

**The Organization of the Executive Branch in Latin America:
What We Know and What We Need to Know¹**

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Abstract

This article proposes a research agenda on the organization of the Executive branch in Latin America by reviewing the literature on the US and Latin American presidencies and outlining the research gap among them. The study finds that while strong, region-wide patterns have been established about cabinets in Latin America, research is lagging behind on the presidential center, presidential advisory networks, and their effects on policymaking. The paper sets a series of research questions and suggests a combination of quantitative, social network and case studies strategies to address them.

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1. Introduction

Presidents and presidential systems have long been under scrutiny in the political science and political economy literatures. Presidents are often singled out and blamed or rewarded for affecting the state of the economy (Moe 1993; Alesina et al. 1997) as well as for governing by concentrating power and the way they manage power -which may include turning democracy into a “delegative” regime (O’Donnell 1994). The presidential system of government has been singled out as the culprit behind the democratic instability experienced by Latin America throughout the 20th century (Linz and Valenzuela 1994) –an indictment disputed more recently by Zelaznik (2001), Cheibub (2002, 2007), Amorim Neto (2006), and Chasquetti (2008)- and praised (but sometimes loathed) by the outcomes it generates (Persson and Tabellini 2003). Still, an analysis of the organization of the presidency and its influence on public policy as well as presidential and regime survival is still pending.

Despite the importance and recurrence of debates about presidents and presidential systems, and regardless of presidents’ centrality to the policymaking process, the progress of research has been uneven in Latin America. The literature on presidential politics has typically dealt with four topics: the organization of the executive branch of government; the resources of the presidency; presidential coalitions; and the specifics of decision-making in particular administrations. Students of the United States presidency have generated a wealth of work on all these topics, but the development of research and knowledge on them for Latin America and other developing countries has not kept the

same pace across some of the topics.¹ While significant pieces have been produced on coalition-building and management as well as on economic and political decision-making in particular administrations, there has been little progress on the organization of the executive branch and the resources of the presidency.

Research on coalition politics in Latin America has established that coalition governments are frequent (Deheza 1997; Amorim Neto 1998 and 2006; Altman 2001; Zelaznik 2001; Martinez-Gallardo 2010a; Chasquetti 2008), more unstable than single-party governments but less unstable than minority single-party governments (Zelaznik 2001; Amorim Neto 2006), and structured by presidents in order to maximize the chances of survival of their legislative coalitions (Amorim Neto 1998, 2006; Zelaznik 2001; Martinez-Gallardo 2010b). Studies have also shown that the office of the president is typically endowed with resources to help build and maintain cabinet and legislative coalitions, and that presidents are generally effective in employing these resources (Pereira and Mueller 2002; Pereira et al. 2005; Amorim Neto 2006; Mejía Acosta 2006). These works have demonstrated that Latin America has mostly proactive presidents whose constitutional and partisan powers enable them to impose themselves on institutionally weaker, mostly reactive assemblies (Shugart and Carey 1992; Carey and Shugart 1998; Cox and Morgenstern 2002).

Research on economic and political decision-making has established the existence of common trends in policy orientation and decision-making sequences on economic adjustment (Haggard and Kaufman 1992, 1995; Torre 1998, Schamis 1999, 2002; Llanos

¹ For example, The Oxford Handbook series includes a volume on the American Presidency but has no similar either for presidential regimes in general or presidencies in developing countries.

2002), pension reform (Mesa-Lago and Muller 2002; Weyland 2005, 2007), and left-wing social and political turns (Levitsky and Roberts 2008; Weyland et al. 2010). Numerous studies have also shown the effects of diverse political variables on presidential decision-making, such as president-government party relations (Corrales 2000, 2002), the socioeconomic nature of reform coalitions (Schamis 1999; Etchemendy 2001), legislative career patterns (Ames 2001; Samuels 2003), constitutional powers (Negretto 2006), public opinion standing (Stokes 2001), and presidential leadership (Novaro and Palermo 1996; Whitehead 2010). These works have demonstrated that while presidential administrations in Latin America differ in their outcomes, stability and survival (Perez-Liñán 2007; Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010), these differences are underpinned by common variables and processes.

However, no equivalent knowledge exists on the organization of the executive branch. This gap rests on two main shortcomings: the absence of a theoretical and methodological agenda; and the lack of information with which to feed the development of empirical research. These shortcomings are probably due to both historical and organizational reasons. Latin America's long experience with political and economic instability has hitherto placed other topics at the center of academic research – such as authoritarianism, corporatism, civic-military relations, regimen transitions, and structural reforms. Also, in contrast to the US, Latin America's frequent experience with coalition governments has called for attention to Congress and Executive-Legislative relations rather than the Presidency and its resources. In addition, information on Congressional workings is typically more readily available than on the Executive's: Latin American Congresses regularly record most of their activities – via committee reports, floor

deliberations, and legislative databases, many available online or in public archives – while the Presidency and the ministries generally publish only the final outcomes of their work – decrees, bills – and withhold the rest.

