

Musical chairs in the composition of the permanent committees of the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil (1991-2022)

A dança das cadeiras na composição das comissões permanentes da Câmara dos Deputados no Brasil (1991-2022)

Sillas musicales en la composición de las comisiones permanentes de la Cámara de Diputados en Brasil (1991-2022)

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Abstract

The article aims to present the intense exchange of vacancies in the standing committees of the Chamber of Deputies. It was adopted a longitudinal approach to the party composition of all standing committees installed in the Chamber of Deputies, in the period between 1991 and 2022. This is an exploratory, documentary analysis. Centrality measures that are closely associated with the possibility of embarrassment or influence of a given actor/party were elucidated. It was mobilized a set of network analysis techniques and models to demonstrate the occurrence of intense movement of vacancies in the composition of standing committees between the different parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies, regardless of the presidential administration. It is possible to risk saying, based on the data presented and notes, that this is not a specific phenomenon of a given moment, of a government or of a given coalition formation. The exchange of seats involves all parties and/or party blocs and all standing committees.

Keywords: Legislative Branch; standing committees; political parties; exchange of vacancies.

Resumo

O artigo tem por objetivo apresentar a ocorrência de intensa troca de vagas nas comissões permanentes da Câmara dos Deputados, no período entre 1991 e 2022. Foi adotada uma abordagem longitudinal sobre a composição partidária de todas as comissões permanentes. Trata-se de uma análise documental, exploratória. Foram elucidadas medidas de centralidade que estão intimamente associadas à possibilidade de constrangimento ou de influência de determinado ator/partido. Mobilizou-se um conjunto de técnicas e modelos de análise de redes para demonstrar a ocorrência de intensa movimentação de trocas de vagas na composição das comissões permanentes entre os diversos partidos com representação na Câmara dos Deputados, independentemente da gestão presidencial. Arrisca-se dizer, com base nos dados apresentados e apontamentos, que não se trata de um fenômeno específico de um dado momento, de um governo ou de uma dada formação de coalizão. A troca de vagas perpassa todos os partidos e(ou) blocos partidários e todas as comissões permanentes.

Palavras-chave: Poder Legislativo; comissões permanentes; partidos políticos; troca de vagas.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo presentar el intenso intercambio de escaños en las comisiones permanentes de la Cámara de Diputados. Se adoptó un enfoque longitudinal de la composición partidaria de todas las

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
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comisiones permanentes instaladas en la Cámara de Diputados, en el período comprendido entre 1991 y 2022. Se trata de un análisis documental exploratorio. Se aclararon medidas de centralidad que están estrechamente asociadas con la posibilidad de vergüenza o influencia de un actor/partido determinado. Se movilizó un conjunto de técnicas y modelos de análisis de redes para demostrar la ocurrencia de un intenso movimiento de escaños en la composición de comisiones permanentes entre los diferentes partidos representados en la Cámara de Diputados, independientemente de la administración presidencial. Es posible arriesgarse a decir, a partir de los datos y notas presentados, que no se trata de un fenómeno específico de un momento determinado, de un gobierno o de una formación de coalición determinada. El intercambio de escaños involucra a todos los partidos y(o) bloques de partidos y a todas las comisiones permanentes.

Palabras clave: Poder Legislativo; comisiones permanentes; partidos políticos; intercambio de escaños.

1 Introduction

The standing committees are institutional bodies of the Brazilian Congress, provided for in art. 58 of the Federal Constitution, and their purpose is to deliberate on matters under their jurisdiction. In turn, the distinction between temporary and permanent committees in the Brazilian committee system is guided by criteria and guidelines about their nature, depending on the persistence of their attributions (Centeno, 2022).

The widespread view is that the standing committees are merely decision-making bodies (Nascimento, 2012; Rocha; Barbosa, 2008). For Mény and Knapp (1993, p. 198), this interpretation is not entirely wrong, although it does not reflect the autonomy that many committees can acquire, *vis-à-vis*, their respective assemblies. Nor does it pay attention to the articulations of interests that take shape within it. In other words, the committee system can become a privileged locus of influence in the task of producing public policies (Diniz, 1999).

Depending on the role they are given institutionally, and according to the configuration of the Legislative Houses and the political-party dispute, an increasingly varied group of political actors (outsiders organized, leaderships, parties, elected politicians) mediate the guidelines for the committees' actions and mobilize strategies that play the role of player in the legislative agenda (Centeno, 2022), whose openness can result in the possibility of interference in decision-making¹.

The process of deliberation within the committees is based on the postulate of a majority. The extent to which the decision taken by the members of the committee will be ratified or not by the Plenary will depend on the procedural rules and the strategic political game — between majority and minority, government and opposition and between the parties themselves.

There is no significant volume of studies on standing committees in Brazil. Roughly speaking, the research is aligned around two perspectives: (i) it follows the path of analysis on the support of parliamentarians for the Executive's agenda (Nascimento, 2012; Pereira; Mueller, 2000; Rocha; Barbosa, 2008), and, in this case, the central point of the studies is to verify to what extent the committee system collaborates with and ratifies the pattern of prevalence of the Executive Branch in legislative production; (ii) or turns to the mechanisms for recruiting members of the Legislative Branch for the composition of committees. In this sense, the work carried out by Silame (2009) provides a precise overview of the application of analysis models aimed at understanding the mechanisms for recruiting members to committees.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to a practice that has been little analyzed in the specialized literature: the exchange of vacancies between parties in the composition of standing committees in the Chamber of Deputies. It is assumed that, in line with recent reflections on legislative committees and patterns of influence in the decision-making process (Cesário, 2016; Mancuso, 2007; Santos; Almeida, 2011; Santos, 2014), the vacancy changes made in the committees are structured according to a certain relational pattern, in which the

¹ Resende (2022), for example, indicates that in the legislature, committees are an important gateway for various organized interests.

actions of the parties and their leaderships require the adoption of selective criteria developed in a wide network of actors to allocate the members of the parties to a given committee. In other words, the composition of the standing committees meets the needs of the ruling party and, subsequently, the other parties. Thus, in the admissibility committees such as Constitution and Justice and Financial Supervision and Control, there tend to be few seats that change. These committees are essential for the approval of the President's legislative agenda, so the space for bargaining between the parties becomes more limited.

On the other hand, for the composition of the other standing committees, the specific interests of each of the parties seem to set the tone for the changes in vacancies. In the case of the Labor Committee, for example, this confirms the findings already pointed out by [Diniz \(1999\)](#), namely the tendency for the PT, PDT, and PCdoB to be over-represented on this committee.

However, more accurate assertions about the determinants of the parties' choices as to which standing committees they will focus their efforts on in order to increase their representation require a detailed and individual study for each of the committees, due to the volume of data that needs to be mobilized.

A longitudinal approach was adopted on the party composition of all the standing committees installed in the Chamber of Deputies between 1991 and 2022. This is a documentary and exploratory analysis in which a set of network analysis techniques and methods were used to demonstrate the occurrence of movement and exchange of vacancies in the composition of the standing committees between the parties in the Chamber of Deputies.

