

**The process of conformation and evolution of the Cuban Socialist Bureaucratic State from 1959 to  
2018<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This working paper shows some of the findings of the author's doctoral dissertation *The Cuban State Decision-making Process during Reforms (1990-2018)*

### **Abstract**

The article provides a historical analysis of the evolution and formation of the Cuban Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS) from the perspectives of public administration and public policy during the period 1959–2018. It defines the Socialist Bureaucratic State as a system characterized by a centralized, hierarchical structure with decision-making concentrated in a few key entities, heavily influenced by ideology, organizational culture, and external forces. This evolutionary process resulted in a state and government organization and culture that significantly influence policymaking. The paper examines the reforms from 1990 to 2018 to examine the role of the “troika”—the Politburo, Council of Ministers, and Council of State—in shaping policymaking. The analysis of the institutional evolution of bureaucratic structures and their functions reveals that state bodies like the Parliament are not fully carrying out their constitutional responsibilities, while entities such as the Council of Ministers and the Council of State have historically overstepped their boundaries, assuming functions that should constitutionally belong to the Parliament.

## **1. Introduction and Methods**

This paper examines the origins and evolution of the Cuban Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS) from 1959 to 2018. It argues that the development of the SBS is not just a matter of establishing state and government bodies; it also reflects ideological struggles that shaped its constitutional and legislative framework and created a specific organizational culture. The study employs an explanatory case study methodology (Yin, 2018), drawing on in-depth archival research, including a review of academic literature on bureaucratic systems and Cuba's political and economic landscape. It also draws some conclusions from legislation, constitutional changes, and public speeches by leaders such as Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro.

The article divides the timeline into four distinct periods, focusing on the evolution of ideology and institutional structures within the Cuban Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS). It examines the origins and functions of key formal institutions that define the SBS, particularly emphasizing the “troika”: the Council of Ministers, the Council of State, and the Politburo. The paper concludes by providing insights into the legislative authority exercised by the troika and its influence on two significant economic reforms implemented between 1990 and 2018.

The analysis employs a methodology akin to Pérez Martín (2017), assessing not only the volume of legislation passed by the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the Council of State but also the relative importance of these legislations in the policymaking process. These reforms serve as a lens through which to understand the distribution of power among Cuba's top

political institutions, as they coincide with periods marked by extensive legislative and constitutional activity.

The process of evolution of the Cuban Socialist Bureaucratic State is still ongoing. In the years following the Triumph of the Revolution in 1959, several events and processes determined the structure and ideology that cemented the path to the institutional and political state and government organization we know today. The selection, setting, and wide spreading of an ideology, are closely linked to the search for economic models and mechanisms of public administration and planning. It led to -and influenced- formal institutions' birth, evolution, and conformation. This process is also largely impacted by external forces like the United States embargo, and commercial and political ties with allies like the Soviet Union. While scholars have extensively studied the impact of external forces on Cuba's political landscape<sup>2</sup>, this paper prioritizes the examination of domestic factors that shaped the SBS's development. Nevertheless, it acknowledges the broader context in which Cuba is immersed and the external forces influencing its evolution.

Methodologically, to facilitate the analysis of the institutional and ideological birth and evolution of Cuba's SBS we have broken down this historical process into four periods:

a. 1959-1970. After the Triumph of the Revolution, the government approved the Fundamental Law as a temporary constitution. In 1965, the Cuban Communist Party was

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<sup>2</sup> For further detail into the influence of external factors on Cuba's economic and political performance and behavior, see López-Levy (2016) and Miranda (2008).

founded. Institutionally, this was a period of nationalization and government takeover of the economy. Ideologically, this was a period characterized by a rich discussion of ideas and the search for a new economic model.

b. 1970-1976. Cuba started its commercial insertion in the COMECON. On the political front, the triumph of Soviet-style orthodox ideas led to stagnation in the debates that characterized the 1960s. Celebration of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the CCP.

c. 1976- 1991 This period starts with the approval of the new Constitution and represents the culmination of Cuba's insertion into COMECON. The period ends with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc.

d. 1992-2018. In 1992, Cuba updated the constitution to introduce more flexible wording in the definition of ownership to allow the expansion of domestic and foreign private investment. This period covers two economic reforms that led to adjustments in the public administration. It culminated with the approval of a new constitution that changed Cuba's state and government structure and the retirement of Raúl Castro from political life.

e. 2019-2024. A new generation of leaders ascended to power. State and government functions are finally separated in Cuba's SBS in the figures of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. A new economic reform process deepened the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The period is not included in this working paper but will be part of the final article.

The historical analysis of government and state bodies from 1959 to the present enables us to conclude that ideology and power struggles have played a significant role in forming a distinctive organizational culture and shaping responses to crises in Cuba. To understand that, we first will examine, in the following section, some of the most significant theoretical and empirical analyses about bureaucratic order and bureaucracy in former and current socialist states.

## **2. Literature Review: Bureaucratic Structure in Socialism. The Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS)**

### **2.1. Theoretical Review of Bureaucracy in Socialist States**

Analysts of bureaucracies in former socialist countries shared concerns about the scope of the Socialist Bureaucratic State and the privileges and usable power in the hands of bureaucrats (See, for example, Allard & Small, 2013; F. Castro, 1965; I. Deutscher, 1969; Luxemburg, 1971; Mandel, 1969a; Scott, 1998; Trotsky, 1938). Bureaucracy was born as a result of the social division of labor that separated society members into two major groups: on one side, the decision-makers organizing the labor, and on the other, the executors of those decisions (Deutscher, 1969; Mandel, 1969a). The division of labor facilitates and improves the efficiency and functioning of the organizations. Some members would be responsible for designing policies, while others would implement them (Simon, 1997). There is no basis to presume that this division of labor is not replicated within the SBS. Niskanen (1971) attributed bureaucracies with bargaining power stemming from the administration and management of the government

(Niskanen, 1971, pp. 28, 39–39). Similarly, in the SBS, despite the bureaucrats’ inability to accumulate capital or perpetuate their position in society - which could be ephemeral - they enjoy privileges like better access to material goods (Deutscher, 1969; Mandel, 1969a). The state is the new owner of capital, land, and properties, and bureaucrats work for and within the state, managing state properties (Deutscher, 1969; Mandel, 1969a).

Scholars studying socialist bureaucracies saw the expansion and development of the bureaucratic system as a limitation for the efficient and proper functioning of the state and society (Deutscher, 1960; Mandel, 1969a; Trotsky, 1938). Bureaucracy is not unique to socialism but inherited from capitalist state organizations (F. Castro, 1965; Deutscher, 1960; Mandel, 1969b), but the attempts to downsize bureaucracies in socialist countries led to its reproduction in other aspects of economic and political life (Huchet & Richet, 2002; Kornai, 1987). Countries not initially identified as bureaucratic states (U., 2007 in Andreas, 2008) devolved into strong controlling bureaucracies, like China (Boisot & Child, 1988; Huchet & Richet, 2002). The Soviet Union, for example, saw a rigid bureaucracy blossoming under Stalin that eventually influenced the reform and return to capitalism by the 1990s (Allahar & Valdés, 2013; Scott, 1998).

