

**ANTÓNIO COSTA PINTO**

**Edited by**



# **RULING ELITES AND DECISION-MAKING IN FASCIST-ERA DICTATORSHIPS**

**SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS**



**António Costa Pinto**

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AND DECISION-MAKING  
IN FASCIST-ERA  
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## The ‘empire of the professor’: Salazar’s ministerial elite, 1932–44

*Nuno Estêvão Ferreira, Rita Almeida de Carvalho,  
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The collapse of the Portuguese First Republic (1910–26) took place during the post-First World War wave of European democratic regime crises and breakdowns, and was caused by a heterogeneous conservative military–civilian coalition rather than by a fascist party (Pinto 2002). Mainly right-wing republicans, the generals who dominated the Military Dictatorship created after the 1926 *coup d’état* sought support from certain elements in the conservative and Catholic elites in the creation of the first dictatorial governments. Nevertheless, the military retained control of the majority of ministerial portfolios and local administrative posts until 1932. Successive political and economic crises, however, forced them to negotiate with those civilian elites several pacts conducive to the institutionalisation of a new regime.

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 the military dictatorship (Pinto 1996; Lucena 2000). The regime’s single party, the National Union (UN—*União Nacional*), which had been created by the interior ministry in 1930, was weak and initially controlled by the administration over which Salazar’s rule was strong (Cruz 1988). Benefiting from a new constitution—the product of a compromise between corporatism and liberalism that had been approved in a plebiscite in 1933—Salazar created

the single party, from above, ensuring that it remained weak and elitist from its very foundation in 1930. The UN was not given a predominant role over either the government or the administration, its position being 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).

The main characteristic of the New State's ministers was that they belonged to a small and exclusive political and bureaucratic elite coming from the senior ranks of the armed forces, the senior administration, and the universities—within which the legal profession was strongly represented.<sup>1</sup> Salazar's single party, being kept organisationally weak and dependent, was never an important element in either the political decision-making process or in the selection of the ministerial elite. This chapter analyses the composition and modes of recruitment of Salazar's ministerial elite during the 'fascist era'.

### **Salazar and his ministers**

In 1932 the president of the republic, General Carmona appointed Salazar prime minister. In 1944 one of the most far-reaching government reshuffles took place, in which eight new ministers were appointed in a cabinet of ten, preparing the regime to face the new post-war international realities. Between 1932 and 1944, 30 ministers served in Salazar's governments, including the dictator, who served as minister of finances, minister of war and foreign minister. Although he was officially only an interim occupant of the latter two, as we will see, he remained in position for quite some time.

In June 1932, Salazar chose the ministers with whom he would collaborate in the creation of the regime's new political institutions. In May the new constitutional project was published, with the new document being approved in a plebiscite held the following year (Araújo 2004). With the introduction of the new constitu-

<sup>1</sup> 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).



tion, which represented the end of the First Republic and signalled the formal transition from the Military Dictatorship (1926-33) to the New State (1933-74), Salazar tendered his resignation and then formed a new executive in which he replaced only three of the ten ministers who had served in the previous government of General Domingos de Oliveira. In April 1933 the new appointments were few compared to the cabinet that took office in July 1932: in effect, it represented only a minor reshuffle, thus justifying the periodisation adopted here.

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' (Pinto, Eatwell and Larsen 2007). Moreover, the military origins of his regime ensured that his position was linked to that of President Carmona, who had been formally legitimated in direct elections in 1928 and who retained the authority to dismiss Salazar. During the consolidation of the New State, Salazar had an ally in the president, although that is not to say there were no tensions between the two men, particularly on matters relating to the armed forces.

Helped by a centralised administration, a top-heavy state apparatus, and a very small qualified administrative elite, with extremely limited access to a highly elitist university system, Salazar concentrated a great deal of the political decision-making authority in his person (Martins 1998: 105-12; Pinto 2001). 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' areas—at least during the period in question.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 6.

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 his attentive gaze extended into practically every piece of legislation, going far beyond those necessary for control that were common within other dictatorships. 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 main characteristic of the concentration of power into his person is reflected in Salazar's formal accumulation of the most important ministerial portfolios. Salazar was minister of finance from 1928 to 1940, to which he accumulated the foreign ministry 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 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.<sup>3</sup> In Salazar's system, the executive authority was split between the prime minister and his ministers, although the extent of the ministers' authority was quite clearly limited. Whether to avoid being subjected to his ministers', or in order to provide them with 'greater solemnity', certain decisions were legally reserved to the council of ministers. However, the prime minister held very few cabinet meetings and so began 'employing a policy of tacit delegation, executing all processes as if they had come to the council, even those the resolution of which had political value and expression' (Caetano 1977: 187). There were some exceptions: Manuel Rodrigues Júnior, minister of justice between 1932 and 1940 seemed to have a great deal of autonomy. The same can be said

