



WORKSHOP REPORT

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# THE CHALLENGES OF THE CONTEMPORARY ADMINISTRATIVE STATE:

Brazil and the United States in Comparative Perspective

May 23, 2018 Washington, DC



 | Wilson Center

# Acknowledgements

The May 23, 2018 knowledge-building workshop and this report are the result of an international cooperation project between Brazil's National School of Public Administration (ENAP), which is part of the Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to strengthen state capacities and public policy creation in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In keeping with this mission, ENAP approached the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars to design and organize a workshop dedicated to the exchange of ideas and lessons for fostering sound public administration practices, the foundation upon which sustainable development policies can be built, through a comparative analysis of Brazil and the United States.

Special thanks go to Francisco Gaetani, President of ENAP, for spearheading the partnership between ENAP, UNDP, and the Wilson Center; to Paulo Sotero, Director of the Brazil Institute at the Wilson Center, for his efforts making the workshop possible; and to the Brazil Office of the UNDP for their support and encouragement. Our sincere thanks go also to the esteemed panelists, whose substantive contributions during the workshop form the foundation of this project.

This report was prepared under the leadership of the Wilson Center, with the support of UNDP and ENAP, so that the experiences and findings of the workshop can be disseminated beyond the select group of participants on May 23, 2018.

Anna Prusa of the Wilson Center's Brazil Institute drafted the report. Kathy Butterfield designed the cover and layout of this publication. Administrative and research support were provided by Carly Rodgers and Andrew Allen of the Brazil Institute. Mariana Prado of the Brazil Institute translated the report into Portuguese. The report was financed by the UNDP.

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# Introduction

*By Paulo Sotero and Francisco Gaetani*

The workshop hosted on May 23, 2018 by the Brazil Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Brazil's National School of Public Administration, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, was a productive exchange of information and experiences between the Americas' two largest nations, and paved the way for further dialogues. The U.S. administrative state faces unprecedented challenges under the presidency of Donald Trump. The Brazilian public sector is trapped in a loop derived from the exhaustion of the institutional framework designed by the 1988 Constitution, requiring nothing short of a reinvention through politically difficult structural reforms.

The May 23<sup>rd</sup> event highlighted the conflictive dimensions of topics such as national state building, budget and tax overhaul, civil service reform, public management policies, and capacity building processes. It aimed to launch the basis for a structured dialogue between both administrations via civil servants, think tanks, and academics.

Both countries face volatile political environments amidst economic uncertainty. In the United States, the Republican Party led by Trump controls the presidency, the House, the Senate, and the Supreme Court—a concentration of power not seen since the 1980s, and even then, only briefly. Brazil has a weak caretaker government backed by an improbable coalition of convenience that emerged from a painful and controversial presidential impeachment process. Both presidencies face difficult times ahead. Strengthening executive power is the challenge in both countries, but whereas in the United States the president sets the agenda, Brazil has essentially a parliamentary presidency given the weakness of the executive branch.

The U.S. budget process has been in question since the polarization of its two-party political system transformed its approval into a recurrent and painful political struggle. In the four decades since the adoption of its current budgeting and spending system, Congress has managed to pass on time all its required appropriations measures only four times: in fiscal years of 1977, 1989, 1995 and 1997. Shutting down the government has come to be a realistic option in the federal budget negotiation process. Despite its problems, the U.S. federal budget remains functional, although highly polarized. The Brazilian budget framework was remotely inspired by the U.S. budget reforms of the 1920s and by the U.S. Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) managerial practices. The current legislation dates from the 1960s. Its shortcomings and limitations help to explain the problems that provided the pretext for President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and removal from office in 2016—the second such episode under the 1988 Constitution.

The U.S. civil service had its most recent consolidating reforms in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Brazilian civil service reforms began de facto at the end of the twentieth century, but have not yet been completed, let alone implemented. The asymmetry of the federal public administration is evidence of the unfinished business of building the national civil service. Although formally sup-

pressed, the culture of “clientelism” and patronage still survive, especially in state and municipalities. Professionalization of public sector careers took root mainly at the center of the government. At the same time, it was accompanied by the rise of strong corporatist behavior among those pursuing careers more entrenched in the public sector. A survey conducted by the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* and news agency Broadcast in July 2018 found that a quarter of the seats in Brazil’s Chamber of Deputies were occupied by career civil servants.

The capacities to be developed in both countries are very different. The maturity of the U.S. administrative state is hardly comparable to that of Brazilian public administration. The technological/digital revolution may reduce this gap in the not so distant future, since it provides opportunities for a certain degree of convergence in managerial techniques. Institutional capacities are, however, heavily dependent on an accumulated critical mass of knowledge and experience. This suggests that there is ample room for cooperative policy learning and co-production of knowledge in selected areas in both countries.

The workshop held at the Wilson Center opened dialogue on topics that are complex, conflictive, and permanent. These issues are known for involving uphill political struggles that demand highly qualified policy knowledge and engagement. The challenge lies in institutionalizing channels of consultation and cooperation in order to move bilateral and international policy dialogue from intermittent to regular.



# Workshop Agenda

The Challenges of the Contemporary Administrative State: Brazil and the United States in Comparative Perspective | May 23, 2018 | Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars | Washington, DC  
Video recordings of each panel are available on the Brazil Institute website.

