



Robert Elgie: supervisor, mentor, friend

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When I sat down to write this piece, I struggled a little as to where to start. Robert was such an accomplished scholar, such a thoughtful and generous supervisor and such a great friend and colleague, that it seemed difficult to condense any remembrance of him into a couple of thousand words. I have so many fond memories of Robert but given that I first knew Robert as my Ph.D. supervisor, then that is probably the best place to start.

At first blush, it may seem slightly strange that Robert and I would work together as supervisor and student. I am a comparative political economist with a strong empirical focus on Latin America. Robert, an expert on French politics, became, particularly after he arrived at Dublin City University, well-known for his expertise on semi-presidentialism, a system of government not synonymous with Latin America. But in a clear testament to the breadth of Robert's intellectual contributions, strands of his work can be found in the literature on the comparative politics of Latin America.

Robert was, first and foremost, an institutionalist. Not for him was the behavioural turn. When Robert began his career as a scholar, he emerged in tandem with the advent of the 'new institutionalism' that was shaping the study of Latin America politics (e.g. Shugart and Carey 1992; Shugart and Mainwaring 1997) so perhaps it was no surprise that his work should find common ground with this literature. And this common ground began with debates about Latin American dalliances with semi-presidentialism; Brazil between 1961 and 1963, Argentina and their *jefe de gabinete de ministros* and his insistence that Peru was semi-presidential, certainly in *de jure* terms if not always in practice (both the 1979 and 1993 constitutions make the head of government and cabinet collectively responsible to the legislature). But his influence extended far beyond this. Robert's work on semi-presidentialism has become important for our understanding of the functioning of presidential governments, cabinet politics and institutional choice in Latin America (see Negretto 2013;

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Neto and Samuels 2010) in addition to the phenomenon of coalitional presidentialism, the increasingly common practice of presidents acting akin to prime ministers by building multi-party coalitions to support their legislative agenda (see Chaisty et al. 2014). His earlier papers, distinguishing regime type and government format according to their dispositional or relational properties (Elgie 1997, 1998) have proven insightful for behavioural and institutional debates about the functioning of presidential governments and echoes of his work in core executive studies (Elgie 2011) can be found in recent work on the executive in Latin America (Inácio and Llanos 2016).

More recently, Robert engaged with scholarship on Latin America in an even more direct manner. Partly, this was through his book on term limits, with our friend and colleague, Alex Baturó (Baturó and Elgie 2019). This edited volume included several contributions on Latin America and continues to influence more recent work on term limits across the region (e.g. Heyl and Llanos 2022). But partly it was also due to his longstanding interest in, and influence on, work concerned with the democratic robustness of regime types (e.g. Elgie 2005; Hochstetler 2011). And partly it was due to his advocacy for an institutional account of political leadership (encapsulated in his two-volume project on leadership completed a few years before his passing), which contended that work on political leadership was founded on different ontological and epistemological assumptions rendering many of these accounts neither compatible nor comparable. And, part of it was due to his work on *The Oxford Handbook of Political Executives*, which, unfortunately, Robert did not get to see published (Andeweg et al. 2020). Again, it is an incredible testament to his intellectual breadth that all this work is relevant for scholarship on Latin America, a region where the president looms large in political processes and where leadership has long been a central concern (e.g. Linz 1990).

I could go on. Robert's intellectual influence was firmly embedded in work on the contemporary politics of Latin America—far more than I realised when I became his Ph.D. student. But as a supervisor, what stood out above his substantive knowledge of the region or his intellectual influence, was his razor sharp and critical analytical mind, combined with his patience and kindness. Robert was a wonderful supervisor. He was always incredibly generous with his time, providing thoughtful and constructive feedback on written work and always willing to sit down and discuss ideas and concepts. He had an incredible capacity to step back, see the bigger picture and place work in its correct context. He also had a remarkable ability to provide critical feedback, which clearly highlighted the inherent weaknesses and problems of your work but he did so in a manner that did not render you crushed and demoralised but rather motivated to keep working and to improve. I often left his office, having been told, more or less, that my work was far below par, with a spring in my step. His enthusiasm for scholarship always pushed you to be a better academic. He was truly inspiring and for me, he set the template as to what a supervisor should be.

And as our relationship evolved from that of supervisor and student to that of friend and co-author (although I was never able to shed the student mantle), Robert provided a template for what an academic should be. He was wonderful to work with. He had such an impressive understanding of a wide array of subjects and he had a natural intellectual curiosity that was genuinely infectious. But he also had an



intellectual openness and even despite his dyed-in-the-wool institutionalist stance, he was always willing to countenance other perspectives on their merits. Before his death, we had begun working on an experimental project, related to the relationship of government format and democratic stability, which for Robert, opened the doors to behavioural considerations (in conjunction with institutions).

I have so many fond memories of Robert. It was with Robert that I was first introduced to international conferences and I spent many a great evening at leisurely dinners with Robert and our friend Shane Martin (one of Robert's other former Ph.D. students and now Head of Department at Essex) at APSA and at MPSA, which often spilled over into the hotel bar late into the evening. Or the long dinners in Dublin with colleagues and friends, Iain McMenamin and Gary Murphy—it was always pizza. I will never forget the one time at APSA in San Francisco when Robert and I walked across the city to Amoeba Records and purely by accident, managed to catch *Family of the Year* playing live in the store. Or in the early days of my Ph.D., when Robert asked me one lunchtime whether I would like to meet 'Percy'. Initially slightly disconcerted, Percy, it turned out, was his new iMac. Or one summer's evening in Oxford, when Robert and I were having dinner in the garden of a restaurant in the centre of the city. As we contemplated ordering a second bottle of wine, a rat ran across our feet. Robert suggested we move on elsewhere. The next day, someone took him to the same restaurant. Robert did not mention the rat.

Robert shared so much with me. His love of scholarship (and of institutions!), his love of music (he had his own music blog), his love of Apple computers and his love of Nottingham Forest. He was an incredible supervisor, a wonderful co-author and a fantastic mentor. He was an academic to aspire to—brilliant and insightful, with an incredible mind and an incredible work ethic but always respectful, patient and generous with everyone. He was a great friend. And I miss him.

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