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 6.

of Duarte Pacheco, who was minister of public works from 1932 to 1945, in whom Salazar recognised sufficient qualities for him to abdicate his tendency to interfere in the management of this portfolio. These qualities ranged from an 'intense joy in creation', an enormous 'power of resolution', an 'iron will' and a 'rare intellectual complexion'—expressions used by Salazar in a speech he gave in the National Assembly on 25 November 1943, following the Pacheco's death in a car accident. The extent of Salazar's personal confidence in the members of his government seems to have been the determining factor in deciding the degree of autonomous decision-making power each minister was granted.

Another characteristic of his relationship with his ministers was that of emphasising 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 with António Ferro's National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN—Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional), which was dependent upon the prime minister. Another such body was the Under-secretariat of State for Corporations and Social Welfare (SECPS—Sub-secretaria de Estado das Corporações e Previdência Social), which was not elevated to ministerial status until 1945. Unlike the situation in Spain under Franco and in Fascist Italy, the Portuguese single-party had no representation within the government. 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' (Nogueira 1978: 290).

However, as a political regime it is important to stress that the locus of power and of political decision-making was always situated with the dictator and with his ministers, as it was through them 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 organisation (Pinto 2002). This did not happen in Portugal, where a centrally controlled public administration was the main instrument of dictatorial political power. When the New State created such or-

ganisations as the paramilitary youth movement, Portuguese Youth (MP—Mocidade Portuguesa), the women's organisation (OMEN—Obra das Mães para a Educação Nacional) and the anti-Communist militia, the Portuguese Legion (LP—Legião Portuguesa), these were controlled by the ministries of education and of interior respectively, upon whom they remained dependent for the duration of the regime. The same was also true of Salazar's political police, the State Vigilance and Defence Police (PVDE—Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado), which was responsible to the ministry of the interior (Kuin 1993; Cova and Pinto 2003: 397–405; Rodrigues 1996).

### **The ministerial elite**

The stability of Salazar's ministerial elite was demonstrated in the duration of ministerial careers. Salazar did not like to change his cabinet often because he believed that each minister ought to serve a period of apprenticeship, which delayed services and increased the risk of mistakes. Moreover, there is also the fact, according to Marcelo Caetano, that 'he knew few people and, not wishing to turn to the politicians of the past nor to appoint too many from within the armed forces, he was left to choose from a small number of experienced men, since the majority of the followers of the new order of things were young' (Caetano 1977: 57–58).

During this 12-year period, ministerial stability was clearly high in four ministries (justice, finance, navy and public works), which had only two ministers each (serving on average six years) (Table 5.1). In one case, that of public works, not even the death of the incumbent minister resulted in the appointment of a replacement. The reason was based in the personal, technical and political trust that Salazar had in the men who occupied these positions. Although the average time a minister served in each portfolio was three years, in the majority of cases only one minister served in each department, which the majority of ministers did for eight or more years. In the case of the foreign ministry, the longest serving occupant of that office was Salazar, who remained in position until September 1944—that is, serving a total of seven years and ten months. However, his exoneration did not oc-

cur until 1947 (after more than one decade in the office in which, it should be noted, he was only serving as an interim measure). Ministerial turnover was much reduced in comparison to the preceding Military Dictatorship.

**Table 5.1**  
**Duration of ministerial careers by ministerial portfolio**

Portfolio		T	<1	1-3.9	4-7.9	8+
Interior		4	—	3	—	1
Justice		2	—	—	1	1
Finance		2	—	—	1	1
War		4	1	2	—	1
Navy		2	—	1	—	1
Foreign affairs		4	1	2	1	—
Public works		2	—	1	—	1
Colonies		4	2	1	—	1
Education		5	1	2	2	—
Economy	Commerce, industry and agriculture (1932-33)	1	—	1	—	—
	Commerce and industry (1933-40)	3	—	3	—	—
	Agriculture (1933-40)	2	—	1	1	—
	Economy (1940-44)	1	—	—	1	—
	Total (1932-44)	5	—	4	—	1
<b>N</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

With an average age of 44.8, 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 ministers' average age gets younger. This is because of the continued presence of military officers who had been active in

government during the Military Dictatorship and who were, generally, much older than the civilian elite.