## Opening Session | 9:00 a.m.

**Welcome:** *Paulo Sotero*, Director, Brazil Institute

**Introduction:** *Yesim Oruc*, Deputy Director of the United Nations Development Programme Office in Washington

*Walter Baere*, Deputy Secretary, Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management

## Panel I: Do Countries Need Strategic Planning? | 10:00 a.m.

**Panelists:** *Francisco Gaetani*, President, National School of Public Administration

*Carlos Santiso*, Division Chief for the Institutional Capacity of State-Sector, Inter-American Development Bank

*Meg Lundsager*, Public Policy Fellow, Wilson Center

**Chair:** *George Alberto de Aguiar Soares*, Secretary of Federal Budget, Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management

## Panel II: Negotiating and Implementing the Federal Budget | 11:30 a.m.

**Panelists:** *Felipe Salto*, Executive Director, Independent Fiscal Institution, Federal Senate of Brazil

*Michael Forster*, Chief Operating Officer, Wilson Center

*Aaron Jones*, Director of Congressional Relations, Wilson Center

*Allen Schick*, Professor, University of Maryland School of Public Policy

**Chair:** *Jón Blöndal*, Head of Budgeting and Public Expenditures, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

## Lunch Presentation: Public Administration and the Brazilian Constitution | 1:00 p.m.

**Presenters:** *Oscar Vilhena Vieira*, Dean, São Paulo School of Law, Fundação Getúlio Vargas; Brazil Institute Global Fellow

*Nelson Marconi*, Professor, São Paulo School of Economics, Fundação Getúlio Vargas

**Panel III: The Endless Story of Civil Service Reforms** | 2:30 p.m.

- Panelists:** *Donald Kettl*, Professor and Academic Director, Washington Center of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin  
*Luiz Alberto dos Santos*, Legislative and Public Administrative Consultant, Federal Senate of Brazil  
*Dustin Brown*, Deputy Assistant Director for Management, U.S. Office of Management and Budget
- Chair:** *Martin Williams*, Associate Professor, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

**Panel IV: Capacity Building for Turbulent Times** | 4:00 p.m.

- Panelists:** *Fernando Filgueiras*, Director of Research, National School of Public Administration  
*Matthew Taylor*, Associate Professor, American University School of International Service  
*Edwin Lau*, Head of Division, Public Sector Reform, Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
- Chair:** *Deborah Wetzel*, Senior Director of Governance, World Bank

**Closing Session** | 5:30 p.m.

- Closing Remarks:** *Francisco Gaetani*, President, National School of Public Administration  
*Paulo Sotero*, Director, Brazil Institute



# Executive Summary





## Executive Summary

Brazil and the United States are both currently in the midst of crises of their respective administrative states. Although the nature of the crises and their origins differs, there is a great deal to learn from a comparative analysis of both countries during this moment of uncertainty. On May 23, 2018, the Wilson Center's Brazil Institute and Brazil's National School of Public Administration hosted a full-day workshop in Washington, DC, to explore the experiences of scholars and policy practitioners from both countries and international institutions, and gain a better sense for how each country can strengthen public administration and management to more effectively carry out the critical work of government.

The panelists were united in their belief in the importance of the administrative state, as the cornerstone of effective government—when it works well. Yet they also discussed the challenges of building an agile and productive administration, including a short-term focus on political gains, bureaucratic inflexibility, and a lack of strategic planning and cooperation. Several key takeaways emerged:

- Successful strategic planning requires intuition and foresight, a long-term perspective, and deliberate implementation.
- Public administration must balance immediate political demands against the government's long-term objectives.
- Every aspect of the administrative state should be viewed through a strategic lens.
- Effective public administration requires a professional, autonomous, capable, mission-driven civil service.
- As the world rapidly changes, the administrative state needs to adjust, adapt, and innovate to meet new demands and opportunities.

Ultimately, the panelists concluded that the contemporary administrative state must remain relevant to the citizens it serves and the government mission it undertakes, adjusting and adapting to meet the needs of the current moment of complexity.



# Presentations and Panels



## Presentations and Panels: Summaries

The presentation slide decks from the workshop are available for download on the Brazil Institute's website.

### Opening Session

*Paulo Sotero*, Director of the Brazil Institute at the Wilson Center; *Yesim Oruc*, Deputy Director of the United Nations Development Programme Office in Washington; and *Walter Baere*, Deputy Secretary of the Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management.

The workshop held at the Wilson Center on May 23, 2018, "The Challenges of the Administrative State: Brazil and the United States in Comparative Perspective," grew out of a longstanding partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Brazil's National School of Public Administration (ENAP). In welcoming the participants, Paulo Sotero underscored the transnational and transdisciplinary nature of this collaboration and of the workshop, which sought lessons from comparisons between the administrative experiences of Brazil and the United States during a moment of great uncertainty and complexity in both nations.

As Yesim Oruc noted in her remarks, Brazil has played a leading role in supporting the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, domestically and internationally. She commended the Brazilian efforts to research, implement, and disseminate best practices that support the adoption of these goals worldwide, especially the 16<sup>th</sup> goal on governance. As a developing country, but one with significant resources, Brazil is able to stand at the nexus between the global North and the global South and advocate for a new vision of development focused on building equal partnerships instead of simple charity: "Development cooperation needs to have a new vision, that is not only about the North providing assistance to the South, or development organizations...advising countries on what to do. It is really a relationship of equal[s]...we can solve [problems] together." Oruc attested to the fact that the UNDP's collaboration with the Brazilian government and ENAP has influenced its approach



to development projects around the world. She expressed hope that the workshop, which takes a comparative look at public administration and development in the two largest democracies in the Western Hemisphere, and arguably in the world, will offer insights that the UNDP can use to achieve its mission of helping countries to develop stronger, more sustainable administrative and governance practices.

Despite these achievements, Brazil faces significant domestic development challenges, which demand institutional reforms. As Walter Baere explained, the future of sustainable growth in Brazil rests on the government's ability to pass and implement several critical policy changes in the coming years. He identified four key areas for action: fiscal consolidation, structural reforms, public-private partnerships, and an improved regulatory environment. He noted that Brazil has already passed a constitutional amendment to cap expenditures, and said that the government is committed to becoming more efficient through technology. For example, the process to travel with a pet from Brazil to the United States has gone from two months and multiple trips to the vet and a customs office to just a 30-minute online form. However, making government more cost-effective will not resolve the country's most significant fiscal challenges. Pension programs currently account for more than 50 percent of government expenditures. The country's changing demographics mean that the gap between pension revenue and payouts will only increase going forward, unless Congress passes a reform measure. In addition to pension reform, which is vital if Brazil is to gain control of its public debt, Baere argued that increasing public-private partnerships is another way of easing the government's fiscal burdens. Brazil has already awarded more than \$40 billion in contracts, and expects to award another \$40 billion in the fu-

ture. However, structural and regulatory reforms will be important steps for encouraging greater private sector participation, including simplifying the tax code, greater Central Bank autonomy, civil service salary regulations, and the privatization of Eletrobras.

