Political Instability, Modernization, and the Institutionalization of Brazilian Political Science in the 1960s

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Abstract

As of the late 1960s, Brazilian political science underwent a process of academic modernization. The field was institutionalized as an autonomous academic discipline and it experienced a theoretical-methodological turn towards scientificity, objectivity, and empirically-oriented methods. In terms of thematic agenda, the discipline envisioned an applied orientation, able to engage in non-academic public debate. Institutionally, political science met a wave of professionalization and academic institutionalization in which several research institutes and graduate programs were created with significant financial support from Ford Foundation’s philanthropic funding. In this context, one of the most prominent institutions was Iuperj (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Estado do Rio de Janeiro), in Rio de Janeiro. Founded by the Brazilian intellectual Candido Mendes de Almeida, the center received Ford Foundation support from 1967 through 1989. This report intends to use the case of Iuperj to show how Ford Foundation policy on social science development in Latin America was articulated on three different, interconnected levels — at the highest ranks of the Ford Foundation’s New York headquarters; regionally, at the Office of Latin American and the Caribbean (OLAC) and its Social Science Program; lastly, at the local level, in the grant agreement between the Ford Foundation and the Iuperj.
Background

During the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Brazilian political science underwent a process of academic modernization. For once, the field was institutionalized as an autonomous academic discipline and experienced a theoretical-methodological turn towards scientificity, objectivity, and empirically-oriented methods that gradually replaced the sociopolitical thought explanations that had traditionally dominated the area until the 1950s. Secondly, in terms of thematic agenda, political science envisioned an applied orientation, able to engage in non-academic public debate. Lastly, the field of political science met a wave of professionalization and academic institutionalization in which several research institutes and graduate programs were created with significant financial support from Ford Foundation’s philanthropic funding.

One of the most prominent political science and sociology institutions created in this context was Iuperj (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Estado do Rio de Janeiro), in Rio de Janeiro. Iuperj first received a Ford Foundation grant in 1967 and by the time the grant agreement was terminated in 1989, Iuperj was well established as one of the leading institutions in the field. Throughout this process, philanthropic support was essential as it provided funding to train at graduate centers in the United States a handful of soon-to-be professors at Iuperj, and further developed Iuperj’s research program by contributing with technical assistance and equipment. Grant support also stimulated international working relationships that would integrate Iuperj’s faculty into a cross-national intellectual network of distinguished scholars. In addition, Ford funding helped plan and implement the field’s first graduate program (first at the master’s level, then at the doctoral level) that would train the second generation of political and social scientists who would spread across Brazil in the late 1980s and 1990s.

In this research report, my objective is to briefly indicate how the Ford Foundation’s policy towards the development of the social sciences in Latin America was articulated in the late 1960s, on three different, interconnected levels. Firstly, how the highest ranks in the foundation saw the role of education in international development. Secondly, at a more regional level, what were the
discussions held at Ford’s Office of Latin America and the Caribbean (OLAC) dedicated to formulating the policy for social science modernization in the hemisphere. And thirdly, at the local level, how these principles, policies, and guidelines manifested themselves in the grant agreement between Ford Foundation and Iuperj. These matters will be further developed in my master’s thesis, to be completed at the University of São Paulo, Brazil.

Ford's HQ in New York: “Political Instability”

The Ford Foundation executives and program officers were worried about the prospects of the modernization process being experienced in underdeveloped countries, especially in Latin America. The diagnosis was that archaic, predominantly poor societies were experiencing economic growth, industrialization, urbanization, higher levels of literacy, expansion of mass media consumption, and rising standards of living. These phenomena indicated that a process of change was underway in the region. However, a continuous and rapid modernization process could also result in an undesirable by-product: political instability. The logic underneath this cautious approach to development was that modern societies have more complex and pressing demands (for example, political participation, job markets, and urban housing). These demands, however, could not be met by static political institutions inherited from the previous traditional context. That is to say that the so-called pre-modern societies were changing at a much faster pace than the ability of the political institutions to follow this rhythm. The discrepancy between the rising expectations of a changing society and the inefficiency of the political system to respond to these demands could result in unpredictable instability. This rationale resembled Samuel P. Huntington’s perspectives expressed in his well-known Political Order in Changing Societies.¹

