

Fascist Era Elites (3) **Salazar's ministerial elite, 1933–44**

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Abstract

This article analyses the composition and modes of recruitment of Salazar's ministerial elite during the 'fascist era'. The main characteristics of the Estado Novo's governing elite was that it belonged to a small and exclusive political and bureaucratic class that almost completely dominated the senior ranks of the armed forces, the senior administration, and the universities - within which the legal profession was strongly represented. Salazar's single party, being kept organizationally weak and dependent, was never an important element in either the political decision-making process or in the selection of the ministerial elite.

Keywords

elites
government ministers
fascism
Salazar

Italian Fascism and German National Socialism were both attempts to create a charismatic leadership and 'totalitarian tension' that was, in one form or another, also present in other dictatorships of the period (Griffin 1991; Payne 1995; Paxton 2004; Mann 2004). After taking power, both National Socialism and Fascism became powerful instruments of a 'new order', agents of a 'parallel administration', and promoters of innumerable tensions within these dictatorial political systems. Transformed into single parties, they flourished as breeding-grounds for a new political elite and as agents for a new mediation between the state and civil society, creating tensions between the single party and the state apparatus in the process (Huntington and Moore 1970; Brooker 1995; Pinto 2002). These tensions were responsible for the emergence of new centres of political decision-making that, if on the one hand led to the concentration of power into the hands of Mussolini and Hitler, also removed it from the government and the ministerial elite, who were often increasingly challenged by the single party and its parallel administration.

This article seeks to ascertain the 'locus' of political decision-making authority, the composition and the recruitment channels of Salazar's ministerial elite during the fascist era.

Power and political decision-making during Salazarism

Portugal's Estado Novo (New State), which was led by Oliveira Salazar, a young university professor with links to the Catholic Party who had become Minister of Finance in 1928, was consolidated during the 1930s out of a military dictatorship that had been implanted in 1926 (Pinto 1995; Lucena 2000). The regime's single party, which had been created by the Interior

1 The 'weak/strong' dictator typology is discussed by Mommsen (1991: 163–88).

Ministry, was weak and initially controlled by the administration over which Salazar's rule was complete (Cruz 1988). Benefiting from a new constitution - the product of a compromise between corporatism and liberalism that had been approved in popular plebiscite in 1933 - Salazar created the single party, the National Union (*União Nacional* (UN)), from above, ensuring that it remained weak and elitist from its very foundation in 1930. The UN was not given any predominant role over either the government or the administration, its position being simply that of a political control filter; as a tool for the selection of members for the chamber of deputies and of the local administration; and to provide some legitimacy in the 'non-competitive elections' that were regularly held (Schmitter 1999: 71–102).

Salazar could not be considered a charismatic leader in the strict Weberian sense. The confusion that exists between the personalization of power, or the emergence of a leadership cult as developed by the propaganda apparatus that is inherent to the majority of the twentieth-century dictatorships, and charisma, is large and has at times characterized analyses of Salazarism. However, Salazar was above all a master whose manipulation of a perverted rational-legal legitimacy meant that he had little need to seek recourse in a charismatic legitimacy that could rise above bureaucratic and governmental mediation between himself and the 'Nation'. Moreover, the military origins of his regime ensured that his position was linked to that of the President of the Republic, General Carmona, who had been formally legitimated in direct elections and who retained the authority to dismiss Salazar.

His extensive centralization of decision-making clearly justifies the use of the expression 'strong dictator' in any characterization of the power exercised by Salazar.¹ The structure of Portuguese society and its political and administrative systems were to help Salazar: a small country, a centralist administration, a top-heavy state apparatus and weak civil society, a very small qualified social and administrative elite, with extremely limited access to a highly elitist university system (Martins 1998: 105–12; Pinto and Almeida 2000). However, his traditional Catholicism and his juridical and financial education, associated with a style of state management that was very much his own, were decisive factors.

Cold and distant from his ministers and supporters and having cultivated a reduced circle of 'political advisors', Salazar stamped his own style on the management of government and politics. The main characteristic of this style was an almost obsessive concern for the minutiae of all areas of government. Whilst many of the other dictators concentrated areas of central importance to their own person - generally foreign policy, internal security and the armed forces - Salazar additionally retained control of the more 'technical' portfolios, at least during the period in question.