A distinctive and essential trait of socialist states is the role of communist parties within state organizations and governance. After the triumph of socialist revolutions, the Party absorbs the role of a vanguard organization. It becomes a bureaucratic institution where “judgments are not subjective and value-laden but objective and logically inevitable” (Scott, 1998, p. 152). As a leader, the Party permeates organizations and structures with its hierarchal and rigid

organizational culture and intervenes in economic and social policies, managerial issues, and administrative matters (Kornai, 1987). This intervention, particularly in state-owned enterprises, led to inefficiency, workers' alienation, disconnection between planning and economic conditions, and a vertical managerial style that neglected workers' expectations and criteria. It happened in Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Hungary, and China (Boisot & Child, 1988; Dingding Wang, 1990; Granick, 1987; Huchet & Richet, 2002; Kornai, 1987). Rosa Luxemburg referred to it in her critique of Lenin's "What Is to Be Done?":

The ultracentrism advocated by Lenin is permeated in its very essence by the sterile spirit of a nightwatchman (Nachtwachtegeist) rather than by a positive and creative spirit. He mainly concentrated on controlling the Party, not on fertilizing it, on narrowing it down, not developing it, on regimenting and not unifying it. (Luxemburg, 1971, p. 291)

Previous and current experiences in socialist bureaucratic states share the traits and effects of highly centralized and bureaucratized governments typical of single-party states:

1. Communist Party's dual monopoly -monopsony- over the economy and politics. (Bunce, 1999a; Csanádi, 1997a)
2. Derived from 1: Pervasive and intrusive role of bureaucratic institutions, like the Party, in the state's economic life, including the Chinese corporative model (Dingding Wang, 1990; Kornai, 1987, 1992).



3. The state “owns” the means of production on behalf of the people (Boisot & Child, 1988; Dingding Wang, 1990; Huchet & Richet, 2002), but the bureaucrats administer and manage those means. It alienates bureaucrats from the workers (Allahar & Valdés, 2013).

4. The party’s role of nigh-watchers asphyxiates creativity (Luxemburg, 1971).

5. “The necessarily simple abstractions of large bureaucratic institutions, (...), can never adequately represent the actual complexity of natural or social processes. The categories that they employ are too coarse, too static, and too stylized to do justice to the world that they purport to describe.” (Scott, 1998, p. 262).

## **2.2. The Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS) in Cuba**

Several scholars refer to the state organization, public administration styles, and organizational culture in former and current socialist countries simply as socialist state (Bunce, 1999a; Lane & Lane, 2019; Meisner, 1999; Milun, 1991); Csanadi (1997) coined the term Party-State to refer to societies where Communist Parties’ hold extensive and monopsony power. This research could not find references to the term Socialist Bureaucratic State, except for some mentions, for example, in Meisner (1999) and Apter & Feinsilver (1993), but no in-depth empirical definition was found. This article argues that, although in agreement with the Party’s power within socialism, the Party-State terminology obscures the relations inter and intra-state bodies with decision-making powers. The term socialist state, while accurate, is inadequate to fully convey the organizational culture and bureaucratic dimension of socialist societies.

Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the appropriate term is Socialist Bureaucratic State (SBS) due to the following reasons:

1. The term “socialist” separates a society where the state mostly owns and controls the economy, like Cuba, from traditional capitalist countries where state-ownership relations are not as extended.

2. Including “bureaucratic” directly references intricate organizational structures, which are interconnected and dominant in decision-making. It extends the tentacles of the bureaucracy’s power beyond the influence of the Party.

3. The selection of state rather than government implies a more influential and intrusive role of bureaucratic institutions in citizens’ everyday lives. The conception of “unity of powers,” introduced in the 1976 Constitution, merges government and state powers and nullifies checks and balances.

In Cuba, the state manages the economy through an extensive bureaucratic structure that plays an invasive role in the nation’s economic life. In the case of a SBS, bureaucracy hypertrophies rules and procedures, hinders citizens’ relations with the administration, and delays action to tackle policy problems (Valdés Navia, 2019a, 2019a, 2019b). The result is people’s alienation from political participation, which eventually translates into apathy and lack of interest.

The bureaucratization process created several departments or sections within state-owned enterprises, corporations, or state-owned not-for-profit organizations that hinder effectiveness

and efficiency in policymaking (Valdés Paz, 2009, p. 57). In Cuba, this process led to hyper-centralized institutions, vertical decision-making, poor development of local government powers, and low economic efficiency (J. A. Fernández Estrada & Guanche, 2008). The result is a misconception of the state under the “unity of the people” principle and a concentration of power in government institutions (J. A. Fernández Estrada & Guanche, 2008).

Although bureaucracy is inherent to the state and government administration, it is necessary to consider its peculiarities in the SBS. First, the Cuban socialist system and other socialist experiences share the identification of socialism with state ownership (Valdés Paz, 2009, p. 135), which translates into state control over politics, economics, and the social lives of citizens.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Ideological and institutional evolution of the SBS in Cuba**

States’ conformations and government structures result from the system’s need for survival, and therefore, these structures are continuously evolving to adapt to that need. The subjacent ideology supporting the system also contributes to cementing the organizational culture that permeated formal institutions in Cuba’s SBS since their creation. But the SBS in Cuba is also the result of ideological struggles more visible in the public sphere during the debates in the 1960s. This ideological heterogeneity never disappeared but became subtle. It manifests primarily in artistic forms, intellectual and academic discussions, political opposition

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<sup>4</sup> One example is that the Cuban state has historically been the principal employer in the country since it owns the majority of the means of production. It also controls the foreign trade monopoly and most of the retail system, at least until 2021.

groups, and independent media (Guanche, 2016; Hoffmann, 1997; Torres, 2024). During crises like the Special Period in the 1990s, these ideological fractures become more evident, even within organizations subordinated to the Party, like the Center for Studies of the Americas (CEA) (R. Castro, 1996; Dilla, 2011).

### **1959-1970. Key Debates in the 1960s. Nationalizations. Search for the economic model**

Immediately after the Triumph of the Revolution in 1959, the *Movement 26 of July*, led by Fidel Castro, appointed the new President Manuel Urrutia, the new Council of Ministers, and Fidel Castro as Prime Minister. President Urrutia gave immediate constitutional powers to the Council of Ministers -and the Prime Minister- to pass the Fundamental Law (FL), a sort of transitional constitution that was enforced until 1976 when the first socialist Constitution was approved in a referendum (de la Cuesta, 2001) (see Figure 1). The 1960s were a period of political and economic turmoil, characterized by the search for an economic model and a development strategy, all that while facing the continuous aggression of the US and the discontent of Cuban exiles in Florida (Bahamonde, 2004). In this decade, Cuba introduced and experimented with different planning styles from socialist countries with little success in many cases (Kunzmann, 2021). (See Figure 2)

The decade was rich in theoretical discussions about the economy and the socialist system (Kohan, 2006, pp. 397–398). The blossoming of debates about Marxism received a noticeable influence from abroad. Literature from the Soviet Union, China, and international communist movements became essential for Cubans eager to learn about the ‘new society’ (Martínez Heredia, 1995, p. 20). On the bright side, Cubans also claimed an original road to

socialism to address the country's specific needs and initially rejected the imposition of dogmatic ideas (Martínez Heredia, 1995, pp. 20–21).

