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Between Renewal and Stability: Party System Change from a Multi-Level Perspective in Brazil (1998–2018)

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The growth of the far right and election results in Brazil are often associated with national or large-scale events. The multi-level features of these developments, namely party competition at the sub-national level, are overlooked in the literature. This article argues that changes in the Brazilian national party system – those observed from Bolsonaro's election, mainly – are rooted in sub-national political dynamics. Through a comparative and longitudinal analysis of multi-level executive and legislative elections, we find that, although there are distinct patterns of competition between the national-sub-national and within-country levels, this difference is not evident in volatility.

Keywords: Brazil, change, congruence, electoral volatility, multi-level party system.

Jair Bolsonaro's election in 2018 represented a major electoral shift that consolidated at the national level the country's realignment from the left to the right (Birlle and Speck, 2022; Singer, 2021). On the one hand, Bolsonaro's party at the time, the Partido Social Liberal (PSL, Social Liberal Party), which had been electorally weak in the national context, not only elected the President but also obtained the second largest number of representatives in the Câmara dos Deputados (Chamber of Deputies). On the other hand, traditional parties crumbled and lost space in the political arena. Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, The Workers' Party) and the Brazilian Social Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB, Democracy Party), which had played leading roles in the federal political competition since re-democratisation had started to shrink by 2016, which consequently meant the end of their two-party domination of the electoral landscape. The end of this polarisation came alongside a widespread anti-PT sentiment triggered by corruption cases against the party, which has been part of the explanations for Bolsonaro's election two years after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (PT) and also for the narrow margin that led PT return to power with Lula's victory against Bolsonaro in the 2022 elections. Nevertheless, the right-wing parties won more representatives in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in the last general elections than PT and its allies.

These unforeseen outcomes showed that the Brazilian party system was not as stable as several authors claimed (Bohn and Paiva, 2009; Borges and Vidigal, 2018; Mainwaring, Bizzarro, and Petrova, 2018a). To cite examples of such assessments, Mainwaring, Power and Bizzarro (2018b: 195)

claimed that ‘even if citizens repudiate the existing parties, they have little choice but to vote for existing organisations because the rules of the game create high barriers to new parties and outsiders’. Meanwhile, Borges and Vidigal (2018: 80) pointed out that ‘a scenario of increased party polarisation in the coming years is unlikely, despite the (mistaken) diagnoses regarding the growth of the extreme right electorate in Brazil’. We claim that such misleading conclusions are due to a narrow focus that primarily concerns the party system at the national level.

We argue that the shift that Brazil’s national party system has undergone in the last few years has its roots in the increasingly unstable political dynamics at the sub-national level, in which higher levels of electoral volatility and party fragmentation could be seen before 2018. We point out that the lack of sufficient stability in the sub-national systems that could have created stronger barriers to the emergence of non-establishment parties and outsiders is likely to impact the national party system. More specifically, we investigate through Brazil’s case of a multi-level party system how party system change at the national level may be traced to developments at the sub-national level. Despite Brazil’s last political developments mentioned above, the existing literature, from our knowledge, lacks broad research on the country as a federalised or multi-level system characterised by multiple territorially delimited party systems (Gibson and Suarez-Cao, 2010).

Drawing on existing literature (Gibson and Suarez-Cao, 2010; Suarez-Cao and Freidenberg, 2014), when party competition, understood as the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP), is similar across various levels of government, it is safe to say that the party system is ‘congruent’. Otherwise, when party competition is divergent across such levels, one can affirm that the system is ‘incongruent’, meaning that national and sub-national competitions are somewhat independent. It is worth noting that high congruence between national and sub-national levels does not necessarily mean that the national arena dictates the same pattern of competition at the states. In this sense, the level of congruence is relevant to compare the national and sub-national levels in terms of the structure of party politics. Our study focuses on the multi-level dynamics of the Brazilian party system by addressing the evolution of its levels of congruence and the interplay between volatility indexes at both national and sub-national levels.

Our central hypothesis is that heterogeneous patterns of party competition in the territory, which means low levels of congruence, are related to the spread of non-traditional/new parties at the sub-national level. This phenomenon will increase electoral volatility first at the sub-national and then at the national level. According to Suarez-Cao and Freidenberg (2014), congruence is related to the predominance of established political parties. We can then assume that, on the contrary, when patterns of party competition between the national and sub-national levels are not homogeneous, it is likely that this happens because non-traditional parties have gained room at the sub-national level. From there, they become capillary electoral organisations (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007), which is also essential for them to gain ground at the national level. The support for new parties in young democracies comes primarily from the local level. According to Poertner (2021), locally organised societal organisations are crucial in securing electoral support for new parties.

Before addressing this hypothesis, we need to empirically test our assumption that inter-party dynamics at the sub-national level do not necessarily abide by the same logic as the national ones, thus being systematically more unstable and increasing the space for the emergence of non-established parties in the political system. To verify whether the multi-level party system in Brazil presents heterogeneous patterns of party competition between national and sub-national arenas, we calculate the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) for national and sub-national elections and measure their variations through the index of congruence as applied by Gibson and Suarez-Cao (2010) and Suarez-Cao and Freidenberg (2014). Although the ENEP does not allow distinguishing the position of each political party in the electoral competition, it is a good indicator for measuring party fragmentation considering the relative parties’ strength. In addition, we calculate the electoral volatility as measured by Powell and Tucker (2014) for executive and legislative elections at the state and national levels. Our study innovates by comparing for the first time the results of three measures of party system change across two types of elections and two levels of government in a Latin-American democracy.