Some of these traits were affirmed from the very beginning, when Salazar took over the Ministry of Finance during the Military Dictatorship - particularly with respect to matters relating to the budget and the state's finances. Once he had become Prime Minister in 1932, his attentive gaze

extended into practically every piece of legislation, going far beyond those necessary for control that were common within other dictatorships. Despite surrounding himself with competent ministers, Salazar refused to allow them anything but the smallest margin for autonomous decision-making. On the other hand, the amount of information to which he had access was impressive, extending far below that appropriate to the ministerial level.

The history of relations between Salazar and his ministers during the period in question is one of the concentration of decision-making power in the person of the dictator and of the reduction of the independence of both the ministers and of the President of the Republic. One of the first symptoms of this process was the rapid elimination of collegiality within the Council of Ministers, and a drastic reduction in the number of meetings of this body, particularly from 1933 onwards.

The main characteristic of the concentration of power into his person is reflected in Salazar's formal accumulation of the most important ministerial portfolios, or at least the accumulation of those portfolios that Salazar himself considered most important. Salazar was Minister of Finance from 1928 to 1940, to which he accumulated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1936 to 1947, and also, in order to secure his control over the military, the Ministry of War, which he headed from 1936 to 1944 (Faria 2001).

The second trait of his style of government was the progressive diminution of the Council of Ministers, whose authority was undermined as a consequence of Salazar's preference for meetings with individual ministers (Nogueira n.d.: 186). From the mid-1930s, meetings of the Council of Ministers had become symbolic affairs, held only when there were major external or domestic policy issues that required demonstrations of a united front for the nation, or when there was a major reshuffle of ministerial portfolios. In some cases, these meetings were held in the presence of the President in order to emphasize their purely symbolic nature. In 1938, Salazar established the office of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, but he did not appoint anyone to this position until the 1950s. Salazar was also to abandon the previously normal practice of collective dismissal: from 1936, he began to replace up to one-third of the Council of Ministers every three to four years.

Another characteristic of his relationship with his ministers was that of emphasizing the 'technical' nature of their function. The truly political areas of the regime were not, in general, accorded ministerial rank, with such matters being dealt with by Salazar directly. This was the case, for example, with António Ferro's National Propaganda Secretariat (*Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* (SPN)), which was dependent upon the Prime Minister. Another such body was the Under-Secretariat of State for Corporations and Social Welfare (*Sub-secretaria de Estado das Corporações e Previdência Social* (SECPS)), which was not elevated to ministerial status until 1945. Salazar's official position was that despite 'politics, as a human art [being] forever necessary as long as mankind exists; government ... will increasingly be a scientific and technical function' (cf. Nogueira 1978: 290).

2 For a profile of the Portuguese ministerial elite during the entire authoritarian period, see Almeida and Pinto (2003: 5–40) and Lewis (2002: 141–78).

As a political regime, however, it is important to stress that the locus of power and of political decision-making was always situated with the dictator and with the government, as it was through these that the great majority of decisions passed. In other dictatorships both the government and its administration were to some extent subjected to interference from a single party that had become an influential organization (Pinto 2002). This did not happen in Portugal where a centrally controlled public administration was instead the main instrument of dictatorial political power. When the New State created such organizations as the paramilitary youth movement, Portuguese Youth (*Mocidade Portuguesa* (MP)), and the anti-Communist militia, the Portuguese Legion (*Legião Portuguesa* (LP)), these were controlled by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior respectively, upon whom they remained dependent for the duration of the regime. The same was also true of Salazar's political police, the PVDE (State Vigilance and Defence Police), which was responsible to the Ministry of the Interior (Kuin 1993; Cova and Pinto 2003: 397–405; Rodrigues 1996).