Brazil, like the United States, is a continental-sized nation home to great challenges but also great opportunities. Baere argued that if Brazil can address systemic inequality, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and other problems limiting growth, and put in place policies to promote sustainable development, then it could become an example for the world. The challenge for the next government, including its bureaucrats, is to steer Brazil along this path.



## Panel I: Do Countries Need Strategic Planning?

**Francisco Gaetani**, President, National School of Public Administration (ENAP); **Carlos Santiso**, Division Chief for the Institutional Capacity of State-Sector, Inter-American Development Bank; **Meg Lundsager**, Public Policy Fellow, Wilson Center; **George Alberto de Aguiar Soares** (panel chair), Secretary of Federal Budget, Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management.

The need for strategic planning has become a common refrain among policymakers and the private sector alike, as a means of guaranteeing that organizational resources and activities are aligned with long-term goals. By definition, strategic planning is a “deliberative, disciplined effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization or other entity is, what it does, and why it does it.”<sup>1</sup> Yet even as strategic planning has become a widely recognized practice, it remains challenging to implement strategic plans and integrate them with the daily administrative functions of government, which are often short-term, process-driven, and reactive. It is also important to recognize that not all planning is strategic.

Francisco Gaetani argued that one of Brazil’s most significant challenges is its short-term focus. Public initiatives are often tied to election cycles, and strategic interests are often overshadowed by “the temptation of doing politics.” Brazil’s overabundance of administrative structures also contributes to short-termism, keeping the focus on process and procedure rather than strategy and long-term objectives. Institutional inefficiency or institutional protections can deter strategic development and innovation. Gaetani noted that Brazilian policymakers also fail to look for international reference points, and that there is a lack of dialogue—domestic and international—among Brazilians on the importance of strategic planning. “There are some words that we do not have in Portuguese, which we pay a price for. ‘Envisioning’ is one of these words...[and] if you do not envision what a country could be, you will be permanently trapped” by short-term thinking, Gaetani argued. Through viewing development from a long term perspective, a country becomes more self-aware of its own particular challenges and, at the same time, gains the

1 Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



opportunity to overcome those challenges and adequately prepare for the future.

Carlos Santiso agreed with the importance of strategic planning, but noted that there is a difference between merely planning for the future and strategic planning, which requires intuition and creative foresight. Given how quickly the world is changing, strategic planning is an ongoing challenge. He cited four key areas which are likely to pose particular difficulties for governments and policymakers undertaking strategic planning initiatives. First, governments must figure out how to regulate a digital economy. The digital economy does not have borders: it has both domestic and transnational dimensions. Brazil recently issued a strategic plan for digital governance, “e-Digital,” which offers one model. Second, administrative efficiency remains an issue, particularly in Brazil. Transaction costs due to the large bureaucracy impose significant burdens on Brazilian citizens, corporations, and the government itself. Third, rapid advances in technology and big data will undoubtedly change the way people and governments interact—but governments are still trying to figure out how to leverage technology to improve access and efficiency, and may struggle to envision the full potential of disruptive innovations. Fourth, the nature of public sector work is likely to shift significantly as technology becomes more integrated into government work, and civil servants increasingly need data science skills. In short, strategic planning must encompass the possibilities of the future, rather than focus on the limitations of the present, and this is indeed a true challenge for governments.

Meg Lundsager also agreed with the premise that strategic planning is important, but with the caveat that plans must also be implementable.

Strategic planning should not be just a theoretical exercise. She stated that there are several important considerations for implementation. First, policymakers should consider what will be necessary to carry out their plan, including whether it will require legislative action or can be done through executive action or under existing regulations. Second, public support (or a lack thereof) is always an important concern and should be factored in to the plan. Third, policymakers should think carefully about how to integrate accountability measures, and also consider what will happen if the plan is not fully implemented. The issue of accountability is a critical one, although the panelists differed in their prescriptions. Lundsager argued that a central executive authority should hold subordinate agencies and offices accountable for meeting their goals and implementing strategic plans successfully, noting that this was the way the U.S. Department of Treasury was run. Gaetani countered, however, that having a single, central figure responsible for oversight and accountability in Brazil would be infeasible in practice, and result in “agenda congestion.” In conclusion, Lundsager stressed that successful implementation of strategic plans frequently depends on successful interagency coordination. Many elements of the government must work in concert to achieve strategic objectives, underscoring the need for effective administration. This is true not only between agencies at the federal level, but also in areas that require the cooperation of state and municipal governments, where lack of resources or capacity can present obstacles to the full implementation of national strategies.

## Panel II: Negotiating and Implementing the Annual Budget

*Felipe Salto*, Executive Director, Independent Fiscal Institution, Federal Senate of Brazil; *Michael Forster*, Chief Operating Officer, Wilson Center; *Aaron Jones*, Director of Congressional Relations, Wilson Center; *Allen Schick*, Professor, University of Maryland School of Public Policy; *Jón Blöndal* (panel chair), Head of Budgeting and Public Expenditures, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

Most political analysts in Brazil and the United States are well aware that each country's budgetary system is dysfunctional, although in different ways and with different outcomes. Whereas the Brazilian system has what Allen Schick called "textbook perfect budget rules that often produce subpar outcomes," the United States has "subpar rules that sometimes produce reasonably good outcomes." Yet both countries suffer from their politicians' focus on short term political gains—which means budgeting is often divorced from strategic planning—and from high levels of mandatory expenditures that squeeze out other programs and reduce room for negotiation.