Education programs were, in this sense, instrumental in achieving development and, thus, ranked highly in Ford Foundation’s priorities for financial support in
Latin America. However, similar to the process of modernization as a whole, education advancement was also subject to fostering political instability. Or as Frank Bowles, then director of Ford Foundation’s Education Program, put it in a conference at the White House in 1965, “Educational development is, then, a quick means to an end still hidden in the mists of the future.” Bowles further explained the risks associated with boosting educational levels in underdeveloped societies. An expansion in access to higher education graduate titles could spur reactions among the intellectual elites that previously held a near-monopoly in access to these titles. Moreover, Bowles questioned if underdeveloped countries were prepared to provide continuous support to maintain the standards of the educational system that “[were] being built for them.” He was also concerned with the economic consequences of educational development focused on prompting industrialization, which was most likely to produce, in a first stage, wealth concentration instead of equal opportunities. An increase in unemployment often accompanied the mass urbanization process — in which case, education advancement becomes a “two-edged blade” that causes, in the downside, frustration among the rural areas that fall deeper into misery. Or, as Bowles stated bluntly, “Political instability, swaying with an urban mass, may replace the stable lethargy of an economy based on subsistence agriculture.”

**Ford's OLAC: “Change Without Institutional Breakdown”**

In an indication that consensus prevailed among Ford Foundation’s different offices, Peter Bell would state in similar words two years later, “Too often migrants merely exchange rural poverty for urban anomie.” The statement was written in an information paper prepared by OLAC (Office of Latin America and the Caribbean) of Ford Foundation’s International Division. The introductory section “Background” expressed concerns with the pace of the developmental process taking place in Latin America:
Demands for political participation by the less advantaged people are not being met quickly or evenly; as a consequence, governments have a chancy existence. The less advantaged people, especially as they move into cities, are becoming increasingly frustrated by their inferior economic status. Their demands for access to education far outrun governments' capacity to provide it. Chile, which has the most liberal and progressive government in South America, is an example of the result; tensions are higher today in Chile than they were five years ago.5

According to Ford’s OLAC, the menace of instability embedded in the developmental process was putting at risk the very political entities that brought forth development and social improvements. Even what could be considered as desirable governments — such as Chile’s “liberal and progressive” government of Eduardo Frei, which the document points to — might be prey to the unavoidable conflict dynamics expected from the development process. Therefore, the types of intervention that the Ford Foundation was willing to exert in Latin America were those designed to promote development and social well-being, combined with stability. “We assume a modern society is one that can continue to change without institutional breakdown,” states the OLAC 1967 document.6 What the region needed, according to Ford’s diagnosis, was “the sophisticated web of ideas and social mechanisms to handle the complexities of modern life.”7 Ford Foundation was aiming beyond the more immediate material rewards associated with the process of economic development. The goal was not only technology but also science, not only to eradicate illiteracy but also to build advanced university research institutions, and not only administrative reform but also social science research. In this sense, a rational, science-informed governmental decision-making process was crucial to generate public policy outputs that would be responsive to a growing and more demanding modern society. Ford Foundation’s main focus in Latin America was, therefore, to strengthen those institutions that were capable of both generating and absorbing social change — in opposition to those seen as stuck with outdated procedures. As Bell noted, “Some traditional institutions everywhere [in Latin America] stubbornly persist after they have lost their usefulness. Some are cracking under the strains of new demands, and others are being rejected before new forms can be invented.”8
But not everything was lost — or, as Kalman Silvert would observed later on, “We are riding the crest of a wave, not attempting to create one.”\(^9\) There were also some exciting individuals and activities taking place in Latin America. These “modernizers,” as Peter Bell called them, were managers, politicians, planners, and critics who shared a common academic or professional background in basic sciences — natural sciences, but also social sciences. Ford Foundation staff’s task was some sort of headhunting: to be able to identify these initiatives and support them. In doing so, Ford’s country operators and program officers wanted to avoid advancing conversations with institutions seen as starters being built from scratch, small-scaled, overly specialized, or too much isolated from the national academic environment.

