This paper defines the Brazilian right in terms of a combination of the socio-economic bases of inequality and clientelism that supported it throughout history and the more contemporary affiliations of conservatives to certain political parties. The main argument holds that the Brazilian right has depended primarily upon its domination of subnational bailiwicks, especially in the Northeast region. Conservatives were the most significant political actors during the first two decades of the post-1985 democracy, but their national influence waned with the elections of 2006 and 2010. These shifts were marked by the decline of the right’s electoral dominance of their traditional subnational redoubts.
The structure of inequality composes a central role in the political strategy and organization of the right in Brazil. Inequality is a necessary condition for the establishment of sustainable clientele networks based on hierarchical relationships between powerful elites and poor clients. This paper argues that the Brazilian right has historically depended upon such formulas of political domination at the subnational (state and municipal) level. From this base, conservative elites gained the capacity to exert leverage at a national level. The history of these models is long, evolving from *coronelismo* during the 19th and early 20th centuries to more contemporary forms of political machine-building under both authoritarian and democratic regimes. The other central claim of this paper is that the subnational organization of conservative power produced an uneven geographic pattern for the quality of democracy, concentrating right-wing political domination especially where inequality is greatest in the poor states of the Northeast. Zones of conservative rule in Brazil are marked by not only the continuation of these elites and their extended political families in power (*parentela*) but by voter attitudes that enable the continuity of political machines. The result is a pattern of political organization that can best be understood by analyzing how spatial logics link who Brazilian conservatives are, how they have organized, and who supports them.

The definition of the Brazilian right used here, which sees their policy preferences and organizational choices emerging from the structures of socio-economic inequality, challenges several alternative conceptions of the right in Brazil. First, conservative rule has persisted through different regime types. While conservatives were closely associated with the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime (1964-1985), making the most of their ties to the generals to enhance their influence, conservatives also adapted to nonauthoritarian contexts such as the populist party period of 1945-1964 and the current democratic regime that began in 1985.
(Mainwaring, Meneguello, and Power 2000). They survived the non-party dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930-1937) and his corporatist *Estado Novo* (1937-1945). Second, no single ideology, defined as a set of programmatic policy preferences, encompasses an understanding of the right in modern Brazil. Conservatives have embraced both statist and market-oriented forms of capitalist development. The right has also advocated a wide range of social welfare policies provided that these did not threaten property rights (Weyland 1996). Third, the Brazilian right is evolutionary in that its base expanded from traditional rural-sector elites to encompass more urban, industrial interests. The latter is still “traditional” in the sense that the sources of power remain imbedded in clientele networks, but the right is also “modern” and pro-modernizing in that it broadened its class range as Brazil industrialized during the 20th century (Dantas 2006b). Chief among its modernizing tendencies is the capacity of the right to maintain a closer and more pervasive interconnection between its social bases of power and the central role of the state in the economy. Although a segment of the right is “traditional” in the other sense that it embraces conservative social mores, this aspect does not determine the composition of the right over time as a broader political entity in Brazilian history. In this sense, the “traditional,” the “conservative,” and the “right” cohere as a single socio-political entity and so these terms will be used interchangeably here.

Two core premises undergird any understanding of the right in Brazil. The first is that the fact of inequality in Brazil, which is especially great in those regions of the country where conservatives have ruled the longest, is central to sustaining clientele networks. As is well known, the mixture of poverty and material dependence on clientele networks can sustain political bosses in power (Scott 1969, 1972). One crucial distinction to make in the Brazilian case is that conservatives created these networks but also embraced limited distributive policies
that did not fundamentally challenge property rights. Brazilian conservatives employed non-programmatic welfare policies to maintain the affiliation of poor supporters while undercutting the attempts by popular and leftist movements and parties to expand the substantive purview of these policies (Souza 2009). This balancing act allowed conservatives to weather the advent of populist politics and industrialization during the 20th century, evolving the right from its 19th century rural and exclusive regimes run by local bosses of landed elites (os coronéis, hence coronelismo).

The other core premise of any analysis of conservative rule is the primacy of subnational bases of power. Domination of governorships and state assemblies has been the main source of the right’s political influence and continuity in contemporary Brazil. More than politicians of the center and the left, conservatives have been most consistent historically in scaling up their position in subnational bailiwicks to exert leverage at the federal level. The right is distinctive from other political ideologies in consolidating at the subnational level models of continuismo not seen elsewhere. The continuity of conservatives in power is a product of their ability to control state resources and extract political support from voters dependent upon the largesse of these elites. So an allied tendency in places dominated by conservatives is governismo – the tendency for voters to elect the incumbent repeatedly at higher rates. Conservatives’ continuismo and the governismo that is acute in their states and municipalities reflect the capacity of these elites to consolidate political machines, differentiating them from the center-right and centrist politicians who practice clientelism but do not dominate their subnational base through extended political families.

Consistent with this view of the subnational bases of conservative rule, voters’ attitudes towards politics vary spatially, mapping well between areas that have been held by conservatives
versus the left or center-left. Voter attitudes concerning the importance of maintaining personal
ties to politicians and the exchange of material rewards for political support states long held by
right-wing politicians, especially in the nine states of the Northeast, distinctive from the rest of
the country. This spatial distinctiveness is more predictive of the association between
conservative rule and voter support than voters’ self-placement on the left-right spectrum.