This paper addresses the shortcomings of presidential studies in Latin America by developing a research agenda on the organization of the executive branch and its effects on policymaking using the literature on the US presidency as benchmark. This benchmark has limitations insofar as the US case differs from Latin America in aspects that may impact organization: the US executive has weaker veto, decree, and appointment powers (Garcia Montero 2009), faces a stronger Supreme Court, more powerful Congress and oversight agencies, politically more subordinated Armed Forces (Pion-Berlin 2009), and a more stable and less complex party system than its Latin American counterparts (Whitehead 2011). However, the common separation-of-powers features, the fairly continuous experience of Latin America with democracy in recent decades, and the shared centrality of presidents to political systems make presidencies more comparable, and the organizational findings of the US literature a useful starting point. This literature has established that the executive branch is a complex, differentiated organization typically made up of three components: the presidential center, the cabinet, and a series of advisory networks in which cabinet members and presidential advisers interact alongside bureaucratic officials and non-governmental counselors. Taking stock of the approaches and knowledge produced within that literature, this paper identifies a set of relevant pending questions on Latin American presidencies and outlines research strategies for their investigation. The argument is presented as follows. The next three sections deal with the literature on the presidential center, the cabinet, and presidential

advisory networks, respectively. Each section begins by reviewing the US literature, subsequently assesses the works about Latin America, and finally proposes a set of pending research questions for the study of Latin American presidencies. Our study shows that while the extant literature on Latin America has produced significant knowledge on cabinet composition, there is a wide research gap on the nature, composition and workings of the presidential center and the presidential advisory networks, as well as on their effects on policymaking processes. The concluding section sums up these research questions and suggests strategies and techniques to address them.²

2. The Presidential Center.

In presidential systems, constitutions and/or special legislation typically outline the executive branch of government as headed by a president assisted by cabinet departments, or ministries, functionally differentiated by policy area. But presidents are also assisted by a closer group of advisers with no necessary departmental responsibilities who work under their most direct supervision. These advisers constitute the office of the president – or presidential center.

The presidential center, institutionalized in the United States with the creation in 1939 of the Executive Office of the President (EOP), was established to strengthen the president's ability to coordinate the work of cabinet departments and other executive agencies which, due to their own organizational interests such as budgetary or power maximization and service delivery to constituents and interest groups, typically had "little

² We acknowledge our present focus on organization far from exhausts cross-country variations in the types of resources – institutional, partisan, economic – available to Latin American presidents which may affect their governing and survival. For space reasons, we must defer addressing this broader picture to future research.

incentive to subjugate their departmental needs to the president's broader bargaining interests" (Dickinson 1997: 46). This rationale has suggested two explanations of the emergence and function of the presidential center.

The informational explanation stems from the bargaining paradigm of presidential politics espoused by Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* (Neustadt 1990). Within this paradigm, in a political system of separated institutions sharing power presidents are forced to bargain with other actors – Congress, the bureaucracy, interest groups, the media – in order to influence the outcomes of government. To bargain effectively, presidents' primary need is information; not just any information, but that which enables them to retain or augment their influence over those other actors with which they have to bargain – contrasting information, from multiple sources, so that presidents can weigh in the biases and interests of those sources and come up with their own assessment and decisions (Neustadt 1990; Rudalevige 2002). The presidential center allows presidents to do exactly that: multiply information sources by charging close advisers with duplicating, supervising or monitoring the task of cabinet ministers (Ponder 2000); and contrast policy ideas and political assessments by inciting dissent between ministers and advisers (Neustadt 1990; Dickinson 1997). The presidential center helps presidents to retain bargaining power by enabling them to escape the informational asymmetries to which they are subjected: that of ministries concerned primarily with their own turf; that of bureaucrats concerned primarily with technical criteria and interest group satisfaction; that of political advisers concerned primarily with the electoral consequences or public opinion payoffs of decisions.

The leadership explanation of the presidential center stems from the unilateral paradigm of presidential politics espoused by rational-choice scholars such as Terry Moe. Within this paradigm, presidents have strong incentives to enhance the autonomy of their office: they are elected by a national constituency that “leads them to think in grander terms about social problems and the public interest”; they are held responsible for “virtually every aspect of national performance”; and they are beset by powerful players – namely Congress and the bureaucracy – with opposing incentives and enough institutional resources to impose them. To assert their leadership over these players, presidents seek to design and run “a unified, coordinated, centrally directed bureaucratic system” (Moe and Wilson 1994: 11) through which they can develop their own policy ideas and use their own unilateral institutional powers to implement them. The presidential center allows presidents to do exactly that: centralize decision-making by placing trusted advisers to supervise or lead cabinet ministries from above and control the bureaucracy by imposing a hierarchical decision-making process through which not only policy alternatives but also information diffusion and political message are decided at the top (Moe 1993; Moe and Howell 1999). The presidential center helps presidents lead the government and the policy process by enabling them to escape the institutional constraints to which they are subjected in a separation-of-powers system, and to attune their decisions to public opinion moods over the particularistic interests of legislators, ministers, and bureaucrats.