We proceed as follows. We first describe how the literature on party system change has been dominated by a strong national focus and explain why considering sub-national political dynamics is crucial to understanding and foreseeing political events at the national level. We then present our methodology

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and the results of our analyses, which consider Brazil's state and federal legislative elections over the last twenty years. In the final section, we conclude that, despite incongruence in party competition between national and sub-national levels in Brazil, no real change in party systems is identified from the analysis of electoral volatility and that the sub-national level in Brazil seems to work as a reservoir of existing/traditional parties. Our hypothesis is partially verified as our results show an electoral rise at the sub-national level of already existing right-wing parties at the expense of traditional parties.

Party System Change in Multi-level Settings

A party system is understood as a 'system of parties (as opposed to a set of parties)' (Bardi and Mair, 2008: 147; see also Mair (1989) whose interactions result from inter-party competition (Sartori, 1976: 44)). Meanwhile, its changes entail a transformation in the competitive or cooperative relationships between political parties. In institutionalised party systems, political actors can have clear and stable expectations about others' behaviours (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2005), while the lack of stability in party systems is often associated with the transformation of inter-party dynamics.

A change or transformation of party systems can be related to several features, such as the number of political parties that contest an election, their electoral strength from one election cycle to another, the membership of alliances, party alignments, parties' ideological positions, and the degree of electoral competitiveness (Mainwaring, Bizzarro, and Petrova 2018a). This variety of factors encourages divergences between scholars in measuring the occurrence of party system change (Mair, 1989). Electoral volatility has been one of the most used indicators to assess the degree of institutionalisation of parties and party systems, as it reflects the parties' abilities to structure the choice of the voters (Pedersen, 1979, 1983; Ferreira, Batista, and Stabile, 2008; Torcal and Lago, 2015). Thus, it is considered a valuable indicator for capturing change and stability. A volatility index measures the oscillation of aggregate electoral preferences in pairs of consecutive elections, indicating that the lower or less oscillating the electoral volatility is, the more institutionalised the party system is.

Although scholars have increasingly debated about how best to measure party system change, the kind of systems usually observed to verify change seems beyond dispute. The literature on party system change has maintained a strong national focus, meaning that 'change is primarily understood as change resulting from transformations of the statewide [national] party system alone' (Swenden and Maddens, 2009: 6). Therefore, the operationalisation and indicators to assess the nature of party systems and their changes focus on the national context of party politics (Swenden and Maddens, 2009, thus exemplifying a 'methodological nationalism bias' (Schakel, 2013; Došek and Freidenberg, 2013: 162). As an example, party system institutionalisation (PSI), a widely used indicator for measuring stability and change of patterns of inter-party competition, is often applied to compare only national party systems across countries over time (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring, Bizzarro, and Petrova, 2018a).

The methodological and theoretical reasons for this bias might be associated with the lack of research at the sub-national level of analysis concerning party system change. First, scholars often avoid analysing sub-national elections because of the difficulty in gathering trustworthy disaggregate data (Maia and Martins, 2021). Second, sub-national elections are often considered second-order elections, meaning they are likely to mirror the results of national elections, which are perceived as ones of the first order (Schakel, 2013). The second-order logic implies that there is a hierarchy between types of elections when it comes to their level of importance. Thus, sub-national elections are subordinate to national elections, and accordingly, what happens in the national party system strongly influences the development of the sub-national party systems (Swenden and Maddens, 2009: 7). Similarly, the structure of analysis applied for grasping the national level is enforced at the sub-national level.

Nevertheless, sub-national elections are not necessarily second-order elections, as sub-national arenas are likely to have their own dynamics of interparty competition (Carneiro and Almeida, 2008; Melo, 2011; Došek, 2023). Bardi and Mair (2008) point out the existence of horizontal divisions within the same party system that incentivise the sub-national units to acquire a certain level of autonomy to establish their dynamics of party competition. Hence, the second-order logic does not always apply, and one can find a conspicuous diversity in the propensity of party systems at both levels to

change over time. In this sense, a system change at the national level does not necessarily trigger a change at the sub-national level. Also, the inertia of national party systems may not be reproduced at the sub-national level.

Concepts such as ‘multilevel party system’ (Swenden and Maddens, 2009: 6) and ‘federalised party system’ (Gibson and Suarez-Cao, 2010: 6) shed light on the importance of the sub-national level as an aspect to be considered in the analysis of party system dynamics, especially when it comes to federal countries. Both concepts follow the same definition: a multi-level or federalised party system is one in which there are two or more party systems in operation that result from patterns of interaction between parties at the sub-national level and thus reflect the outcome of sub-national elections.

By understanding a party system as a multi-level or federalised one, it is possible to look at studies on party system change from another perspective, focusing on sub-national contexts and their realities as well as on the interactions between sub-national party systems and the national one. Accordingly, although linked to national political competition, sub-national elections are essential in their own right (Maia and Martins, 2021; Došek, 2023). Sub-national party systems constitute a crucial part of the inter-party competition in a federal or multi-layered state (Swenden and Maddens, 2009; Melo, 2011). Therefore, researchers must be careful when ‘drawing conclusions on electoral instability purely based on aggregated data. These types of data may hide real levels of volatility’ (Pennings and Lane, 1998: 12).