Based on the right’s dominance of its redoubts in the overrepresented Northern and
Northeastern states, conservatives gained an upper hand in guaranteeing the stability and shaping
the quality of Brazilian democracy after 1985. Much scholarship on the first two decades of
Brazilian democracy emphasizes the continuous influence of traditional elites, and particularly
those forming the right, in federal and subnational politics. For example, Frances Hagopian’s
(1996) seminal examination of traditional politics before and during Brazil’s democratic period,
known as the New Republic, is most interested in explaining “why [such elites] survive and
continue to monopolize power” (p. 20). Similarly, Timothy Power’s (1996, 2000) essential
studies of the right are most concerned with mapping out how the “durable political machines”
undergirding conservatives contribute to their dominance in the post-1985 democracy. Little
consideration is given in these works to the possibility that the social bases of conservatives’
political machines can change.

This chapter will show that these assumptions that conservative rule will remain a
loadstone around the neck of Brazilian democracy are obsolescing. Despite the pervasive
influence that the right has had on democratic institutions and Brazilian governments, the erosion
of its position at the subnational level, and especially in conservative redoubts in the states of the
North and the Northeast, has accompanied and made more sustained the decline of the right’s
influence in national politics. Analysis of the results of the 2006 and 2010 elections provide
evidence that conservatives have failed to protect their erstwhile sources of political power sufficiently and will likely see a far more limited role as Brazilian democracy matures. I have explored the empirical causes of this decline elsewhere (cf. Montero 2010, 2011a), so the analysis here will focus on the broader significance of this reversal of political fortune for conservatives.

Defining the Brazilian Right

The Brazilian right has been a part of every governing coalition since independence in 1822 until the last decade. The definition of the right based on either ideological or historic-sociological terms must be able to encompass this long history. Ideological definitions do not travel well across time since the proclivities of conservatives in one period do not hold longitudinally. But an ideological-programmatic definition does lend itself well to operationalization of the right in terms of parties and governing programs during specific periods (Mainwaring et al. 2000). By contrast, a focus on the organization of clientele networks is broadly applicable throughout history, but underspecifies the right in contemporary democracy where many parties and political persuasions, including some on the left, engage in clientelism. The approach taken by this study is to marry the two perspectives by emphasizing the socio-economic bases for political clientelism used by conservatives and then to use the programmatic operationalization employed by Mainwaring et al. (2000) and Power (2000) in Brazil’s post-1985 democracy. The key link between the two approaches, I argue, is the subnational base for both the clientele networks and the parties of conservatives. To differentiate these further from contemporary centrists and some leftists, I emphasize the geographic focus of conservative rule in the nine states of the Northeast and, less so, the five states of the North. These subnational
polities have been unambiguously the redoubts of conservatives and their main bases for exerting authority at the federal level. To be sure, notable conservatives such as Paulo Maluf, the longtime friend of the military and stalwart of São Paulo politics, is a rightist, but he never consolidated his role in paulista and national politics the way that the political machines in the Northeast did. In this sense, my definition for the Brazilian right is imbedded in a conception of conservative rule that has as its core the dominance of subnational bailiwicks and the use of these bases to sustain the influence of conservatives in national politics.

Alternative definitions used to define the right do less well in the Brazilian context. One might define the Brazilian right in terms of its core constituency from the upper classes and business (Gibson 1996), in terms of its position on the incorporation of labor into the political arena (Collier and Collier 1991), or regarding its policy preference for market-oriented reform. In contrast to Gibson’s (1996) definition, Brazil’s rightists have primarily depended upon the support of low-income voters (Mainwaring et al. 2000: 166). The Brazilian right may be the most friendly to business interests and the least congenial to labor (Power 2001: 621), but these cleavages are insufficient to identify the right since workers in the Northeast plump for conservatives (Dantas 2006a) and some business interests have abandoned them in the industrial South (Kingstone 1999). The same is true for the right’s positions on market-oriented policies. It should be remembered that conservatives partnered with the armed forces during the authoritarian period to deepen the import-substitution model and oppose trade liberalization, but they shifted to support neoliberal structural reforms during the 1990s and especially under the democratic administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Power 1998). Now that even leftists such as Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT)
support these reforms (Hunter 2010), these policy preferences are no longer useful indicators for defining the right.

Below, I first consider the historical roots of clientelist forms in rural society and particularly in the least industrialized states of the Northeast. I then turn to the role of control over public sector patronage at the subnational level and, finally, the use of this base to exert influence at the federal level. This is a story that includes political parties but is not driven by these organizations.

Traditional conservative elites in Brazil trace their roots back to the 19th century in which political machines, landed families, and local strongmen known as os coronéis (the colonels) ruled over peasants who depended upon these figures for their livelihoods (Vilaça and Albuquerque 1988; Nunes Leal 1976). The availability of a large, free small-farmer peasant population allowed the northeastern states in particular to replace slave labor more easily with tenants, who were imbedded in social hierarchies of dependence that survived the end of slavery in 1889 (Bernardes 2007: 59-60). Peasants working on the land of rich families were seen in patrimonial terms by the economic and cultural elite as “extensions” of the family, literally agregados (hangers-on). The agregado economy did not prevent economic modernization, for similar forms were swept away in states such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Rio Grande do Sul, where the commercialization of agriculture, and particularly the coffee and ranch economies, created the capital needed for the first phase of light industrial manufacturing and urbanization by the turn-of-the-20th century. By contrast, in the Northeast, the agregado economy changed much more slowly. And it was precisely that lack of dynamism that justified more assertive and developmentalist efforts by the central state, most notably the creation of the Banco do Nordeste in 1952 by Getúlio Vargas and the Superintendency for the Development of
the Northeast (SUDENE) by his successor, Juscelino Kubitschek. These projects helped to industrialize parts of the Northeast’s economy and modernize agriculture through the provision of official credits. The results, however, did not change greatly the concentration of landownership or existing social relations of dependency. Developmentalism merely expanded the pool of patronage by increasing the size of the public bureaucracy. Social marginalization became more urbanized as witnessed by the growth of large shantytowns (favelas) in the major cities of the region (Bernardes 2007: 75-76).