Three of these debates deserve a closer look (Candiano, 2018). Once Fidel Castro publicly declared Cuba's socialism in 1961, the search for new economic models started. Ever since, the country has undergone several managerial styles (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 35). One of the most significant debates in the economic management arena was led by Guevara with the intervention of relevant international Marxists like Ernest Mandel and Charles Bettelheim (Guevara et al., 2005). The debate mostly focused on the dilemma planning vs. the market. In the short run, it led to an economy in which two different administrative and managerial models coexisted for over a decade (Bahamonde, 2004, pp. 56–57; González, 1997, pp. 5–6; Rodríguez, 1990).

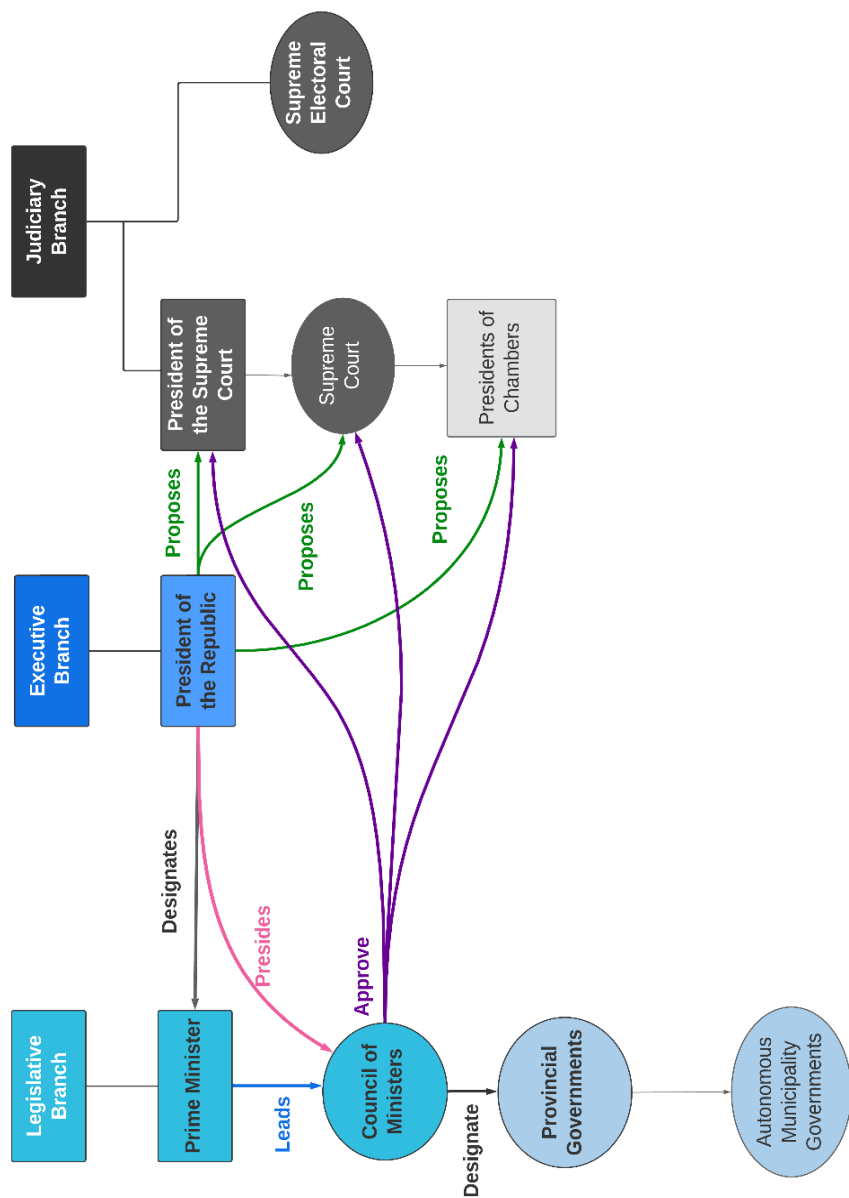


Figure 1 State and Government Structure Established by the Fundamental Law in 1959.  
 Source: Figure 5.1 in Bahamonde (2024) based on the Fundamental Law (1959)

The relevance of the dual managerial model is pragmatic and theoretical. As pointed out by Fidel Castro in the report of the first Congress of the Party in 1975, the co-existence of two administrative and managerial styles eventually gave birth to a hybrid model that combined elements of both (F. Castro, 1975a). This hybrid model created an organizational culture among Cuban bureaucrats that neglected financial aspects like costs, profits, or economic efficiency in decision-making (F. Castro, 1975a). It led, as expected, to inefficiencies, low productivity, and a general sentiment of alienation from economically objective rules (F. Castro, 1975a). In the long run, the debate over planning and the market led to programmed reactions to economic crises. In Yaffe's perspective, market reforms are more a tactical retrieve required to adjust to new conditions, not the socialist system's need to improve social and economic performance (Yaffe, 2012, p. 36). In the 1960s, while Cuba was experimenting with new managerial and administrative styles, former socialist countries were progressively experiencing the exhaustion of their extensive pattern of economic growth, fighting inefficiencies in the allocation of resources (González, 1997, p. 5). The same model, already in crisis in socialist countries, was introduced in Cuba in 1962 (González, 1997) and remained in place until the 1980s, when it showed the same signs of exhaustion (Monreal & Carranza, 1997), and led to the "rectification process" in 1986 (Bahamonde, 2004).

A second debate took place over the political order of socialism in Cuba, in which Fidel Castro led a controversial process against Anibal Escalante, called Process against Sectarianism, whose purpose was to oppose attempts to bureaucratize -Stalinist style- the Cuban state (Candiano, 2018; F. Castro & Habel, 1965; Kohan, 2006). After the triumph of the Cuban

Revolution in 1959, organizations that participated in the war in the 1950s joined together to form the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (United Revolutionary Organizations, ORI). In 1965, the ORI evolved into the Communist Party of Cuba (CCP) (PCC, n.d.). The confrontation against the bureaucratization of the Party during its foundational process showed that the revolutionary government's initial projection differed from the final result (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 36; F. Castro & Habel, 1965).

The third debate revolved around the idea of artistic production in socialism. This particular debate early on showed what would become the Communist Party in future decades. It also proved that controversial dogmatic ideas lived and fed the lines of orthodox Cuban communists (Candiano, 2018, p. 2).

In parallel to these intellectual discussions, the institutional evolution resulted from a deep necessity for change. Cuba introduced a University Reform in 1962 to include Marxism as a mandatory class in all curriculums and created the Institute of Philosophy and the Schools of Revolutionary Instructions of the Communist Party (Party's Schools) (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 36; Martínez Heredia, 1995, p. 21). The Party's Schools used Soviet handbooks to teach Marxism, which solidified their views and epistemology as "Marxism in Cuba." The CCP also founded *Socialist Cuba*, the theoretical and epistemic journal of the Party (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 36).

This period of rich discussions about ideology and economic and managerial models did not translate into a referendum. The government established by the FL in 1959 was conceived as



transitory but lasted 17 years. The arguments against the Party's bureaucratization faded, and orthodox forces gained traction in the following decade.