Studies report empirical evidence about the differences between national and sub-national party systems and diversity within countries on party system change, primarily through the analysis of electoral volatility. Historically speaking, Brazil’s volatility has resulted from mostly political variables, such as party change and state-level parliamentary groups’ turnover rates, which have varied greatly among states and fallen before 2010 (Peres, Ricci, and Rennó, 2011). Epstein (2009) identified four different patterns of competition between Brazilian states: fragmented, unstable competitive, stable competitive, and hegemonic. Factors such as the distinctiveness of the political history, traditions, and culture among the sub-national units as well as the strategies adopted by the parties in search of votes, are pointed out to account for differences in the electoral competition inside the country (Epstein, 2009; Tarouco, 2012). Moreover, evidence shows that, despite the increasing number of small parties at the sub-national level, they have slightly affected electoral volatility at the state level (Nascimento, Silva, et al., 2016; Nascimento, 2018).

Nevertheless, the literature on Brazil needs a systematic analysis of the diversity within the country and a comparison between the national and sub-national levels when it comes to inter-party competition. Researchers usually apply scattered methodologies and measures to analyse party systems individually in each Brazilian state. Meanwhile, few studies have used congruence and electoral volatility as valuable indicators for contrasting inter-party dynamics at national and sub-national levels. In this article, we analyse comparatively and longitudinally party systems at both levels, which we argue is crucial for identifying possible circumstances at the sub-national level that may be relevant for spelling out developments in the national party system.

Data and Methods: Measuring Party System Change

To understand the complex relationship between national and sub-national levels of Brazil’s party system, we applied several measures that quantify changes in parties’ vote shares for elections. We used the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) of Laakso and Taagepera (1979), the electoral volatility as measured by Powell and Tucker (2014), and the Summary Measure of Congruence applied by Gibson and Suarez-Cao (2010) and Freidenberg and Suarez-Cao (2014). In addition, we calculated voting developments for both executive and legislative elections and national and state-level tickets. These are the races for the president, governors, national representatives (federal deputies), and state representatives (state deputies).

Thus, our study innovates by comparing, for the first time, to our knowledge, the results of these three measures of party system change across two state branches and two levels of government in Brazil. We argue that the combination of these measures brings a clearer picture of a multi-level or federalised party system such as the one in Brazil. To demonstrate the heterogeneity between the patterns

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of party competition between the national and sub-national levels in the country, we first calculate the ENEP, which displays the patterns of electoral competition by addressing the degree of party fragmentation in a given party system. Second, the measure of congruence summarises the variations in party competition between the national and sub-national levels and the average differences between the sub-national party systems. The electoral volatility, when analysed alongside the level of congruence and fragmentation, can indicate whether there is an association between stability and congruence, as we postulate in our hypothesis:

H1: low levels of congruence are likely to come alongside the spread of non-traditional parties, which results in increasing extra-system/Type A volatility at the sub-national level.

We construct a dataset containing information on the vote share of all Brazilian parties that ran for election for the tickets mentioned above. Considering that the Brazilian party system went from stabilisation at the beginning of the 21st century, characterised mainly by the long-standing government of PT, to a certain rupture of the patterned inter-party interactions with Bolsonaro's election in 2018, the data range from 1998 (t_0) to 2018 (t_5). We collect the data from the public database of the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE, Brazilian Electoral Justice). It is worth noting that the statistics about the effective number of parties, electoral volatility, and congruence regarding the race for the Chamber of Deputies consider disaggregate electoral results by district. This means that for the sake of our methodology, we analysed the Brazilian national party system in its legislative race as composed of 26 independent sub-national party systems – one for each district (state) plus the Federal District.

We follow Peres, Ricci, and Rennó (2011) in their insightful consideration that the problem of the ecological fallacy may exist if researchers disregard the fact that the elections for federal deputies have the states as their electoral district. Also, we design a method to keep track of parties' electoral records overall to overcome the challenge of calculating statistics for parties that merged with, split from, or simply joined other parties, as well as for those that changed names, ceased to exist, or were founded during the study period. In so doing, we can gather information on vote transfers from one election to another, which we then use to calculate the ENEP, volatility, and congruence indices for all parties.

The effective number of electoral parties measures how many parties, weighted according to size, are in a party system in a given election. As applied by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and Casal Bértoa (2014), the ENEP is calculated according to the following formula, where v_i is the proportion of votes of the i party:

$$\text{ENEP} = \frac{1}{\sum v_i}$$

We then draw on Powell and Tucker (2014) to calculate electoral volatility at both the national and sub-national levels between the 2002 and 2018 elections. The authors divide the Pedersen index into two types of volatility: Type A and Type B, in which the first measures vote transfers from existing to new parties, while the second quantifies vote transfers between existing parties. Type A volatility is then defined as:

$$\text{Type A} = \frac{\sum_{o=1}^n P_{ot} + \sum_{w=1}^n P_{w(t+1)}}{2}$$

where P_{ot} is the vote share of any 'old' party that contested an election at the time and obtained at least 5 percent of votes; $P_{w(t+1)}$ is the share of votes of any 'new' party in the election at time $t + 1$ regardless of whether it contested the previous election in t or passed the threshold of 5 percent. By definition, an 'old' party is, therefore one that contested the election at time t but did not contest the subsequent election at time $t + 1$ or did not pass the threshold of 5 percent on this occasion; and a 'new' party is one that contested an election at time $t + 1$ but did not contest the previous election or did not pass the threshold at that time. Accordingly, Type A volatility considers only the volatility caused by the entry of a new party into the system and the exit of an old party from it. The definition of 'insider' and 'outsider' parties is given by the 5 percent threshold of vote share in each election. In other words, the Type A index measures the volatility (or vote transfer) of a party system exclusively between parties lying inside and outside the given system.

