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Parliamentarism in reverse: an analysis of the institutional architecture of the Brazilian empire under the auspices of the Braganza dynasty.

Inverted parliamentarism: an analysis of the institutional architecture of the brazilian empire under the auspices of the house of braganza

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Summary

This paper analyzes the institutional configuration of the Brazilian Empire from what has been conventionally termed "parliamentarism in reverse," highlighting the role of the Braganza Dynasty in the political leadership of the State. It examines the actions of the Moderating Power and its implications for the relationship between the Executive and Legislative branches, demonstrating how the centralization of power compromised parliamentary autonomy and shaped a unique institutional architecture in nineteenth-century Brazil.

Keywords: Brazilian Empire; Parliamentarism; Moderating Power; Imperial Family; Constitution of 1824.

Abstract

This paper analyzes the institutional configuration of the Brazilian Empire based on what has been termed "reverse parliamentarism," highlighting the role of the House of Bragança in the political leadership of the State. It examines the operation of the Moderating Power and its implications for the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative branches, showing how the concentration of power weakened parliamentary autonomy and shaped a distinctive institutional framework in nineteenth-century Brazil.

Keywords: Brazilian Empire; Parliamentarism; Moderating Power; Imperial Family; Constitution of 1824.

1. Introduction

The political and institutional organization of the Brazilian Empire was formed from a unique experience in the context of 19th-century constitutional monarchies. The granting of Brazil's first post-independence Constitution, in 1824, established a model that combined elements of European constitutional liberalism combined with centralizing political practices, resulting in an institutional architecture marked by tensions between parliamentary representation and authority. In this scenario, the Braganza Dynasty played a central role in the governance of the State, decisively influencing the functioning of imperial political institutions (Bonavides, 2019).

Unlike classic parliamentary systems, in which the Executive branch is directly dependent on the government... With the confidence of Parliament, the model adopted in imperial Brazil presented characteristics that they subverted this logic. The presence of the Moderating Power, constitutionally attributed to the Emperor, allowed direct interference in the relations between the branches of power, compromising the autonomy of the Legislative branch and the stability of ministerial cabinets. This configuration gave rise to...



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which the literature calls "parliamentarism in reverse," an expression used to describe the inversion.

of representative logic in the functioning of the imperial political system (Carvalho, 2017).

The actions of the Moderating Power proved to be one of the central elements of this architecture.

institutional. By granting the Emperor prerogatives such as the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies,

Regarding the appointment and dismissal of ministers and the enactment of laws, the 1824 Constitution established a

A mechanism for concentrating power that limited the scope of parliamentary control.

Historical studies indicate that this institutional arrangement contributed to the fragility of

political representation and the subordination of Parliament to the imperial will, even in a

formally constitutional context (Ferraz, 2016).

An analysis of imperial political practice demonstrates that the alternation of ministerial cabinets

It did not necessarily stem from parliamentary crises or the loss of legislative support, but rather...

To a large extent, the Emperor's decisions were made. This institutional dynamic reinforced a model of

centralized governance, in which the political responsibility of the Executive to Parliament

It was mitigated by the direct action of the monarch. This characteristic distinguishes the Brazilian system from...

European parliamentary experiences highlight the limits of the institutionalization of liberalism.

Politics in the Empire (Lynch, 2016).

In this context, the imperial political elite played a significant role in sustaining this.

institutional arrangement. The relationship between the Emperor, the political parties and Parliament was

marked by agreements, disputes, and strategies aimed at maintaining order and stability.

Politics, often at the expense of expanding democratic participation. The literature points out

that this configuration favored the consolidation of patrimonialist practices and the reproduction of a

a restricted political system, in which decision-making power remained concentrated in small circles.

(Faoro, 2018).

Understanding parliamentarism in reverse therefore requires an analysis that goes beyond...

constitutional text and consider the political and institutional practice in the social reality of this period of

History. The organization of the institutions of the Brazilian Empire reflected a particular adaptation of

Liberal constitutionalism adapted to the historical, social, and economic conditions of the country, resulting in a

a model that formally reconciled political representation with effective mechanisms of

centralization of power (Mattos, 2017).

Given this context, the objective of this work is to analyze the structure

institutional framework of the Brazilian Empire under the leadership of the Braganza Dynasty, with emphasis on

The workings of parliamentarism in reverse and the role of the Moderating Power. The aim is to...

to understand how this institutional arrangement shaped the relationships between the branches of government, influenced

The dynamics of imperial politics contributed to the formation of the Brazilian state in the 19th century.