The ministerial elite

The main characteristics of the New State's governing elite was that they belonged to a small and exclusive political and bureaucratic class that almost completely dominated the senior ranks of the armed forces, the senior administration, and the universities - within which the legal profession was strongly represented.²

With an average age of 44, the ministerial elite of the New State's first phase was from the same new generation as Salazar. It is important to stress that if we only include ministers of civilian portfolios, then the average age of the ministers gets even younger. This is because of the continued presence of military officers who had been active in government during the Military Dictatorship who were, generally, much older than the civilian elite.

Having been formed out of a military dictatorship, the most significant changes introduced by the Salazarist regime were concerned mainly with reducing the military component. While the military retained a significant presence within the ministerial elite, amounting to 28 per cent, mainly in the military and colonial portfolios, there was an unprecedented increase in the involvement of university professors, who came to hold around 40 per cent of all ministerial portfolios. A third group, that of the liberal professionals (who were mainly lawyers), also maintained an important presence, with 20 per cent of ministerial positions. It is also instructive to note the overwhelming presence of ministers who had had professional experience within public administration - almost 78 per cent of ministers had previously been civil servants of one form or another. Ministerial turnover also declined significantly; from 65 ministers between 1926 and 1933 to only 28 between 1933 and 1945.

The number of university professors and, specifically, of professors of law, obviously merits particular attention. It is important to note that this trait of the Salazar regime was not particular to the period being analysed

	1926–33	1933–44
Diplomat	3.2	2.9
Military officer	57.1	28.6
Professor	15.9	40.0
Judge	3.2	5.6
Liberal professions	19.0	20.0
Landowner/farmer	1.6	0.0
Banker	0.0	2.9
Total	100.0	100.0

3 For more about the *grands écoles* and their role in the formation of the French elites see Suleiman (1978).

Table 1: Occupational background of ministers, 1926–44 (%).

here, but that it was a structural feature of the New State's political elite for most of the regime's existence (33 per cent) (Almeida and Pinto 2003: 25).

The predominance of law graduates within the administrative and bureaucratic elite was a characteristic of continental Europe that had been inherited from the past (Armstrong 1973). Although there are no studies available for the 1930s, it is probable that law graduates accounted for the majority of senior public administrators during that time. The Portuguese case from the 1930s onwards presents us with a clear illustration of Ralf Dahrendorf's thesis that 'the true continental equivalent of Britain's public schools as a means to achieve power is the study of law' (cf. Martins 1998: 111).

The law faculties of both Coimbra and Lisbon Universities were already the main educators of the Portuguese political and bureaucratic elite, and their equivalent status to the French *grands écoles* was reinforced throughout this period.³ Although there were some continuities inherited from the liberal First Republic (1910–26), with Salazar a section of the law professors was transformed into a super-elite, spread throughout the leading sections of the economic, bureaucratic and political worlds. It is also important to emphasize that we are talking about an extremely small and closed universe in which, during the 1930s, there were many university professors from outside the legal field who were also government ministers.

Very few of Salazar's ministers had been active in politics during the First Republic, and virtually none had occupied any position within the republican regime. Because of their youth, some had only become involved in politics after the 1926 coup, and almost all were ideologically and politically affiliated to Catholic conservatism and monarchism. Whilst the dual affiliation of 'Catholic and monarchist' was shared by some members of the elite, the fundamental issue - particularly in relation to the Military Dictatorship - was the steady reduction within the ministerial elite of those who had been affiliated to the conservative/republican parties (including such ministers as Duarte Pacheco, Albino dos Reis and Rafael Duque), and the corresponding increase in those whose roots were in the monarchist camp, and particularly of those who had been influenced during their youth by the Action Française inspired royalist movement, Lusitanian Integralism (IL) (such as Pedro Teotónio Pereira and Marcello Caetano). Those whose connections were with Catholicism also saw their numbers slightly increase. A large number had no previous affiliation,

4 In the classifications used here, the following distinctions are used: 'military' - those ministers who, prior to their nomination, had spent the majority of their professional life as officers in the armed forces; 'politicians' - those who were activists and leaders of official regime organizations or, previously, of other political organizations prior to taking office; 'technicians' - those ministers who had previously been professional administrators or specialists, and who had not been active in the regime's political organizations or who had not been actively involved in politics prior to becoming government ministers.