Regardless of the weight each explanation may have, the emergence of the presidential center has been linked to the centralization of the policymaking process by the executive branch in general, and particularly to its hierarchization under the

presidency. The political and administrative relevance of the presidential center has consequently induced scholars to focus on its composition, its relation to presidents, the stability of its membership and functions, and its participation in decision-making.

Composition and characteristics

The composition of the presidential center has been investigated with particular emphasis on the types of staff constituting it, and the size of that staff. The premise of this research has been that the kinds of persons recruited to the presidential staff and its operating procedures are the critical conduits through which presidents can influence the performance and outcomes of their government (Burke 2000: 25). Presidents may surround themselves only with cronies and clerks, or with political and policy advisers with independent standing; advisers may be pundits or seasoned political operatives, learned students of policy or experienced policymakers, political system insiders or novice outsiders (Burke 2000). Presidents may organize their staff in a hierarchical, competitive or collegial way (Johnson 1974); they may develop staff structures congruent to the challenges of their decision settings (Walcott and Hult 1995); or may suspend centralization altogether contingent to critical variables in their political and bureaucratic environment (Rudalevige 2002).

The types of staff recruited to the presidential center in the United States have evolved from an exclusively organizational capacity to a complex network of personal assistants, policy advisers, political strategists, communication personnel, and legal counselors (Arnold 1998; Lewis 2008). The expanded scope of direct presidential jurisdiction has been explained as the joint outcome of environmental pressures for increasing government activity, congressional action in response to those pressures, and

particular presidential initiatives to seize control over specific policymaking areas (Ragsdale and Theis 1997). But such increasing complexity within the presidential center also appears to have pressured presidents into concentrating the control of decision-making in their own office in detriment of the very agencies established within the EOP. This dynamics has generated what has been labeled the paradox of politicization: the recruitment of politically loyal but administratively inexperienced aids into the EOP has increased presidential control over decisions but diminished the technical ability of EOP agencies to advise the president on policy matters (Dickinson 2005).

The staff in the presidential center of the United States does not seem to enjoy much stability. Four not necessarily exclusive explanations have been advanced for this pattern. One is partisan turnover: when the governing party is ousted, most of the presidential staff is also changed. Another is the duration of organizational units within the presidency – which, though increasing since the 1950s, has varied considerably from one year to another, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1970s (Ragsdale and Theis 1997). A third explanation is administrative overhaul, which has been frequent in the 20th century (Arnold 1998). A fourth explanation is the changing nature of presidential campaigns – which has forced prospective presidents to invest more on specialized campaign staff rather than policy or administrative experts, and has thus led to increased turnover rates after the campaign-turned-governing staff proves inadequate for their new function (Dickinson and Dunn Tenpas 2002). High turnover rates help foster centralization of decision-making in the president but, at the same time, increase the leverage of career bureaucrats over the policymaking process.

The tradeoffs between centralization and isolation before bureaucracy, between politicization of the administration and technical expertise, suggest that the staff in the presidential center must perform several functions within decision-making processes. Research has defined these functions according to the specialization of staff types (Walcott and Hult 1995), or to forms of staff involvement in the policy process (Ponder 2000). The staff specialization perspective, stemming from organization theory, argues that the president's staff participates in decision-making in either of three capacities: outreach, policy processing, and coordination and supervision. Outreach tasks include liaison with Congress, press relations and publicity, contacts with interest groups, executive branch staffing operations, and presidency-executive branch relations management. Policy processing, in turn, encompasses information gathering, analysis and proposals in domestic, economic, and national security policy – as well as in specific inter-branch policy structures such as task forces or commissions. Finally, coordination and supervision include speechwriting, managing the president's schedule, and governing the presidential center itself (Walcott and Hult 1995).

The staff involvement perspective, privy to information theory, argues that the president's staff participates in decision-making as director, facilitator, or monitor (Ponder 2000). As director, it centralizes policymaking tasks and reports only to the president. As facilitator, it brokers agreements among policy jurisdictions under the president's supervision. As monitor, it delegates policy to other agents within the executive branch but “keeps a watchful eye on the progress and substance of policy development” (Ponder 2000: 14). These forms of involvement in the policy process need not be exclusive of any particular staff member or structure; in fact, according to Ponder,

presidents (such as Carter) practice “staff shift” – the movement of staff members and structures from one function to another – in tune with the issue at hand and the availability of technical expertise and political capacity to control the substance of policy outcomes (Rudalevige 2002).