2. Theoretical Framework / Results

Understanding what's called the "reverse parliamentarism" in the Brazilian Empire requires a direct dialogue between constitutional theory, political history, and institutional practice. The theoretical framework. This study is based on authors who analyze the formation of the Brazilian National State in 19th century, the organization of powers foreseen in the Constitution of 1824 and the role played by The Braganza Dynasty in the political leadership of the country. These references allow us to interpret the results of the historical-institutional analysis developed show that the political arrangement The imperial system did not correspond to the classic parliamentary model, even though it formally adopted some of its features. of its elements.

The drafting of the 1824 Constitution established a unique structure by instituting, in addition to The Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches, including the Moderating Power, as provided for in the tenth article. this document, attributed exclusively to the Emperor, as stipulated in article ninety-eight of The aforementioned coding.

Article 10. The Political Powers recognized by the Constitution of the Empire of Brazil are four: the Legislative Power, the Moderating Power, the Executive Power, and the Judicial Power. (Brazil, 1824)
Article 98. The Moderating Power is the key to the entire Political organization, and is exclusively delegated to the Emperor, as Supreme Head of the Nation, and its First Representative, so that he may incessantly watch over the maintenance of the Independence, balance, and harmony of the other Political Powers. (Brazil, 1824)

As analyzed by Bonavides (2019), this device broke with the liberal tradition. European in concentrating the role of supreme arbiter of the political system in the monarch. In theory, This configuration weakened the principle of the balanced separation of powers and compromised the Parliamentary autonomy, creating the legal basis for a governance model. centralized, with a clear influence from monarchical absolutism which guided the Old Regime of Europe in the period before the Enlightenment ideals and the French Revolution of 1789.

José Murilo de Carvalho (2017) makes a decisive contribution to this debate by demonstrating that the imperial political elite operated within limits previously defined by the authority. monarchical. The political parties of the period, although organized around disputes ideologically driven, they did not have effective control over the permanence of ministerial cabinets. This fact The theoretical basis finds direct support in the results of the historical analysis carried out in this work, which This shows that the rotation of ministries occurred primarily by imperial decision, and not by parliamentary crises.

The results also reveal the functioning of Parliament in the Brazilian Empire. It was marked by a structural asymmetry of power. Although the Chamber of Deputies exercised Although formally legislative in nature, its capacity for oversight and political control was limited by the Emperor's prerogative to dissolve it at any time. Ferraz (2016) highlights that this The legal possibility reduced Parliament to a subordinate body, weakening the principle.



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of ministerial responsibility, a central element of classical parliamentarism.

From a theoretical point of view, Lynch (2016) interprets this model as an expression of a conservative liberalism, in which order and political stability were prioritized at the expense of expansion of representative participation. The results of the study confirm this interpretation. to demonstrate that the Moderating Power functioned as an instrument for preserving authority. imperial and aimed at containing political tensions, even when this meant restricting autonomy. legislative.

Historical analysis also shows that the actions of the Braganza Dynasty, especially During the Second Reign (1840-1889), the personalization of political power was reinforced. Dom Pedro II He used the Moderating Power as a regular mechanism for institutional intervention, interfering directly in the formation and dissolution of cabinets. This empirical data confirms the interpretations. de Mattos (2017), for whom the Brazilian imperial state consolidated itself based on a logic centralizing, sustained by agreements between the monarch and the political elite.

The results also indicate that parliamentarism in reverse cannot be understood. not as a simple deviation or institutional failure. It is, in fact, a model consistent with the historical, social, and political conditions of 19th-century Brazil. Low political participation, The fragility of representative institutions and the fear of territorial fragmentation were often used as justifications for concentrating power in the hands of the Emperor, as noted by Faoro (2018).

This connection between theoretical framework and results allows us to affirm that architecture The institutional framework of the Brazilian Empire produced a hybrid system, situated between constitutionalism. Liberalism and monarchical centralization. Parliament existed and functioned, but did not hold supremacy. policy regarding the Executive. Ministerial responsibility was mitigated by imperial intervention, the which consistently characterizes the inverted parliamentarism as a structural feature of the regime.

