

MEANING OF TIME: LEGISLATIVE DURATION IN THE BRAZILIAN CONGRESS

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The study provides descriptive data on durations, attributes, and parliamentary activities in legislative processes at the level of individual proposals. It examines government proposals considered by the Brazilian Congress since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution and seeks to disentangle when duration means legislative activism, when it is related to political conflict, and when it only represents inertia in Brazil's multiparty coalitional presidential system.

The analysis is based on an original dataset, which includes 1,437 bills of ordinary law, bills of complementary law, and proposals for constitutional amendment submitted to the Brazilian Congress by the executive branch, between October 1988 and December 2012. The legislative processes of these proposals are traced until the fall of 2015 (between August and October 2015). If proposals were still pending at that point, they were censored.

The results indicate that there are significant variations in the durations of legislative processes. Legislative activism by legislators to influence the content and outcome of policy proposals can account for much of the delays in the legislative process. However, the data also revealed that substantial amounts of time lapse without accompanying content-influencing legislative activism. Extensive procedural votes that occur in the Brazilian Congress suggest that legislative obstruction associated with political conflict between presidents and their own legislative coalitions and one between the government and opposition significantly contribute to legislative delay. Hence, political conflict is as important a source as policy disagreement in accounting for legislative delay.

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