The rich period of intellectual and academic discussions of the 1960s perished in the 1970s (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 38; Martínez Heredia, 1995, p. 22). Economic praxis clashed with theoretical discussions, resulting in a shift towards a more dogmatic approach to policy and administration. Therefore, the first ideological divorce occurred between intellectuals, social scientists, and governance.

Fidel Castro's quote from 1961, in a speech at the National Library, "Within the Revolution, everything, outside the Revolution, nothing" (F. Castro, 1961) eventually became the motto for asphyxiating discussions and dissent. Critical postures were interpreted as anti-Soviet (A. Alonso, 1995, pp. 37–38), evidencing the triumph of orthodox thought over moderates and critical leftists within the Party. Cubans traveled to the USSR -and other socialist countries- to study social sciences, and the knowledge produced outside of this echo chamber was neglected and excluded, even if coming from Latin America: "The Social Sciences suffered years of impoverishment whose recovery is still in question" (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 40).

By 1970, the Cuban economy was in recession, and it failed to achieve its economic goal of producing 10 million tons of sugar. The insertion of the COMECON in 1972 came right after the cancellation of critical debates over socialism and Marxism (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 38). Two institutions that hosted debates in the 1960s—the magazine *Critical Thinking* and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana—were closed in 1971. This marked the

completion of the ideological shift toward an orthodox, Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism as the sole interpretation of Marxism. (A. Alonso, 1995, pp. 37–38; Martínez Heredia, 1995, p. 22).

To some authors, integration into the COMECON resulted from ideological agreement and as a response to aggressive US policy towards Cuba (Carranza et al., 1995, p. 27). To others, the incorporation into the COMECON was not solely a result of dire circumstances but the triumph of an ideology (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 38). The fast deepening of the political, economic, and military alliance with the USSR further consolidated the Soviet version of Marxism as ideological base in Cuba (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 36) and eventually permeated policymaking and governance.

### **1970-1975 Stagnation in the Debates and Adoption of a Unique Ideology. Initial insertion into the COMECON. The 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the Party**

The 1960's nationalization of properties reached its pinnacle with the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968. This process set the base for the specific interpretation and definition of socialist ownership in the Constitution of 1976 (Azcuay, 2010; Kunzmann, 2021). With the ideological penetration of the Soviet organizational style and culture, there was only one pending step: the institutional transformation of Cuba to facilitate the economic insertion into the socialist bloc. The celebration of the First Congress of the Communist Party in 1975 sealed the deal, and a year later, in 1976, Cuba approved the first constitution after 1940, changed the political-administrative division, and established the institutional rules of the - not so new anymore - state.

The Report of the First Congress of the Party identified errors in policymaking related to managerial styles, administrative methods, and cadres' limited understanding of economic mechanisms, like costs and efficiency (F. Castro, 1975a). For example, at the end of the 1960s, the state budget was eliminated, and gratuities expanded without proper regulations or sufficient analysis of their economic impacts (A. Alonso, 1995, p. 38; F. Castro, 1975a). "In our economic management, we have undoubtedly fallen for idealistic errors, and at times, we have disregarded the fact that there are objective economic laws to which we must adhere" (F. Castro, 1975a).

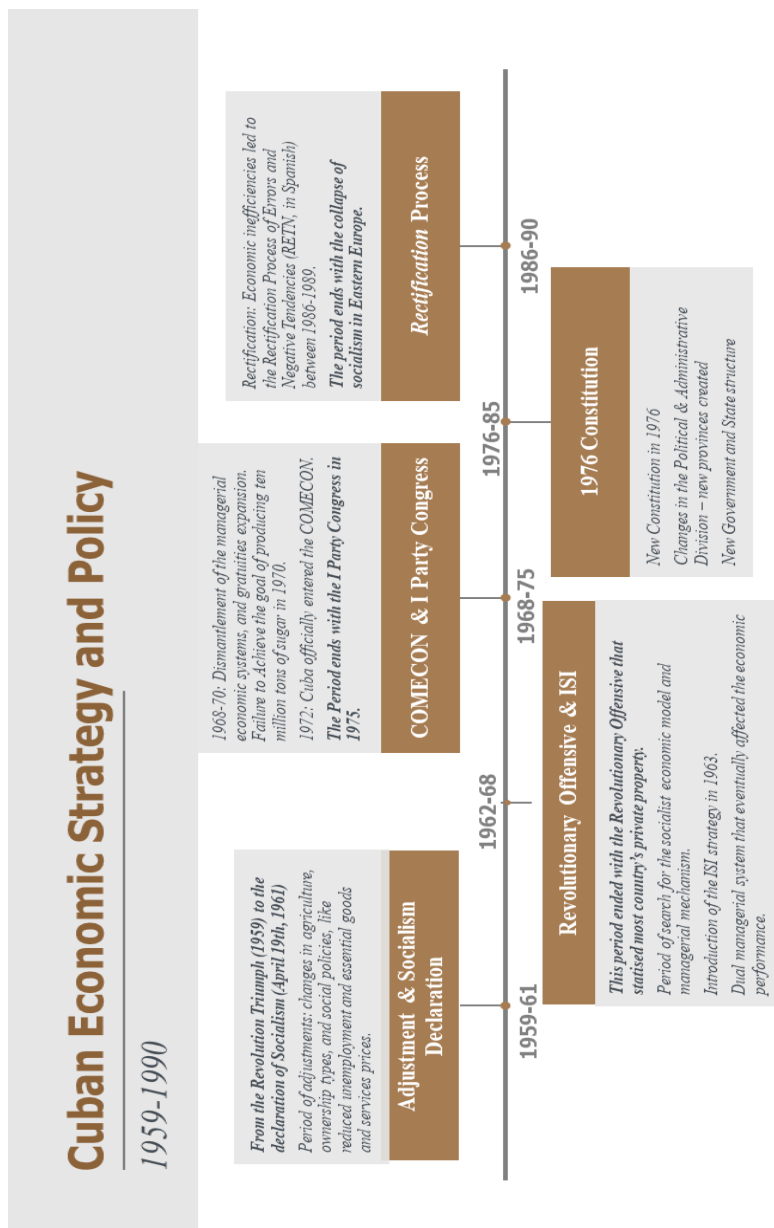


Figure 2. Timeline of Cuba's Evolution from Revolutionary to Constitutional State  
Source: Figure 5.7 in Bahamonde (2024). Prepared based on Bahamonde (2004)

The First Congress of the Party in 1975 approved several agreements that set the path to the foundation of the Cuban SBS. The agreements included the referendum for the “proclamation of the socialist Constitution” (PCC, 1975a), the establishment of the state structure and government bodies, the constitution of the local governments and defining the scope of their functions, and the country’s new Political-Administrative Division (PCC, 1975a). In the latter’s case, the Party was involved in the process directly, with members of the newly elected Politburo leading it at the regional and national levels (F. Castro, 1975b).

### **1976-1991 The Cemented Ideology and Institutional Culture from 1976 to 1989. Official Foundation of the SBS. Prelude for the Special Period and the Reforms**

The Cuban government operated for over fifteen years without restoring the 1940 Constitution or calling for a plebiscite or open elections. An agreement between the Politburo and the Council of Ministers created a joint commission with Party and government members to draft the 1976 Constitution (Azcuay, 2010, p. 85). The USSR Constitution from 1936 and the Cuban Constitution from 1940 inspired several articles of the 1976 Constitution (de la Cuesta, 2001). The constitution *unified powers* among government branches, officially declared the Marxist-Leninist nature of the Cuban socioeconomic and political process, and established the state and government structure that remained until 2019 when a new constitution was approved by referendum. Some institutional aspects, like the single Party, the structure of the state - with a National Assembly of the People’s Power (NAPP) and a Council of State - as well as the unified powers, resembled the Soviet state structure (de la Cuesta, 2001) (See Figure 3).