Finally, the results indicate that this model has left lasting marks on the culture. Brazilian politics: The centralization of power, the fragility of the Legislature, and the prominence of certain figures. Personalistic figures of authority reappear, in new forms, in later periods of history. national. Thus, the theoretical framework adopted in this study not only supports the analysis of the period imperial, as well as contributing to understanding the perpetuation of certain institutional customs. that go beyond the 19th century.

3. Materials and Methods

This study is characterized as qualitative research, with an approach...

Bibliographical and historical-institutional analysis, focused on the political situation of the Brazilian Empire.



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and the workings of what is known as parliamentarism in reverse. The choice of this approach

The methodological approach is justified by the need to understand complex institutional phenomena, whose

Analysis requires the interpretation of normative devices, political practices, and theoretical constructs.

developed throughout the 19th century.

Bibliographic research formed the central axis of the work, allowing for the surveying of...

A systematic collection of classic and contemporary works related to the political history of Brazil,

Imperial constitutionalism and the forms of power organization during the monarchical period. They were

consulted books, scientific articles and academic studies produced by recognized authors in

The field of political science, history, and Brazilian constitutional law, with particular emphasis on those

which analyze the 1824 Constitution, the Moderating Power, and the actions of the royal family.

In parallel, documentary research was carried out based on primary and normative sources.

especially the text of the Constitution of the Empire of Brazil of 1824. The analysis of this document

It allowed us to identify the legal foundations of the organization of powers and to understand the

prerogatives attributed to the Emperor, fundamental for the characterization of parliamentarism

opposites. The examination of the constitutional text was carried out in an interpretative manner, considering both

its formal wording as well as its practical implications for the functioning of imperial institutions.

The inclusion criteria for the analyzed sources considered thematic relevance,

Academic relevance and theoretical consistency of the selected works were prioritized.

that directly addressed the formation of the imperial state, the relations between the Executive and Legislative branches.

and the political role of the monarch in the 19th century. As exclusion criteria, the following were disregarded

materials of a purely descriptive nature, publications without recognized academic backing or

studies that did not directly engage with the object of the research.

The data analysis was performed through exploratory and analytical reading of the sources.

selected. Initially, a general reading of the material was carried out, with the aim of identifying

Key concepts and central analytical categories, such as centralization of power, political representation,

Ministerial responsibility and conservative liberalism. A reading then took place.

in-depth, seeking to establish relationships between the different authors and identify convergences and

differing interpretations regarding the functioning of the imperial political system.

Subsequently, the analyzed content was organized thematically.

enabling the connection between the theoretical framework and the historical data examined. This

The organization allowed for structuring the analysis in a coherent manner, connecting the devices.

constitutional principles applied to the effective political practice of the imperial period. The interpretation of the results occurred

In light of the adopted theoretical framework, enabling a critical understanding of the limits and...

contradictions of the Brazilian institutional model in the 19th century.

The methodological approach adopted proved to be adequate for achieving the objectives.



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proposed, ensuring academic rigor, analytical coherence, and compatibility with the requirements.

formalities of the periodical. By combining bibliographic and documentary research, the study made possible a

A consistent analysis of parliamentarism in reverse as a structuring element of the political experience.

Brazilian imperial.

From a theoretical point of view, the functioning of parliamentarism in the Brazilian Empire

It distanced itself substantially from the classic European model. As outlined by Norberto

Bobbio (2000), parliamentarism presupposes the political responsibility of the Executive towards the

Parliament, as well as the real possibility of the government being ousted through loss of support.

legislative. In the Brazilian case, however, the existence of the Moderating Power produced a reversal.

This logic, in which the ministerial cabinet remained formally responsible to the Chamber,

but substantially subordinate to the will of the Emperor, who held the prerogative of appointment,

to dismiss and reorganize governments independently of parliamentary alignment.

This structural asymmetry explains why imperial parliamentarism can be...

understood as a system that appears liberal but operates in a centralized manner.

Parliament existed, deliberated, and legislated, but it did not constitute the decision-making core of political power.

As a result, the Brazilian model moved closer to a monarchical constitutionalism.

more like a tutelary regime than a fully parliamentary one, in which political sovereignty is exercised through...

representation. The experience of the Zacarias Office thus demonstrates not an occasional dysfunction of

not the system, but the very mode of operation of the inverted parliamentarism in nineteenth-century Brazil, in

How did liberal institutional frameworks coexist with permanent mechanisms for containing autonomy?

politics (BOBBIO, 2000; LYNCH, 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the bibliographic and documentary analysis confirm that the

The parliamentary system established in the Brazilian Empire took on characteristics distinct from the classical model.