Relationship

To work within this complex organization, presidents have developed different managerial styles. Johnson (1974) identified three: *competitive*, in which the president stands at the center of decisions by overlapping jurisdictions, duplicating assignments, and developing rivalries; *formalistic or hierarchical*, in which the president delegates authority on top advisers who run a hierarchical organization with clearly specified, differentiated functions, and who filter the information and policy alternatives that reach the presidential desk; and *collegial*, in which the president operates as the hub of a wheel the spokes of which are a group of advisers who collectively discuss and propose alternatives. (Franklin Roosevelt’s style has been described as competitive (Dickinson 1997); Nixon’s, as hierarchical; Carter’s, as collegial (Link 2002).) As Johnson argued, each style has its own strengths and weaknesses: the competitive style maximizes presidential control and considerations of bureaucratic feasibility and political viability in decision-making, but demands an enormous investment of time from the president to manage and solve staff tensions; the formalistic style maximizes diversity in information gathering and advice, but may generate upwards distortions and slowness in crisis situations; the collegial style maximizes technical optimality and bureaucratic feasibility, but requires skilled presidential management to maintain a working group dynamics (Burke 2009).

Inspired by organizational theory, Walcott and Hult (1995: 20) argued that managerial styles are a function of staff structures, and that presidents develop staff structures that are “roughly congruent with the prevailing decision setting”. Thus, if presidents are confronted with uncertainty, they should build competitive or collegial arrangements that foster the search for alternative sources of information and advice. If presidents face controversy, they should use adversarial multiparty advocacy or adjudicative arrangements in which they decide after thorough debate. If presidents encounter certainty, they should develop hierarchical or collegial-consensual arrangements to enhance control over decision-making (Walcott and Hult 1995: 21-23).

Combining the above perspectives with transaction-cost theory, Rudalevige (2002) contended that presidential centralization of the policy process was contingent upon the costs of acquiring information, and those costs were, in turn, dependent on a number of political variables such as divided government, size of presidential legislative contingent, presidential public opinion approval rates, ideological distance between the president and the legislature, policy area, issue complexity, crisis situation, and length of the presidential term. Presidents would only centralize decision-making in their office when they can acquire information to do so at the least possible cost – i.e. when policy proposals cross-cut jurisdictions, the presidential center has stronger policymaking resources, policy approaches are new, and speed is of the essence (Rudalevige 2002: 39).

Consequently, managerial styles should change according to the conditions that determine information costs, and staff structures within the presidential center should be prepared to deal with all possible contingencies.

Evidence in LAC

Research on presidential centers in Latin America is practically non-existent. O'Donnell (1994) characterized concentration of power and policymaking drive in the presidential center as typical of delegative democracy, but provided only theoretical and broad comparative strokes of evidence. Bonvecchi and Palermo (2000) compared staff types within the presidential inner-circles of Menem and de la Rúa in Argentina, as did Siavelis (2010) for the Concertacion governments in Chile, but their evidence is more impressionistic than systematic. Aninat and Rivera (2009) described the functions of the presidential center in the latter administrations, but with a normative orientation towards proposing a reorganization of the executive branch. Whitehead (2011) specified the conditions under which Mexican presidents under the PRI regime could govern alone with their entourage, but provided scarce comparative evidence.

A significant field of research is thus open. What countries have and do not have a presidential center? What are the conditions for the emergence of presidential centers in Latin America? How are presidential centers structured? What types of staff are presidential centers made of? How is that staff managed by the president: competitively, hierarchically, or collegially? How stable are staff structures, staff types and presidential managerial styles in presidential centers? What accounts for (potential) variations? To answer these questions at least two types of information must be collected. On the one hand, legal and administrative information about the structure of presidential centers, its evolution through time, formal powers attached to each component of the presidential center, and the types of staff recruited. On the other hand, qualitative and quantitative information on the relation between presidents and their presidential center: frequency

and nature of interaction between presidents and the different types of staff; forms of staff involvement in decision-making processes; staff turnover rates, etc.

3. The Cabinet.

The role of the cabinet within the executive branch in presidential systems of government has experienced a paradoxical development: while the number, size, and policy responsibilities of cabinet ministries have grown over the past decades, their participation in decision-making processes has been increasingly contested by both the presidential center and presidents themselves. These tendencies, empirically substantiated for the United States but scarcely for Latin America, have been explained by the combination of governmental responses to environmental demands and the informational and political incentives of presidents to enhance control over decision-making. US presidents seem to have risen up to these challenges despite lacking what their Latin American counterparts possess: the power to create and eliminate departments, and appoint their ministers and secretaries, without Congressional approval.

The composition of the US cabinet has gained complexity at the levels of structure and staff types. In terms of structure, the cabinet evolved from three departments in 1789 to nine by 1903 and 15 by 2002 (Campbell 2005: 254). The structure of the cabinet has been taken to reflect both environmental pressures and ideological preferences for increased governmental activity (Ragsdale and Theis 1997: 1292-1295). Based on the recent assignment of some policymaking responsibilities to the vicepresidency, some authors also include this office as part of the cabinet structure (Baumgartner and Evans 2009), although the actual participation of vicepresidents in

decision-making has experienced significant variations across and even within each presidency.