5 Paul Lewis reaches a similar conclusion for the period 1932 to 1947. See Lewis (1978, 2002: 129–78).

Politicians	Technicians	Military
31.42	40.00	28.58

Table 2: 'Politicians', 'technicians' and 'military' ministers, 1933–44 (%).

and only a small and infamous minority had come through Rolão Preto's fascist National Syndicalism (NS) following its prohibition in 1934 (Pinto 2000). The remainder may be identified by their connections to conservative ideas associated with the more pragmatic and inorganic 'interest'-based right wing (Armando Monteiro, for example) (Oliveira 2000: 56).

The use of the classifications 'military', 'politician' and 'technician', allows us to illustrate an important comparative dimension in the study of authoritarian elites, and to know their sources of recruitment and the extent of the more 'political' institutions' access to the government, particularly when such access is to the central location of political power (Lasswell and Lerner 1965).⁴

Given the conjunction of a political elite with extremely strong technical competences, with some of the institutions, the armed forces for example, that contained some politicized officers, as well as participants in the regime's political organizations, in Parliament and as militia leaders in the LP, Salazarism presents us with some complex borderline cases.

One such borderline case, classed here as 'military', is Santos Costa who was a true Salazarist 'political commissar'. A junior military officer who was charged with overseeing the military, he had also been an active member of the National Union since its first congress (Cruz 2004). Nevertheless, despite the Portuguese example confirming the tendency towards a greater presence of politicians in the institutionalization and consolidation phases of dictatorships, followed by a process of 'routinization' that strengthened the technical-administrative elements, the governing elite during the 1930s was more one of technicians (40 per cent) than it was one of politicians (31 per cent).⁵ These results, when complemented with an analysis of other indicators of the ministerial elite's *cursus honorum*, clearly indicate the reduced presence of the truly political institutions of the regime as a central element for access to the government.

Of particular note amongst the 'political' ministers of this period are Marcello Caetano, the New State's leading ideologue and active leader of such official organizations as the MP, and Pedro Teotónio Pereira, the architect of the regime's corporatist system (*Comissão do Livro Negro sobre o Regime Fascista*, 1987–91). In the case of the technicians, the cases of both Rafael Duque and Duarte Pacheco provide examples of careers that were most remote from the regime's more political 'corridors'. It should be noted, however, that even the politicians were tightly woven into the university elite.

Routes to governmental power

What can the political functions performed by the Salazarist ministerial elite prior to their appointment tell us about the main routes to power? Only 2 of the 28 ministers during this period exercised any leadership

functions within either the MP or the LP; neither of which were, in any event, political institutions with privileged access to the government. The same also applies to those who came from local administration; the four former civil governors or the six former mayors. It should also be noted that some were officers in the armed forces, and that the civil governorships that were occupied by military officers were a legacy of the Military Dictatorship that was not ended until the end of the 1930s.

Of greater significance was the number of deputies and those who had occupied leading positions within the National Union, of which there were a total of ten. Whilst being a leader, or even a member, of the single party was never considered a prerequisite for entry into the government, it was almost certainly perceived to be a good thing. We should also note that these ministers accumulated senior positions within the public administration and the university system. Participation in the single party was, therefore 'quite helpful [especially when] combined with other qualifications: [such as] a brilliant academic or civil service career, and identification with other groups ... such as religio-political interest groups' (Linz 1976: 184).

We should also note that very quickly progression via a state under-secretariat and secretariat came to be considered a privileged path for future ministers and that this was a route to office followed by a sizeable proportion of the ministerial elite of this time. Similarly, whilst the coalition that initially overthrew the liberal republic included a significant number of different political 'families', some of whom were excluded from the construction of Salazarism, it remains difficult, if we are to attribute them with the normally accepted minimal structural connotations, to consider them as actors in the dictatorship's decision-making process. Using this minimal definition we can say that of the informal political pressure groups within the dictatorship that were recognized as 'tendencies', two important and often interlinked 'families' emerged: the Catholics and the monarchists (Cruz 1987). The role of these two families in the composition of the Portuguese governmental elite is much less clear than was the case in Spain, however, where Franco was much better conditioned than Salazar to think in terms of the balance between these families within the regime.