**Table 5.2**  
**Ministers' occupational background (%)<sup>\*</sup>**

Occupational categories	%
Military	26.7
<i>Army</i>	20.0
<i>Navy</i>	6.7
<i>Air Force</i>	0.0
Judge or public prosecutor	3.3
Diplomat	3.3
Senior civil servant	10.0
Middle civil servant	0.0
Officer of state corporatist agencies	0.0
University professor	40.0
Teacher	0.0
Employee	0.0
Writer or journalist	0.0
Lawyer	10.0
Medical doctor	0.0
Engineer	0.0
Manager	0.0
Businessman, industrialist or banker	10.0
Landowner or farmer	6.7
Full-time politician	0.0
Other	3.3
N	30

<sup>\*</sup> Occupations immediately before the first ministerial appointment. Multiple coding has been applied. Percentages do not, therefore, total 100; N = Number of all ministers for this period.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

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 26.7 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. It is instructive to note the overwhelming presence of ministers who had professional experience within public administration—80 per cent of ministers had previously been civil servants of one form or another.

The number of university professors and, specifically, of professors of law, obviously merits particular attention (Table 5.2). It is important to note that this trait of the Salazar regime was not peculiar to the period being analysed here, but was a structural feature of the New State's political elite for most of the regime's existence (33 per cent) (Almeida, Pinto and Bermeo 2003: 25).

The predominance of law graduates within the administrative and bureaucratic elite was a characteristic of continental Europe (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' (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.<sup>4</sup> Although there were some continuities inherited from the First Republic, 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 emphasise that we are talking

<sup>4</sup> For more about the *grands écoles* and their role in the formation of the French elites see Suleiman (1978).

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.

### **Routes to the cabinet**

What can the political functions performed by the Salazarist ministerial elite prior to their appointment tell us about the main routes to power?

Very few of Salazar's ministers had been active in politics during the First Republic. Because of their youth, some had only become involved in politics after the 1926 coup, and almost all were ideologically and politically affiliated to republican, Catholic and monarchist conservatism. While 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, Rafael Duque and Pais de Sousa. This last named was, like Salazar and Mário de Figueiredo, still involved in Catholic organisations. This friend and colleague of the dictator's since their days at Coimbra University was well-known for his monarchist views, as were Carneiro Pacheco and Costa Leite.

An old disciple of Salazar, whom he succeeded as minister of finance, Costa Leite gravitated towards the National Syndicalist Movement (MNS—Movimento Nacional-Sindicalista), as did Eusébio Tamagnini. From the constitutional monarchist parties that had been abolished in 1910 came Caeiro da Mata and Linhares de Lima. Effectively, with the diminution of ministers who had been affiliated to conservative-republican parties, there was a 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—Integralismo Lusitano) (such as Pedro Teotónio Pereira and Marcelo Caetano). However, the existence of monar-



chists within Salazar's governments indicated only that the loyalty of those ministers to Salazar was greater than their convictions with respect to the type of regime he led.

A large number had no previous affiliation, and only a small minority had come through Rolão Preto's fascist MNS following its prohibition in 1934 (Pinto 2000). The remainder may be identified by their connections to a the more pragmatic and inorganic 'interest'-based right wing (Armindo Monteiro, for example) (Oliveira 2000: 56).

Sebastião Garcia Ramirez was the only one located in the sphere of interest organisations, which indicates the poor level of representation these groups had within the government. A leader in the canning industry, Garcia Ramirez met Salazar in 1931 when, in his position as a leader of the Portuguese Industrial Association (AIP—Associação Industrial Portuguesa), he accompanied the then finance minister on a visit to a part of the country in which his industry was particularly important. The following year he accepted an invitation to join the government, where he was responsible for beginning the corporatist organisation of the Portuguese economy, paying particular attention to the canning sector (Loff 2005).

As we noted above, some of the portfolios in more 'political' areas, such as propaganda (SPN), reported directly to Salazar, while some under-secretaries of state were just as powerful as the ministerial elite, if they were not in fact more so. 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 politicised officers, as well as participants in the regime's political organisations, in parliament and as militia leaders in the LP, Salazarism presents us with some complex borderline cases.

One such borderline case is that of Major Santos Costa who was a true Salazarist 'political commissar' for the armed forces as under-secretary of state when Salazar took control of the ministry of war in 1936. 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). Also of particular note during this

period is Pedro Teotónio Pereira, the architect of the regime's corporatist system, also as an under-secretary of state.

Only 3.3 per cent of 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. It should also be noted that some former mayors and prefects were officers in the armed forces, which was a legacy of the Military Dictatorship that lasted until the end of the 1930s.