Conservative modernization of the countryside during the military regime accelerated the region’s economic growth but left the agregado economy largely intact. Traditional elites in the northeastern states provided the most stable support base for the generals. In return, the government transferred agricultural credit and subsidies to large landholders, reinforcing their control of material resources for production. Developmentalist policies, especially the sugar cane gasohol program, Proálcool, channeled capital investment into once-defunct export enclaves in the sugar zone. Capital- and technology-intensive production reduced the demand for labor, diminishing the ratio of workers to land (Pereira 1997: 45; Barzelay 1986). Even the economic growth during the “Brazilian miracle” (1968-1973) was accompanied by higher levels of underemployment (Jatobá 1986: 238). The expansion of agribusiness crowded out subsistence agriculture, increased demand for imported staples, and raised average food prices. All of these tendencies were “modernizing” but they failed to raise citizens out of the erstwhile socio-economic categories of dependency that were characteristic of the agregado economy since the 19th century.

The political corollary of the agregado economy was the dependence on clientelism that poor tenants relied upon to survive. Rural clientelism took on many of the same elements of
urban clientelism (cf., Gay 1990; Diniz 1982) in that it created continued reliance by rural and marginalized households on the patronage bestowed by established political networks (Mainwaring 1999: 181). The weakness of rural popular movements and their cooptation by patrimonial leaders at the national and subnational levels, allowed conservative elites to tap the poor’s search for individual, as opposed to collective, solutions to everyday problems of poverty as a source of support (Pereira 1997). As is typical of the development of clientele networks elsewhere (cf. Chubb 1982; Scott 1972), those that were forged based on economic dependence and poverty in the Northeast of Brazil became the lifeblood of conservative rule for decades, “modernizing” only in terms of tactics in the form of more elaborate and pervasive forms of vote-buying, coercion, and machine-building. As is well-known in the literature on clientelism, such political monopolies are strongest where elites can isolate their subjects, oversee their electoral behavior, and credibly threaten them if they renege on their vote-buying contracts (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007; Medina and Stokes 2007). It is, therefore, not surprising that these conservative elites persisted in power, establishing in several cases, multi-generational political families with control over positions of executive authority.

What sustained the conservative, dominant class in these polities was their continued hegemonic control of the state apparatus. They were neither unambiguously an agrarian elite nor a comprador class. Urban bankers and lawyers filled their ranks as much as did landed elites and merchants in commercial agriculture (Hagopian 1996: 19-20). More crucial was their capacity for limiting political competition, closing down the opposition’s access to patronage, including national resources. In this way, traditional incumbents practiced what Gibson (2005) calls “boundary control,” by undercutting the creation of possible alliances that could otherwise empower an opposition to conservative rule and broaden political competition.
Patterns of recruitment into the elite depended upon kinship or demonstrated service to the kinship circle that defined the locus of power. Since the parameters of political competition were narrowed to an “oligarchy of families that cross the blurred boundaries between state and society,” only through “membership in or alliance with these families [was]… political advancement” assured (Hagopian 1996: 16). These clans of friends and “extended family” (parentela) adapted to the modernization of the state and to democracy by becoming electoral families in subnational politics (Lewin 1987). Those among them who were best at attracting voters’ support (that is, they are bom de voto) and/or became the most effective brokers of federal resources, emerged as the leaders of these cliques.

The dominant elite’s control over patronage at the subnational level required renewable sources of fiscal transfers from the federal government in return for political support to an array of different national leaders, authoritarian as well as democratic; military as well as civilian. During the oligarchical Old Republic (1889-1930), subnational elites and their political parties could control the federal government directly during a time known as a política dos governadores. Although Getúlio Vargas’ “revolution of 1930” ruptured this system and his Estado Novo dictatorship (1937-1945) broke apart many of the traditional networks that dominated the states, his government recreated these subnational networks by appointing executives known as interventores who had ties to the traditional elite. Notably, one of the political parties Vargas created – the Social Democratic Party (PSD) – as well as its rival, the anti-Vargas, National Democratic Union (UDN), organized political machines at the subnational level. Many of these were interwoven with the pre-existing traditional elite (Mainwaring et al. 2000: 170). After Vargas’ dictatorship, these subnational clientelist networks remained as the main arbiters of electoral and legislative politics during the 1945-1964 populist democracy.
(Souza 1976). These forces conspired with the military to oust President João Goulart in 1964. Although the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime attempted to replace traditional elites with their hand-picked “technical” governors, this effort failed and the generals would come to rely on conservatives (Hagopian 1996). The military’s own political party, the National Renovating Alliance (ARENA), became a vehicle for these traditional elites, many of whom came from the old PSD/UDN structures. For example, the conservative networks that organized in Bahia around the governor, Antônio Carlos Magalhães (ACM) during the late 1960s, first emerged from the UDN apparatus in the state, later to adapt its structures of institutionalized political recruitment and clientelism to the military’s grafting of the ARENA apparatus onto the carlista political order in the state (Dantas 2006b). From these bases, conservatives played the role of collaborators with the military, representing the generals in the still-open federal congress through the ARENA and its successor after 1979, the Democratic Social Party (PDS) (Hagopian 1996; Power 1996).