Immersed in this effort of identifying the “modernizers,” Ford’s OLAC *modus operandi* towards social sciences in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s was purposefully elite-centered. The foundation “believed” that their resources would be “used most efficiently,” if applied to leadership training in already established institutions that searched for a modern approach to its operations. This option meant extra monies for teaching, research, and applied fields of social sciences — but, on the other hand, less funding to the “insistent appeals” to “subsidized community-development projects and youth groups,” for example.\(^{10}\) This strategy was further elaborated by Kalman H. Silvert, then the OLAC’s Social Sciences program advisor.\(^{11}\) In January 1969, he typed a “Draft of Policy Guidelines for Social Sciences in Latin America” and asked for reactions and commentaries from several other Ford staff members involved in the social sciences activities. Silvert recognized that the elite-centered approach would tend to widen the gap between the top-of-the-line social sciences institutions (“whether faculties, departments, or autonomous institutes of private or mixed private-public status”) and the less advanced institutions. The Ford Foundation, however, considered that this option would play a “multiplier effect” and turn out to be advantageous in the long run. Ford’s staff was interested in supporting first-rate institutions able to develop high-quality graduate programs in the short term and that could become “breeders” for other institutions. Silvert stated, “We presume, of course, that the advanced centers will act as measuring sticks, and that they will also become a major supplier of professionals and professional literature for consumption by
Other than helping to create an environment of excellence in higher education and graduate training, in Ford Foundation’s viewpoint, investment in the social sciences was also considered instrumental to establish a modern society. Applied knowledge provided “the capital goods of descriptive data and analysis” for different sectors of the society, from federal government officials to local city planners, from business executives to social workers. In his “Draft of Policy Guidelines...,” Kalman Silvert laid out that one of the criteria to be taken into consideration when searching for academic excellence in the Latin American intellectual scene should be tied to the ability to locate what types of social science outputs were “relevant and significant for social development.” This formulation had a significant impact on the philanthropic approach to what the foundation specifically referred to as the “applied social sciences” — namely, the subfields of planning, administrative sciences, and law. These three areas were of interest to the Ford Foundation, only if “tied to problems of development.”

The term “development,” at that point in the late 1960s, was already considered to be too narrow. Different Ford Foundation documents follow this rationale: that Latin American countries were experiencing something beyond a mere industrialization process. “As we see it, the task in Latin America is ‘modernization’ more than ‘development,’” said the opening line of the 1967 OLAC “Background” section. Social development was “the new frontier” in the hemisphere, as Reynold E. Carlson, OLAC’s associate director, wrote and explained in 1965:

Integration or the full participation (social, political, and economic) of all classes in the national life is the essence of social development. The Latin American countries are now engaged in a difficult transition from a closed to an open society. In more precise terms, the countries are moving from a traditional agrarian, hierarchical, oligarchical, and paternalistic society into one which is urban, industrial, contractual, and, hopefully, democratic. The real challenge, therefore, is to find ways whereby the Foundation may participate in the process and perhaps to a small degree accelerate the transition.
Ford-Iuperj: “Cooperation for National Planning”

My purpose in writing is mainly to introduce Dr. Candido Mendes de Almeida who is currently visiting our Center [for International Affairs, at Harvard University]. I have been impressed by his book on Nationalism and Development, and we have all been stimulated by his presentations at the Center on the social aspects of Brazilian development. Dr. Almeida feels that there are now special opportunities for extending the scope and increasing the depth of research on social problems in Brazil. And I took the liberty of suggesting he should contact you to discuss these plans. If you can spare him a little time, I think you will find the encounter interesting and his proposals of merit. Sincerely, Alex Inkeles.16