The text is organized as follows. After this introduction, the second section presents a brief definition and the main approaches to the legislative committee system, in order to situate the reader who is unfamiliar with the discussion. The third section revisits the analysis of the Brazilian case. The fourth section deals with the methodological procedures used in this article. Subsequently, in the fifth section, the analysis of networks configured by the exchanges of members participating in each standing committee was implemented. The sixth section presents the data and analysis of the patterns and behaviors observed. The conclusions and final considerations portray the findings in light of what has been produced so far and point to the need for new approaches to the commission system in the country.

2 Definition and theoretical approaches

According to [Sartori \(1994, p. 304, our translation\)](#), a committee² is:

a small group of face-to-face interaction (whose) maximum efficient size is established by its operational code [...] durable and institutionalized, in the sense of its existence being recognized, legally or formally, (and which deliberates) in relation to a flow of decisions.

Based on the aforementioned definition, there are three fundamental variables to be highlighted. These are: 1) the number of people who take part in the decision-making process; 2) how these people are selected; and 3) the rules that guide the decision-making process.

Every political decision involves external costs and risks. The first refers to the decision-makers. The costs of this process are usually those of time, commitment, energy and negotiation. They are internal and procedural, according to [Sartori \(1994\)](#).

Risks refer to the community for whom decisions are made and can cause damage. The fundamental variable for making a political process viable is one that does not increase the costs of the decision-making process too much and, on the other hand, protects the recipients of the public policy from any possible damage.

An excessive number of participants, for example, in the plenary of an assembly (in the case of the Chamber of Deputies, the 513 deputies), increases the cost of the decision-making process, but minimizes the risk of a harmful public policy being adopted. On the other hand, if the cost of the decision-making process is reduced too much (by adopting a smaller number of participants), the risk is maximized.

² The author uses the term committee as a synonym for commission.

The central question is how to balance costs and risks in the decision-making process. The solution suggested by Sartori (1994) is to adopt a deliberative process via committees. These would be the optimum units for decision-making, as they allow for a reduction in external risks, with a reduction in decision-making costs, compared to the costs of assemblies.

Three strands of analysis have emerged from the debate on legislative organization in the US Congress, focusing on standing committees: distributist, informational and partisan. The first (Shepsle, 1986; Shepsle; Weingast, 1987) assumes that the organization of legislative work aims to provide exchange gains between parliamentarians and their constituents. The congressmen's actions would be aimed at promoting the interests of their electoral strongholds, which are geographically concentrated, in order to ensure their re-election.

From this perspective, the committee system would provide the conditions for the approval of distributive policies. The practice of catering to concentrated interests permeates all the committees, facilitating the gains of exchange, which is helped by the fact that the Conference Commission generally does not modify what has been decided by the committees.

The informational approach (Krehbiel, 1991), the second analytical strand, starts from the assumption that the organization of legislative work via committees can contribute to the technical training of parliamentarians as experts in the area of jurisdiction of the committee to which they belong. Because they are experts, they would be in a position to provide good quality information on the public policy to be deliberated, generating informational gains for the subsequent decision in Plenary.

In order for specialization to be an advantage, the optimal composition of committees will be one that brings together parliamentarians from opposite sides of the political spectrum, as this will increase the amount of information available to committee members. Furthermore, the internal composition should be a "mirror" of the Plenary, because in this way the consensus reached within the committee would represent the preferences of the members of the assembly of the Houses.

The last model is called "partisan" and, unlike the previous two, it assumes that the analysis of the committee system should be carried out with reference to the political parties. The main exponents of this approach are Cox and McCubbins (1993), who claim that the legislative process, in general, and the committee system, in particular, are oriented in favor of the interests of the majority party, functioning in a kind of "legislative cartel." The majority party creates the rules that regulate, for example, the committee system that gives the majority party advantages facilitated by the rules defined by the cartel and which are policed by the cartel leadership (Cox; McCubbins, 1993, p. 2).

According to Limongi (1994), it is not a question of saying that parties in the United States of America (USA) are strong along the lines of European parties, but rather that parties act through committees. Thus, the autonomy of the committees in selecting their members is relative. The committees would give greater prominence to the majority party, which, given its status, would control all activities, both in the committees and in Plenary, since the speaker, the majority leader, and the Resolutions Committee were treated as representatives of the party.

3 Studies on committees in Brazil

Not many studies have been published on the committee system of the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil, and there are even fewer in the Federal Senate. In addition, much of the research analyzes the committee system in light of the debate on the preponderance of the Executive Branch in legislative production, resulting from the legislative powers of the President of the Republic and his agenda-setting power over the activities of the National Congress.

Thus, at the heart of the debate on the Brazilian presidential system, there is a set of work that sees the committee system playing a secondary role in the decision-making process, given the instruments available to the Executive Branch to control this process.

This category includes the work of Figueiredo and Limongi (1994), who, when analyzing the legislative output between 1989 and 1992, found that only 7.4% of the laws passed were the

subject of a final decision³ and that 58.6% of that output was not considered by committees, indicating that these bodies are not highly valued as a locus for political decision-making. Another publication by the same authors (Figueiredo; Limongi, 1996, p. 51) confirms the previous conclusion. The commissions in Brazil only play their “negative role” (Krehbiel, 1991), blocking most of the proposals submitted.

A similar result was found by Diniz (1999), when he carried out a case study on the Labor, Administration and Public Service Committee (Comissão de Trabalho, Administração e Serviço Público – CTASP). By analyzing the proposals submitted to the committee between 1989 and 1994, the author states that the members of the CTASP managed to block the projects that did not correspond to their interests and that the vast majority of the projects approved by the CTASP were not ratified by the Plenary.

In the same vein, Santos (1997, p. 150), when analyzing the processing of the so-called “Port Law” (Law No. 9.432/1997), points out that the strategy to be followed by those seeking to pass regulatory legislation (as is the case with this law), which imposes costs on organized and politically active groups, is to withdraw the bill from the standing committees and take it to the Plenary, by means of urgent requests or the formation of special committees. This means that in this case, too, the standing committees were overlooked, reinforcing the view that, in Brazil, they do not have full control of the projects submitted to their area of jurisdiction.

Subsequently, Santos (2002) and Santos and Almeida (2005) returned to the subject of commissions starting from the informational approach⁴ to emphasize that criteria of expertise in themes specifics are taken into account by party leaders when choosing rapporteurs. A counterpoint to this perspective is the work of Müller (2005), for whom the recruitment pattern for the commissions is close to the party approach, despite the differences in the electoral model applied in Brazil and the USA.

Still on the subject of recruitment, but from a political sociology perspective, there is a study by Centeno (2022) on the social background as an important criterion in appointing the composition of committees. The author also opens up another fundamental discussion about the division of power between the houses:

the Senate’s reality is profoundly different from that of the Chamber of Deputies, since matters in the upper house do not need to go through the central committees (CCJ and CAE), and all the thematic collegiate bodies can give their opinion on the merits of the proposal [...], approving them on a terminative basis, making not only the legislative advisors, but above all the standing committees, crucial to the legislative process (Centeno, 2022, p. 11-12, our translation).