Using the democratic-authoritarian cleavage as his standard, Power (2000) defines the political right as the cohort that affiliated to the ARENA/PDS, but as I have argued, this cohort is endogenous to the larger socio-historical phenomenon of conservative rule in Brazil. Power’s framework, however, is useful in underscoring the highpoint of conservative rule under both the military and the subsequent democratic regime and in clarifying its modernizing tendencies. As his study demonstrates, the ARENA/PDS cohort retained its influence within the New Republic, choosing indirectly through an electoral college and accidentally through the death of the first civilian president, Tancredo Neves, on the eve of his inauguration, one of their own in José Sarney in 1985, the longtime boss of Maranhão state. Conservatives played a key role in solidifying the Centrão (literally, the “big center” alliance of right-wing politicians) that shaped
the Constitution of 1988, giving themselves the benefits of electoral malapportionment in the congress by overrepresenting the less populous states in the North and Northeast that they dominated (Snyder and Samuels 2004). And while Sarney proved incapable of addressing the multiple crises produced by the decline of the developmentalist economy, the conservative elite was able to evolve in support of market-oriented policies, beginning with the ill-fated presidency of Fernando Collor (1990-1992) and then most notably during the two terms of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) (Power 2000, 2001; Mainwaring et al. 2000).

Unlike the experience of other Latin American countries, the Brazilian right’s social base obviated the need to develop political parties to defend its interests. In all cases in which conservatives affiliated with a particular organization, these were created by regime insiders. This is a distinctive aspect of right-wing parties in Brazil that differentiates them especially from left-wing parties such as the Workers’ Party (PT) that originated outside the state as the products of grassroots activism. Using a distinction first designed by Martin Shefter (1994: 30-31), Mainwaring (1999: 165-166) argues that conservative and center-right parties in Brazil were “internally created” by regime forces while parties such as the PT were “externally created,” having been born during the opposition in the transition to democracy. This makes Power’s (1996, 2000) definition of the political right during the New Republic as the cohort that emanated from the ARENA/PDS useful for identifying the individuals that fall into this group. It should be underscored as well that the ARENA/PDS was, apart from the generals themselves, a vacuous organization without the involvement of the conservative governors and mayors that adopted the party label. As noted above, ARENA was initially divided by the técnicos appointed directly by the regime and the traditional (conservative) elite. The latter group regained control of state party machines during the political liberalization (abertura) process after 1973,
effectively pushing out the técnicos from positions of power and restoring what these conservative elites had since the days of Vargas (Samuels and Abrúcio 2000: 51-52; Hagopian 1996). Continued recruitment into and career success within the arenista cohort depended upon a politician’s ties to the subnational political machines run by traditional elites. This group had been greatly strengthened during the late 1970s and early 1980s when the generals cultivated their support in response to the official opposition, the MDB’s (Brazilian Democratic Movement/Movimento Democrático Brasileiro) electoral victories in state and national legislatures in 1974 and 1978 (Power 1996: 62-63). Conservative elites remained strongest in the rural states of the North and Northeast and the regime fortified them by pouring resources into these regions in the form of development project money and fiscal transfers. The generals malapportioned the national congress to the benefit of these states in the 1978 electoral reform. Then, in the contest of 1982, when governors could be directly elected for the first time, the military provided them with great fiscal and policy-making autonomy. In lieu of creating a new, national political elite as a bulwark against the MDB, the military scaled up the subnational networks of conservatives. These processes had lasting effects on conservatives themselves, even years later, as shown by Timothy Power’s surveys of congressional elites between 1991 and 1997: conservative deputies are far more likely than others to identify with their region than their party (Power 2000; Mainwaring et al. 2000: 182).

As a consequence of maintaining and even expanding their control over their subnational bailiwicks, right-wing politicians had no incentive to regard party labels as having any real significance. They could change parties if they believed such a move would afford them privileged access to public sector patronage. After the democratic transition in 1985, many of these politicians easily abandoned the PDS to avoid the stigma associated with pro-military ties.
Their preferred new party was the PFL (Party of the Liberal Front/Partido da Frente Liberal), but also the catch-all PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement/Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro), ironically the party of the ARENA’s rival during the period of restricted two-party competition (1966-1978), the MDB. During the Constituent Assembly (1987-1988) that drafted the country’s constitution, a fifth of the PMDB representatives were former arenistas (Power 2000: 77). Power’s data for the 48th-50th (1987-91, 1991-95, and 1995-99) congresses demonstrate that ARENA/PDS veterans also moved to other national parties such as the PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy/Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira), where approximately 15 percent of the party’s deputies during the first term of Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency were ex-arenistas. ARENA/PDS veterans also migrated to smaller, regional parties such as the Partido Liberal (PL), the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), and the various configurations of the merged PPR-PPB-PP organizations. Based on the percentage of seats won in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the apogee of conservative influence during the post-1985 democracy occurred during the Cardoso administration. As Table 1 shows, the right-wing parties averaged 43.8 percent of seats won in the Chamber and 36.6 percent in the Senate for the 1990-2002 period. The PFL led all right-wing parties with an average of 17.8 percent of seats in the Chamber and 21.5 percent in the Senate. During the 2002-2010 period, these averages fell to 33.1 percent for all right-wing parties in the Chamber and 24 percent in the Senate. The PFL’s gains were especially small (an average of 12.5 percent in the Chamber and 14 percent in the Senate) for the period.