Conversely, Type B volatility is defined by Powell and Tucker (2014) as follows:

$$\text{TypeB} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n P_{it} - P_{i(t+1)}}{2}$$

where P is the vote share of the party i at times t or $t + 1$ when a party must have passed the 5 percent threshold in both elections. Therefore, the Type B volatility formula is the same as the Pedersen index, which calculates the vote transfer among parties lying exclusively inside the system. Accordingly, the sum of the indices of Type A and B is the so-called ‘total volatility’, which measures the aggregated electoral volatility of a party system (Powell and Tucker, 2014). In other words, the total volatility measures the sum of vote transfers among all political parties including both parties inside and outside the system. Thus, comparing three measures of volatility affords us a clear picture of the dynamics of the party system change in Brazil over time, as we differentiate vote transfers among existing/traditional parties from those in which votes go from existing parties to new ones, a situation that illustrates a genuine change in the party system.

In this study, we calculate the volatility indices by applying thresholds of 2 percent and 5 percent because both have a reference in the literature. The goal was to check for possible divergences in the statistical results. It is worth noting that we find no important difference in the magnitude of all three volatility indices when applying thresholds of 2 percent and 5 percent, meaning that our results are the same regardless of which threshold is used. We report the calculations using only the 5 percent threshold, which is in line with the regional scholarship in our field of study. The use of a higher threshold for inclusion follows the considerations of Powell and Tucker (2014) and Casal Bértoa, Deegan-Krause, and Haughton (2017).

Finally, to determine whether the Brazilian party system presents similar or divergent patterns of party competition at both levels in each election, we calculate the Summary Measure of Congruence (SMC), which is a measure of dispersion in patterns of electoral competition between national and sub-national systems of a federalised party system. To calculate the SMC, we estimate the ENEP following the formula of Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Accordingly, the definition of the SMC is:

$$\text{SMC} = \left[\frac{1}{N} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n (s_i - S)^2 \right] + \frac{1}{N-1} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n [(s_i - S_m)^2]$$

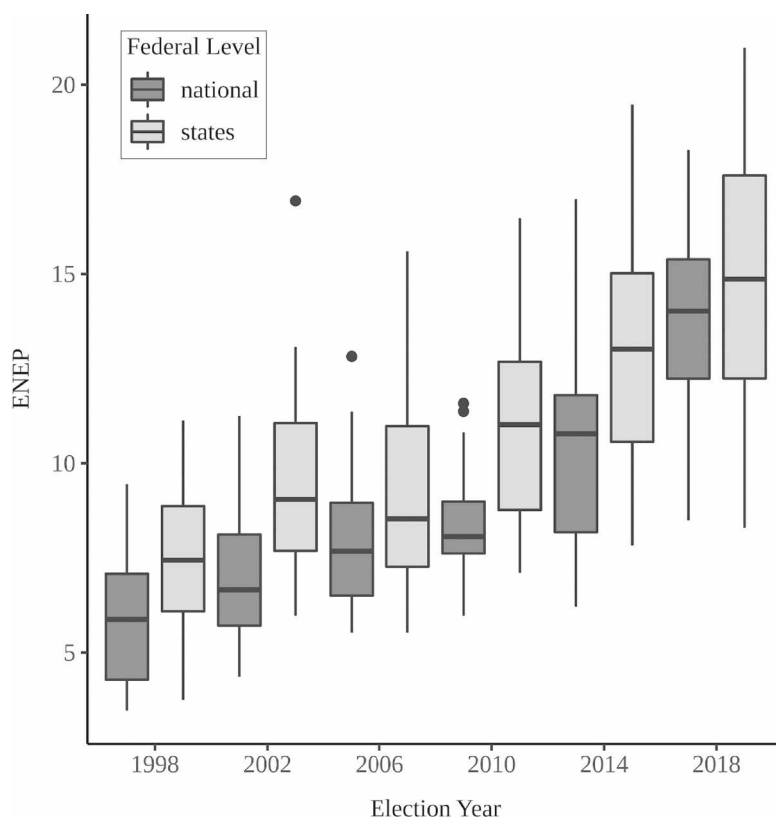
where N is the number of districts in each polity, s_i is the ENEP competing in the districts $i = 1$ to n , S is the ENEP competing nationally, and S_m is the average value of s_i for all districts. In sum, the national/sub-national average difference is the first part of the formula to calculate congruence while sub-national variance is the second. SMC is then a relative measure: the lower the value is, the more ‘congruent’ the federalised party system is, or conversely, the greater its value, the more ‘incongruent’ the same system. Therefore, the SMC allows us to understand how changes in electoral competition at the sub-national level can be associated with the same changes at the national level and vice-versa. The Type A volatility and the SMC can together shed light on the evolution of party system (in-)stability.

In addition, it is worth noting that this measure, as a macro indicator, rather than focusing on specific changes or dynamics across sub-national party systems it gives us information on the general level of similarity between the inter-party competition across the states and between them and the national arena of political competition. This means that the SMC focuses on the structure of inter-party competition rather than its membership. To complement the quantitative analysis, we bring about in the next section data on the electoral evolution of the political parties over the years, that is, which parties can be considered as winners and losers, particularly at the sub-national level.