The increase in the cabinet's organizational complexity has led to the distinction between inner and outer departments (Cronin 1975; Cohen 1988): the former – i.e. State, Treasury, Defense, and Justice – tend to have broad and expanding missions, work closer to presidents, and their performance is generally considered critical to the assessment of any presidency; the latter – i.e. the remaining departments – usually have more specialized missions, work closer to interest groups and constituencies than to presidents, and their performance is only assessed as relevant contingent to the weight each president's program gives each policy area. This distinction has apparently also shaped the types of staff. Inner and outer cabinet members have been found to possess different profiles: while the former tend to be specialists or personal confidants of presidents, the latter are usually either party activists or individuals with backgrounds in related interest groups (Cohen 1988). In addition, the politicization of cabinet departments has reached beyond the chief executive officer level to the policy and support layers – to the point that “one has to bore down four levels below the secretary before reaching strata populated almost entirely by career officials” (Campbell 2005: 258).

These patterns have been explained as outcomes of presidential attempts to cope with information asymmetries and enhance control over policymaking. Information asymmetries arise from the inevitable fact of functional differentiation between the presidency and the cabinet departments, and from the position of departments as agents with multiple principals – namely the president, Congress, and interest groups (Weingast 2005: 313). Presidents cannot ignore the perils of departmental capture by the

particularistic interests of bureaucrats and socioeconomic constituencies, nor can they risk letting cabinet secretaries freely propose legislation to Congress – where they can collude with specialized committees also potentially captured by particularistic interests (Light 1999: 223). The appointment of political allies and confidants to cabinet positions and the politicization of increasingly deeper layers of departmental ranks help presidents reduce these risks.

Presidential concerns with information asymmetries and control over policymaking also seem to have affected the stability of cabinet members and the role of departments in decision-making. While only little over 50% of cabinet secretaries in the United States completed a full presidential term or more between 1789 and 1989 (Nicholls 1991), this percentage rose significantly in the 1990s (81.3% and 66.7% in each Clinton term) and 2000s (87.5% and 65.2% in each of G. W. Bush terms) which would reflect the upside of politicizing the cabinet and controlling policymaking from the presidency (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2010). However, the increasing use since the 1960s of inter-departmental bodies as forums to develop and discuss policy alternatives has in effect limited the ability of cabinet secretaries to influence decision-making (Hult 1993). Councils, task forces and presidential commissions have effectively undermined the authority of cabinet secretaries by carving departmental subunits for specific purposes, pitting them against presidential center and extra-governmental advisers, and shifting their staff from one function to another within policymaking processes (Hult 1993; Ponder 2000). Therefore, as scholars have consensually concluded, there is no such thing as cabinet government in the United States.

Evidence in LAC

Research on presidential cabinets in Latin America has grown considerably in recent years – but this growth has been uneven and accumulated knowledge is still incipient. Studies have focused mostly on the composition and stability of cabinets. In contrast, little investigation exists on the relation between presidents and cabinets, and the participation of cabinet ministers in decision-making processes.

The composition of presidential cabinets has been studied on three dimensions: their partisan makeup; the staff types; and their structure. Scholars have established that coalitions are the most frequent form of cabinet composition in Latin America. In comparative work on Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, Amorim Neto (2006) showed that 76% of cabinets between 1978 and 2004 were either majority or minority coalition cabinets. Working on practically the same list (merely replacing Panama with Paraguay), Martinez-Gallardo (2010a) showed that coalition cabinets were in place 52% of the time between 1982 and 2003, while Chasqueti (2008) finds coalition cabinets in 41% of all governments in the sample between 1978 and 2006. All cabinets in the present democratic periods of Brazil and Chile have been coalition cabinets; in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay this has been the case between 80% and 91% of the time (Chasqueti 2008). Majority coalition cabinets have been more frequent in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay (Amorim Neto 2006) while single-party majority cabinets are the least frequent form – prevalent only in Mexico (Amorim Neto 2006). These patterns have been explained as the joint outcomes of the size of presidents' legislative contingents, the number of parties in the legislature, and the Executive's lawmaking powers: coalition cabinets appear as more frequent when presidents have minority status, face a large

number of legislative parties, and have weak lawmaking powers (Zelaznik 2001; Amorim Neto 2006; Martinez-Gallardo 2010a).

The types of staff recruited for cabinet positions have been studied on three dimensions: their partisanship; their background; and their gender. Amorim Neto's (2006) data showed an average of 78.2% of partisan ministers, with peaks over 92% in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay, and lows below 60% in Brasil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. The share of partisan ministers appears to be correlated to the cabinet's coalescence rate – i.e. the extent to which the partisan makeup of the cabinet is consistent with the distribution of seats in the legislature. Average coalescence rates – which vary from 0 (no coalescence) to 1 (perfect coalescence) – have been above 0.85 in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico, and below 0.60 in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. These patterns have been explained as outcomes of the “presidential calculus” (Amorim Neto's 2006): the partisan makeup of cabinets is contingent on the strength of executive lawmaking powers, the size of the president's legislative party, its discipline, the ideological position of the president vis-à-vis legislators, the elapsed length of the term, and the country's economic conditions. The share of partisan ministers and the cabinet coalescence rate should be higher when presidents' parties control the legislative majority, are only beginning their terms in office, and have weak lawmaking powers.

