to time during the last fifteen years by governors and congresses. Such blockages did not affect substantially, however, the steering capacity of the presidents. Even regarding the most obstructive area of domestic politics: the constitutional domain, Menem and Cardoso managed to have their respective Constitutions reformed in order to permit their previously banned re-election. Since written constitutions are admittedly a consensual feature of political regimes, given the super-majorities usually required to change them (Lijphart 1999), the Argentine and Brazilian cases show how fragile such a restriction was in these countries. It was unable to prevent majoritarian-like concentrations of power. The way in which both presidents obtained Constitutional reform and, subsequently, their own re-election, is revealing about the extent to which political power is effectively –and increasingly— concentrated in presidential hands.

Some observers maintain the opposite thesis, that is, that presidential offices are not increasingly concentrating power but relinquishing it to coalition partners. Thibaut (1998), for instance, compares Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay and argues that only Argentina under Menem can be considered a case of presidential supremacy, while all other cases are better understood as having 'coordinated' rather than 'subordinated' relations, given the president's need to reach agreements with parliamentary parties. However, if my argument is correct, coalitional presidentialism is precisely an expression of concentration of power in the executive, rather than the contrary. This is so because, in a separationist presidentialism such as the American, coalitions are not only unnecessary but also contradictory, since they entail a linkage between both branches of government –and not their separation. South American presidents build coalitions in order to govern effectively, not to give up the power to do so. *Subordination*, so to speak, is achieved through *coordination*. Whereas in most parliamentary democracies coalitions are formed as a functional response to the logic of the system –in order to establish a government and make it function—, in most presidential democracies coalitions have strategical rather than functional causes –in order for the entering parties to take advantage of the resources that only the executive holds.

Shugart and Mainwaring's (1997) claim that the fragmentation of the party system is a key factor to explain the performance of presidential regimes is significant. At the turn of the century, both Argentina and Brazil have left behind any (previous or not) two-party format and

feature coalition governments without exception. However, no presidency seems to have diminished its grasp whether over politics or policy. On the contrary, as a bipolar mechanics of competence consolidates, the negative impact of party system fragmentation upon presidential power turns weaker.

As mentioned above, these countries are no longer an exception to the claim that "institutions matter." Presidents have, nevertheless, managed to promote their agendas regardless of institutional and non-institutional impediments. Presidents have not become all-mighty rulers though, as the *delegative democracy* label may have led us to believe. Przeworski (1999: 15) has spelled out this situation by affirming that, "*aún cuando los presidentes brasileños y argentinos parecieran conseguir la mayor parte de lo que desean, es dudoso que se encuentren menos restringidos institucionalmente que los primeros ministros de España o Inglaterra*."[25]

In closing, I would like to make a broader reference to South American presidential democracies. At the beginning of the XXIth century, there are three clear clusters of countries across the continent: at one extreme, Peru and Venezuela; at the opposite end, Chile and Uruguay. Somewhere in the middle, lie the two countries I have defined as *concentrationist presidencies*. So where are the *delegative democracies*? If the label is still useful –and I believe it is—, it is more likely to define the regimes that allowed Fujimori and Chávez to become presidents, rather than those that produced Menem and Collor de Mello.[26] Argentina and Brazil do show a significant degree of regime institutionalization –even if 'other,' to paraphrase O'Donnell (1996). In contrast, Peru and Venezuela have undergone a process of increasing de-institutionalization, whereas Chile and Uruguay are plausibly located along the continuum running from separationist to concentrationist presidentialism. Further empirical analysis should be carried out in order to improve or dismiss the qualitative typology I am proposing, but my expectation is that such a typology will contribute to orienting future research.

[25] "Even though Argentine and Brazilian presidents may seem to obtain most of what they wish, it is doubtful that they are institutionally less restricted than the prime ministers of Spain or Britain" (author's translation).

[26] See Figueiredo (2000) for a coincident argument.

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Abstract

Presidentialism has been long defined as a regime type based on the principle of separation of power. However, actual presidential systems have most of the times performed on a very different basis, closer to concentration rather than separation of power: this is especially the case in most Latin American countries. In shedding some light over such mismatch, this article adopts a restricted definition of presidentialism and advances a typology of democratic regimes, in order to thereafter apply it to the two largest South American countries: Argentina and Brazil. Subsequently, these countries are located in a rank order herein developed, to conclude by drawing some broader implications of the proposed framework for both theory and practice of presidential government.