[Table 1 Percentage of Total Seats Won in the Chamber (C) and the Senate (S) by Conservative Parties, 1982-2010]
These party labels remain useful as one indicator for identifying where the Brazilian right resides in the current democratic regime since the organizations that were favored by the arenista cohort remain the parties of choice for conservatives. If one employs a programmatic-ideological definition of the right, empirical evidence stemming from surveys of congressional leaders, analyses of legislative roll-call voting, and the historical genealogy of who the members of the conservative right are, these continue to be the parties associated with the right in Brazil (Power and Zucco 2009; Power 2000; Mainwaring et al. 2000). Although their distinctive views may not travel well over broader periods of Brazilian history, the members of current conservative parties have similar programmatic preferences including support for market-oriented policies (Power 1998), social conservatism (though this varies across parties, it differs fundamentally from the positions identified with the left and center), opposition to land reform (Mainwaring et al. 2000), and an embrace of hard-line (mão dura) approaches to maintaining law and order (Ahnen 2007).

**The Geography of the Brazilian Right’s Effects on Democracy**

The right has been neither excessively strong nor exceedingly weak in terms of its effects on the quality of the post-1985 Brazilian democracy. To be sure, conservatives played a stabilizing role by engaging the system (“staying in the game”) and then supporting in the congress all of the presidents who were elected between 1985 and 2002 (Power 2000). But Brazilian democracy was institutionally weak when the generals relinquished power, and that allowed conservatives to imprint their parochial interests on democratic procedures (Power 1996). So “support” meant providing votes in return for patronage (pork barreling) (Ames 2001; Mainwaring 1999). This served to parochialize Brazilian democracy more broadly and weaken the state (Weyland 1996, 2000). At the national level, the right was able to keep off the
legislative table political reform and reversals of the fiscal transfer system that gave their bailiwicks access to federal resources without the need to extract taxes (Samuels 2000; Montero 2000). At the subnational level, conservatives’ continued dominance of their states undermined the quality of democracy by weakening elite contestation, accountability, and government responsiveness. As I argued above, these two intergovernmental levels are linked, with conservatives’ influence on national politics emanating from their dominance of their subnational polities.

As the political actor most loyal to the outgoing military leadership during the transition, securing the support of the right for democracy guaranteed the stability of the regime but introduced a series of tradeoffs that hurt the quality of democracy. By far the most studied institutions in this regard are the Brazilian congress and the presidency. The tradeoffs between the right’s participation in the regime and its resulting quality were clear during the debates over drafts of the 1988 Constitution. The Centrão, which the arenistas dominated, embraced the previously mentioned malapportionment of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house), allowing overrepresentation of underpopulated states in the North and Northeast and limiting the number of deputies from the more industrialized states of the South and Southeast, the base for center-left and leftist opposition to the military (Snyder and Samuels 2004). The right also opposed provisions to increase the oversight powers of the congress and the courts, the transparency of the policy-making process, and a lower threshold for legislative quorums (Power 1996). These positions all preserved conservatives’ preferences for opaque, personal exchange-oriented forms of doing politics. And the right would continue to protect these preferences during the subsequent governments of Fernando Collor, Itamar Franco (1992-1994) and especially Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Cardoso’s PSDB shifted to the center-right decidedly
during the 1994 campaign when it formed an alliance with the PFL and then subsequently when Cardoso relied upon PFL chieftains such as Antônio Carlos Magalhães (Bahia) and his son, Luis Eduardo, to shepherd his legislative agenda in the congress. Despite Cardoso’s previous attacks on what he called “fisiologismo” (clientelist politics) and his long-held belief that the PFL was at the core of the country’s problems, the president recognized the practicalities of allying with conservatives who held more than forty percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Power 2001: 623-624).

If the point of right-wing support for presidents such as Sarney, Collor, and Cardoso was the orientation of legislation and political careers around the reinforcement of subnational bailiwicks, it was the continuation of conservative dominance in these redoubts that provided the right its influence at the federal level. According to David Samuels (2003: 85-88), this meant that these elites played the game of *gubernatorial* politics well. As his research shows, gubernatorial, not presidential, candidates have “coattails” in concurrent elections. Candidates for federal, state, and municipal office wish to associate with gubernatorial candidates, who have the mixture of name recognition, local connections (especially important for traditional elites), and campaign finance support. By using federal resources to reinforce their clientele networks at the subnational level, conservatives helped to undermine elite accountability and government responsiveness by limiting their rivals’ access to power. To accomplish this they did not need to resort to the *de jure* limitations on the electoral system that the generals used during the bureaucratic-authoritarian period nor did they need to rig election results on a regular basis. Instead, they employed erstwhile tactics for parochializing politics: the use of the state apparatus to dispense material incentives to poor voters and local political allies.
Parochialization limits electoral contestation *de facto* by allowing a few elites to mobilize citizen participation during electoral cycles. The best analysis of this phenomenon is found in Frances Hagopian’s *Traditional Politics and Regime Change in Brazil* (1996). For Hagopian, traditional polities are *authoritarian* in the sense that the oligarchy controls representation, mobilizing citizens through vote- and turnout-buying and de-mobilizing them through turnout-suppression. Voters can express their choices at the ballot box, but they are influenced *ex ante* by conservative elites through material incentives, realized or promised. Consequently, political elites can compete for power, but a small, predictable few capture and hold it repeatedly. While the alternation, albeit seldom, of governments both within and outside the traditional elite in most Brazilian states would disqualify these polities as strictly authoritarian, de facto limitations on elite contestation weaken the pluralism of these systems.