Felipe Salto spoke of the challenges of reducing government debt in Brazil, given the high rigidity of the federal budget and low projected growth in the short term. The vast majority of the federal budget goes to mandatory expenditures, as set forth in the 1988 Constitution. As a result, there is limited space for fiscal adjustment, particularly during periods of low or negative GDP growth, leading to rising public debt. Since 2012, overall expenditures have consistently exceeded revenues. In order to comply with the mandatory spending cap passed by the Brazilian Congress in 2016, the government needs to reduce spending as a

percentage of GDP by 4.4 points by 2030. Other fiscal deadlines loom closer: by 2019, if current trends continue, the government's borrowing will exceed spending, causing Brazil to violate the "Golden Rule" of its Constitution. One of the root causes of this problem is the high degree of budget rigidity, which also reduces the quality of government spending. Mandatory pensions spending and other obligatory social benefits account for more than 70 percent of total primary government spending, and 14.4 percent of GDP—a very high figure, relative to the OECD average. As the amount spent on pensions and other mandatory social programs increases over time, it squeezes out discretionary spending, thereby reducing public investment and undermining the country's long-term development objectives. Although in the last several years politicians have given some attention to these issues, Salto argued that policymakers and politicians in general lack a true "spirit of fiscal responsibility." If they do not genuinely believe in the importance of sustainable growth, which requires addressing government debt, then it will be impossible to craft policies and conditions that successfully spur long-term development.

Aaron Jones noted that the U.S. Constitution, though it does not mandate certain spending levels, nonetheless led to an "inefficient" budgeting system and one that rarely works as designed. Congress, which is supposed to draft and pass a budget each year, rarely manages the task on time. Instead, it frequently relies on continuing resolutions, which keep the government operating but at the same level set forth in the previous budget, often passing the annual budget well-into the fiscal year. Jones argued, however, that this apparent dysfunc-

tion was a deliberate choice by the framers of the Constitution to create a process that would give representation and voice to all the states' diverse interests. In essence, the founders chose democracy over efficiency.

In the present day, however, the uncertainty involved in the annual budget process makes strategic planning a challenge for any entity that relies on federal appropriations. As Michael Forster testified, late federal budgets mean organizations must plan their activities for the coming year without a clear understanding of the resources that will be available. When federal entities find out the actual amount of appropriations allocated for their activities, sometimes halfway through the fiscal year, they scramble to either cut costs or spend the excess. This cycle makes true strategic planning difficult at both the agency and the federal government levels. Forster also addressed Salto's comments on the rigidity of the Brazilian federal budget, noting that the United States faces similar challenges given the high cost of mandatory spending. Moreover, although roughly \$1.2 trillion is available for discretionary spending each year, half of that is earmarked for the military. This severely restricts the U.S. Congress' ability to negotiate and find funding for non-military programs.

Allen Schick contended that while dysfunction can sometimes work in the short run, dysfunctional budgeting inevitably causes issues in the long run. He noted that Brazil and the United States share certain characteristics that contribute to their problematic budget processes. In both countries, many different political actors play a role in creating and approving the budget, which is inefficient and raises the cost of building the political majority necessary.

Schick also noted that both countries have a high degree of budget rigidity: mandatory entitlement spending consumes a disproportionately high share of the annual budget in Brazil and the United States. The two countries also are characterized by weak budgetary discipline (irresponsible spending when the economy is doing well), low investment in infrastructure (which undermines economic growth potential), and low trust in political institutions (which limits the government's ability to win popular support for its programs and reforms).

However, there are also several key differences between Brazil and the United States that influence the nature of each country's budgetary challenges. The United States' level of economic development and position within the global economy and global financial system gives it greater flexibility with regards to deficit spending, compared to Brazil. Brazil is more susceptible to global economic conditions and fluctuations in its exchange rate and commodity prices, and also faces a stronger threat of capital flight during downturns. Domestically, corruption in Brazil "significantly widens the





gap between what the budget says and what actually occurs.” Structurally, the political systems in Brazil and the United States also produce difference processes: the fragmented party system in Brazil results in a less efficient negotiation process than in a two-party system, as the president must win support from a half-dozen or more political parties. In terms of implementation, however, the Brazilian system is more centralized than in the United States.

The main challenge for both countries, however, is to find the political will necessary

to address expansionary budgets and rising public debt. Brazil will be unable to adhere to the spending cap imposed by the 2016 constitutional amendment unless it passes some type of pension reform in the near future, yet pension reform remains highly unpopular. In the United States, solving budgetary issues and the growing deficit has not been a priority for the public or the political class: only a crisis is likely to put budgeting back on the radar in the near future.



## Lunch Session: Public Administration and the Brazilian Constitution

*Oscar Vilhena Vieira*, Dean, São Paulo School of Law, Fundação Getúlio Vargas; Brazil Institute Global Fellow; *Nelson Marconi*, Professor, São Paulo School of Economics, Fundação Getúlio Vargas. Both participated via Skype.

The form that public administration takes frequently stems from a mixture of historical tradition and institutions, beginning with a country's constitution. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 is a fundamentally reactive document: a response both to the military dictatorship (1964-1985) that had ended just a few years prior and to the structural legacy of socio-economic inequality in Brazil. The Constitution established a consensual democracy with a coalition presidential system and a prominent judiciary, and lays out a vision of socio-economic justice for Brazil. Yet the drafters took a highly prescriptive approach to implementing their vision: the resulting text had 207 articles and a broad array of protections and guarantees, including mandatory spending on certain welfare programs and policies for hiring and managing the federal workforce.

Oscar Vilhena Vieira argued that the overregulation of the Brazilian state has its roots in the debates that formed the basis for the 1988 Constitution. Although the structured dialogue between the Constituent Assembly and the public was intended to promote democracy and participation after two decades of military dictatorship, the Assembly's various commissions and sub-commissions were heavily lobbied, resulting in a document packed with language dedicated to protecting a host of benefits and special interests. Vilhena noted that the judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's Office are two key beneficiaries of the lobbying and subsequent overregulation of the administrative system in Brazil. One section of the Constitution, for example, which covers the administration of the judiciary and Public Prosecutor's Office, grants them additional career protections beyond what civil servants typically receive. While these protections give these groups greater independence—arguably helping them to avoid political interference—it has also contributed to the recent shift in the balance of power toward the judiciary and the



*Nelson Marconi and Oscar Vilhena Vieira (via Skype)*

Public Prosecutor's Office in the wake of the Mensalão and Lava Jato corruption scandals.