However, the choice of which committee will be the subject of in-depth analysis mainly takes into account the structure of the committee⁵ and the prerogatives of authority and responsibility attached to it, whether it be those dedicated solely to organizing legislative work or those dealing with priority issues and projects on the government’s agenda (Centeno, 2022; Silame, 2009) and the strategic importance in selecting the legal initiatives that will be part of the legislative agenda. According to this criterion, “in order to operationalize this selectivity, the actions of the chairman of the committee and the rapporteur are decisive” (Inácio, 2007, p. 173, our translation).

3 In the Brazilian Senate, a matter approved on a terminative basis in a given committee is understood to be the last vote that approves the changes and (or) overturns the changes made by the Plenary of the Chamber of Deputies (Centeno, 2022; Vasquez, 2020).

4 A similar approach can be found in Pereira and Mueller (2000).

5 The work by Inácio (2007), “Estrutura e Funcionamento da Câmara dos Deputados” (Structure and Functioning of the Chamber of Deputies), is one of the obligatory references on decision-making in government, dealing with structure, mechanisms and barriers according to the power of influence and bargaining between the Executive, the Legislative and the committees.

4 Empirical object and methodology

The Standing Orders of the Chamber of Deputies try to preserve the principle that the committees are the representation of the Plenary, by establishing that the distribution of deputies among them obeys the criterion of party proportionality. To this end, after the opening of the legislative session, the speaker of the Chamber issues a rule called the “act of the Directing Board”, defining the number of members, as well as the amount of deputies to which each party will be entitled in each of the committees.

In operationalizing this research, the first task was to collect all the acts issued between 1991 and 2022. Next, the Chamber of Deputies’ diaries were consulted, always around April 15⁶ of each year⁷, to collect data on which deputies had been appointed to the committees. These activities made it possible to draw up a longitudinal overview of the composition of the standing committees⁸ in the Chamber of Deputies and to note a fact that has been little explored in the literature: the exchange of committee seats between parties⁹.

In general terms, exchanges are carried out according to the following procedures:

- 1 Committee members: the Directing Board act defines the total number of members each committee will have. This definition is valid for two years.
- 2 Parties on the committee: every year, an act of the Directing Board defines the number of seats each party will have on the committees, following the criterion of party proportionality. The aim is to ensure that the representation on the committee mirrors, as closely as possible, the representation on the floor of the House.
- 3 Committee chairmanships: negotiations begin between the various party leaders to decide which party will hold each of the committee chairmanships. In general, the parties or party blocs with the largest caucuses control the majority of committees.
- 4 Swapping vacancies: negotiations are also underway for the swapping of vacancies in each committee.

To make things easier to understand, let’s assume that the definition of the Directing Board’s acts in 1991 established the following distribution, according to Table 1, for the Agriculture and Rural Policy Committee (Comissão de Agricultura e Política Rural – CAPR) and the CTASP.

Table 1 – Number of vacancies on the CAPR and CTASP standing committees

Party	Number of vacancies in the CAPR	Number of vacancies in the CTASP
Party A	8	9
Party B	6	7
Party C	4	5
Party D	2	2
Totals	20	23

Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Suppose that party “C,” out of preference or strategic action, chooses to increase its representation in the CAPR, while party “A” opts for the CTASP. The leaders of the “A” and “C” parties could then agree that “A” will give up 2 seats to “C” on the CAPR, enabling an equivalence of political strength between “B” and “C”; in return, “A” will receive 2 seats from “C” on the CTASP, further increasing its supremacy on this committee.

Of course, in the real world, the complexity of such exchanges is greater. For this reason,

⁶ The dates of the diaries consulted range from April 15 to, sometimes, mid-May.

⁷ There is a time lag between the issuance of the Directing Board’s acts and the nomination of the leaders, probably due to the inherent processes of inter- and intra-party negotiation for the nomination of members.

⁸ The breakdown of members credited as participants in the standing committees of the Chamber of Deputies was made possible by access to official reports, obtained via Law No. 12.527/2011 (“Transparency Law”), from the Federal Chamber.

⁹ Diniz (1999) had already noted the occurrence of this phenomenon in the CTASP case study, but the author does not say whether this was a typical aspect of the CTASP and of MPs on the left of the political spectrum, nor whether it was specific to a particular moment or a common practice.

it has been assessed that the complex network analysis model makes the occurrences explicit, and its analysis has made it possible to model this dynamic system of member exchanges in profile connections/interactions longitudinal and restrictions by governments.

Data analysis will be divided into 2 stages: (i) in the first part, the networks are scaled in graphs, responsible for building a diagnosis on the profile of the exchanges, organized into criteria on types and scaling; (ii) the second is the result of the operationalization of the descriptive/qualitative (informational) data set of the participating actors (nodes), under the graph structure metrics, such as centrality and cohesion measures.

Among the findings, detailed in the next section, it was possible to identify relational patterns according to the different actors and their respective profiles, the eccentricity in certain governments, the preferences and perspectives of action in the exchanges, and, above all, to determine which subcommunities represent the main interactions in this complex exchange network.

5 Data analysis

The swapping of seats between political parties on the Chamber's standing committees took place throughout the period studied in this study and in all the standing committees. Although it is a recurring practice, in the literature review carried out, the only article that mentions this aspect is by [Diniz \(1999\)](#). For the author, what explains why the CTASP was able to block the labor reform bills presented during the Sarney and Collor governments was precisely the over-representation that the left-wing parties achieved in the committee, due to the mechanism of swapping vacancies.

Previous studies, such as those mentioned above, indicate that one of the reasons why committees play a secondary role in the legislative process¹⁰ is the fact that there is a high turnover rate among their members. In this study, this aspect does not directly affect the analysis because turnover is targeted at the individual parliamentarian, with the previous agreements on the number of seats allocated to each party remaining unchanged, either by acts of the Directing Board or by agreements between party leaders.

5.1 The profile of changes in the standing committees

In fact, before the more robust analysis for each of the networks, we highlight three measures of centrality and one measure of cohesion, which emphasize the actors' ability to influence the global network and show the relational patterns of the complex network, as shown in Figure 1.

Statistics relating to network structure, such as "Diameter" and "Modularity", make it possible to discuss the profile and intensity of the networks formed. Networks with high "Modularity" indicate internally denser connections between the nodes of the same network or subcommunities. By contrast, once measures of high "Modularity" have been verified in the subcommunities, attention should be paid to the inverse phenomenon that these networks reflect measures that indicate low connectivity between the other nodes of other subcommunities in the same network, leading to isolation in the decision-making, choice, bargaining and exchange process.

In turn, the "Diameter" can be understood as the longest geodesic¹¹ of a network. Thus, the statistics on the "Diameter" and, above all, on the "Modularity" of the network allow us to verify the relational profile of connections between the subcommunities of parties and members participating in the exchange in each of the committees.