The empirical indicators for the parochialization of democratic politics in the redoubts of conservative rule can be demonstrated through subnational electoral data and surveys of voters. The first set of indicators draws on an emerging literature that attempts to measure the quality of subnational democracy through the existence of excessively long mandates, large margins for incumbents, executive dominance over the legislature, and high re-election rates (cf. Goldberg, Wibbels, and Mvukiyeh 2008; Gervasoni 2010: 315). The second set of indicators measures the tendency of voters in states traditionally ruled by conservatives to engage in *governismo* and to evince political attitudes that embrace personalism and clienelist rule. These voters maintain fewer hopes of good government but they expect the politicians they select to reward them personally and improve their well-being.

Using electoral measures of limited contestation and *continuismo*, I construct an index to list the 26 Brazilian states from least competitive to most competitive. Drawing on Gervasoni
(2010) and Borges (2007), the index is based on a single-factor score from a principal components analysis of four measures of contestation: the proportion of the valid vote won by the incumbent party or coalition in the first round of the gubernatorial elections, succession control (coded as 1 = governorship is lost to opposition, 2 = incumbent is succeeded by co-partisan or similar political family, 3 = incumbent is re-elected or returns to office in a non-consecutive term if previously served), and the percentage of seats in the state assembly won by the governor’s party and party coalition. The index pools data from four elections (1990, 1994, 1998, and 2002). It excludes the 1982 and 1986 contests due to their different electoral rules, party systems, and the exclusion of new states. The index also omits the contest of 2006 since that one was relatively more competitive (Borges 2007: 113). The analysis produced one significant factor (2.27 eigenvalue with a 1.504 difference over the second eigenvalue). The result is a baseline ranking of “electoral dominance.”

[Table 2 Electoral Dominance and Its Components by State and Region, 1990-2002]

Table 2 places at the top of the list what scholars of Brazil routinely report as the least competitive polities. Most of these are located in the Northeast region, the most notoriously clientelistic area of the country (Ames 2001) and also, as the last column shows, the most unequal in terms of income distribution. Not one state from the more populated and socio-economically more developed and more equal southern or southeastern regions appears in the top 14 entries. The first eleven slots on the list include the only four states to never have a second-round contest for governor (Mato Grosso, Alagoas, Pernambuco, and Amazonas). With the exception of Paraíba, these states all re-elected governors at least once (five did twice, and one, Amazonas, did so three times). The dominant parties in these states tend to be the right-wing PFL and the center-right PMDB, commensurate with the conservative profile of these
cases. The centrist social democratic PSDB, which is dominant in only the case of Ceará, elected a winning governor only five times (including one re-election) in the other states placed within the least competitive cohort. Notably, the PT, the largest leftist party in Brazil, captured no governorships and it found itself in only four partisan coalitions of successful candidates in this group prior to 2006. In virtually all cases, conservative candidates and right-wing parties retained control of the governorships of these states.

The legislative profile of these elections follows the dynamics of the governor’s races with average seat shares for the winning coalition supporting the gubernatorial candidate standing at about half of each state assembly (49.9 percent). By contrast, the same figure for the bottom eleven entries on Table 1 is just over half that amount (27.8 percent). This is an indicator of the incentives even minor parties have for forging alliances to winning gubernatorial candidates as this allows them to make claims on the governor’s largesse, an essential factor in shaping political careers (Samuels 2003). But it is notable that the Northeastern states stand-out in this regard for the high average concentration of gubernatorial bandwagoning.

As a group, conservative subnational governments have represented an appreciable number of all state governments. Data for the 1982-2006 period reveal that 28 percent of Brazil’s state governments have belonged to this cohort. Conservative subnational governments can be subdivided into the more traditional category of governments of the North and Northeast led by parties favored by the arenista cohort (38 cases or 21 percent of the total number of governments). Conservative governors have served mostly in the northern and northeastern regions, where a full 77 percent of all such officials have run states in these regions. Relaxing the geographic parameter adds just 12 more cases. If all PMDB-led governments are coded as centrist, then most subnational governments have been middle-of-the-road (56.9 percent),
albeit with a majority of these being center-right judging from alliances between the catch-all PMDB and the traditional conservative parties. Correlations among the presence of right-wing parties, the Northeast region, and the electoral dominance index are strikingly consistent during the period of Brazilian democracy (cf. Montero 2011b).

Turning to voter attitudes as a second set of indicators for conservative rule, I attempt to develop longitudinally consistent indicators that identify the characteristics typical of a supporter of conservatives. This is difficult because, unlike political elites, most Brazilian voters have neither strong ideological tendencies nor acute partisan identities (Almeida 2001, 2006; Carreirão 2007; Baker, Ames, and Rennó 2006; Samuels 2006). But conservative voters do evince several characteristics consistently. First, conservative voters are significantly less likely to identify with a party. In keeping with the interpersonal and informal dynamics of clientele networks, these voters tend to be more loyal to personalities than to organizations (Mainwaring et al. 2000: 196-197). Second, since clientelism is based on a hierarchical relationship between elites and subjects, voters tend to take their cues from political bosses who exchange particular rewards for constituent support. Consequently, voting for incumbents (governismo) is higher in places ruled by clientele networks, and these have tended to be the redoubts of conservative rule in Brazil (Zucco 2010). Third, as a function of personalism and governismo, conservative voters have less regard for how well their representatives follow the letter of the law than how well they provide particularistic rewards to their clients. To coin a phrase used to describe the São Paulo politician, Ademar de Barros, these voters accept the logic of the popular phrase, “he steals but he gets things done” (rouba mas faz).

