

Challenges for Democratic University Management: A reading based on bills and university councils¹

*Desafios para a Gestão Democrática Universitária:
uma leitura a partir dos projetos de lei e dos conselhos universitários*

*Desafíos para la gestión democrática de la Universidad:
una lectura a partir de los proyectos de ley y la percepción de los consejos universitarios*

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Abstract: Between 2018 and 2022, university democracy was marked by setbacks due to successive interventions in electoral systems. With Lula's recent election, among the propositions is societal re-democratization. In this context, the work aims to problematize the challenges for advancing the autonomy and democratic management of Federal Universities. To this end, documentary research and questionnaires were applied to university counselors from 10 federal institutions. The results indicate that, among the main challenges, the need to deal with bills that suggest setbacks to democratic management stands out, as well as the representative discrepancy in collegiate bodies and the legacy of the culture of chairs marked by internal resistance to participatory forms management.

Keywords: University management; Participatory democracy; University autonomy.

Resumo: Entre 2018 e 2022 a democracia universitária foi marcada por retrocessos em vista de sucessivas intervenções nos sistemas eleitorais. Com a recente eleição de Lula, dentre as proposições está a redemocratização societal. Nesse contexto, o trabalho visa

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problematizar os desafios para o avanço da autonomia e da gestão democrática das Universidades Federais. Para tal, se recorreu a pesquisas documentais e aplicação de questionários aos conselheiros universitários de 10 instituições federais. Os resultados indicam que, dentre os principais desafios, destacam-se a necessidade de lidar com projetos de lei que sugerem retrocessos à gestão democrática, bem como a discrepância representativa nas instâncias colegiadas e a herança da cultura das cátedras marcada pelas resistências internas às formas participativas de gestão.

Palavras-chave: Gestão universitária; Democracia participativa; Autonomia universitária.

Resumen: Entre 2018 y 2022, la democracia universitaria estuvo marcada por retrocesos debido a sucesivas intervenciones en los sistemas electorales. Con la reciente elección de Lula, entre las propuestas está la redemocratización de la sociedad. En este contexto, el trabajo tiene como objetivo problematizar los desafíos para avanzar en la autonomía y la gestión democrática de las Universidades Federales. Para ello se utilizó investigación documental y aplicación de cuestionarios a asesores universitarios de 10 instituciones federales. Los resultados indican que, entre los principales desafíos, destaca la necesidad de abordar proyectos de ley que sugieren retrocesos en la gestión democrática, así como la discrepancia representativa en los órganos colegiados y el legado de la cultura de las cátedras marcada por resistencias internas a formas participativas de gestión.

Palabras clave: Gestión universitaria; Democracia participativa; Autonomia universitaria.

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Introduction

The years between 2018 and 2022 were marked by more than 26 appointments of rectors who were not among the most voted on the triple list of federal higher education institutions, in addition to appointments of intervenors, in the *Pro Tempore* modality, who were not included in the electoral campaign (PARENTONI et al., 2022).

Added to this, during the period, were several legal changes, through technical notes and provisional measures. They changed the course of political movement within educational institutions, harming representation among the three categories (students, teachers, and technicians) for the appointment of their top managers.

These facts indicate setbacks to legal practices, established by the Federal Constitution of 1988, which determine democratic management as a principle of Brazilian public education, expressly provided for in article 206 (BRASIL, 1988).

In contrast to what was established by previous governments, with the recent presidential election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for his third term (2023-2026), among the campaign propositions is the re-democratization in the Public Administration environment (SPECHOTO, 2023). In the first month of government, one of the initial acts was to revoke

Decree no. 9,759, of April 11, 2019, which had extinguished the popular participation in federal administration collegiate bodies. Still in the same month, the president met with the rectors of Federal Universities and Institutes, stating that the autonomy of the institutions would be guaranteed, and that the right to choose electoral processes for rectors would be decided by the academic community itself (MAZUI, 2023).

In this scenario, marked by speeches on the re-democratization of public bodies, the general objective of this work was to problematize the challenges for the advancement of autonomy and democratic management of universities, in light of the analysis of the bills being processed in congress, as well as the internal dynamics of their institutions, based on the representation and perception of university counselors.

To this end, a qualitative and quantitative research was chosen, whose data collection process followed two paths: bibliographical and documentary research and application of questionnaires to representatives of university councils. In the first stage, academic works and legislation that dealt with autonomy and democratic management in Brazil were reviewed. Next, we sought to analyze the bills sent and/or being processed, in the National Congress, between the years 2011 and 2022, and which aimed to regulate the topic in the context of Federal Higher Education Institutions. Finally, representations on university councils were analyzed, as well as the perception of its actors regarding democratic management and university autonomy.

There are several studies in the literature on democratic management that deal with participation as the main theme (DOURADO, 2000; CARDOSO, 2009; PAULA; SOUZA, 2018). However, Mendonça (2001) emphasizes that, contrary to what is idealized about coexistence between members, the mechanisms adopted in the academic community did not manage to put an end to the war between its segments.

In this sense, the work advances by problematizing the representation and perceptions of the various categories that form university democracy. In empirical terms, the work also contributes from a perspective on university councils, an object still little explored in the literature.