The letter above is the oldest piece of documentation preserved in the grant files of Ford Foundation’s support to Iuperj. In March 1965, Alex Inkeles, a social scientist from Harvard, wrote to Harry Wilhelm, OLAC’s director,17 to arrange a meeting in New York’s Ford Foundation headquarters for Candido Mendes de Almeida, a Brazilian jurist and social thinker. They met at Harvard’s Center for International Affairs (CFIA), where Candido took a position as a visiting fellow amid an intellectual exodus wave in Brazil after the 1964 military coup. Candido was a descendant of the “Mendes de Almeida,” an elite family in Rio de Janeiro that held political influence as well as close ties with the Catholic Church since the nineteenth century. More importantly, in 1962 Candido Mendes de Almeida became provost of the higher education private complex of law and economics that had been founded by his grandfather, “Count” Candido Mendes de Almeida, sixty years earlier. In 1965, he was about to set up Iuperj and sought aid from the Ford Foundation with the help of his colleague and soon-to-be close friend Alex Inkeles, who would later be hired as Ford’s consultant.18

In his brief presentation letter on behalf of Candido Mendes, Inkeles specifically mentioned the “social aspects of Brazilian development.” This notion appears regularly throughout the grant files. This approach to the topic was similar to OLAC’s, in its internal discussions. In Brazil’s case, the economic and administrative sciences academic scenes had attained in the previous years, with
Ford’s support, a relatively high level of quality, in the eyes of the foundation executives. Yet, these fields needed “themselves to be infused by the social sciences.”

It was time to provide support for social scientists. And Candido Mendes’ Iuperj presented a very appealing case to start. The diagnosis of the Brazilian academic development was somewhat analogous to how the Ford Foundation interpreted, more broadly speaking, the developmental process taking place in Latin America. In both cases, the focus on economic knowledge and a carefully designed economic planning as solutions to drive development were under attack by a wave of critics of more orthodox modernization theories.

As Bell observed regarding another Ford-funded institution, “If the economic and administrative studies of the FGV [Fundação Getulio Vargas] are sometimes criticized as narrowly ‘technocratic,’ such criticism is due in part to their lack of social dimension.”

In Iuperj’s formal request for support to the Ford Foundation, the “comprehension of the non-economic aspects of development” was also a topic of attention. One of the features that demonstrated the “condition of backwardness” of the Brazilian social sciences’ scientific scene — as the Iuperj document described it — was that the investigations about these “non-economic aspects of development” were still at a very early stage. Therefore, Iuperj formulated that one of the “fundamental activities” in the foreseen grant agreement with the Ford Foundation should be:

Supplement of funds for research (...) in a line which would permit the relative homology of methods of observation and analysis of the social reality of under-developed countries, or the generalization of some of the pioneering experiences in the effort of adding a sociological political dimension to economic planning.

The emphasis on non-economic development in the institute’s activities was not an episodic one. It could be seen in the press statement issued to publicize the grant agreement, which recognized that Iuperj “has been endeavoring to develop (...) a modern center for the investigation of the manifold aspects of social changes brought about by development.”

This special attention to development issues would also be observed in the design and description of one of the first collective research endeavors carried out by Iuperj under the Ford Foundation grant
agreement. The “Consensus and Dissensus in Brazilian Development” project was the flagship of the institute in its earlier years — at least in terms of funds destined, staff mobilized, and appeal made to the foundation. Described as a major contribution to “attitudinal studies” social science scholarship, the project intended to deploy survey methodologies to collect the perceptions towards the development process of elite groups in Brazil, focusing, in the first stage, on businesspeople and college student leaderships, and later on, the military and workers’ unions. The project’s theoretical assumption was that Brazilian society, due to an “accelerated process of industrialization and urbanization,” experienced high levels of dissent. This was true, the project argued, since the downfall of Estado Novo — the Getulio Vargas regime (1930-1945). Consensus and political accommodation were, therefore, impossibilities in Brazilian society, as the country’s previous political history had shown:

The attempts to put an end to political deadlocks by ‘turning the tables’ were far from a few. In 1964, this kind of intervention was put into practice with unprecedented depth: with the deterioration of the low degree of institutionalization of the national political system, the conflicts that occurred in the final months of the Goulart Administration surpassed traditional possibilities of conciliation.24

In this sense, the project was set to investigate the elites’ perception towards: a) what should be the priorities of the development process; b) what were the tolerable marginal sacrifices when facing income distribution policies; c) what were the prospects and social aspirations of these groups; and, finally, d) to be able to describe how these processes of disintegration or consensus manifested within the elite groups.25 It is also worth noting that in order to underscore the relevance of the “Consensus & Dissensus” research project and the singularity of Iuperj, Candido Mendes carefully mentioned, in his correspondences with Ford’s executives during the negotiation process of the grant agreement, that some parts of this project were commissioned for Brazil’s Ministry of Planning and Ipea (Instituto de Pesquisa e Economia Aplicada), a public agency specialized in providing technical support for the federal government in areas such as planning and public policies.26 One year later, however, Candido Mendes would inform, in its annual financial report to the Ford office in Rio de Janeiro, that some of their
contracts with government agencies “did not come about by force of various circumstances.”

Iuperj’s expertise in providing scientific data to Brazil’s government planning agencies was of crucial importance in the grant agreement, given that the standards for identifying the “modernizers” institutions included the ability to produce social science outputs that were “relevant and significant for social development,” as Kalman Silvert’s aforementioned “Draft of Policy Guidelines...” stated. This aspect was emphasized in the official request submitted to the Ford Foundation in January 1967 and that received final approval months later. The first line of the document, in its English translation, affirmed, “This project fits into the framework of pioneering activities with the view to systematize and structuralize the study of social sciences in Brazil, and the cooperation which this may lend to national planning.” In a supporting document also delivered to the Ford Foundation, Iuperj reinforced the idea that the efficiency and quality of its research projects should be measured in terms of application in public policy. In the “Criteria for Performance” section, Iuperj established that its research should be “externally evaluated” given the following elements:

a) utilization as a support for planning activities or sectorial governmental policy officially conducted at any level (federal, regional, or municipal);
b) utilization for organization in the private sector and the business company level;
c) utilization in conducting significant public and social measures for the country, which could be manifested towards the rationalization and concrete imposition of motivations or renewed expectations in its actions. (Producing impacts, for example, in ordering the institutional activities of workers’ unions, universities, political parties, or professional associations throughout the country.

Concluding Thoughts

My decision to present a three-level documental analysis is to reinforce the idea that the grant agreement between the Ford Foundation and Candido Mendes’
institute, at the local level in Rio de Janeiro, was part of a larger philanthropic project of intervention in Latin American social sciences. At the same time, this type of intervention, which obeyed predefined guidelines and pursued long term goals, was designed as an outcome of an even larger view, shared among Ford Foundation’s staff. The primary concern of this interpretation, I argue, addressed the risks of political instability associated with an accelerated developmental process. It is not possible to comprehend the local Iuperj grant agreement without considering the bigger picture. The documents show that these three levels of the foundation’s decision-making process somewhat shared a common ground, employed a similar vocabulary, and followed equivalent intentions.

4 Peter Bell, “Sectoral Programs: Social Sciences,” p.17, in “Information Paper: The Ford Foundation’s Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean”, International Division, Ford Foundation; September 1967, Catalogued Report #002409, Ford Foundation records, RAC.
5 “Information Paper: The Ford Foundation’s Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean,” International Division, Ford Foundation; September 1967, p.1, Catalogued Report #002409, Ford Foundation records, RAC.
6 Ibid., p.2.
7 Ibid., p.1.
8 Peter Bell, “Sectoral Programs: Social Sciences,” p.17, FF, RAC.