[Table 3: Dimensions of Conservatism Among Brazilian Voters]
In keeping with the geographic distribution of electoral dominance, these characteristics should cluster spatially. Using three separate waves of the LAPOP survey of Brazilian voters (2006, 2008, and 2010), Table 3 compares the attitudes of Northeastern and Northern voters versus those in the developed South and Southeast. It also compares urban and rural voters and self-identified conservatives versus those voters declaring a different ideological proclivity. The data demonstrate that there is a geographic association for each of the three dimensions of conservatism, though governismo and rouba mas faz have stronger regional associations than the lack of partisan identity. This is probably due to the fact that the weakness of partisanship is more systemic and national than regional (Samuels 2006). Given that several of the reported associations disconfirm the hypothesized direction, the results for partisanship are indeterminate. Respondents in the Northeast and North are more consistent in reporting a tendency to vote for incumbents or their candidates and, most notably, support dishonest politicians provided that they are effective and initiate many public works. Notably, the associations between geography and governismo and rouba mas faz hold up more consistently than the rural placement of voters or whether they self-identify as conservatives.

The data show that the geographic distribution of conservative rule in Brazil has had a lasting effect on the quality of democracy at the subnational level in terms of electoral competition and at the level of individual voters. Social inequality coincides with these structures. As the history of clientelism in these polities underscores, inequality has formed an integral part of what has sustained conservative rule across different regimes, development models, and the modernization of Brazil. The main consequences of this history are that the Brazilian right is not the result of a national movement or the product of an ideational or
transnational network. It is particularistic and specific to the subnational polities that sustain it and enable it to engineer influence in Brazilian politics.

*The Erosion of Conservative Rule: the 2006 and 2010 Elections*

More than thirty years ago, the Brazilian political scientist, Gláucio Soares (1973) argued based on electoral data that conservatives in Brazil were in decline. While the post-1985 democracy proved him wrong (Mainwaring et al. 2000: 222; Power 2000), the post-2006 maturation of democracy might well be proving him right. As the data presented by Table 1 demonstrates, right-wing parties suffered notable declines in the Congress after 1998. Right-wing parties went from gaining almost half and one-third of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, respectively, in 1994 when the PFL allied with the PSDB to support Cardoso’s first administration, to winning a third of the Chamber’s seats and a mere 14 percent of seats in the Senate.

[Table 4: Regional Averages of Conservative Candidates' Share of Gubernatorial Votes, 1990-2010]

To be sure, in Brazil’s fragmented party system this still affords the right an appreciable influence at the national level, but given the erosion of their gubernatorial holdings, their continued decline seems assured. Table 4 shows a secular erosion in shares of votes going to conservatives in gubernatorial elections. These are central to the right’s control of subnational bailiwicks since holding the executive is crucial to the distribution of patronage (Power 1996: 72; Samuels 2003; Abrúcio 1998: ch. 3). Notably, the right’s losses in their redoubts in the Northeast are as substantial as their losses in more developed states, suggesting that their clientele networks are no longer sufficient to maintain their control over these polities. In the 2006 cycle in
particular, conservatives lost control of most of their bailiwicks in the Northeast and, notably, these losses came at the hands of leftists, who are less likely to distribute patronage to conservatives in return for political support (Montero 2010). The results of that election showed that conservatives could be replaced by leftists in their erstwhile redoubts in Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe. In 2010, leftists held onto these gubernatorial seats in all of these states except Maranhão and Rio Grande do Sul, both cases in which conservatives staged a comeback in part by retaining control of rural clientele networks.

These trends put in a different light Mainwaring et al.’s (2000: 165) observation more than ten years ago that the gap of electoral fortunes for conservatives in the Northeast and the more industrialized states of the South and Southeast would narrow. Conservatives’ electoral performance has not been indicative of a relative inter-regional narrowing but a more systemic decline. And it is the erosion of their command over executive offices in their bailiwicks that spells their doom more than anything that has challenged the right since the advent of democracy in 1985.

Conclusions

The death of conservatives in Brazilian politics is one of those demises that have often been exaggerated. Given the erstwhile dominance of the right in national and subnational politics since the end of the Vargas era, scholars have tended to underscore the enduring influence of conservatives. For example, Frances Hagopian’s (1996) seminal examination of traditional politics before and during the New Republic offers no explanation for the possible decline of conservatives as she is most interested in “why they survive and continue to monopolize power”
Similarly, Power (1996, 2000) is most concerned with mapping out how the “durable political machines” undergirding conservatives contribute to their dominance in Brazilian democracy. Weyland (1996) attributes such lasting influence to traditional politics that he sees these actors undermining the capacity of the Brazilian state itself. All of these treatments of Brazilian politics emphasize the continuity of conservative rule.

This is understandable given how continuous the social bases of conservative rule have been in Brazilian history. Decades of the maintenance of subnational political machines in states such as Bahia, Maranhão, Ceará, Pernambuco, and Alagoas have produced low-quality democracy registered in elite *continuismo* and *parentela* and, at the level of citizens, troubling attitudes towards the relative importance of receiving material rewards versus upholding the law and democratic processes. Conservatives have used these subnational bases to influence federal policy-making and coalitional presidentialism in the post-1985 democracy so much so that it has been difficult for scholars of Brazil to envision the country’s decision-making operating any other way with any other kinds of actors. Even as the right has shown itself capable of working with different regimes, evolving as Brazil modernized economically, shifting their policy preferences and social support networks chameleon-like to respond to these political challenges, its control over patronage has depended upon its continued ability to sustain itself at the subnational level and in the Northeast and North in particular.