¹⁰ The national decision-making process is characterized above all by the concentration of power in a few actors: in the legislative powers of the Executive, which glimpses the interactions between Executive and Legislative ([Diniz, 2005](#)); party leaders and, consequently, the ascendancy of deputies in the legislature ([Anastasia; Melo; Santos, 2004](#); [Santos, 2003](#)); and in perspective centered on the political system, where the Executive foresees the construction of a majority in the caucuses, in which greater discipline and cooperation is ensured for the agenda, and, on the other hand, the Legislative's power of veto over the Executive's actions is assumed ([Melo; Anastasia, 2005](#)), with an emphasis on controlling the position of committee chair ([Silame, 2009](#)).

¹¹ The geodesic represents the shortest distance between two pairs of nodes in a network.

These relational characteristics described here *a priori* have been mobilized in order to allow the first-time reader to approach the subject with a more critical view of the arguments that will be operationalized by the analysis of the statistical information presented. The measures that describe the possibilities and relational patterns in each of the governments can be seen in Table 2.

Figure 1 – General graph statistics* in Gephi 0.9.2

Measures	Description
Degree centrality	Degree centrality consists of the number of links/relationships of each of the actors (vertex/node). As the number of ties (interactions) increases, “alternative flows can emerge in order to pursue their goals, being less dependent on other individuals” (Canato, 2017, p. 116, our translation).
Closeness centrality	Closeness centrality indicates the average proximity of an actor (node) to the others, responsible for “indicating the potential ability to reach all the actors (nodes) in the network” (Alejandro; Norman, 2005, p. 16, our translation).
Centrality of intermediation (betweenness)	The centrality of intermediation is responsible for measuring the “relative power” of an actor (node). In other words, it comprises the “capacity of a given actor to mediate communications between pairs of nodes” (Alejandro; Norman, 2005, p. 16, our translation). In this context, actors who develop greater centrality in intermediation act as “bridge actors” (brokers), acting as necessary points for the flow between nodes (Canato, 2017, p. 116). This ability to build communication “bridges” between different subgroups, or subcommunities, is the connector/mediator link between pairs of underlying nodes.
Clustering coefficient**	The clustering coefficient indicates more densely connected sets of actors/nodes. This measure is responsible for indicating the strength of a subgroup’s relationships with each other. This indicates that subgroups with a high clustering coefficient tend to disseminate ideas among themselves and, above all, exchange members mainly among their members — connection between the nodes in its neighborhood.

Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes: * A complete graph has all possible edges and a density of 1.

** The clustering coefficient of the complex network represents the average of the coefficients of the nodes.

Table 2 – Exchange networks in committees: legislatures from Collor to Bolsonaro

Mandate	Centrality measures				
Government	Middle grade	Diameter	Density	Modularity	Average clustering coefficient
COLLOR	3.778	5	0.222	0.265	0.230
FRANCO	4.25	5	0.283	0.254	0.233
FHC I	4.88	4	0.203	0.251	0.181
FHC II	8.652	4	0.393	0.114	0.363
LULA I	16.095	4	0.805	0.118	0.441
LULA II	11.333	3	0.493	0.289	0.113
ROUSSEFF I	17.464	4	0.647	0.147	0.504
ROUSSEFF II	3.115	4	0.125	0.353	0.053
TEMER	11.286	2	0.418	0.258	0.106
BOLSONARO	8.931	5	0.319	0.184	0.243
Average	8.9784	4	0.3908	0.2215	0.2467

Source: Own elaboration (2023) using software Gephi 0.9.2

Mapping the relational social network presupposes the application of a statistical model which develops an adjacency matrix between the interaction records of all the actors in the network — adjusted based on their role and position (Higgins; Ribeiro, 2018). The work of Borgatti, Everett and Johnson (2015) is one of the must-read references in complex network analysis. The authors provide a systematic review of the descriptions and relationships between measures of centrality and network cohesion and present considerations on their properties, the effect of mobilization and influence despite the breakdown of data into arenas (or clusters) and, in effect, in the analysis of the relational processes of the probabilistic model (Penna, 2017).

The “Density” measure indicates how close a graph/network is to being complete (ratio between the actual number of links and the maximum possible number of links). Although a complete graph is expressed with links between all possible edges/actors (value 1), networks rarely have syncretic or isolated behavior — the statistical value ranges from 0 to 1. In the networks analyzed, this number varied between 0.125 (in Rouseff II) and 0.805 (in Lula I).

A graph density measure close to zero shows the existence of isolated groups, where the actors representing them are not connected to the others (Oliveira; Gama, 2012). Therefore, the data shows a tendency towards moderate links between the candidates, insofar as the network expresses a significant connection between all the actors. In fact, the actors exchanged more seats among themselves in mandates that required broader coalitions. The exception in this case is Collor and Rouseff II, who counted from 1990 to 1992 and only in 2015, respectively.

In relation to the “Average Degree” measure, which measures the intensity of communication¹² (connectivity) of the overall network (Oliveira; Gama, 2012), the values indicate moderate to low connectivity (Table 2). In an analytical sense, this means that, on average, each actor (node) in the network has power to control the structure of the network — either by supporting connectivity or by influencing (directing) specific interactions.

Next, the complex network analysis model was applied to the historical profile of member changes in the standing committees. Complex networks are graphs that present non-trivial properties to the interactions between the actors involved. The model makes it possible to measure the structural complexity and evolution of the network, the diversity of connections and nodes, or to establish subcommunities according to the cohesion expressed between nodes, among others (Strogatz, 2001).

A descriptive assessment was made of the complex network of exchange in the committees, identifying how individual actions by the parties can establish relational patterns between the actors (nodes), either individually or amplified. The aim is to demonstrate how specific exchanges in each government determine a complex pattern (graphs), whose relational network is oriented throughout the process — outgoing/incoming parties; repeat offenders; degree of action by base or opposition parties, among others.

In addition to the statistics shown in Table 2, there are some measures relating to the structure of the network, which indicate the intensity of the network’s connections. Among these, “Modularity” is designed to measure strength according to the division of the network into modules/subcommunities (clusters). Networks with high modularity both reflect the formation of denser and more preferential connections between a subcommunity and are indicative of low connectivity with neighboring nodes. The networks analyzed show low modularity; however, there is no statistically significant deviation from the average.

5.2 Network of organized interests and exchanges in the standing committees: central actors, agenda and subcommunities

Figures from 2 to 11 show the graphs representing the complex networks set up by the exchanges in the standing committees. Individual analyses by the government of the networks shaped by the changes of members in the standing committees are portrayed. Each of the graphs groups together their respective measures of structure, as well as the composition of the

¹² In the analysis of complex social networks, understanding the average degree is divided into two directions, where the inner degree is called support, and the outer degree is called influence on the network (Freeman, 2004).

sociogram, by members, from subcommunities, represented by different colors.

Silveira (2018) points out that the procedure of fragmenting complex networks by periods would act as an increment to data analysis and, in particular, has peer validation precisely because it is based on techniques that do not modify the characteristics of the general complex network model. The procedure would only be responsible for amplifying a certain frame of the network (Centeno, 2022; Silame, 2009).