Results: The Evolution of the Brazilian Party System from a Multi-level Perspective

Our findings demonstrate that even before the 2018 election, considered a turning point in Brazilian party politics, sub-national party systems in Brazil had traits of persistent instability to the outcomes

Figure 1. Evolution of the Effective Number of Parties by Year and Government Level for Legislative Elections.



Source: Authors

of the national party system. Figure 1 is a boxplot comparing the number of effective parties, that is, the ENEP's rates between the races for the national Chamber of Deputies and the state's assemblies in the past six elections. It demonstrates that the ENEP has steadily increased in Brazil at both levels of government, which contributes to the literature's evidence of party system fragmentation (Braga, 2016; Nascimento, 2018; Peres, Conceição, and Tarouco, 2018; Borges, 2021). It is worth noting, however, that median ENEP values are higher for sub-national elections than for their national counterparts in all cases.

This finding meets our assumption that inter-party dynamics at the sub-national level not only differ from the national ones but are also more unstable. The distribution of the ENEP values for legislative elections not only reveals the diversity of party fragmentation and, therefore, of dynamics of inter-party competition within the country but also indicates that the real origin of the transformations in the Brazilian party system is at the sub-national level rather than at the national level, as the data point to a more significant party fragmentation within the states.

This impression is confirmed when the congruence measure is applied to the legislative elections, as shown in Table 1. Considering these elections at both levels of government, the multi-level Brazilian party system has been incongruent throughout the entire analysis period. Still, from 2010 on, it has been especially so. Consider that the North American state assemblies have an average of 25 percent and a peak in Kansas of 43 percent (Squire and Hamm, 2005). The Brazilian turnover is more significant, averaging 43 percent between 1998 and 2018. The variance in party competition at the sub-national level is what most accounts for the high level of incongruence in all elections in the last twenty years, except for 2010.

Table 1. Congruence versus Type A Volatility at Legislative Elections

Election year	National/ sub-national difference	Sub-national variance	Congruence	Type A volatility (mean state legislative elections)	Type A volatility (national legislative elections)
1998	2.365	3.484	5.849	NA	NA
2002	5.099	5.917	11.016	2.46	2.63
2006	1.933	6.828	8.761	4.39	2.97
2010	5.961	5.762	11.723	2.56	2.69
2014	5.663	10.067	15.729	7.78	7.71
2018	0.638	12.436	13.074	2.62	3.87

Source: Authors.

Turnover increased considerably in two elections during the period of analysis: 2014 and 2018. These elections occurred after massive public demonstrations in the country that eventually led to the impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff (PT) and expressed profound discontent in the population with politics and politicians. Civil society movements, such as *RenovaBR* and *Movimento Agora*, became more widespread and powerful. They sought to change the landscape of politics in Brazil with the election of new, outside-the-political-spectrum individuals. A new political party was even created called *Novo*, which described itself as ‘anti-re-election’.

In 2014 Brazil’s party system reached the highest level of incongruence (15.729), which converges with the period in which it became evident that the traditional parties were losing space in the national and sub-national electoral arenas following the June 2013 protests. Although the present study does not undertake to explain congruence, scholars have indicated that the predominance of traditional parties in the electoral arena almost always enables it (Suarez-Cao and Freidenberg, 2014). It is interesting to note the reverse outcome when analysing the multi-level legislative elections in Brazil, that is, the increase of levels of incongruence in a context in which traditional parties and their leaders have lost space, which is shown by the highest degree of extra-system electoral volatility reached in 2014 both in the national and state legislative elections. At first, this finding supports our argument that low levels of congruence are likely to come alongside high electoral volatility. Major traditional political parties such as the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, Workers’ Party), the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (PMDB, Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement), and the *Democratas* (DEM, Democrats) saw their legislative representation in the Chamber of Deputies erode in 2014, while small and micro parties such as the *Partido Republicano Brasileiro* (PRB, Republican Brazilian Party), the *Partido Ecológico Nacional* (PEN, National Ecological Party), and the *Partido Republicano Progressista* (PRP, Progressive Republican Party) witnessed a rise in theirs.

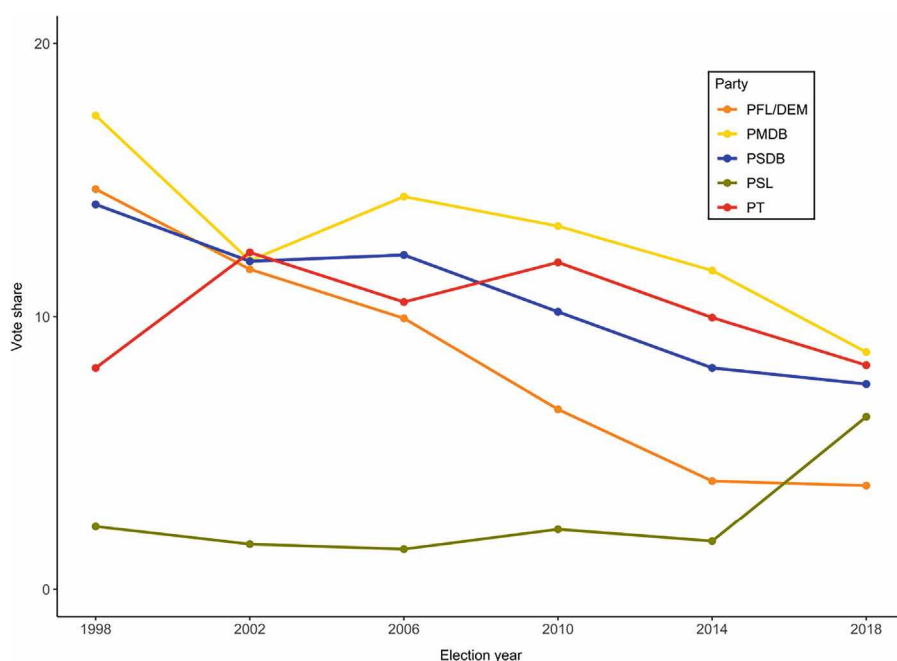
At the state level in 2014, we can also observe a similar situation, with the increasing number of parties represented in the state legislative assemblies while the traditional parties were losing space. This situation had already started in 2010 (Figure 2). As happened at the national level, PT, PSDB, and DEM lost state deputies in these elections. In 2014, the state legislative branch of the PT suffered a reduction of 22.8 percent, while PSDB and DEM witnessed a shortening of 9.3 percent and 43 percent, respectively. On the contrary, small parties that had already competed in the 2010 elections, such as PSL (with which Bolsonaro was affiliated in his election in 2018), expanded the number of state deputies (Correio Braziliense, 2014).