In 1975-1989, central planning rose with a tendency to replicate the Soviet model. This model is more accurately defined as central administration of resources, a form of direct regulation that results in a reductionist and distorted form of planning (O. Fernández Estrada, 2012). It also resulted in insurmountable rigidity, underestimation of economic incentives, overestimation of the central planners' optimization capacity, and the encouragement of administrative discretion over any form of economic rationality. This ultimately led to a highly costly process, even for the legitimization of the viability of socialism (O. Fernández Estrada, 2012, p. 53). As a result, the economic performance showed low efficiency and high compensation levels via foreign trade (Carranza et al., 1995, p. 33). The practical failures of this economic model led to the “rectification” process after 1986.

The conceptual and ideological strangulation of private property -even small and medium enterprises- in the 1976 Constitution, made it impossible to review, assess, and correct the “statisation” (Azcuay, 2010, p. 263). The *statisation*, although the result of an economic crisis, in the long run, demonstrated that instead of helping the government to address crises, it worsened the living conditions for Cubans (Azcuay, 2010, p. 263).

The most significant changes in the government structure and politics during the years 1975-1980 were (Rodríguez, 1990, p. 157):

1. The 1976 Constitution changed the government structure, among other important elements, and established the new electoral system.

2. New Political-Administrative Division. From 6 original provinces (Ramos, 2016), Cuba was divided into 14 and the Special Municipality Isla de la Juventud. Havana City was the Capital.

3. The constitution of new bodies of People's Power and restructuring of the government bodies and structure.

In 1986, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Party identified a series of structural problems stemming from the implementation of the Soviet-inspired economic model (See F. Castro (1986)).

When evaluating the Economic Policy in the period from 1976 to 1985, one can see (...) a reduction in the role assigned to political factors in the construction of socialism, while absolutizing the capacity of economic mechanisms to solve all the problems - including political and social - that the new society had to face.  
(Rodríguez, 1990, p. 187)

As a result, the Cuban government launched the “Rectification Process” in 1986, the first attempt in Cuba to address deficiencies in the centrally-planned economy and the rigidities in the SBS's structure and functioning. This research argues that the economic model exhaustion came not from the prevalence of economic mechanisms over the political ones but the opposite: the political imposition of an economic model extracted from former socialist countries with a poor understanding of economic mechanism's role in the system as a whole, and the hypertrophy of a highly centralized economic system that was already failing in European socialist countries (see Bunce, 1999; Csanádi, 1997; Kornai, 1992). Even when the economy moved forward in the

sense that established the five-year plan and the annual plan, government structures and financial organizations did not follow the same development pace and lagged behind (Rodríguez, 1990).

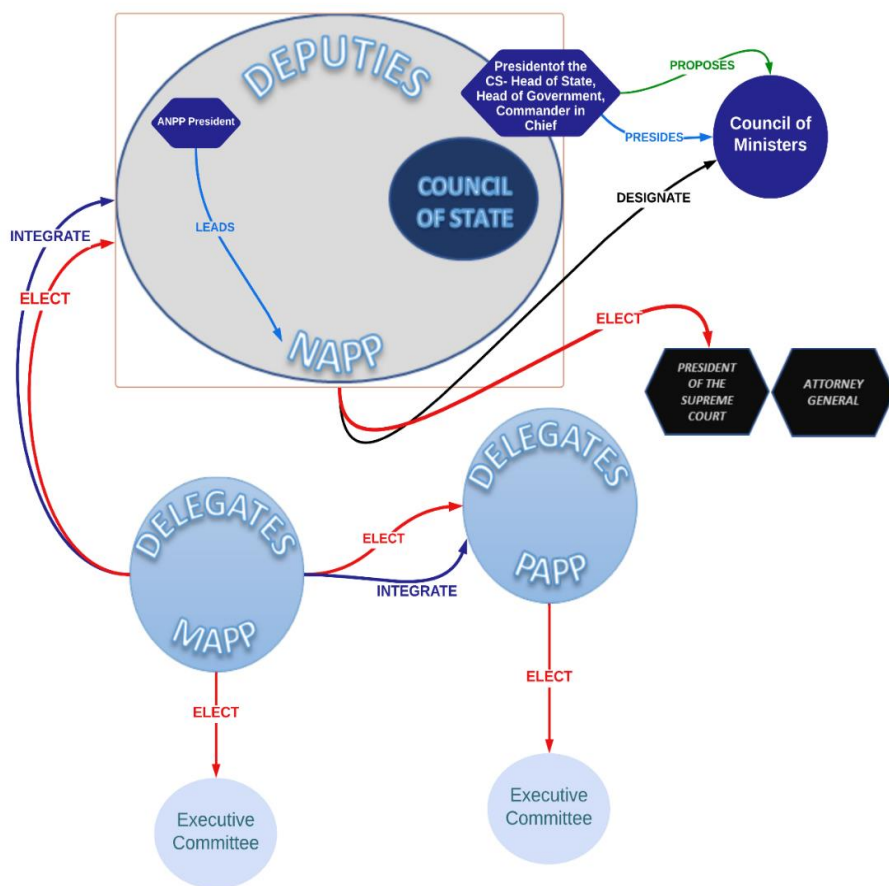


Figure 3. State and Government Structure Established by the 1976 Constitution.

Source: Figure 5.2 in Bahamonde (2024), adapted from the government structure in

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## **1992-2018. The collapse of Socialism in Eastern Europe. The Special Period. Constitutional reforms in the 1990s and the 2010s. The transition of power from Fidel Castro to Raúl Castro**

The collapse of the socialist bloc in the 1990s shocked the Cuban economy, deepened the deficiencies of the economic model, and triggered the country's worst recession of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cuba entered a new period—that lasts until today—characterized by cycles of crises, reforms, and counter-reforms (Bahamonde, 2024).

From 1992 to 2018, the Cuban SBS went through resizing processes that reduced its staff, the number of government bodies (some ministries were merged and others disappeared), redefined state functions, slightly decentralized power downwards (towards provinces and municipalities) and to the sides (towards ministries), increased the autonomy of some stakeholders and different levels of government, promoted new people to lead ministries, and granted more room to market relations (Valdés, 1997, cited by Guanche, 2013, p. 50).

After Fidel Castro announced his provisional retirement from public life in 2006 due to health issues, his brother Raúl Castro, who was the First Vice President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers and the Second Secretary of the Politburo, assumed the leadership of the country. Fidel's retirement became permanent by 2008, and Raúl Castro was officially elected President of the Council of States and the Council of Ministers, positions he held until 2018 (EcuRed, n.d.). Some authors refer to this transition of power as going from charismatic leadership to bureaucratic leadership (Bye, 2020; Guanche, 2016; López-Levy, 2016). Raúl

served for two five-year terms and stepped down as President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers but continued serving as the Politburo's First Secretary until 2021 (EcuRed, n.d.).