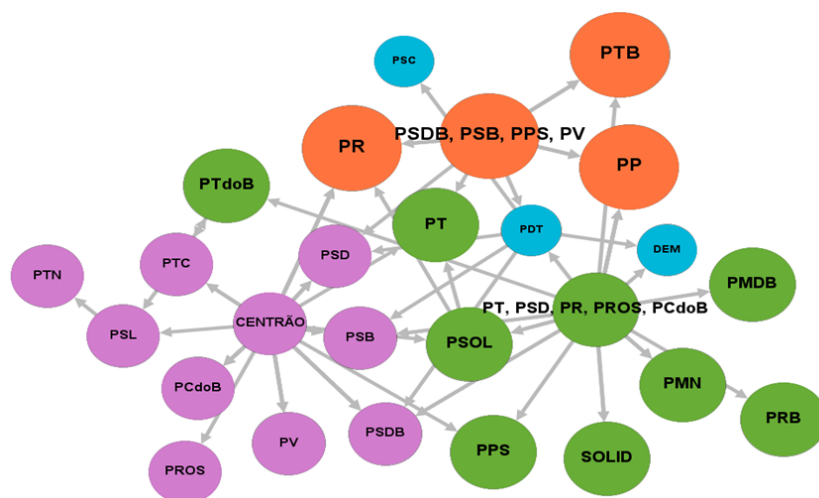
The subcommunities are set up as particular representations, although they have an intrinsic link to the determinants of the total network, precisely because they preserve the connections in a complex way, either by maintaining the link between the frequencies of global interaction and(or) by the hermetic bias of the processes that drive the exchanges (Alves, 2023; Resende, 2022).

It is noteworthy that over the 21 years the majority of the exchanges took place around three subcommunities, but since 2015, due to the increase in party fragmentation, the number of subcommunities has varied between four and five. Two other aspects are worth mentioning. The first is that the exchange of seats goes beyond the ideological blocs and(or) the individual party caucuses, which may be an indication that there are thematic niches that interest specific groups/blocs or caucuses.

The second is the intensification of the parties' interrelationships, especially since 1995, with periods of wide-ranging exchanges of seats, such as in 2003-2006, the first Lula government (Figure 8); in 2011-2014, the first Dilma government (Figure 4); and finally in 2019-2022, in the Bolsonaro government (Figure 7).

Rousseff II (Figure 2) and FHC II (Figure 3) stand out as having the highest (0.353) and lowest (0.114) "Modularity" values, respectively. The central argument derived from the analysis of this measure is that there is a recurring relational pattern that is reproduced in other governments, in which the grouping of actors converges in a structure that gives preference to a single module/subcommunity.

Figure 2 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (2015)



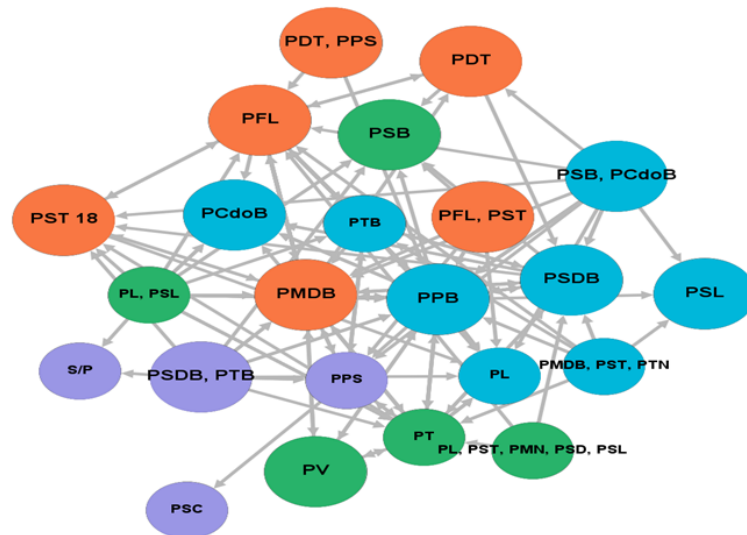
Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- Rousseff II (2015): 25 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 81
- Subcommunities: 4
- Modularity: 0.353
- Diameter: 4
- "Centrão" (PMDB, PP, PTB, DEM, PRB, SOLID, PSC, PHS, PTN, PMN, PRP, PSDC, PEN, PRTB)

The "Clustering Average" Coefficient ("Clusterization") specifically indicates the degree of connection/association between all the pairs/actors in the global network under analysis. The results showed the highest and lowest values for Rousseff I (Figure 4) and Rousseff II (Figure 2), 0.504 and 0.053, respectively.

Figure 3 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (1999-2002)

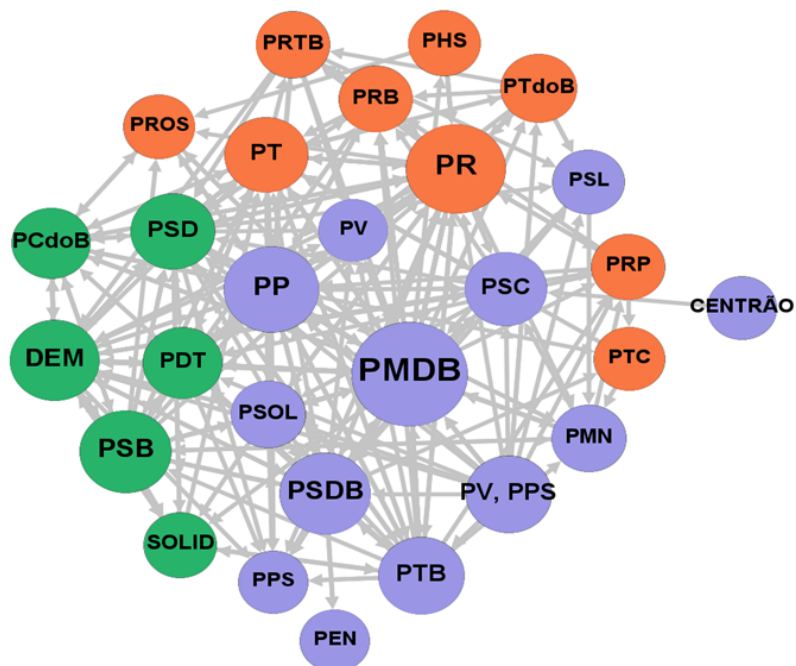


Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- FHC II (1999-2002): 23 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 199
- Subcommunities: 4
- Modularity: 0.114
- Diameter: 4

Figure 4 – Graph of networks of exchanges of seats in committees (2011-2014)