Similarly, we also observed higher levels of incongruence in 2002, 2010, and 2018. Even though these three electoral years share alternance in power in the presidency, the incongruence between them is not only quantitatively but mostly qualitatively distinct, especially when we contrast 2002 with 2018. The difference lies mainly with the protagonists and their role in the party system.

In 2002 the survival of stable party systems and established elites at the sub-national level was challenged by the consolidation of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s PT as a national force. In the less developed regions mainly, which are characterised by less electoral competition, Lula’s first victory for the presidency triggered processes of vertical competition between national and state coalitions (Borges, 2010), which had a twofold consequence. First, the intensification of this vertical competition

Party System Change from a Multi-Level Perspective

Figure 2. The Vote Share of the Main Political Parties Running for State Assemblies in Brazil (1998–2018).



Source: Authors

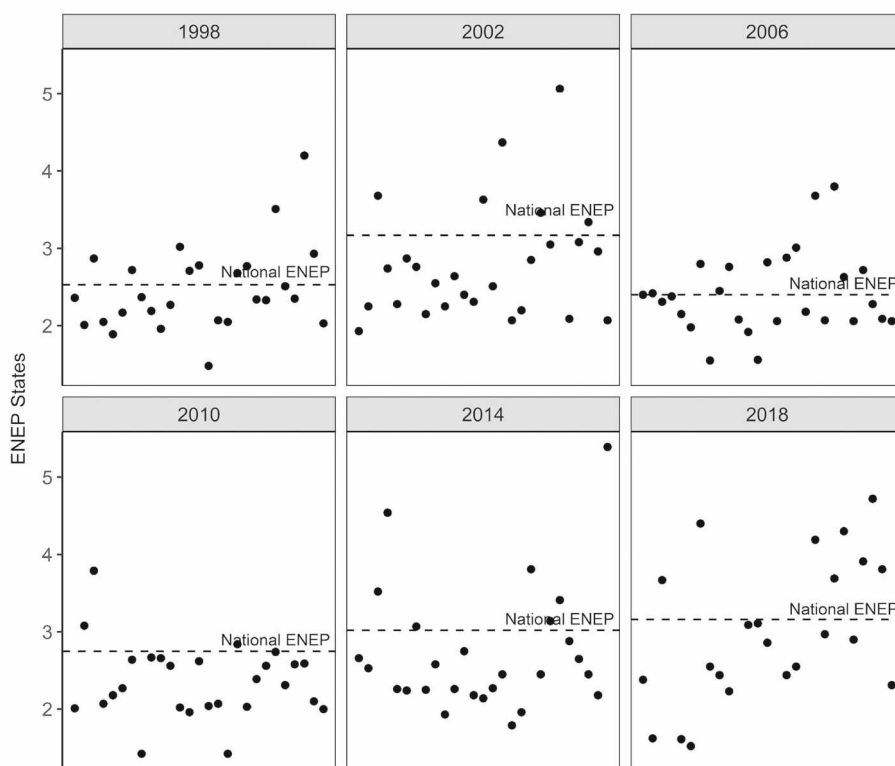
broke the accommodation that had prevailed among national and regional interests, thereby showing the weakening of the governors and parties that had long held great power, especially in the poorer states (Borges, 2010). Second, the conflict between national and sub-national political projects enabled the progressive electoral growth of the PT, which had, in turn, a positive impact on the stability of the national party system (Borges, 2010; Roberts, 2014; Mainwaring, Bizzarro, and Petrova, 2018a).

In contrast, the close election in 2014 between the two parties that had dominated the presidential race until then, i.e., the PT and the PSDB, resulted in these ‘mainstream’ parties (necessary since the re-democratisation) falling apart in 2018. Braga (2016) points out that the tight margin of votes in the 2014 presidential elections between competing PT and PSDB – a distance of 3.28 percent of votes – spelled the collapse of the electoral cycle controlled by these two political forces. The biggest change for all levels in Brazil occurred in 2018 when the turnover rate in the Chamber of Deputies in this election was 47 percent, proportionally the highest turnover since the election of the Constituent Assembly in 1986. The same happened in the state legislative assemblies of the states with the greatest number of voters in the country, namely São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, which had, respectively, 55, 51, and 41 percent of the turnover rate in these elections. Since the 1994 election, the Chamber of Deputies’ turnover has been below 40 percent, averaging around 37 percent. Until then, the election with the highest number of new faces had been 1990, with a 46 percent turnover.