During the initial years of Raúl Castro's administration, he focused on two primary areas: leadership and institutional reform, in preparation for the economic reform known as the "Updating," and strengthening of international alliances and relations.

### **The 1992 Constitutional Reform: Requirement for Economic Reform. Institutional Transformations in the SBS (1992-2018)**

The 1992 constitutional reform was not submitted to a referendum. It changed some of the wording of the 1976 Constitution to adjust it to the requirements of the forthcoming economic reform. It also introduced changes to the economic system that had a direct institutional impact (Azcuay, 2010):

1. The reform modified the definition of socialist ownership to "the *fundamental* means of production." The addition of the word "*fundamental*" introduced the possibility for non-state actors, like foreign capital and the domestic self-employed, to participate in the economy.
2. The constitutional reform modified the planning concept, allowing more room for market relations among state-owned enterprises and theoretically giving them more autonomy.

3. It introduced changes in people's power bodies and the system's social and economic bases, allowing for the transformation of some aspects of the economic model (Azcuy, 2010; Kapcia, 2014).

4. The constitutional reform removed the explicit reference to *unified powers* and democratic centralism, which came from the Soviet ideological and administrative culture (Guanche, 2013, p. 50) (Azcuy, 2010; Guanche, 2013).

5. The reform changed the indirect election of parliamentarians for direct elections and designed more specific and well-delimited functions for territorial parliaments (Azcuy, 2010; Constitución de La República de Cuba Con Reformas, 1992; Cuban Constitution, 1976).

As already stated, in the 1980s, the Cuban government identified several problems in the public administration and policy design that led to the *Rectification*. These issues resulted—directly and indirectly—from ideological substrates sedimented in decision-makers attitudes that permeated organizations and policymaking. The crisis in the 1990s proved that the country needed flexible institutions and to abandon some of the inherited ideological rigidities incorporated into the SBS.

After the economy hit rock bottom in 1993, in April 1994, in an attempt to reduce public expenditures and increase efficiency in the public sector, the Council of State reorganized the public administration structures (Decreto-Ley 147/94 Sobre La Reorganización de Los Organismos de La Administración Central Del Estado (OACE) [Decree-Law 147/94 About the Restructuring of the Bodies of the State Central Administration], 1994). The changes included the disappearance of State Committees and the creation of ministries that absorbed their

functions. Existing ministries absorbed some other State Central Administration Bodies (OACE).<sup>5</sup> The number of OACEs was reduced to 27 ministries and five national institutes. Just one month after the NAPP session, the CS passed legislation that changed the bureaucratic and institutional structure of the Cuban government, impacting labor, policy design. The changes of 1994 indicate that the Council of State's legislative functions and participation in policy design exceeded the NAPP's decision-making powers.

We can safely argue that institutional transformation was a policy priority in Raúl Castro's administration. Right after his official arrival into power in 2008, by March 2009, Raúl Castro not only introduced changes in the individuals holding power positions, substituting key members of the CS and the CM like Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque. On the same week, the CS merged ministries and dissolved others, transferring oversight functions (Decreto-Ley 264/2009 De Los Ministerios Del Comercio Exterior y La Inversión Extranjera, y de La Industria Alimenticia [Decree-Law 264/2009 About the Ministries of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, and the Food Industry], 2009). To Raúl Castro, institutional order and efficiency were essential to achieving a more efficient economy and reducing the overgrown state apparatus (R. Castro, 2008, p. 110).

Several cadres, particularly ministers, changed during Raúl Castro's administration. In Bye's words,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the Housing Committee was absorbed by the Ministry of Construction.

By 2012, Raúl had substituted a total of 32 ministers, which means that the country's executive leadership under the over-arching Communist Party leadership had been changed from Fidel to Raúl. However, the militarisation of the ministry offices turned out to be a preliminary solution: by 2016, only two line ministries in addition to Defence and the Interior were headed by military officers. (Bye, 2020, p. 4)

#### **4. State and government bodies in the Cuban SBS (1976-2018). The Troika**

The decades of conformation and evolution of the SBS and its organizational/ideological culture resulted in a highly centralized government and state organization. The economic model of central administration of resources prevailed for decades with an organizational culture that hindered decision-making and economic efficiency—even the effectiveness of public services suffered during the crisis, showing the economic model's failures. Four state and government bodies held the ability to directly legislate, or indirectly influence legislation: The National Assembly of the People's Power (NAPP), which is the Cuban parliament; the Council of State (CS); the Council of Ministers (CM); and the Politburo of Cuban Communist Party (CCP). Each of them had a different function in policymaking that complemented the others. Out of these four, three bodies held enough decision-making power to consider them the most powerful: the CM, the CS, and the Politburo. This article will refer to them as the *troika*.

Chronologically, in the Socialist Bureaucratic State of Cuba, the Party was founded first, then the Constitution, and with it, the Parliament, Council of State, and local governments. The Council of Ministers, the executive branch of the government, is a structure inherited from the

1940 Constitution, which means it precedes the CCP of 1965. The 1976 Constitution establishes the Party as “the leading force of the society and the state” (Cuban Constitution, 1976). The economic model, strategies and policies, state organization, and even the reforms were first approved by the Party and then ratified by the Council of State and the NAPP (Bahamonde, 2024). On the other hand, the CM continued to hold a massive role in policymaking by passing decrees and controlling policymaking through ministries and state-owned enterprises.

The First Congress of the Party approved documents establishing a multi-level subordination for the state-owned enterprise. People’s power bodies were in charge of planning and managerial-operative functions, while ministries were responsible for designing methodologies to make enterprises’ plans compatible with the system and homogeneous across the economy (PCC, 1975b). In practice, state-owned enterprises lacked autonomy and clarity on subordination relations.

#### **A. The National Assembly of the People’s Power<sup>6</sup>**

The NAPP, the Cuban parliament, holds constitutional and legislative powers. The NAPP structure included a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and over 600 parliamentarians until 2018. Theoretically, the parliament is the more powerful and democratic organization in the Cuban government. In practice, its effective participation in policymaking is drastically limited. For example, parliamentarians only meet twice per year, which is surpassed by the multiple

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<sup>6</sup> Except where stated otherwise, all information regarding the functions and structure of government bodies was retrieved from Constitución de La República de Cuba Con Reformas (1992).

meetings held by the CM or the CS. NAPP members were indirectly elected until 1992 (1976 Constitution) and through direct vote after the approval of the constitutional reform of 1992.

The NAPP composition is almost equally distributed among members proposed by the people and local governments, and nominees from official mass organizations. The organization of national unions (CTC) leads the selection of the members of the Candidature Commission, the constitutional body in charge of selecting candidates for the Parliament. The Commission selects candidates from two sources: those locally voted and elected in municipalities and those proposed by official organizations like the women's organization (FMC), students' organizations (FEEM and FEU), and the unions (CTC).

The NAPP passes bills (laws) when in session. The CS is the legislative body called to prepare and pass bills (decree laws) when the NAPP is not in session, which is often since the NAPP only meets twice yearly.