Marconi elaborated on several Constitutional constraints to public employment and administration. He argued that the statutory employment regime is, in general, highly rigid and ineffective. Once an employee has entered the system, it is virtually impossible for them to be dismissed, regardless of the reason. There is also no flexibility to accommodate different career circumstances, such as allowing for part-time work. He noted that recruitment is overly formal and the use of standardized tests, tailored to each career-type, is ineffective. Vilhena recalled one judge who told him that the quality of Brazilian judges was poor because "we recruit those who are capable of passing these ridiculous exams, and not those who are capable of being the best judges." Under the 1988 Constitution, there are more than 400 different civil service career paths, each with its own entrance exam. Not only does this system result in a particular type of civil service applicant, it also re-

stricts the ability of employees to move between agencies or career paths, even if they have the skills and experience to do so.

Marconi also identified the pension system as an area in need of reform, noting that it currently disproportionately benefits public sector employees, who are already some of highest paid workers in Brazil. They tend to retire earlier and receive higher pension payments than private sector employees, which amounts to a redistribution of income that increases inequality.

Lastly, Marconi argued that the senior management system suffers from over politicization. Elected officials often use senior management appointments to win political support, rather than selecting individuals based on merit or fit. These positions have come to be viewed as part of the bargaining process to form party coalitions, to the detriment of their agencies and public administration in general.



*Walter Baere asks a question of Nelson Marconi*

## Panel III: The Endless Story of Civil Service Reforms

*Donald Kettl, Professor and Academic Director, Washington Center of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin; Luiz Alberto dos Santos, Legislative and Public Administrative Consultant, Federal Senate of Brazil; Dustin Brown, Deputy Assistant Director for Management, U.S. Office of Management and Budget; Martin Williams (panel chair), Associate Professor, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford.*

Although often overlooked in discussions of strategic planning and governance, public servants play a critical role in the work of government. Effective public administration requires an effective and empowered workforce, and civil service reforms—if done well—contribute to the process of achieving the government’s objectives. Failing to equip public servants with the tools and skills they need to meet new challenges will result in the failure of the government to lead and govern well. The goal, as the panelists all noted, is an obvious one but far from simple: the creation of a transparent, merit-based, and adaptable human resources management process.

Donald Kettl argued that the key to solving the civil service reform debate is bridging the gap between human capital development and the process of achieving the government’s objectives. Society tends to lose sight of the reason civil servants are hired—to carry out the government’s mission—and instead turns the civil service into a symbol leveraged for various political ends, such as in debates over the size of government or equality in hiring practices. As a result, civil service reform becomes a rallying cry for different ideological groups, rather than a means of accomplishing the mission of the government, leading to an endless cycle of civil service reforms. Nonetheless, Kettl noted that there is a genuine need for civil service reform. Rules and

processes created to address mission-critical problems have, over time, become obstacles to the mission, as following procedure takes precedence over problem-solving and efficiency. Moreover, reform is necessary to keep pace with rapid changes in technology and the way people and governments engage. He argued, however, that reform efforts need to be targeted and deliberate. Reforms should be mission-driven and premised on the idea that the role of the civil service is to inform and undertake the government’s work. Reforms should also focus on creating a merit-based selection and promotion process, with innovative and supportive accountability measures. He concluded that technology can support this effort: “The more we can use good, strong real-time, real-world data to try to ask and answer the right questions, the more we can escape the rules.”

Luiz Alberto dos Santos noted that U.S. institutions were a model for the development of the Brazilian administrative state, but argued that Brazilian institutions, such as its civil service, have become much more centralized over time. Although civil service reforms date back to the Vargas administration in the 1930s, the promise of reform under democratic rule has not yet materialized. Since 1986, none of the attempts at major civil service reform have successfully passed Congress and been fully implemented. However, Santos contended that the characterization of the Brazilian state as “over-bureaucratized” is incorrect, and distracts from the true problem: the systemic presence of corruption, cronyism, and patronage, which has been a constant obstacle to meaningful civil service reform in Brazil. Instead, Brazil needs a more transparent and merit-based approach to the civil service and a bureaucracy that is professional, autonomous, and engaged with society.

Dustin Brown concurred with Kettl's assessment that an understanding of the desired outcomes and mission of the government is essential for understanding the needs of the civil service. He discussed several of the structural challenges in the United States, including an overabundance of rules due to a lack of trust in civil servants. He also cited the government's use of an outdated compensation system (based on a 1923 model), which emphasizes horizontal pay equity. For example, the system focuses excessively on details such as whether a typist at the State Department earns the same amount as a typist at the Bureau of Land Management. Brown also agreed with Kettl that two key drivers of change are technology and data, but added a third: the changing workforce. He noted that data is now being used to take a systemic look at the civil service structure. The U.S. government used an office-level survey to collect information on 27,000 different offices across all parts of the government, marking the first time the "center" has gained a real understanding of what is happening in the workforce at all levels of government. This allows reforms to reflect the "on-the-ground" reality of civil servants, based on their own feedback, instead of being a top-down initiative driven by assumptions. Using



*Luiz Alberto dos Santos*

technology and data, Brown argued that "There is a real opportunity to move beyond a one-size-fits-all human capital system." He advocated in particular for adjusting the federal occupation schedule to create unique occupations based on the needs of individual departments or skillsets.



*Paulo Sotero asks a question of the panelists*

## Panel IV: Capacity Building for Turbulent Times

**Fernando Filgueiras**, Director of Research, National School of Public Administration (ENAP); **Matthew Taylor**, Associate Professor, American University's School of International Service; **Edwin Lau**, Head of Division, Public Sector Reform, Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development; **Deborah Wetzel** (panel chair), Senior Director of Governance, World Bank.