On the background of cabinet ministers, comparative work on Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and the United States (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009, 2010) has shown that relevant education or work experience, political insider experience, and known links to ministry clients are the most important traits for

ministerial recruitment. Relevant education or work experience oscillates between 89.6% of ministers in the US and 75.3% in Colombia; political insider experience weighs the most in Argentina (63.1%) and Costa Rica (58.1%) and the least in Chile (48.9%) and Colombia (42%); while links to ministry clients are more important in the US (48.1%) and Argentina (45.9%) and least in Chile (36.2%) (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2010: 31). Most ministers have primary careers in government in Argentina (67.5%), Chile (68.1%) and the US (59.7%), while primary careers in business are more relevant in Costa Rica (43.7%), and friendship with the president is more relevant in Argentina (40%) than anywhere else (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2010). On gender, the same authors found the highest shares of female ministers in Chile (35.1%) and Costa Rica (24.7%), and the lowest in the United States (18.2%).

The structure of the cabinet is the least researched dimension of cabinet composition. The little comparative data available (Martinez-Gallardo 2010a) shows significant variation in the number of portfolios across countries – from nine in Paraguay to twenty-seven in Venezuela in 2008. Within-country variation has also been established as large for Bolivia (IDB 2006), less so for Brazil (Inacio 2006) but not for Argentina (Molinelli et al. 1998). Twelve Latin American countries have a ministerial position with cabinet coordination responsibility: defined constitutionally (Argentina, Peru) or legally (Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Venezuela); located within the presidential center (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico); or assigned to the vicepresident (Guatemala, Nicaragua). Complete data collection and explanation of these stylized facts are still pending.

Cabinet stability has been investigated considering the duration of both cabinets and ministers. For duration, Amorim Neto's (2006) data shows an average of 2.6 years

for Latin American cabinets – compared to 4 years for US cabinets. Cabinets survive longer than average in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, and less in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru (Amorim Neto 2006). These patterns have been explained as outcomes of the presidential party's legislative status, the share of partisan ministers and the cabinet's partisan makeup: cabinets last longer if the president holds a legislative majority, there is a high share of partisan ministers and a single-party makeup (Amorim Neto 2006).

Ministerial duration varies considerably across Latin America. Measured in months by Martinez-Gallardo (2010b), ministers last an average 19.8 months, with Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay above average, and Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela below average. Measured in years by Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2010), ministers serve longer in the United States (3.6 years) than in Latin America (2.2 years). Ministers have been found to serve longer if inflation and political conflict are low, economic growth, presidential popularity, and elections proximity are high, and institutional powers strong (Martinez-Gallardo 2010b); and if they are linked to ministry clients – whereas political, education or work experience do not increase tenure (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2010).

There is practically no research on the relationship between presidents and cabinet ministers in Latin America. There are some case studies of presidential administrations that contain accounts of conflicts between presidents and finance ministers and/or between finance ministers and the rest of the cabinet (Palermo and Novaro 1996; Corrales 2000, 2002; Altman 2000; Mayorga 2001; Novaro 2001; Lanzaro 2001), as well

as Pion-Berlin's (2009) thorough review of organization and dynamics of defense policy, but no systematic dataset or account of presidential-ministerial interaction exists so far.

The role of the cabinet in decision-making processes is also understudied. Martinez-Gallardo (2010a: 121-122) claims that ministers have "a near-monopoly" in policy design, are charged with steering presidential bills through Congress, and enjoy a central position in the implementation stage. However, no empirical evidence has been hitherto provided on any of these claims.

Consequently, important research questions remain unanswered. What is the nature of the portfolios included in Latin American cabinets? Under what conditions has each portfolio emerged or disappeared? How is the cabinet organized: in functionally differentiated portfolios, in inter-departmental councils, or both? How is authority distributed within cabinets: is it institutionally wielded by a coordination portfolio, concentrated by the president, or informally assigned by the president to one or more ministries? What are the formal and effective powers of ministers? In what ways are cabinet departments involved in policymaking? How do ministers relate to the presidential center and its staff? How do presidents manage relations between the presidential center and cabinet departments? What is the structure of decision-making within the cabinet and within the ministries? In what ways do presidents intervene in cabinet deliberations and internal ministerial decision processes? To answer these questions, as in the case of the presidential center, two types of information would be required and two different research strategies would be adequate for treating that information. On the information side: a) legal and administrative instruments depicting the organization of cabinets and ministries and its evolution through time, the formal

powers of ministries and their subordinates, the formal powers of presidents vis-à-vis ministers, and the scope of policy responsibilities of presidents, cabinet departments, and the presidential center; b) quantitative and qualitative information on the frequency and nature of interactions among presidents, ministers, and presidential center staff, forms of involvement of ministries in decision-making processes, turnover rates, etc.