The advent of the two-term Lula da Silva presidency and his succession by Dilma Rousseff in 2010 highlights a period of transition in which conservatives have been displaced at the national and, most importantly, at the subnational levels, including in their redoubts in the Northeast. This period also coincides with the gradual reduction of social inequality and the expansion of targeted social policies such as the conditional cash transfer program, *Bolsa*
Família. Further research on these and other factors is necessary to more fully understand the causes of the electoral erosion of the right in Brazil.
Works Cited


Table 1: Percentage of Total Seats Won in the Chamber (C) and the Senate (S) by Conservative Parties, 1982-2010

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<td>20.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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a Includes the seats shares of the Partido Democrata Cristão (PDC) after 1993 as the Partido Progressista Reformador (PPR).

b Was previously the Partido Social Trabalhista (PST) and the Partido Trabalhista Renovador (PTR).

c Includes the seat shares of other parties not included in merged entities already listed on the table. For a list of other parties, see Mainwaring et al. (2000: 180-181).

Sources: Mainwaring, Meneguello and Power (2000: Tables 6.5 and 6.6); Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE).
Table 2: Electoral Dominance and Its Components by State and Region, 1990-2002

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
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<th>Gubernatorial Winner Vote Share</th>
<th>Succession Control</th>
<th>Winning Party Seat Share</th>
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<th>Average Gini Coeff. 1994-10</th>
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Table 3: Dimensions of Conservatism Among Brazilian Voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voters in the Northeast</th>
<th>Voters in the North and Northeast</th>
<th>Urban v. Rural Voters</th>
<th>Self-Identified Conservatives</th>
<th>Average N</th>
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<tr>
<td>VB10</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.483</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLIEN1</td>
<td>3.916*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CLIEN2</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.481*</td>
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<td>Governismo</td>
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<tr>
<td>VB3</td>
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<td>20.443*</td>
<td>30.360*</td>
<td>26.201*</td>
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<td>4.962*</td>
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<td>21.500*</td>
<td>12.413*</td>
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LAPOP Survey Items: (1) Partisan Identity: Does not declare a partisan identity (VB10). No confidence in political parties (B21). Reports frequent receipts of offers of particular benefits from politicians (CLIEN1) and that benefit influenced vote for candidate (CLIEN2); (2) Governismo: Voted for presidential (VB3) or gubernatorial (VB60) incumbent in 2006 first round. Intention to vote in next elections for incumbent or candidate of incumbent for president (VB20) or governor (VB61). (3) Rouba mas faz: Belief in the efficacy of politician is more important than if he/she steals (RM9). Belief that politician that does a lot of public works and steals a little is better than an honest politician who does less (RM10). Belief that a politician who steals and does a lot deserves the support of the people (RM14). Belief in the necessity of sometimes paying bribes (EXC18). Figures are Pearson chi-squares. Numbers in bold are significant at the .05 level. Italicized figures indicate significant results contrary to hypotheses.
Table 4: Regional Averages of Conservative Candidates' Share of Gubernatorial Votes, 1990-2010

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</table>

Sources: Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE) and Jairo Nicolau, “Dados Eleitorais do Brasil, 1982-2006.”
Notes

1 While these tendencies are also favored by many politicians in the center-right, center and even some on the populist left, politicians of the right are overrepresented within the pool of those elites who sustain the localist-clientelist dimensions of Brazilian democracy. See Power (1996: 72, fn 26).

2 For a comprehensive view of the migrations of the ARENA/PDS cohort, see Table 4.1 in Power (2000: 75). A comprehensive list of all of Brazil’s right-wing parties is Table 6.3 in Mainwaring et al. (2000: 180-1). Since the list includes as many as 18 parties, some which were merged in later years, I simplify the presentation by referring to the larger parties – the PFL, PL, PTB, and the various mergers involving the PDS (merged with the Partido Democraça Cristão (PDC) in 1993 to form the PPR (Partido Progressista Reformador). PPR merged with the PTB and the Partido Progressista (PP) to form the Partido Progressista Brasileiro (PPB) in 1995). The PFL changed its name to Democratas (DEM) in 2007.

3 Of course, this was not new to conservatives, who had participated in the previous experience with democracy during the 1946-1964 period. See Mainwaring et al. (2000: 169-172).

4 This is true despite recent empirical evidence that federal deputies respond to partisan cues at the national level more than the preferences of their governors (cf., Cheibub, Figueiredo, and Limongi 2009). These authors stipulate that gubernatorial patronage continues to be important, though not determinate.

5 On the different strategies used by clientele networks to shape the vote, see Nichter (2008).

6 Given generally weak parties and high personalism in Brazilian elections, it was easier to code the 3’s than the 1’s and the 2’s. These were done “by hand” through a comparison of party labels in winning and rival coalitions, candidate profiles, and ideological profile of parties at the time of the election.

7 Notably, inclusion of the 2006 contest only moves two states listed in the top 12 a couple of ranks, but it does not greatly alter the results presented here.

8 The term is Borges’, who conducts a factor analysis that produces a state ranking not very different from my own.

9 Although re-election for governor was not legalized until 1998, several governors returned for nonconsecutive second or more terms during the pre-98 period.

10 The data reported here are taken from the author’s own dataset of Brazilian states.
Mainwaring et al. (2000: 178) omit the PMDB from the conservative cohort precisely because its deputies evince notable distance on their views and voting records from the right-wing. This is true *despite* the historical circulation of former *arenistas* into the PMDB.

Pearson chi-squares ($X^2$) are reported in the table but directionality was assessed from independent-sample t-tests. Respondents from the Center-West (Goiás, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul) were excluded to facilitate the comparison between the poorest and richest states. Respondents reporting non-voting or blank or spoiled ballots were not included on relevant items. Missing and nonresponsive answers were excluded for all items.