Discussions of capacity-building frequently focus on the organizational level. While all the panelists agreed on the importance of improving agencies' efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness at the institutional level, they also noted that organizations are only as good as the people who work for them. Moreover, capacity-building at all levels, including individual professional development, should be viewed as part of the strategic planning process. Framing capacity-building through a strategic lens allows management to focus on building the skills public servants need to fulfil the government's mission, even as society and development needs change.

Fernando Filgueiras framed the discussion by arguing that capacity building is not only about state capacity at the organizational level, but also about capacity at the individual level, highlighting the intersection of capacity and policy work. The successful development and implementation of policies depends on actions performed by individuals within the context of their organization. As Filgueiras stated, "The degree to which [individuals'] skills and competencies are mobilized, or not, can affect policy in various ways." Organizations must not only give their workers the tools and skills necessary, but also figure out how to foster commitment and motivation.

In studying individual and organizational capacity building, Filgueiras has found it useful to divide civil service work into two categories for analysis: administrative work and relational work. He noted that a recent survey of Brazilian civil servants found that the majority are involved in administrative and/or managerial tasks. Only a small group performs more relational, analytical, and expertise-drive work functions.

Matthew Taylor noted that the Brazilian administrative state contains "islands of excellence," which offer key lessons for capacity building across government agencies. His recent research assigned a score for capacity, autonomy, and party dominance to each Brazilian federal agency. Taylor and his colleagues found that partisan dominance raises the level of corruption, but that this effect is mitigated by capacity and autonomy. This suggests that a highly professionalized civil service will be less prone to corruption in Brazil. Interestingly, Taylor noted that the literature indicates that political appointments tend to distort public policy more in Brazil than they do in the United States.

Edwin Lau underscored the need to view human resource management as a part of capacity-building. OECD data shows that from 2004 to 2015, Brazil's human resource management practices have not improved, despite attempts at reform. A 2010 study found three key challenges that remain present today: First, Brazil needs to develop a comprehensive federal system for human resource management. The current career system is highly fragmented, leading to a lack of mobility for public servants. Lau suggested the French system as a model, as it includes mandatory mobility and a central strategic human resource system to promote dialogue among



agencies and plan for current and future employment needs. Second, Brazil should reinforce a meritocratic system of hiring and promotion. The current compensation system is opaque, and financially costly for the government. The demographic shift underway in Brazil—the aging of the population—presents both an opportunity and a challenge, and is likely to drive at least some reforms (e.g., pension reform), but Lau specifically identified performance management as a critical area for improvement. He noted that Finland offers individual and collective bonuses, paid out annually and multi-annually, to promote cooperation and long-term efficiency. Third, the government needs to view human resource management as a strategic function, rather than a transactional one. Civil servants should be viewed not just as a necessary expense, but also as an investment; they should develop transferable competencies that go beyond simple expertise, such as data literacy, storytelling skills,

and curiosity. Lau stated that the OECD recommends all governments develop a values-driven culture of leadership, create work environments that promote individual capacity-building and trust (civil servants should feel valued and trusted), and build institutions that are agile and adaptive.

The panelists concluded that it is also important for the civil service to not stand apart from the public it serves. It should be relevant to the lives of the citizens and be accessible. Deborah Wetzels noted that Bolsa Família in Brazil is one successful example of this directive: through the program, the Brazilian government reached small communities across Brazil and engaged with the poor and marginalized. In essence, governments need to remember that capacity-building should be strategic, and focused above all else on helping the government be more efficient and effective at its work.



# Key Takeaways





## Key Takeaways

Public administration is the linchpin between a government's mission and its actual impact. Yet governments around the world frequently struggle to implement more effective and efficient administrative and management processes. Most U.S. political analysts are acutely aware of the current challenges to effective public administration in Washington, from negotiating and passing annual budgets to effectively managing the various agencies and their large federal workforces. Brazil is similarly confronting the challenges of rising deficits and an often unwieldy bureaucracy as it seeks to overcome the profound political crisis and deep economic recession of the last four years. There has been growing dissatisfaction in each country over the government's ability to manage global challenges and domestic problems, and although politicians have capitalized on problems to win elections, once in office they have failed to adequately address them. Public trust in institutions has fallen and faith in democracy has diminished. Although their histories diverge in several critical ways, Brazil and the United States are the two largest democracies in the Western Hemisphere, and there are valuable lessons to be learned through comparing the current administrative environments in both countries.

### *Several key themes and best practices emerged from the workshop presentations and discussions:*

- ❖ **Successful strategic planning requires intuition and foresight, a long-term perspective, and deliberate implementation.** Although strategic planning is widely recognized as important, many institutions do it poorly. It is critical for policymakers and public administrators to understand that strategic planning is different than simple long-term planning, and requires a broader, systems approach.
  - *Strategic planning should be focused on achieving the government's mission, through setting long-term priorities and envisioning what the future might bring (challenges and opportunities).* Francisco Gaetani noted that long-term thinking allows countries to factor different future scenarios into their planning process, including demographic and social shifts as well as technological advances. Carlos Santiso argued that governments need to completely consider the potential ramifications of technology: it will change the way governments deliver services and engage with citizens, and will also dramatically change the nature of public sector work.
  - *Strategic planning should not be a theoretical exercise, which means consideration must be given to feasibility, implementation, and accountability.* Meg Lundsager stated policymakers need to consider a number of questions when designing a plan: Will the plan and its objectives have popular support? Is the plan feasible under existing regulations and statutes, or will it require new legislation? How will success be measured? What would failure look like?

- *Policymakers should be open to considering lessons from a broad range of organizations and experiences* in order to improve their own processes. Francisco Gaetani noted that traditionally, Brazil has not looked to international experiences in designing its own structures; he contended that the Brazilian state should take a broader perspective in looking for best practices. Moreover, as Edwin Lau noted, governments are not the only institutions to engage in strategic planning or the other administrative challenges discussed at the workshop: private sector companies, non-profits, and other organizations may be able to offer lessons, based on their own experiences, that prove useful for the state.

❖ **Sound public administration must balance immediate political demands against the government’s long-term objectives.** A short term political focus makes long-term strategic planning difficult.