## **B. The Council of State (CS)<sup>7</sup>**

The NAPP elects the members of the Council of State from parliamentarians. The CS had a President, a First Vice-President, five Vice-presidents, a Secretary, and 23 additional members. The President of the Council of State was also the President of the Council of Ministers and the Head of the State but was not the President of the NAPP. The CS represented the NAPP between sessions, dictated *decree laws* when the NAPP was not in session (Article 90), and represented

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<sup>7</sup> The structure described remained until 2019, when the new constitution changed some of the structural rules, like the number of members and the functions of the President.

the Cuban state in the international and national arenas (Article 89). It required a simple majority of votes to reach an agreement (Article 91).

The CS, then, effectively acted like a Parliament of twenty-six members. During the reforms, the Cuban government passed more decree laws (issued by the CS) and decrees (issued by the CM) than laws passed by the NAPP.

### **C. The Council of Ministers (CM)**

The CM is the oldest government body in Cuba, coming from the pre-revolutionary period (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1940). Although defined by the Constitution as the supreme executive and administrative government body, the Council of Ministers also holds legislative powers. It was constituted by a President, a First Vice-President, Vice-presidents (undetermined), Ministers, a Secretary, and any other member determined by law. The CM also had an Executive Committee formed by the President, the Vice-President, and any other member that the President designated for the position.

During the reforms, the CM played an essential role by passing *decrees* that, in practice, established the rules of the market-oriented policies. The Constitution of 1976 and the 1992 Constitutional reform established that the President of the Council of State was also the President of the Council of Ministers, while a different cadre held the position of the President of the NAPP. From 1976 until they retired from public office, Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro held the position of President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers. Government figures in



charge of the reforms in the 1990s and the 2010s were members and officers of the Council of Ministers.<sup>8</sup>

#### **D. The Cuban Communist Party (CCP) and the Politburo**

The Cuban Communist Party was founded in 1965, and celebrated its First Congress in 1975, before the Constitutional referendum of 1975 (*I Congreso del PCC [1st Congress of the CCP]*, n.d.). Article 5 of the 1992 Constitution states:

The Communist Party of Cuba, heir of the ideas of Martí and follower of Marxism-Leninism, is the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, and the superior leading force of society and of the State, which organizes and directs joint efforts towards the lofty goals of building socialism and the advance towards a communist society.

Ultimately, the Party is the most crucial legislative force in Cuba - constitutionally speaking -even when it does not hold direct legislative or executive power. For example, the Party's first and second secretaries were presidents and first vice presidents of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers until 2019. The current President of the Republic is the First Secretary of the Politburo. Members of the Politburo were also members of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers, repeatedly, across decades. Most members of the NAPP are members of the Party, and more importantly, economic decisions, strategic economic guidelines, and direction of the economic policy were always first and foremost discussed and approved by

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the roles of Carlos Lage and Marino Murillo during the reforms.

the Party's Congresses before getting to the NAPP or the CS for discussion and approval. (See PCC, 1991, 1997, 2011b)

In addition to the troika, the SBS has several state and government bodies that contribute to its functioning. Ministries, political and mass organizations, and state-owned enterprises are some of the most significant. For the purposes of this article, we will only briefly describe ministries.

## **E. Ministries**

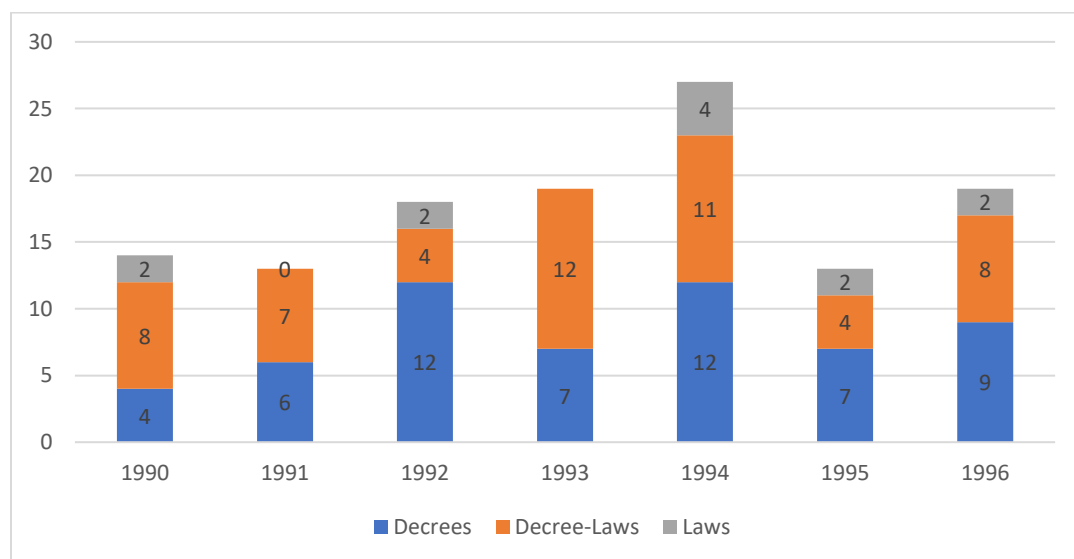
Cuban ministries are executive bodies led by Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Ministers are members of the CM, and their positions are appointed. Most state-owned enterprises are part of a structure that subordinates them - directly or indirectly - to a Ministry. In a nutshell, the CM and ministries capture the organizational culture and structure of the central planning system: highly centralized structures, rigid functioning style, and fading decision-making power further down the hierarchy. Ministry decisions affect the country's economy, society, and policy since their "resolutions" carry legislative power, especially in terms of policy execution.

### **5. The role of the troika in the SBS: The case of economic reforms (1990-2018)**

Economists tend to identify bureaucratic and institutional obstacles as the cause behind economic inefficiencies (See, for example, Bergara & Hidalgo, 2016). Alternatively, experts in constitutional law argue that crises per se become obstacles to institutional transformation that could lead to an improvement in the economic conditions and life standards in Cuba. For example, the unified powers principle limited the power of the state (Azcu, 2010; Guanche,

2013). This had a particularly pervasive effect on local governments and entrepreneurial autonomy.

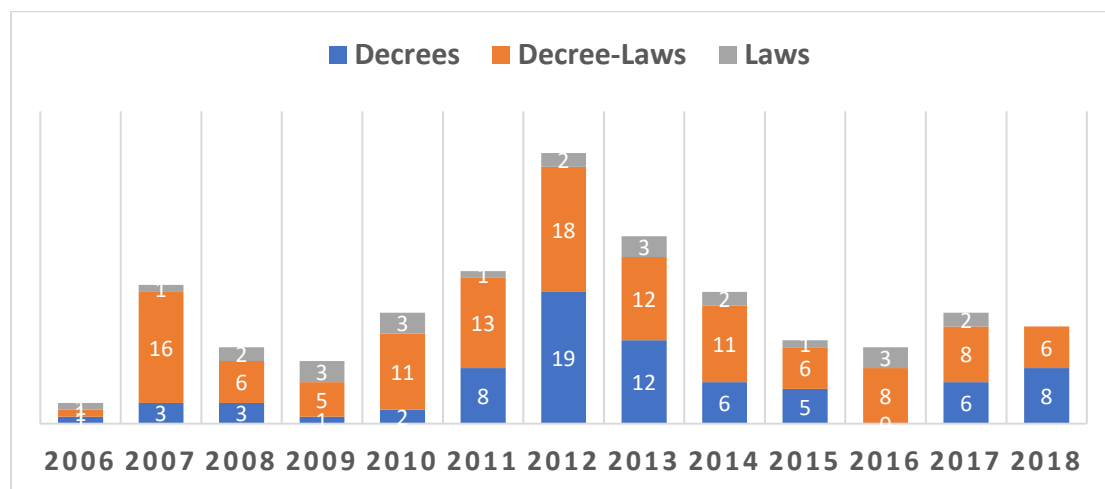
The two economic reforms between 1990 and 2018 opened a window to a better understanding of government and state bodies' roles in policymaking. Pérez Martín's (2017) research on legislative action in Cuba during the reforms indicates the massive role of the Council of State (CS) in policymaking. During 2007-2013, for example, the Cuban SBS passed more decree laws than laws, placing the CS above the NAPP in legislative action. Expanding on Pérez Martín's findings,<sup>9</sup> including the CM in the analysis, we can see how its role compares - and even surpassed at times - to the CS. During the reforms, the CS and the CM met more frequently and passed more legislation than the NAPP. (See Graphics 1 and 2)