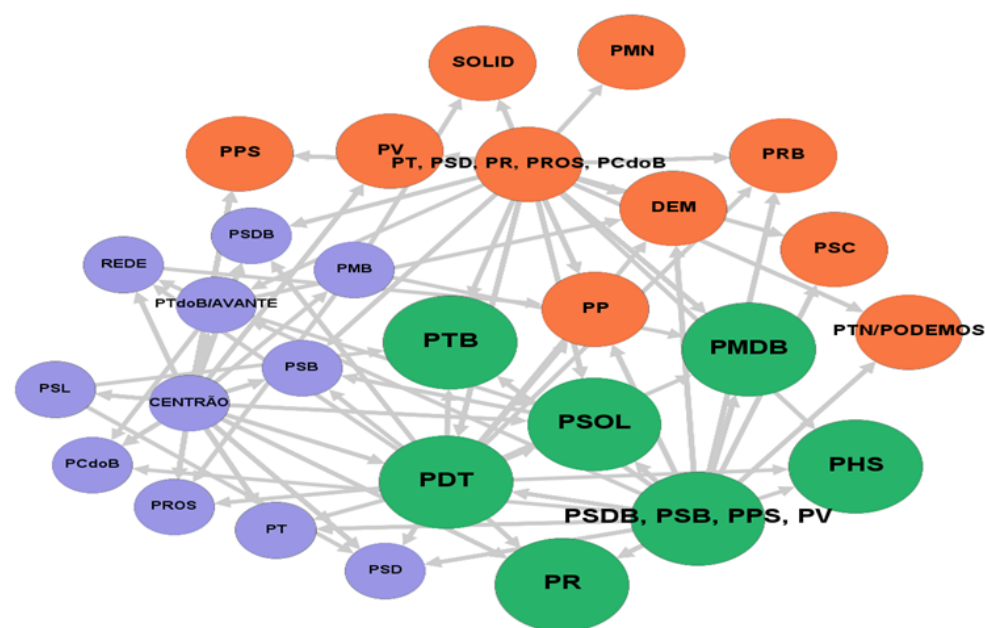
Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- Rousseff I (2011-2014): 28 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 489
- Subcommunities: 3
- Modularity: 0.147
- Diameter: 4
- “Centrão” (PMDB, PP, PTB, DEM, PRB, SOLID, PSC, PHS, PTN, PMN, PRP, PSDC, PEN, PRTB)

Notes:

- Figure 6 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (2016-2018)



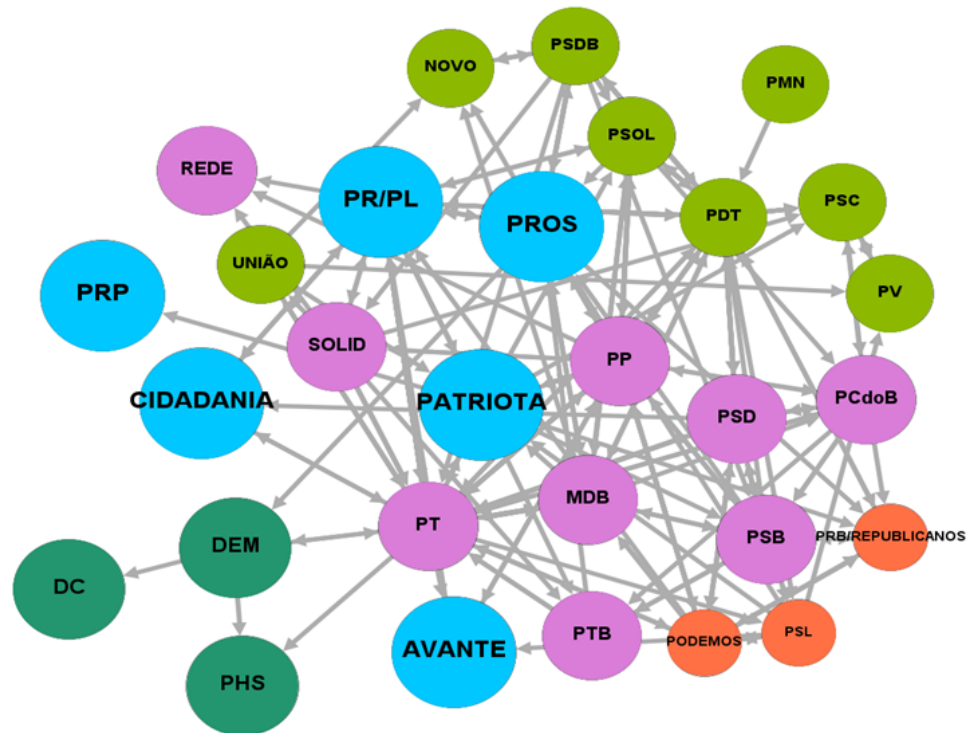
Notes:

- E-Legis | Brasília | v. 16 | n. 41 | p. 4-23 | jul./dez. 2024 | DOI 10.51206/elegis.v16i41.848

According to the general statistics shown in Table 2, the measurement of the “Diameter” of the net does not produce a significant oscillation, alternating in absolute values of 2 and 5. This means that even though the actual number of interactions expressed by the total number of changes of members in the committees for each government fluctuated, there was a certain predominance of changes by recurring actors. What can be observed is that the variability in exchanges is not very frequent, considering the longitudinal profile of the committees. In other words, positions that are dear to certain parties tend not to be shared.

When you look at the figures for Lula II (Figure 5) and Temer (Figure 6), 3 and 2, respectively, you can see that the discrepant measures may be justified by the profile of the coalition needed for governability. The coalitions formed have a strong conflictual nature and converge on the understanding that they need constant integration efforts and stability (Couto; Soares; Livramento, 2021).

Figure 7 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (2019-2022)



Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

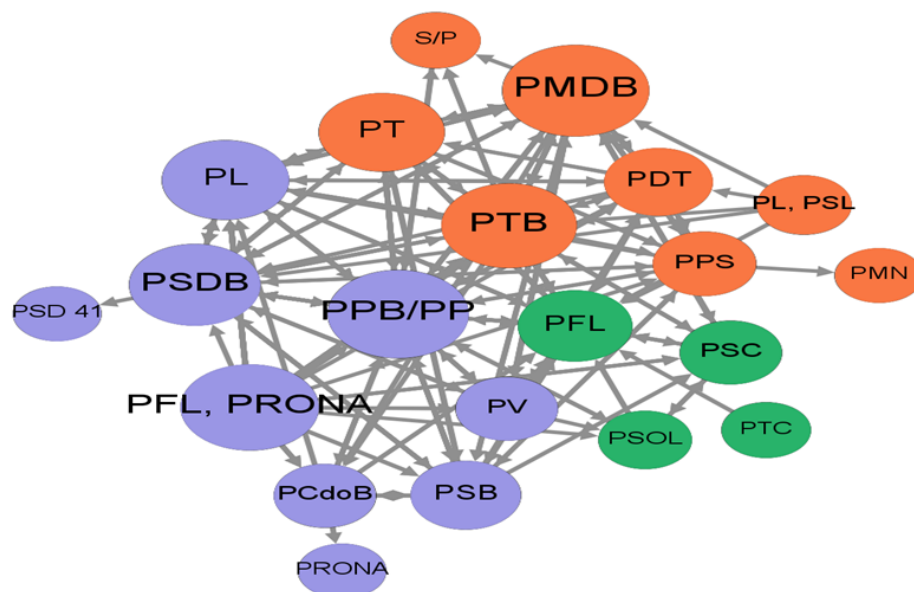
- Bolsonaro (2019-2022): 29 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 259
- Subcommunities: 5
- Modularity: 0.184
- Diameter: 5

The profile of the coalition imposed to maintain governability requires, as Raile, Pereira and Power (2011) and Bertholini and Pereira (2017) point out, political game in an integrated and active way as the members of the coalitions become ideologically more distant from the elected government. Under Lula II (Figure 5), the government coalition expanded from (PMDB / PTB / PSB / PPS / PDT / PCdoB / PV / PP / PL) to (PMDB / PTB / PSB / PPS / PDT / PCdoB / PV / PP / PR / PRB), which, although aligned with the government, now have the power to push through policies of their choice, allocating members of their base to committees that until then had been exempt, and in turn, have power and interference¹³ over the processing of bills that are dear to them.