- *Election cycles can have a detrimental effect on the administrative state’s capacity to implement long-term plans.* Francisco Gaetani noted that, in Brazil, strategic initiatives are often tied to election cycles which keeps policymakers from taking a truly long-term strategic perspective. Strategic interests are often hindered by the “temptation of doing politics”. Similarly, in the United States, short term political calculus among U.S. party leaders—scoring a “win” for the base—often takes precedence over finding compromises to support strategic, long-term growth. As Michael Forster noted, this short-term perspective comes at a cost: political fighting during the U.S. federal budgeting process often leaves federal agencies guessing what their annual budget will be, and knowing that every election cycle has the potential to upend the calculus. Moreover, during election years, the work of government often grinds to a halt, making planning impossible.
- *It is often difficult to convince the public (and therefore politicians) that fiscal responsibility is important—this is true in the United States and in Brazil—because the focus is often on immediate needs and wants instead of long-term objectives.* Felipe Salto argued that Brazilian politicians lack the “spirit of fiscal responsibility,” and tend to kick the ball down the road instead of tackling unpopular yet critical spending reforms. The same can be said of the United States, as evidenced by the frequent inability of the U.S. Congress to pass a budget that does not contribute to the federal deficit.

❖ **Every aspect of public administration should be viewed through a strategic lens.** The purpose of the administrative state is to develop and implement policies that reflect the government’s priorities and serve its citizens. As the OECD recommends, a strategic systems approach requires viewing “the entire operation of government as an interconnected system rather than disparate pieces.”<sup>2</sup> This means that interagency cooperation should be prioritized,

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2 OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. Embracing Innovation in Government: Global Trends 2018. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-government/embracing-innovation-in-government-2018.pdf>.

as well as cooperation within agencies, to ensure all parts of the government are working together towards strategic objectives. It also means that individual government functions should be considered strategically.

- *Cooperation between individuals and agencies is critical to achieving strategic objectives*, as Meg Lundsager argued. The challenge is overcoming the tendency of each agency to become a silo, focused on its own work and territory within the policy space. The U.S. executive government has several entities devoted to coordinating strategy and policy across agencies, such as the National Security Council or the National Economic Council; nevertheless, challenges remain. Brazil faces a similar hurdle in fostering interagency cooperation, which is perhaps exacerbated by the strict career paths—tied to specific agencies—of its civil service. In Brazil, the federalist system also requires the federal government to cooperate closely with state and local governments to achieve its objectives.
- *The administrative state should be wary of becoming process-driven rather than mission-driven*. As Carlos Santiso noted, excessive red tape imposes significant transaction costs on individuals and organizations, including the government, undermining its ability to implement its strategy. Dustin Brown argued that the excess of bureaucratic rules in the United States, stemming from a lack of trust in civil servants, constrains the ability of public sector agents to innovate and problem-solve.
- *Individual functions, including those not directly involved in policy creation, should also be considered from a strategic perspective* as they all support the government's ability to achieve its objectives. Edwin Lau argued that human resource management in particular needs to be reconceived as a central element of a successful administrative state, rather than just a necessary cost of doing business. Dustin Brown noted the importance of defining the desired outcomes in order to understand civil service needs. The hiring process for civil servants in Brazil is one example. Nelson Marcroni and Edwin Lau both argued that the Brazilian recruitment process is divorced from the actual needs of the state, and based on poorly targeted entrance exams, which have led to a poor fit between the public sector workforce and the work to be done. France, in contrast, offers a good example of strategic human resource management, with a centralized human resource system that works across agencies to coordinate current and future employment needs.

❖ **Effective public administration requires a professional, autonomous, capable, mission-driven civil service.**

- *Civil service reforms should focus on strengthening the professionalization and autonomy of the civil service*. There is a tendency to politicize the civil service, whether through patronage jobs after an election or holding it up as a symbol of government excess. Matthew Taylor and Luiz Alberto dos Santos argued that the over-politiciza-

tion of the public sector, and the corruption that often accompanies it, is one of the main challenges facing Brazilian public administration. A number of panelists argued in favor of reforms to increase the autonomy and transparency of the civil service as a means of improving the effectiveness of the administration state, including strengthening merit-based hiring and promotion processes. Several Brazilian agencies already do this well, as Matthew Taylor found in his research, and their processes should be studied and implemented more widely. Edwin Lau noted that the Finnish system of performance management offers one example of how a country can reward and incentivize effectiveness and efficiency.

- *States should develop capacities at an individual level.* Fernando Filgueiras noted that individual capacities have a significant impact, as policies depend on actions performed by individuals. Edwin Lau argued that governments should hire and cultivate civil servants with competencies that go beyond simple skills, from data literacy to curiosity. Carlos Santiso similarly remarked that civil servants need to develop new skills for a twenty-first century state, including technology and data science capabilities.

❖ **As the world rapidly changes, the administrative state needs to adjust, adapt, and innovate to meet new demands and opportunities.**

- *A reoccurring theme among the panelists was the need for governments to be open to bottom-up, collaborative reform.* Dustin Brown cited a U.S. government survey which collected data from 27,000 individual offices across the administrative state to gain a better understanding of the competencies and requirements at all levels of government. In this respect, new technologies and data can help the administrative state to break down traditional hierarchies by providing the center with a more accurate view of the entire government, allowing for more effectively targeted internal administrative reforms.
- *Governments can also use technology to improve service delivery and external engagement with citizens.* Bolsa Família, as Deborah Wetzel noted, is a good example of this trend at work.

Workshop participants concluded that the administrative state must work to maintain its relevance in an ever-changing and complicated world, through building public trust, serving as a steward for the resources of government, and promoting sustainable and inclusive development. The ongoing administrative challenges in Brazil and the United States only underscore the fundamental role that public administration plays in a government's ability to meet its objectives and serve its citizens.