**Table 5.3**  
**Political offices held by ministers (%)<sup>\*</sup>**

Political offices	%
None	56.7
Mayor or local councillor	16.7
Prefect	3.3
Colonial governor	0.0
Parliamentarian	16.7
<i>Deputy</i>	16.7
<i>Peer or Senator</i>	0.0
Member of corporatist chamber	3.3
Secretary or under-secretary of state	26.7
Member of <i>cabinets ministériels</i>	0.0
Ministerial director	0.0
Local or national leader of the single party	16.7
Youth movement	0.0
Militia	3.3
Para-state corporatist institutions	3.3
Party officers	0.0
N	30

<sup>\*</sup> Before their first appointment to cabinet. Multiple coding has been applied when ministers had held different political offices; N= Number of all ministers for this period.

Source: ICS database on the fascist elite (2009).

Of greater significance was the number of deputies and those who had occupied leading positions within the UN (Table 5.3). While 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).

Progression via a state under-secretariat and secretariat soon came to be considered a privileged path for future ministers and this was a route to office followed by a sizeable proportion of the ministerial elite of this time. 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 both the channels of access and 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 '[he] who does the recruiting and how it is accomplished' is perhaps more important than some of those variables analysed above (Ai Camp 1995: 27).

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. Despite remaining distant and prudent, it was this intimate circle of advisors to whom Salazar listened 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 UN in this respect was undeniably greater (Carvalho 2002). Manuel Rodrigues Júnior was one example of this small group of 'political counsellors' during the 1930s. Like Salazar, Rodrigues Júnior had studied at the seminary before going on to become a student and then professor at the University of Coimbra. He was also a supporter of the Military Dictatorship and a member of the national political council, a consultative body created in 1931 to report on all administrative and political matters that were of interest to the state (Araújo 2005), he assisted in the preparations of the 1933 constitution and was a leader of the UN. Manuel Rodrigues Júnior, who had no known civic, political or religious affiliations (Chorão 2005: 294), served as minister of justice in the Military Dictatorship's first government. He governed independently, and when he met Salazar it was usually to discuss matters of general policy rather than subjects related to the ministry of justice that he headed from 1932 to 1940.

As we have seen, in addition to Salazar's 'political counsellors', the president of the republic also played an important role in the choice of ministers for the military portfolios, and his power of veto was significant right up until Salazar took control of the ministry of war in 1936. Thus, while Salazar was able to appoint the interior minister, Pais de Sousa (1931-32) and Mesquita Guimarães (who was naval minister from 1928 to 1929) to his first government, the president intervened to approve those chosen to serve in the ministries of war and of the navy. Some years later President Carmona, after discussions with military chiefs, opposed an attempt by Salazar to replace Luís Alberto de Oliveira as minister of war (Nogueira 1977: 231-2). In the end, Salazar managed to replace Alberto de Oliveira by nominating Colonel Passos e Sousa. Close to Carmona, the conservative republican Passos e Sousa had seen his nomination for the position of prime minister in the wake of a crisis within the Military Dictatorship in 1930 being vetoed by Salazar; however, now his appointment 'signified the need for Salazarism to cohabit with ... the armed forces (Faria 2001: 62, 259-60). Nevertheless, in 1936 President Carmona prevented Salazar from replacing Passos e Sousa, although it proved to

be a short-lived victory for the president as later that year Salazar took advantage of the international situation (the outbreak of the Spanish civil war) to personally take interim control of the ministry of war, where he remained until the end of the Second World War.

### **Concluding remarks**

The Salazarist ministerial elite belonged to the same generation, was largely made up of university professors, and they remained in office for long periods of time. There was no mobility between portfolios. The members of this elite were not particularly 'political', although they did express conservative and authoritarian values. Effectively, Salazar's single party, by being kept organisationally weak and dependent, was never an important element in either the political decision-making process or in the selection of the ministerial elite. The party's main function was to select the local and the parliamentary elites, and it remained small and devoid of mobilisational organisations (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.

Despite Salazar's ministers having diverse origins, to speak of 'political families' remains difficult, if we are to attribute them with the normally accepted minimal 'semi-organised' connotations. It is even more difficult to consider them as actors in the dictator's selection of ministers. Using this minimal definition we can say that of the informal political pressure groups within the dictatorship that were recognised as 'tendencies', two important and often interlinked 'families' emerged: the Catholics and the monarchists (Cruz 1987). However, the role of these two families in the composition of the Portuguese governing elite is much less clear than was the case in Spain, where Franco was much better conditioned than Salazar to think in terms of the balance between 'political families' within the regime. The sources consulted do not indicate any great concerns for the maintenance of any equilibrium, or predominance of one 'family' over another

in time. While they may 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).

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