The role of the informal 'political advisors'

At this point, it is worth complementing the above with some qualitative information on the informal recruitment channels into the governmental elite and the role of some of Salazar's political advisors. By so doing we will attempt to outline not only the channels of access, we will also show the qualities deemed necessary for recruitment into the ministerial elite. This point is particularly important in respect of authoritarian regimes without clear channels of access, in which 'who does the recruiting and how it is accomplished' is perhaps more important than some of those variables analysed above (Ai Camp 1995: 27).

Salazar's correspondence is not as rich as would be expected from a primary source. Most of the conversations between the dictator and his advisors were not minuted, and there is very little of their correspondence in Salazar's archive.⁶

6 This is particularly true in relation to the correspondence between some of the important background figures within the regime, such as, for example, Bissaia Barreto and others. See Oliveira Salazar Archive (AOS) - CP-235, CP-27, CP-152, CP-224, CO/PC-4A, CD-19, CP-115.

7 See their biographies in Barreto and Mónica (2000–02).

Mayor	6
Civil governor (prefect)	4
Deputy	8
Member of Corporatist Chamber	1
UN leader	10
MP/LP leader	2
Secretary of state	2
Under-secretary of state	6
None	6
Total*	28

*Table 3: Political offices held by ministers, 1933–44. (*Multiple coding applied)*

Each ministerial reshuffle, just as each renewal of the National Assembly, was preceded by a consultation process to determine whose names to put forward for advancement. From the earliest days of his ministerial career, Salazar listened to a small group of trusted advisors. While the make-up of this group did change through the years, there were several permanent ‘notables’: Bissaia Barreto, Mário de Figueiredo, Manuel Rodrigues, Albino dos Reis, José Alberto dos Reis, José Nosolini and Mário Pais de Sousa.⁷ Despite remaining distant and prudent, it was this intimate circle of advisors that Salazar listened to when whittling down the list of candidates for ministerial office. While he also listened to this group in relation to the selection of candidates for the National Assembly, the role of the National Union in this respect was undeniably greater (Carvalho 2002).

With respect to the representative nature of the political families, the sources consulted do not indicate any great concerns for the maintenance of an equilibrium. Whilst they might always have been used as labels to refer to the origins and tendencies of certain personalities - whether they be more or less integralist or monarchist, for example - it seems that the need to create a balance between the families, in response to pressure from below, did not trouble the dictator at this time. In times of crises, such as at the end of the Second World War, for example, Salazar strengthened his ministry by rewarding loyalty and dedication. As Marcello Caetano noted when appointed to government:

when forming his government, Salazar made no attempt to promote the equilibrium between various forces or representatives of certain currents of opinion: his sole aim was to surround himself with safe people, people who had, in the main, already proved their dedication to the regime and its leader (Caetano 1977: 253).

Concluding remarks

Salazar’s single party, by being kept organizationally weak and dependent, was never an important element in either the political decision-making

process or in the selection of the ministerial elite. Several organizations, such as the militia (LP), the youth organization (MP) and the political police (PVDE), were kept entirely dependent on the ministers. The National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) was a general directorate within the state apparatus, equipped with its own autonomous leadership that was responsible to Salazar directly rather than to the party. The National Federation for Happiness at Work (FNAT), a modest Portuguese version of Mussolini's *Dopolavoro* and Hitler's *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF), was dependent upon the Under-Secretary of State for Corporations (Valente 1999). The party's main function was to select the local and the parliamentary elites, and it remained small and devoid of mobilizational organizations (Carvalho 2001; Fernandes 2001; Castilho 2001).

In sum, not only was there no tension between Salazar's UN and the state, but neither the dictatorial system nor the political decision-making and implementation processes were ever threatened by the existence of autonomous political institutions directly subordinated to the dictator.

Note

This article is part of a project on ministerial elites and political decision-making within the fascist-era dictatorships. For an earlier Portuguese-language version of this article, see Pinto (2001). For a general overview, see Almeida, Pinto and Bermeo (2003).

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