The same incongruent scenario for the multi-level party system in Brazil is visible when we analyse the executive elections. Figure 3 compares through the ENEP the patterns of electoral competition between national and sub-national party systems. It shows the calculated number of effective parties (y-axis) running for governor in each state (x-axis) – each dot representing a state – against the average number of parties competing for president across all districts (dotted line) per election year (boxes). This plot illustrates the degree of ‘congruence’ or ‘incongruence’ in party competition in Brazil, a federalised party system.

The dots’ dispersion reveals the variance in the ENEP measured within Brazilian states. Thus, the closer the observations are around the National ENEP line, the more congruent the pattern of competition in the federalised party system or, in other words, the more the party competition in the states

Figure 3. Effective Number of Political Parties in Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections (1998–2018).



Source: Authors

emulates the pattern of party competition observed at the national level. On the contrary, the more dispersed the dots are, the more incongruent the system is – or the more independent the competition in the states *vis-à-vis* the national race. The boxes with election years allow us to evaluate how such trends have developed.

In Figure 3, we see that Brazil exhibits a substantial variation in the congruence of party competition across states regarding the elections for executive offices. Although there is no observable pattern in the data indicating an association between ENEP and district size, party competition behaves differently in most states, with almost two-thirds of the states lying below or above the standard deviation of national ENEP's historical trend. The sub-national party systems have become more diverse and detached from the national party system to the extent that the relevant political parties tend not to take the structure of the presidential race into account before deciding their strategies regarding alliances to compete for sub-national offices (Melo, 2011; Carreirão, 2014).

Also, it is notable that the dispersion of the number of effective parties competing for executive offices increased at the state level in 2014 and especially in 2018, which indicates a gradual increase of incongruence between Brazilian states and concerning the national party system in this period. This increase converges with the beginning of the re-positioning of political forces in Brazil, especially at the national level. In 2014, when we observed that the dispersion of the ENEP started increasing, the PT had obtained the victory for the presidency in the second round by a small margin of votes ahead of the PSDB. Four years later, when we notice in Figure 3 that the dots are farther apart from each other and from the line that represents the national ENEP, traditional parties such as PT and PSDB had lost space in the political arena. The diversity of the number of effective parties running for state executive elections in 2018 may indicate that local political elites had increased their autonomy to shape sub-national political competition in the face of the reorganisation of the national party system.

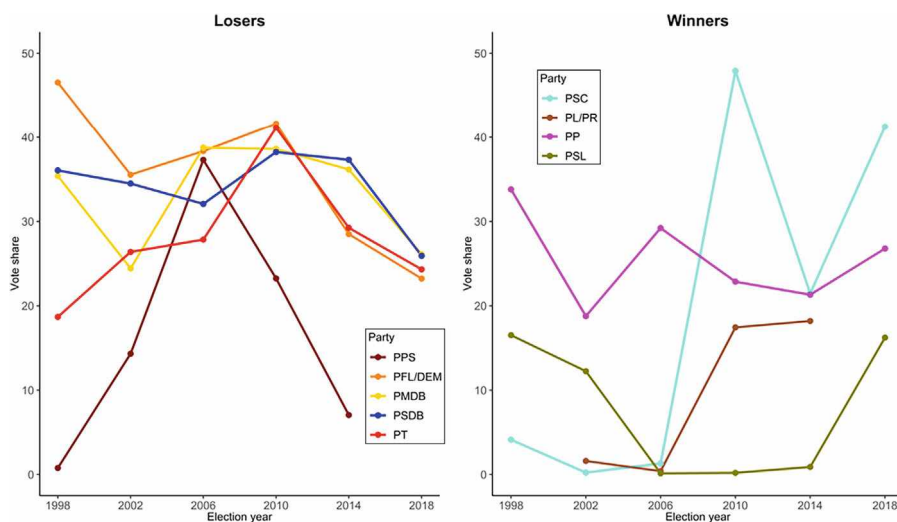
Party System Change from a Multi-Level Perspective

Table 2. Congruence versus Type A Volatility at Executive Elections

Election Year	National/ sub-national difference	Sub-national variance	Congruence	Type A volatility (mean state executive elections)	Type A volatility (presidential elections)
1998	0.004	0.292	0.296	NA	NA
2002	0.138	0.539	0.677	33.709	10.94
2006	0.000	0.276	0.276	38.925	19.89
2010	0.155	0.231	0.386	38.827	11.13
2014	0.083	0.645	0.728	48.314	11.04
2018	0.016	0.703	0.719	41.105	44.24

Source: Authors.

Figure 4. Losers and Winners of Gubernatorial Elections in Brazil (1998–2018).



Source: Authors

Table 2 shows the results of the executive branch’s congruence index by election year and compares them with Type A volatility, that is, extra-system volatility. As explained in the previous section, the further the congruence index moves away from zero, the more incongruent the party system is.

Table 2 confirms that congruence in the Brazilian party system decreased in 2006 but peaked in election years 2014 and 2018. Considering the 2014 gubernatorial elections, there was an increase in the dispersion of winners and the number of votes by political party. In this election, nine parties made a governor in at least one state and had a discrepant percentage of votes from state to state (Amaral and Tanaka, 2016; Braga, 2016). The sub-national variance of 0.645 found for this election illustrates this dispersion by showing that the patterns of party competition in gubernatorial elections were not as homogeneous between the states. The high incongruence observed in 2014 (0.728) is caused more by the divergence in party competition among the states than by the difference between the national and sub-national arenas.