However, this trend had already been spotted by Peter Bell in 1967: “Sixteen of the 31 leading social science centers in Latin America represented at a regional meeting last year had been established between 1960 and 1960, and 26 of the 31 centers had been established since 1950. The Foundation, which now is the largest single source of external support for training and research in the social sciences in Latin America, is concentrating a growing portion of its resources on developing a relatively few programs to the graduate level and on building institutions to the quality attained in the advanced nations. Such institutions as the Torcuato Di Telia Institute in Argentina, the Getulio Vargas Foundation in Brazil, and El Colegio in Mexico are increasingly able to serve as resource bases for the region and to engage in truly collaborative work with North Americans and Europeans.” Peter Bell, “Sectoral Programs: Social Sciences,” p.18, FF, RAC.
Kalman Silvert explains: “Thus, we should be concerned not with law instruction in itself, for example, but with law as it is related to the development process. To assume that improved law instruction will automatically lead to developmental consequences begs even more questions than the also somewhat vague belief that studying law and development together will have direct relevance to ongoing problem-solving.” Kalman Silvert, “Draft Statement of Policy Guidelines...” p.14, FF, RAC.


Reynold E. Carlson, “The Development of the Social Sciences in Latin America,” OLAC, Ford Foundation; November 1965, p.12, Catalogued Report #000100, Ford Foundation records, RAC.

Alex Inkeles to Harry E. Wilhelm; 17 March 1965, grant files, PA67-492, reel 5351, Ford Foundation records, RAC. Emphasis added.


Between 1967 and 1971, Alex Inkeles produced five reports to the foundation. As a consultant to Ford’s Iuperj grant, Inkeles flew periodically to Rio de Janeiro to conduct interviews with institute’s staff, but also to deliver lectures and seminars.

Peter Bell to Stacey Widdicombe, Inter-Office Memorandum, “Brazilian Society for Instruction: Social Science Research and Training (L66-566),” 2 May 1967, grant files, PA67-492, reel 5351, Ford Foundation records, RAC.


Fundação Getulio Vargas was one of the first Humanities institutions in Brazil to receive Ford Foundation financial support. FGV established itself as a renowned economic and public administration center, as seen in Peter Bell’s report: “The Center for Economics at the Vargas Foundation has attained a level of quality whereby its research is fed into policy-making by the Ministries of Finance, Planning, and Agriculture and its professors are sought for collaboration (...). EBAP itself [FGV’s public administration branch] has gained a national reputation for its teaching and research program in public administration, and is used by the Government not only for advisory services but also for teacher training.” Peter Bell to Stacey Widdicombe; 2 May 1967, FF, RAC.

This document was originally written in Portuguese. The official translated version that was sent to be reviewed by the Ford Foundation is somewhat truncated. The excerpt in Portuguese: “Suplementação dos fundos para pesquisas (...) numa linha que permitisse a relativa homogeneização dos métodos de observação e análise da realidade social dos países subdesenvolvidos, ou a generalização de algumas experiências pioneiras no esforço de adicionar a dimensão sociológica e política ao planejamento econômico”. Iuperj, “Linhas Gerais do Projeto de Cooperação Entre a Fundação Ford e o Grupo Universitário da Sociedade Brasileira de Instrução,” 10 February 1967, grant files, PA67-492, reel 5351, Ford Foundation records, RAC.

“This is the financial report of the Ford Foundation...” January 1967, grant files, PA67-492, reel 5351, Ford Foundation records, RAC.

28 Originally, in Portuguese: “a.) sua utilização como suporte de uma atividade de planejamento ou de política governamental setorial, oficialmente realizável em qualquer das suas órbitas (Federal, estadual ou municipal); b.) pela utilização na programação do setor privado, e no plano da empresa; c.) pela utilização nas condutas públicas e sociais significativas no país, na manifestação de seu concurso para a racionalização e imposição concreta de motivações ou novas expectativas para a sua ação. (Impacto, por exemplo, na ordenação da atividade institucional dos sindicatos, das universidades, dos partidos políticos ou das associações de classe do país).” Ibid.