4. Advisory Networks.

Presidential advisory networks are groups of individuals, organizational units and subunits linked to presidents through the provision of advice for their decisions (Hult 1993: 113). Studies of advisory networks contend that interaction among network members may affect “the nature and timing of the advice a president receives, the president’s views on the credibility and importance of that advice, and the impact of the advice on presidential decisions and decision outcomes” (Hult 1993). Research on these networks in the United States has focused on their composition, operation, and effects on presidential decision-making.

Studies on the composition of advisory networks have focused on the nature and stability of their membership. Organizational approaches have concentrated on the specific organizational units and subunits involved in particular networks – stressing how their mandates, information, working routines, and linkages to other actors such as Congress and interest groups shape the advice they produce and their clout on presidential decisions. Stemming from Allison’s (1972) classic work on the Cuban missile crisis, this approach has been used primarily to investigate foreign policy decision-making – particularly under crisis situations (Janis 1972; 1982; Kozak and

Keagle 1988; Burke and Greenstein 1989; Hart 1994; Hart et al. 1997; Preston 2001). The main finding of these studies is that the composition of networks involves crucial tradeoffs for presidents to maintain control of decision-making. If networks are staffed solely with policy area specialists, presidents would most likely receive biased information designed to protect policy turfs and hide previous bad choices or least-preferred alternatives of departments and bureaucrats. If networks are staffed with units from various areas and different mandates information and advice would be more diverse, but two opposing dynamics may complicate decision processes: either the pressure to produce decisions by consensus may lead to “groupthink” and its pathologies of information filtering, misrepresentation, and denial of alternatives and potentially bad consequences or outcomes (such as in the Bay of Pigs invasion); or the competition between units for dominance over outcomes may force the president to invest excessive time and energy in the process – as in decision-making on Vietnam under Johnson (Rudalevige 2005: 340).

Interactional approaches have defined individual advisers, rather than organizations, as their units of analysis, and have categorized them according to their level of access to the president. Based upon presidential schedules and diaries, scholars (Best 1988a, 1988b; Thompson 1992; Link 2002) have established the volume of interactions between presidents and advisers and determined the existence of different adviser types according to the distance between their formal positions in government and their effective positions in advisory networks. Link’s study of the Nixon and Carter administrations found three types of network members: inner-core advisers, with extraordinary – i.e. one standard deviation greater than the mean – access to the

president's time; outer-core advisers, with above average but less than standard deviation access levels; and peripheral advisers, with below average levels of access (Link 2002: 251-252). This categorization of advisers makes it possible to pinpoint the influence of particular individuals and organizations – as represented by individuals – on presidential decisions by weighing in their frequency of interactions with the president, the length of their paths to the president's attention, and the precise timing of their presence before the president.

The stability of network membership has also been studied from the organizational and the interactional perspective. Organizational studies have concentrated on the survival of units and on variations in presidents' use of those units within decision-making processes (Porter 1980; Burke and Greenstein 1989; Ragsdale and Theis 1997), whereas interactional analyses have stressed the turnover of each adviser type (Link 2002). Network stability has been explained from the organizational perspective as the outcome of presidents' managerial styles: turnover would be higher under competitive styles (Dickinson 1997) than collegial styles – though staff shifting to different functions in the policy process may also yield high turnover (Ponder 2000). From the interactional perspective, turnover rates seem to be determined by overload: since presidents have to deal with an increasing number of problems, their engagement in parallel processing of issues forces them to limit the number of advisers they contact, and to seek only those who can quickly provide information and solutions that are easy to understand and implement (Link 2002: 253). High turnover rates of network members may therefore be construed as indications of greater adaptability of presidents to changing decision

settings, or as signals of presidential difficulties in handling complex environments and simultaneous challenges.

The operation of presidential advisory networks has been studied on three dimensions: decision procedures; conflict among network members; and the effects of both on presidential decision-making. Decision procedures have been found to change according to context and issue. Routine decision contexts typically involve deliberation and decision-making by cabinet members and top-level bureaucrats which presidents subsequently sanction; whereas extraordinary contexts such as crises or unexpected events typically lead to direct presidential involvement – either through hierarchical arrangements with heavy reliance on the presidential center, or adjudicative rules by which advisers provide competing counsel and presidents decide (Hult 1993; Walcott and Hult 1995). Foreign policy issues are typically settled through competitive and collegial decision-making in which presidents encourage adversarial deliberation among the specialized agencies; whereas domestic policy issues, particularly social policy, are generally discussed by inter-departmental councils and subjected to multiple advocacy procedures (George 1972) whereby all concerned agencies and even outside parties such as interest groups voice their position – typically with some cabinet secretary or top presidential aide acting as an “honest broker” charged with laying down all the information and choices. These variations have been explained as outcomes of the diverse incentives of network members. To govern effectively and secure their place in history (Moe 1993), presidents should maximize the chances to push their agenda through, and since campaigning consumes most of their time and energies they typically have little in the way of ideas and resources to develop policy agendas upon inauguration

– so they must eventually rely on the institutional sources available: cabinet departments, Congress, interest groups, think tanks (Light 1999: 83). This opens a window of opportunity for policy entrepreneurship by career bureaucrats and cabinet secretaries, as well as for influential congressional leaders – all of whom compete for agenda setting and program jockeying on their preferred issues (Light 1999: 158).