In addition, there is a growing level of type A volatility for gubernatorial elections, peaking in the 2014 elections (48.31) and continuing to be higher than in the previous period in 2018. Therefore, while inter-party competition differs from state to state in the 2014 gubernatorial elections, the transfer of votes from existing to new parties increases in these elections. Nevertheless, the transfer of votes among existing parties in gubernatorial elections over the period accounts more for the general rate of electoral volatility which partially contradicts our hypothesis. Figure 4 illustrates this scenario in

which the historically Brazilian traditional parties, namely PT, PSDB, PMDB (currently MDB), and DEM, have been the main losers in gubernatorial elections, particularly since 2010. In contrast, other existing parties, but comparatively more minor, appear as winners, especially from 2014, such as PSL – which shows a slight electoral increase since 2010; the Progressive Party (Partido Progressista, PP), and the Social Christian Party (Partido Social Cristão, PSC). We observe that the gradual decrease in the number of votes received by traditional parties over the state elections occurred simultaneously with the general increase of electoral support for small right-wing parties. This finding meets our expectation that non-traditional parties have ascended at the sub-national level.

Although higher levels of sub-national variance are observed in the 2014 and 2018 elections, it is worth noting that the high incongruence in the 2002 elections – the third within this span – also refers to sub-national variance. In this sense, although it seems that party competition in Brazil has shown similar patterns between federal and state levels when it comes to executive elections (considering the rates of national/sub-national difference close to zero in Table 2), the patterns of inter-party competition among states have proved to be divergent from each other. This difference among states counts more for the final scores in the congruence index throughout these years. Finally, it is worth noting that the congruence rates differ depending on the type of elections at stake. Whereas the analysis of legislative elections supports our assumption that the patterns of competition at the national and sub-national levels are heterogeneous, the findings of executive elections are less corroborative.

Conclusions

Even though the scholarly literature has increasingly recognised sub-national patterns of party interaction, the national party system is usually placed above sub-national party systems, and the latter still needs to be more prominent in the overall analysis of party system dynamics. By studying Brazilian legislative elections' indices of (in)congruence, we can say that party systems at the national and sub-national levels differ. Furthermore, the high value of sub-national variance accounts for more of this greater incongruity; sub-national party systems vary significantly. Our findings contradict those reported in the literature that there is no detachment between the political competition at the national and sub-national levels (Amaral and Tanaka, 2016), particularly regarding legislative elections in the country. Moreover, we find evidence that not all sub-national party systems are necessarily changing at the same pace, in the same direction, and with the same results as the national party system.

In the 2006 and 2010 elections, the congruence between national and sub-national executive elections increased, matching the findings reported in previous literature (Borges, 2010). However, in the 2014 elections, Brazil's multi-level party system becomes more incongruent. It was from the 2014 elections that PT started decreasing as a political force and when its polarisation with PSDB began to end. In these elections, the established parties shrank, especially PT and PMDB (currently MDB), and there was an increase in small and medium parties at the national and state levels.

Brazil follows an international trend in the rise of right-wing parties and the distancing of people from the centre of the ideological spectrum. Even though there is a growth in self-identification with the right, this number is the same as in 2003, showing that Brazilian voters' behaviour also shows stability over the last 30 years (Singer, 2021). The characteristics of the right are not the same, however. First, there is a growth in right-wing parties associated with conservative and religious values, such as Christian Democrats (Codato, Berlatto, and Bolognesi, 2018). Second, this was followed by the rise in right-wing populist parties and policies with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018.

As we have seen in the previous section, the data point to an increase in renewal in both the national and state level legislatures, which is commonly a key indicator of electoral volatility. Nevertheless, although we have identified distinct patterns of competition between the national-sub-national and within-country levels, this difference is not evident in volatility. That is, despite being incongruous, legislative disputes at the national and sub-national levels show similar patterns of stability when we analyse volatility: type A volatility has a lower weight in total volatility, which means that votes in both national and sub-national arenas are transferred among consolidated/competing parties in all elections. The data show that in the 2018 state assemblies' elections, for example, only 2.62 percent

of votes were won by new parties or did not compete in previous elections. Regarding the Chamber of Deputies, that number grows to just 3.87 percent. The highest value occurs in the 2014 elections, where the values for both elections reach around 7 percent, which is also low when considering renewal percentages. Hence, type A volatility is lower for both elections, indicating more stable competition or no real change.

Party systems in Brazil have different logics from a multi-level perspective when we consider national and state legislative disputes. Still, no real change in party systems is identified when we analyse volatility indices since the transfer of votes in all legislative elections occurs between parties competing in all elections. It was expected that for the NEP-based congruence index, more significant incongruence would mean an increase in the number of effective parties and, therefore, an increase in type A volatility. But this is not what we observe. We learned that this incongruence does not manifest itself in the distinct volatility patterns – on the contrary, both elections are similar, with greater type B volatility. Therefore, despite this incongruence found between Brazil's national and sub-national levels, especially when considering the multi-level legislative elections, it seems that the sub-national level works as a reservoir of established/existing parties.

Developments occurring at the national party system are often transferred to the sub-national realities, concealing the potential distinctiveness of the patterns of interparty interaction at the sub-national level, especially regarding their propensity to change over time. New research focusing on analysing electoral results at the disaggregate level (sub-national units) could bring to light more robust conclusions about electoral competition and party system dynamics, especially in the case of multi-level systems. One must consider that one size does not fit all.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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