¹³ This structure which provides for the addition of another veto-player to the government goes back to the assumptions made in the work of Lijphart (1999) and Tsebelis (2002), later discussed by Albala (2017).

Temer (Figure 6), in turn, faced a different scenario with ambiguous effects deriving from the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. In addition to the 42 days it took for the necessary consensus between the Executive and the Chamber of Deputies to come into force, the dispute over the command and distribution of spaces in the main thematic committees ran through much of his mandate.

Figure 8 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (2003-2006)



Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- Lula I (2003-2006): 20 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 338
- Subcommunities: 3
- Modularity: 0.118
- Diameter: 4

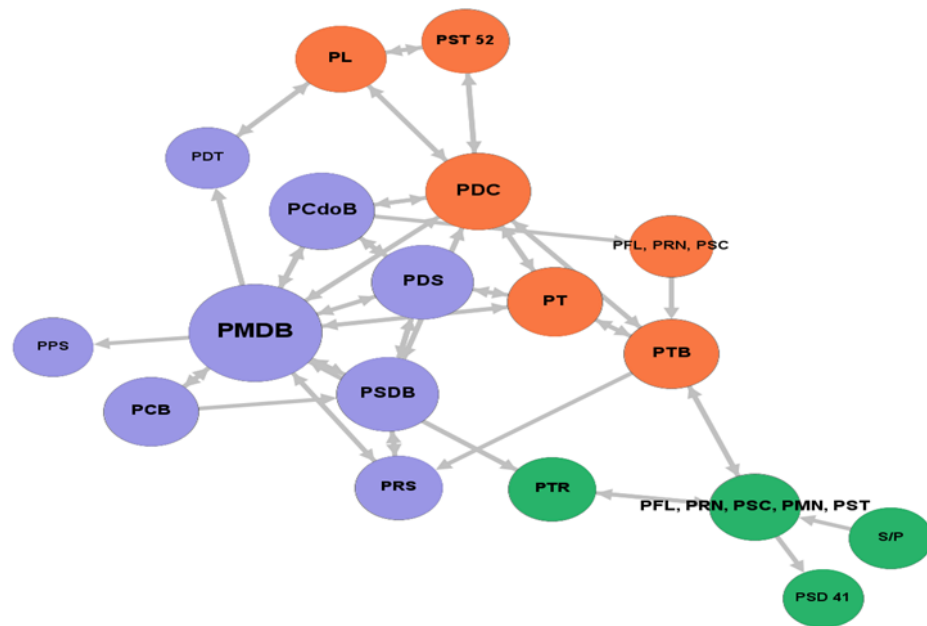
By way of comparison, while in the 29 months of the Temer government (8/31/2016 to 12/31/2018), there were 316 changes of members in the standing committees, in the 4 years of the Bolsonaro government (Figure 7), there were 259 changes between members participating in the committees. An even more complementary measure, which furthers the argument, is to compare the value in eccentricity¹⁴ between the governments, respectively 13 and 82 in Temer and Bolsonaro — this average path supports the assumption that a restricted number of political actors/parties have entered essential spaces in the decision-making arena with the openness to introduce their agendas and reproduce a network of stable interaction between their peers.

The statistics on the “Diameter” and “Modularity” of the networks can be analyzed together, indicating more connections between the subcommunities in the member exchange networks in FHC II (Figure 3) — “Modularity” 0.114; “Diameter” 4 — and Lula I (Figure 8) — “Modularity” 0.118; “Diameter” 4 — compared to those made in Rousseff II (Figure 2) — “Modularity” 0.353; “Diameter” 4 —, Lula II (Figure 5) — “Modularity” 0.289; “Diameter” 3 — and FHC I (Figure 11) — “Modularity” 0.251; “Diameter” 4.

Reflecting on these statistical measures of “Density” adds three determinants for important reflections: (i) the networks of the five governments have almost identical “Diameter,” which allows us to gauge that the strength of interaction (eccentricity) of the networks formed between their subcommunities does not differ; (ii) the change in the “diameter of the network is not associated with the inclusion of an actor (node), the diameter of the network only grows

¹⁴ Strogatz (2001) personifies eccentricity as the metric that indicates the maximum distance between two and other nodes in the network, a phenomenon responsible for demonstrating the size of the interrelationship between actors in the network. In other words, although Temer made a greater number of changes in the committees, these changes occurred with a limited number of parties involved.

Figure 9 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (1990-1992)



Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- Collor (1990-1992): 18 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 68
- Subcommunities: 3
- Modularity: 0.265
- Diameter: 5

when a peripheral node is included in the network” (Cervi, 2019, p. 133, our translation); and (iii) respecting the conditions, and the numbers of “Edges” representing FHC II (Figure 3), Lula I (Figure 5), Rousseff II (Figure 2) and Lula II (Figure 5) are 199, 338, 81 and 272 respectively, it can be concluded that, despite the high discrepancy between the values, there was no actor (node) acting on the periphery of the exchange system: all the participants act in a homogeneous and coordinated way between the network’s subcommunities.

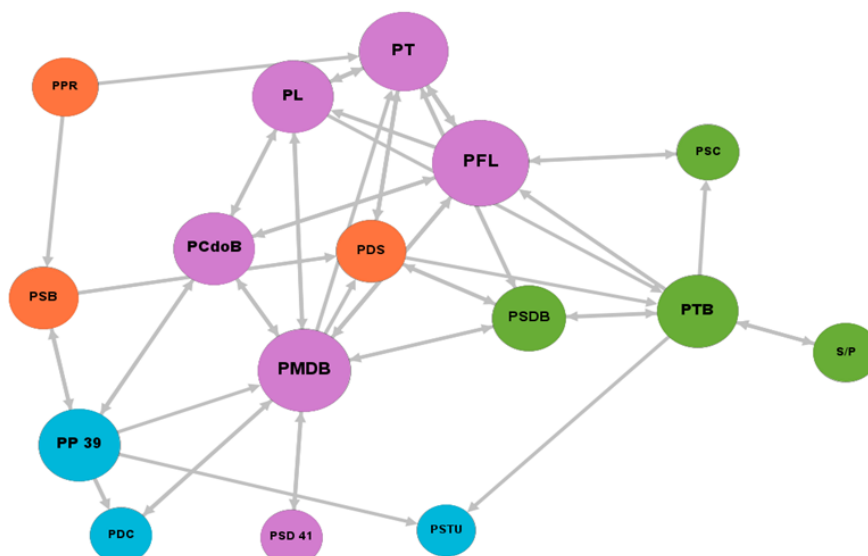
Thus, as previously discussed, it can be assumed that the networks with high “Modularity,” Rousseff II (0.353) and Lula II (0.289), reflect the most cohesive formation with denser and more disciplined connections between their members. However, they are also responsible for establishing low connectivity to the other subcommunities in their respective network. This perspective can be easily verified by looking at the variation in complexity in the links/interactions in Figure 8 (Lula I) and Figure 5 (Lula II), as well as when comparing Figure 4 (Rousseff I) and Figure 2 (Rousseff II).