European. Although it formally adopted parliamentary mechanisms, such as the existence of cabinets

With ministerial bodies and a representative Parliament, the system functioned under a strong centralization of power.

political, especially because of the prerogatives granted to the Emperor by the Constitution of 1824

(BONAVIDES, 2019).

An analysis of the constitutional provisions shows that the Moderating Power occupied a position

central to the institutional architecture of the Empire. By granting the monarch the power to dissolve

The Chamber of Deputies, the power to appoint and dismiss ministers, and to enact laws, the constitutional text created a

The mechanism of executive supremacy over the legislative branch. This institutional arrangement weakened the

The principle of ministerial responsibility to Parliament, an essential element of



classic parliamentarism, as highlighted by Ferraz (2016).

The results also demonstrate that, in imperial political practice, the alternation of
The formation of ministerial cabinets occurred primarily by decision of the Emperor, and not as a consequence.
directly resulting from parliamentary crises or the loss of legislative support. Carvalho (2017) observes that the
Ministerial instability in the Empire was less related to the internal dynamics of Parliament and
more closely linked to the exercise of the Moderating Power, which reinforces the characterization of the system as a
Parliamentary system that is merely apparent.

The episode of the Zacarias de Góes e Vasconcelos Cabinet, dissolved in July 1868,
This constitutes one of the most emblematic examples of the practical operationalization of the Moderating Power in
Second Reign¹. Although the parliamentary system had been formally in operation since
In 1847, the dismissal of a liberal cabinet that had not been defeated in Parliament demonstrates that
Ministerial stability did not depend on the confidence of the Chamber, but on the direct approval of the Emperor.
The decision by Dom Pedro II to replace Zacarias with the conservative Viscount of Itaboraí revealed,
in an explicit way, the limits of parliamentary autonomy and the supremacy of the imperial will over the
representative logic, reinforcing the inverted character of Brazilian parliamentarism.

This intervention cannot be understood as an isolated gesture, but as part of
a long history of tensions between the Executive, Legislative and Crown, intensified since the revolts
liberals of 1842 and influenced by the conciliation policy of the following decades. As observed
José Murilo de Carvalho, the closing of the Zacarias Office marked a turning point in
The institutional balance of the Second Reign, by publicly exposing the fragility of the system.
representative before the Moderating Power. By politically silencing a cabinet that sought greater
Regarding civil autonomy in the face of military control of the Paraguayan War, the Emperor reaffirmed his position.
as the supreme arbiter of the political system, a gesture that many contemporaries and historians
Later interpretations suggested it as one of the initial signs of the terminal crisis of the imperial regime.
according to Carvalho (2017).

Regarding the functioning of Parliament, the data analyzed indicate that its
The performance was marked by structural limitations. Although formally invested with functions
In legislative matters, Parliament was subordinate to imperial authority, which restricted its power.
capacity for effective political control. This condition is interpreted by Mattos (2017) as part

¹ The dissolution of the Zacarias Cabinet is part of a broader political context, marked by the consequences of the Paraguayan War (1864-1870) and by disputes over the autonomy of civilian power in relation to military command. Although Zacarias had nominated Luís Alves de Lima e Silva, the Duke of Caxias, a conservative figure, to lead the Brazilian forces in the conflict, disagreements over appointments and the limits of military authority led to a break with the Emperor. The subsequent rise of the Count d'Eu, husband of Princess Isabel and therefore son-in-law of Dom Pedro II, to command the troops, made explicit the personal and dynastic nature of imperial decisions, reinforcing contemporary criticisms of the centralization of power and the discretionary use of the Moderating Power.



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of a centralizing state project, in which political representation was tolerated, but rigidly controlled.

Discussing these results allows us to understand that reverse parliamentarism does not This can be interpreted as an occasional anomaly. It is a model consistent with the conservative liberalism that guided the formation of the Brazilian imperial state. Lynch (2016) argues that 19th-century constitutionalism in Brazil sought to reconcile liberal principles with preservation of order and monarchical authority, resulting in institutions that limited the expanding political participation.

