

**Daniel J. Epstein—Dissertation Abstract**  
**Tipping the Scales for Parties:**  
**Executive-Legislative Balance and Party System Institutionalization**  
**at the Subnational Level in Russia and Brazil**

This dissertation examines a critical institution of democracy, the political party system, in Russia and Brazil. The findings demonstrate that the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches is a key explanatory factor in incentivizing politicians either to institutionalize a system of political parties, or to allow the system to remain inchoate and the parties epiphenomenal.

In addition to electoral goods that political parties (or other entities) can provide to politicians, a political party is uniquely suited to serve politicians as a vehicle for building a majority—either alone or in coalition—to gain control of a multi-seat legislative organ. The more powerful the legislative branch, the more worthwhile it is for politicians to invest in building up parties over time, which will result in a well-institutionalized party system. The more the balance of power favors an executive with a separate mandate (a directly elected president or governor, for example), however, the less power the legislature will command, and the less incentive there is to build political parties to control it.

In Russia and Brazil, two countries with presidential systems that experienced regime transition near the end of the Third Wave, neither pre-authoritarian party systems nor highly politicized social cleavages augured propitiously for the formation of a well-institutionalized party system, which makes them a useful pair for comparison to test this theory in different world regions. The two countries have the additional advantage of being divided into federal sub-units that form their own electoral arenas which serve as building blocks for national patterns of political competition. Each unit elects its own legislature and (until the practice was abolished in 2005 in Russia) its own governor, and the sub-units also serve to delineate the districts from which deputies are sent to the national legislature (in Russia only until rules to elect the State Duma were changed in 2007). Thus, variation in party system institutionalization and in executive-legislative balance across federal sub-units can be used to multiply cases to test the theory, which also helps to control for national differences.

Although political party system institutionalization is a difficult concept to operationalize, electoral volatility is shown to be the best of many imperfect metrics with which to capture it (higher volatility indicates a less institutionalized party system). An improvement on the traditional Pedersen's Index of volatility developed in this dissertation provides the proxy for party system institutionalization that is used as the dependent variable for statistical analyses of variation among the federal sub-units of Russia and Brazil. Statistical tests using measures of executive-legislative balance in the sub-units and other controls show that a systematic and statistically significant relationship prevails between a balance that favors executives and a more poorly institutionalized party system.

In addition, the theory is tested through case study comparisons of Volgograd and Voronezh Oblasts in Russia the states of Santa Catarina and Paraná in Brazil. Although both pairs are quite similar demographically and socio-economically, they display differing levels of party system institutionalization that track with variations in the executive-legislative balance. Volgograd and Voronezh began the post-Soviet era as very similar Communist-leaning regions, but then diverged. The Volgograd party system achieved a moderate level of institutionalization, far better than that of Voronezh. At the same time, the balance of power came to favor the executive more and more over time in Voronezh than in Volgograd, where the legislature maintained autonomous importance. In Brazil, Paraná had a much more weakly-institutionalized party system and more submissive legislature than neighboring Santa Catarina throughout most of the post-authoritarian era, until a convergence is seen beginning in the most recently completed electoral interval (2002-2006). During this time, the Paraná state legislature began to evince a tendency to resist manipulation by the governor, a pattern seen in Santa Catarina during the entire period. At the same time, the party system institutionalization in Paraná has improved, approaching Santa Catarina's relatively high level of institutionalization.