A comparative analysis of the network measures shows that the average degree, density and average clustering coefficient of Lula I and Rousseff I are well above the average of the networks of the other mandates. The low level of connectivity with neighboring subcommunities presupposes the formation of influence strategies between the dominant sub-groups, a fact that structures organized subcommunities and favors certain political actors (nodes) to occupy positions on the standing committees. However, the construction of this conducted and organized system of flows and movements in exchanges can represent limitations to the circulation of ideas between subcommunities, especially if the “Clusterization Coefficient” measure in the respective network is observed for this set of data.

Among the sociograms of the exchange networks shown, the highest and lowest number of “Edges” are, respectively, of Rousseff I (Figure 4) — 489 — / Lula I (Figure 8) — 338 — and Collor (Figure 9) — 68 — / Franco (Figure 10) — 68 —, in which one of the explanations for this phenomenon, depending on the precision and discrepancy between the values, is based on the political context linked to them. While Lula I and Rousseff I carried out their entire mandate and formed a majority in the legislative houses, the Collor and Franco governments established

a smaller number of connections between peers, largely associated with scandals in the political and economic context, leading to the impeachment which, concomitantly, is responsible for both the reduction in the length of time in office and the drastic loss of support among the bases that configured these governments.

Figure 10 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (1993-1994)

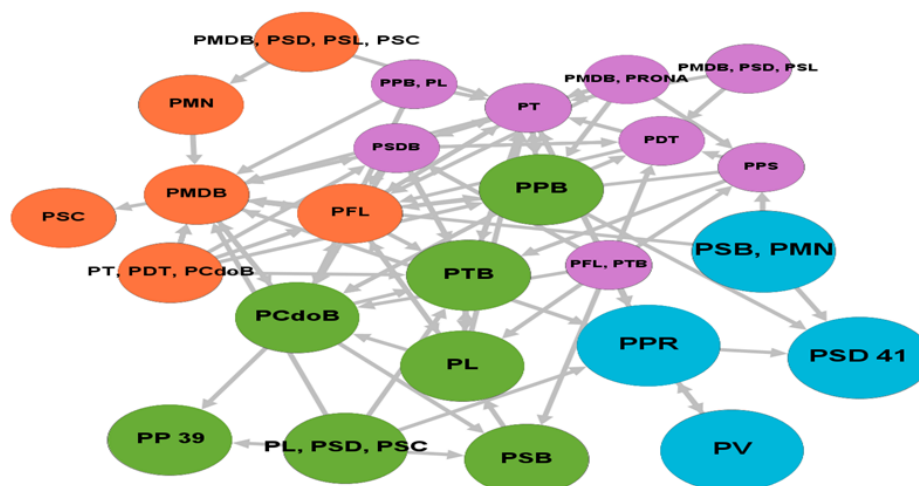


Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- Franco (1993-1994): 16 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 68
- Subcommunities: 4
- Modularity: 0.254
- Diameter: 5

Figure 11 – Graph of the networks of exchanges of seats in the committees (1995-1998)



Source: Own elaboration (2023)

Notes:

- FHC I (1995-1998): 25 actors (nodes)
- Edges: 122
- Subcommunities: 4
- Modularity: 0.251
- Diameter: 4

Finally, the “Degree of Centrality” and the “Degree of Intermediation” indicate respectively: (a) the coincidental aspect between some subcommunities and certain arenas/spaces

socio-organizational, given the greater interaction between the participants in these spaces, and (b) the “relational power” of intermediation of a given political actor who is responsible for linking the different subcommunities.

6 Conclusions and final considerations

The aim of this article was to present a mapping of the networks exchanging seats, elucidating measures of centrality that are closely associated with the possibility of a particular actor/party gaining influence. Influence is understood as the likelihood of a phenomenon or actor to participate/interfere directly in decision-making (Alejandro; Norman, 2005).

A set of network analysis techniques and models were used to show that there is a great deal of swapping of seats on the standing committees between the various parties with representation in the Chamber of Deputies, regardless of the presidential term. It is safe to say, based on the data presented and notes, that this is not a phenomenon specific to a given moment, a given government, or a given coalition formation. The exchange of vacancies permeates all parties and/or party blocs and all committees.

Although recurrent, the exchange of vacancies varies from committee to committee. In terms of the volume of trade, the data allows them to be grouped into four blocks. In the first, there are the committees on Agriculture; Science and Technology, Communication and Informatics; Education; Labor, Administration and Public Service; and Roads and Transport, with Agriculture being the one that most mobilizes parliamentarians to make the changes. They are commissions of intense exchanges, between 150 and 200 exchanges in the period analyzed.

Next are the so-called medium exchange commissions, between 149 and 100 moves. They are: Consumer Protection Committee; Finance and Taxation Committee; Mines and Energy Committee; and Foreign Affairs Committee.

A third group is made up of the committees on Constitution and Justice; Human Rights; Economy, Industry and Trade; Legislative Participation; Social Security and Family; Urban Development; the Amazon; Supervision and Control; the Environment; Public Security; and Tourism, which are called low exchanges, between 50 and 99 exchange movements.

Finally, the fourth group, called the minimum exchanges, under 49 movements, is made up of the committees on National Defense; People with Disabilities; Sports; the Rights of the Elderly; Women’s Rights; and Culture.

At one end of the spectrum, of the largest exchanges, are commissions that can generate distributive gains. On the other, policies for minority groups and unattractive economic sectors predominate.

Among the studies on the standing committee system mentioned here, the informational approach prevails (Pereira; Mueller, 2000; Santos, 2002; Santos; Almeida, 2005). Like Müller (2005), the analysis carried out here is close to the partisan strand, given that the movement within the committees aims to increase or overrepresent specific party caucuses, as a way of obtaining or maintaining access to power resources in order to influence the legislative process and the outcome on public policies, at the expense of maintaining the principle of party proportionality.

Recognizing the limitations of an exploratory approach such as this one, the elements presented here are intended to initiate new questions and provocations that demand attention for future research, allowing for continuity and extension of this model of analysis for political science.

Which committees are essentially dear to which parties, the cost of which in losing control could have an impact on their electorate or constitute a “veto” mechanism for the Executive’s agenda? Identifying and understanding the patterns of relationships between the party caucuses, as well as checking whether there is transitivity or recurrence (insulating) in the exchange between the parties, can be a good starting point for further research and questioning.

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