Another relevant finding relates to the actions of the imperial political elite. Liberals and Conservatives, despite programmatic differences, operated within the limits imposed by The monarch's authority. Political disputes focused less on consolidating majorities. stable parliamentarians and more in their ability to negotiate with the Emperor, as analyzed Faoro (2018). This pattern contributed to the consolidation of personalistic political practices and patrimonialists.

The analysis also highlights the decisive role of the Braganza Dynasty in maintaining this institutional arrangement. During the Second Reign, Pedro II used the Moderating Power as an institutional arrangement. a recurring instrument of political intervention, guaranteeing administrative stability, but compromising the autonomy of Parliament. According to Carvalho (2019), this practice reinforced the The political system's dependence on the figure of the monarch hinders institutionalization. full parliamentary system.

The results also indicate a significant gap between normativity. Constitutional law and political practice. Although the current Constitution provides for the separation of powers, The concrete functioning of the institutions revealed the supremacy of the Executive. Nogueira (2018) highlights that this discrepancy between legal text and institutional reality is fundamental for to understand the limits of imperial constitutionalism.

Finally, the discussion of the results allows us to affirm that the inverted parliamentarism left... lasting marks on Brazilian political culture. The centralization of power, the fragility of Legislative power and the emphasis on personal authority reappear, in different forms, during periods... later stages of national history. As Villa (2020) observes, these institutional legacies help to to explain recurring difficulties in consolidating effectively representative political practices. in Brazil.

Final Considerations

The analysis developed throughout this work made it possible to understand that the The parliamentary system adopted in the Brazilian Empire was configured as an institutional experiment.



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unique, marked by a reversal of the classical logic of the parliamentary system. The so-called Parliamentarism in reverse did not represent a simple, incomplete adaptation of the European model. but a political arrangement deliberately structured to ensure the centralization of power in The Emperor's hands, under the auspices of the Braganza Dynasty. This configuration proved to be... fundamental to understanding the institutional architecture of the Brazilian imperial state.

The results obtained demonstrated that the Moderating Power constituted the main element. supporting this model. By granting the Emperor broad and decisive prerogatives over the In addition to other powers, the 1824 Constitution established a mechanism that compromised the autonomy of Parliament and downplayed the political responsibility of ministers before the Chamber of Deputies. This structure distanced the Brazilian system from classic parliamentarism, in which the Executive branch depends on the government. directly from parliamentary confidence, configuring an institutional dynamic marked by supremacy of monarchical power.

The research also showed that imperial political practice reinforced this design. constitutional. The rotation of ministerial cabinets occurred, to a large extent, at the initiative of Emperor, and not as a result of parliamentary crises or actual manifestations of loss of legislative support. This data confirms that Parliament, although formally integrated into the structure of the State, played a limited role in the political control of the Executive, remaining subordinate to centralizing logic of the Moderating Power.

Another relevant aspect identified was the role of the imperial political elite in maintaining within this institutional arrangement. Liberals and conservatives, despite their ideological differences, operated within the limits imposed by imperial authority, adapting its strategies to the dynamics of power. in effect. This relationship contributed to the consolidation of political practices marked by personalism, through patrimonialism and direct negotiation with the monarch, to the detriment of Strengthening representative institutions.

The analysis also made it possible to understand that parliamentarism in reverse should be interpreted in light of the historical and social conditions of 19th-century Brazil. The fragility of institutions, limited political participation, and concern for maintaining territorial unity. These were factors frequently cited to justify the centralization of power. In this context, the The Moderating Power was conceived as an instrument of political stability, albeit at the cost of... expanding democratic representation and strengthening Parliament.

The results also indicate that the Braganza Dynasty played a decisive role in The consolidation of this institutional model. The actions of Dom Pedro II, in particular, reinforced the The personalization of power and the dependence of the political system on the figure of the monarch. Although This arrangement also ensured relative institutional stability throughout the Second Reign. limited the development of autonomous parliamentary practices and the full institutionalization of



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Political liberalism in Brazil.

Therefore, it can be concluded that parliamentarism in reverse constituted an element structuring the Brazilian imperial political experience, decisively influencing the formation of the State and of the national political culture. Recognizing this institutional uniqueness allows to understand the tensions between centralization and representation that marked the imperial period and that, To a certain extent, they left lasting legacies on the Brazilian political trajectory. Thus, the study reaffirms the importance of historical-institutional analysis for a critical understanding of Brazilian constitutionalism and the challenges faced in building a political system. effectively representative.

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