<sup>9</sup> Pérez Martín's research (2017) did not include the Council of Ministers.

Graphic 1. Legislations Passed Per Year by Type of Legislation (1990-1996)

Source: Graphic 6.6 in Bahamonde (2024), with information retrieved from the Gaceta de Cuba (1990-1996), based on Pérez Martín’s (2017) methodology



Graphic 2. Legislations Passed During the “Updating”

Source: Graphic 7.4 in Bahamonde (2024) with information retrieved from Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba (2006-2018) based on Pérez Martín’s (2017) methodology

The Party is a core organization in the Cuban SBS. The multiple overlaps between members of the Politburo, the CS, and the CM until 2018 made it very difficult to distinguish whether its role is more or less determinant. Beyond the constitutional-given role as a supreme ideological organization, the everyday influence of the Politburo dilutes with the functions of the CS and the CM. The Party is the starting point of the reforms, with the Party’s Congress marking the decision to pursue transformations, discussing and approving their scope, which is later reflected in the Congress’ public documents.

Of course, in the period that follows the Party's approval, the CM takes over and officially becomes the most influential government body in decision-making during economic reforms. This influential role is evident in the prominence of the CM's vice presidents and its Secretary, who played pivotal roles during these reforms, often serving as their spokespersons and public faces (See Cubadebate, 2011; Harris, 2006; C. Lage, personal communication, November 1992, personal communication, October 1993, personal communication, December 20, 1995, personal communication, August 3, 2000; Lage, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). The massive role of ministries during the reforms stems from the CM's involvement in all significant decision-making processes. For example, CM members held monthly meetings to discuss reforms' advancements during the Raúl Castro era (Cubadebate, 2013; Edith, 2013; Puig Meneses & Martínez, 2013).

Members of the CM, the CS, and the Politburo overlapped significantly between 1990 and 2018, which, from the governance perspective, could result in a conflict of interests to advance policy, mainly depending on the positions towards the reform of some powerful ministries, like the Army, and whether their interests align with the Politburo and the CS (See, for example, Kapcia, 2014; Marc, 2013, pp. 93–95; Mesa-Lago & Pérez-López, 2013, pp. 169–172). The CM is in charge of the reform execution (PCC, 2011a) but also passes legislation (decrees) - like the CS - to regulate the reform's structure, pace, and specificities. At the same time, the CM oversees the reform advances and discusses them in their meetings. All that makes the CM judge and liable party in the reform process, a similar role played by the CS.

The President of the CS, constitutionally, was also the President of the CM, and since 1976, he has also been the First Secretary of the CCP. Also, the First Vice-President of the CS was historically the First Vice-President of the CM and the Second Secretary of the Party. Given the economic power that the Army corporation, GAESA, holds in the country, it is not farfetched to assume the Army plays a distinctive role in decision-making during the reforms, specifically if their interests might be affected by some policies (See, for example Alonso & Vidal Alejandro (2020a, 2020b); Bye (2020)).

Institutional reforms meant to facilitate macroeconomic adjustments in Cuba have resulted in two contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, there is an increasing number of institutions with similar functions and overlapping goals. On the other, there are persistent voids in the organizational structure to deal with the everyday challenges of economic transformations (Hidalgo de los Santos, 2016). Additionally, Cuba faces an excess of administrative regulations (Hidalgo de los Santos, 2016; Maqueira & Triana, 2016; Quiñones & Trujillo, 2016) that ultimately compromise economic efficiency (Quiñones & Trujillo, 2016) in both state-owned organizations and the private sector (Maqueira & Triana, 2016). In a highly centralized and vertical decision-making economy, major policy decisions are ultimately in the state bureaucrats' hands, limiting citizens' participation and hindering efficiency (Odriozola Guitart, 2016).

## **6. Final remarks**

The conformation and evolution of the SBS in Cuba are as ideological as institutional. This trait contributed to the ideological struggle and clashes that preceded the First Party

Congress, the 1976 constitution, and the official organization of the government and state. The institutional and ideological evolution of the SBS is an ongoing process that depends on multiple factors, including economic performance. During economic crises, the SBS needs to transform itself to provide the economy with enough adjustment room. However, these institutional changes were minor and incremental.

The roles of government bodies in policymaking are quantifiable by using the number of legislations each of these bodies has passed. It is also measurable by assessing how influential these legislations were in setting policies that transformed the reforms' goals, targets, and actions (See Pérez Martín, 2017). This is the case of the CS and the CM. Both bodies passed a higher number of regulations than the NAPP, with identical or higher regulatory influence in the reform process. Also, the CM was the body in charge of executing and supervising the reforms, which translated into many ministerial resolutions establishing, controlling, and regulating the policy implementation processes.

At the “outskirts” of the official legislative process, the Party oversees and regulates policymaking during the reforms. The reforms and counter-reforms were born in congresses or plenums of the Party. The Party's reach and scope often determined the reforms' duration and focus. Contrary to what the traditional literature about the SBS in former socialist countries teaches us, the Party, by itself, does not control or hold absolute power over decision-making. The Party, in Cuba, has become an extension of a larger organizational structure that uses three structures as table legs to keep the system together.

The Cuban centralized decision-making process introduced distortions with several social and economic costs. Cuba is an underdeveloped country with an open economy, facing an additional challenge: the embargo imposed by the United States. Under the circumstances, Cuba cannot afford a slow DMP that could cost millions of dollars or impede access to essential goods and services for millions of citizens—any obstacle between the people and their well-being needs removal. Cuban SBS has created rigid structures, including the state-owned enterprise, whose organizational culture reminds of a corporative system similar to capitalist monopolies controlling the market.

The SBS faces a crisis today resulting from the exhaustion of the economic model based on central planning and state administration. When the system cannot guarantee its reproduction means while satisfying the population's growing needs, SBSs confront a dilemma: reforming the system or keeping the status quo. In the case of the former, the dilemma becomes, for the SBS, a matter of how to reform the economic system without sacrificing political power. The contradiction lies on the fact that the rigid institutional and ideological nature of the SBS becomes the oppositional force that hinders the advancement of policies that could, eventually, contribute to the survival of the SBS.



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