Conflict within advisory networks has been studied as a consequence of members’ incentives, problem overload, presidential inattention, and decision cycles. Presidential incentives to maximize control over decision-making clash with bureaucratic turf protection, Congressional interest on credit-claiming for politically promising issues, and departmental policy entrepreneurship (Volden 2002; Epstein et al. 2008). Problem overload may lead to inefficient information processing and biased deliberation (Light 1999), high network turnover rates (Link 2002), and ultimately inadequate choices. Presidential inattention, either to specific issues or to tensions among network members, may lead to domination of decision processes by powerful actors or agencies, decision gridlock, and “traffic jams” in policy processing due to “underdirected participants” (Helmer 1981, quoted in Hult 1993). Finally, conflicts within advisory networks tends to increase throughout the term as presidents focus on their reelection campaign or lose power as lame ducks (Light 1999).

Evidence in LAC

There is no comparable literature on presidential advisory networks in Latin America. A handful of studies have analyzed the role of economists in policymaking– particularly during the structural reforms of the 1990s (Markoff and Montecinos 1993; Centeno and Silva 1998; Montecinos and Markoff 2009) but mostly via case studies, without

systematic datasets and unrelated to network analytic perspectives. An even smaller literature on the diffusion of policy ideas (Madrid 2003; Weyland 2007) has developed comparative analyses of the role of policy networks in the spread of pension reforms throughout Latin America using network concepts, but these works generally do not deal with the interaction between presidents and advisory networks.

There is therefore a considerable research agenda still pending. To what extent do presidents in Latin America employ advisory networks? For what policy issues or areas do they employ those networks? What is the composition of presidential advisory networks? How stable is this composition, and if unstable, how does it vary? What explains the emergence, duration, and demise of advisory networks? How are authority and power distributed among network members? How does decision-making operate within advisory networks? How do presidents manage conflict among advisory network members? To answer these questions, legal and administrative information is needed on the level of institutionalization, formal powers, and evolution of presidential advisory networks and their members, and quantitative information on the frequency and nature of interactions and conflicts among network members is also required.

5. To Conclude: Methodological Suggestions for a Research Agenda

This paper's review of the literature on the organization of the executive branch in the United States and Latin America has shown that research on Latin American presidencies has produced strong, region-wide findings on the composition of cabinets while, in contrast, research is significantly lagging behind the on the presidential center and the presidential advisory networks.

Research on the presidential center, the powers of cabinet departments, and the presidential advisory networks could profitably combine statistical analysis with social network analytic strategies. This combination would be most adequate to establish not only the determinants of different types of staff structures and arrangements but also the nature of staff involvement in policymaking and the frequency with which each form of involvement is mobilized by presidents. Quantitative analyses of the presidential center and/or the cabinet should use them as dependent variables and test the effect of the standard independent variables in studies of the institutionalization of the presidency: legislative strength of the president's party; formal powers of the president; presidential popularity; length of presidential term; economic context; government size; government structural complexity; etc. Social network analyses of the relationship between presidents and their staff should look into the frequency, nature, and volume of interactions among presidents, ministers and advisers as indicators of the importance of each staff type in decision-making processes. The identification of network structures and relational contents would enable the reconstruction of presidential managerial styles and their application to specific policymaking processes or decisions.

Finally, research on the effects of executive organization and presidency resources on policymaking should combine statistical analysis with case studies in order to pinpoint the determinants of governing strategies, policy aims and ideas, policymaking structures, and policy outcomes, and trace the mechanisms by which the former variables affect the latter. These studies could profitably treat policy ideas, forms and frequency of staff involvement and outcomes as dependent variables, and staff types, presidency

resources, organizational arrangements and standard political and economic environmental factors as independent variables.

The questions and research strategies proposed on the basis of this literature review may of course be corrected and improved upon. But the fact will remain that advancing this research may greatly help to improve the understanding of the workings of the presidency, the causes of its weaknesses in specific countries in the region, its effects on policymaking and its outcomes. The academic payoff of this research agenda can be large, for at least two reasons. One: while the US-based literature has advanced at a faster pace, it is still in its infancy, particularly regarding the use of strong quantitative and comparative analysis. The other: many theoretical propositions about presidentialism have not been connected or tested against the organizational specifics of the presidency. Researchers taking on the Latin American executives may then be able to make a contribution that resonates beyond the Latin Americanist research network of scholars.

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