# Appendix

## List of Panelists



**George Alberto de Aguiar Soares**, Secretary of Federal Budget, Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management



**Walter Baere**, Deputy Secretary, Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management



**Jón Blöndal**, Head of Budgeting and Public Expenditures, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development



**Dustin Brown**, Deputy Assistant Director for Management, U.S. Office of Management and Budget



**Fernando Filgueiras**, Director of Research, National School of Public Administration



**Michael Forster**, Chief Operating Officer, Wilson Center



**Francisco Gaetani**, President, National School of Public Administration



**Aaron Jones**, Director of Congressional Relations, Wilson Center



**Donald Kettl**, Professor and Academic Director, Washington Center of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin



**Edwin Lau**, Head of Division, Public Sector Reform, Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development



**Meg Lundsager**, Public Policy Fellow, Wilson Center



**Nelson Marconi**, Professor, São Paulo School of Economics, Fundação Getúlio Vargas



**Yesim Oruc**, Deputy Director of the United Nations Development Programme Office in Washington



**Felipe Salto**, Executive Director, Independent Fiscal Institution, Federal Senate of Brazil



**Carlos Santiso**, Division Chief for the Institutional Capacity of State-Sector, Inter-American Development Bank



**Luiz Alberto dos Santos**, Legislative and Public Administrative Consultant, Federal Senate of Brazil



**Allen Schick**, Professor, University of Maryland School of Public Policy



**Paulo Sotero**, Director, Brazil Institute



**Matthew Taylor**, Associate Professor, American University School of International Service



**Oscar Vilhena Vieira**, Dean, São Paulo School of Law, Fundação Getúlio Vargas; Brazil Institute Global Fellow



**Deborah Wetzel**, Senior Director of Governance, World Bank



**Martin Williams**, Associate Professor, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

## Suggested Resources for Further Study

*The references listed below offer additional information on the theme of public administration and governance, including case studies and best practices from Brazil, the United States, and the rest of the world.*

### **Brookings Institution Center for Effective Public Management**

<https://www.brookings.edu/center/center-for-effective-public-management/>

### **The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Democracy and Governance Portal**

<https://carnegieendowment.org/topic/1286>

### **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**

<https://www.cbpp.org/>

### **Diretoria de Análise de Políticas Públicas**

<http://dapp.fgv.br/sobre/>

### **Instituição Fiscal Independente**

<https://www12.senado.leg.br/ifi>

### **Organization of American States Governance Portal**

<http://www.oas.org/en/topics/governance.asp>

### **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Public Governance Portal**

<http://www.oecd.org/governance/>

### **Revista de Administração Pública da Fundação Getúlio Vargas**

<http://bibliotecadigital.fgv.br/ojs/index.php/rap/index>

### **Revista Gestão & Políticas Públicas da Universidade de São Paulo**

<http://www.revistas.usp.br/rqpp>



**Revista Temas de Administração Pública do Departamento de Administração Pública da FCLAr-Unesp**

<https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/temasadm/index>

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division For Public Institutions And Digital Government**

<https://publicadministration.un.org/en/About-Us/Who-We-Are>

**United Nations Public Administration Network**

<http://www.unpan.org/>

**The World Bank Governance Portal**

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance>



## Institutional Support

### ***About the Wilson Center's Brazil Institute***



Founded in 2006, the Brazil Institute—the only public policy institute in Washington dedicated to Brazil—seeks to foster dialogue on key issues of bilateral concern between Brazil and the United States, while advancing Washington's understanding of the complexities of Brazil as a regional, democratic power and a global player. Through events, research, and other activities, the Institute's initiatives bring together the public, private, and nonprofit spheres on a broad range of issues, including trade, science and technology, corruption and rule of law, democracy, and sustainability.

The Brazil Institute is an important resource of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, which is the national memorial to President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921). The Wilson Center, chartered by Congress in 1968, is the nation's key non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues through independent research and open dialogue to inform actionable ideas for Congress, the administration, and the broader policy community.

### ***About Brazil's National School of Public Administration***



The National School of Public Administration (ENAP), a public foundation linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Development and Management, is a school of government whose statutory purpose is to promote, design and execute human resources

training programs for the federal public sector employees, aiming at the development and application of management technologies to increase the efficiency and quality of the services provided by the State to its citizens.

ENAP, founded in 1986, also works to produce research and promote knowledge-sharing on innovations in public administration and the management of public policies. The research area coordinates the development of research projects focused on the discussion of new assumptions and strategies for quality improvement in the provision of public services.

ENAP also serves as an intersection for national and international cooperation on the themes of public administration and management. ENAP maintains a strong connection to the academic world and with the scientific community, thereby nurturing a transformative relationship with the international community, that allows for the sharing Brazilian experiences and innovations in public management and for bringing back to Brazilian administration the best practices and experiences of others around the globe.



### ***About the United Nations Development Programme***

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, and for more than 50 years has advocated for sustainable and inclusive growth, and worked to provide countries with the resources, knowledge, and experience to help people build a better life. UNDP works in about 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion.

Since the entry into force of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Objectives (SDOs) in January 2016, UNDP Brazil has been developing its cooperation around four key areas or axes, according to its Country Program for the 2017- 2021.

**People:** Capacity building to reduce inequalities, overcome crises and improve the quality of public services, focusing on people in vulnerable situations, through technical subsidies for public policies.

**Planet:** Support for better management of natural resources, encouragement of energy efficiency and addressing global climate change, as well as strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations and regions, including areas at risk of natural disasters, involving both governments and companies.


**Prosperity:** Inclusive economic growth, through the strengthening of public-private partnerships, the implementation of Agenda 2030 and SDOs in Brazilian states and municipalities, contributing to the reduction of gender inequality in the private sector, promoting inclusive businesses, among other actions.

**Peace:** Encouraging transparency and addressing corruption, strengthening the institutions of the justice system, establishing dialogues for the elimination of different forms of prejudice and discrimination, modernization of the State, among other measures that promote human rights and a peaceful society.

The fifth axis, **Partnerships**, is transversal and depends on the reach of the others.



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20004-3027

 [www.wilsoncenter.org/program/  
brazil-institute](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/brazil-institute)

 [brazil@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:brazil@wilsoncenter.org)

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 202.691.4087 / 202.691.4147