University councils correspond to the materialization of the aforementioned constitutional and legal provisions as they are deliberative collegial bodies whose composition has seventy percent of teachers and has the participation of the institutional and external community. These Councils are established by the Statute of each university, which already specifies their duties. In general, they are responsible for the main strategic and practical decisions relating to the political and administrative life of the institution, such as drafting the university's Statute and General Regulations and organizing the triple list for choosing its top leader, fulfilling the role of highest body of the collegiate bodies of universities.

Democratic management and autonomy in the university context

Andes (2010), which represents the majority of Federal Universities in the country, deliberates that democratic management is understood as the management of the university community itself through democratic collegiate bodies. This implies direct election of management positions with the participation of all sectors of the university community, and the equal representation of teachers, students, and staff in management bodies.

The existence of democracy in the University presupposes a process of learning and political struggle that envisions the possibility of creating channels for effective participation and learning of the democratic 'game' (DOURADO, 2000). Therefore, democratic management is based on breaking the perspective of power centralization, the presence of dialogue, and the creation of a locus for community participation in issues that are significant to the involved actors (CARDOSO, 2009).

The philosophical premise of this concept is close to the ontological foundation that there is no absolutization of ignorance or knowledge. Whoever knows everything can no longer know, as they would not inquire. Man, as a historical being, inserted in a permanent movement of search, constantly makes and remakes his knowledge (FREIRE, 1983).

In this sense, dialogue is understood as something that is part of the very historical nature of men, since it is the moment when they meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. Through dialogue, reflecting together on what they know and do not know, they can act critically to transform reality, producing forms of knowledge (FREIRE, 1986).

Based on these premises, participating in debates around a different world project is a right of the popular classes that cannot be purely "guided" or made dream by their leadership (FREIRE, 2000). Only from an authoritarian viewpoint, there is a belief in the natural incapacity of the masses. Unable to think correctly, to abstract, to know, to create, eternally "minor," the masses need to be "defended" (FREIRE, 1989).

In parallel with the university context, it is possible to infer similar arguments of minorities, such as the ideas that students, who are a transient category with possible short-term visions, should participate less (PIRES; LIMA, 2013); that administrative-technical staff are not qualified enough to participate in the managerial complexity, in addition to the exclusivity for actors who dominate technical criteria, since the entire mass is seen as ignorant (PAIVA, 2016).

In line, Carvalho (2011) underlines that the advance of neoliberal ideas in the university context tends to obscure the political dimension in technical aspects, transforming political-social issues into technical-instrumental ones. As a result, there is a segmentation

between a small group involved in the decision-making processes and the rest of the subjects summoned to execute what was previously planned by the group holding the decision-making power (TURÍBIO; SANTOS, 2017).

Another aspect in understanding democratic university management is its tensions with the concept of autonomy. For Law, autonomy is the effect of a limitation that the law imposes on itself. It means to regulate, with its own norms, situations intentionally not reached by the law, with a view to guaranteeing and protecting certain interests (RANIEIRI, 2018). However, as Brazilian Federal Universities are part of the State, when granting autonomy to an entity, it does so by self-limitation.

Therefore, the autonomy from which Universities historically benefited from is not an absolute right, and as such, it cannot contradict the higher purposes of Education. The principle of university autonomy is conditioned to the interest of the institution that holds it (University) and limited by the legal framework that granted it such condition (CURY, 1991).

In this public *ethos* that arises from the tension that constitutes the principle of autonomy, one can question: how can the University exercise university democracy when the State becomes authoritarian in a given society? Silva Junior and Sguissardi (2005) underline that, in cases like this, it is possible that university democracy does not have the strength of the public social pole and tends to yield to the centralizing legal order, as the recent history of the country has shown in recent years.

For this reason, the history of democratic construction in a nation tends to reflect in the internal practices of the most diverse institutions and social spaces, intertwining with elements specific to the culture of each of these spaces. In the context of the Brazilian University, the struggle for democracy is associated with social struggles that harbor clashes with the legacy of the culture of chairs and the strength of meritocratic thought (CALDAS; PICANÇO, 2019), as will be illustrated in the following topic.

Elitist and Authoritarian Legacies of Brazilian Universities

The history of university institutions in Brazil indicates that autonomy was marked by discontinuities and contradictions, often being denied through legal devices of control and containment. The first Federal University in the country, the University of Rio de Janeiro (URJ) in 1920, despite being constituted under the principle of didactic and administrative autonomy, had its rector and the directors of the units appointed by the President of the Republic, contradictorily (FÁVERO, 1999).

It is only in the first Statute of Brazilian Universities, in 1931, that the selection of rectors is specified, as a member of the higher teaching staff, among the names of triple lists prepared by the University Councils, by uninominal voting. However, university autonomy was limited to relative aspects centered on the administrative and didactic dimension (CUNHA, 1994).

The direct interference in the appointment of rectors and directors was marked again in the coup of Getúlio Dornelles Vargas who, when establishing the University of Brazil (UB), in 1937, besides not referring to the principle of autonomy, arranged that the rector and the directors of the educational establishments would be chosen by the president of the Republic, from among the respective professors. After the fall of the *Estado Novo*, Decree-Law No. 8,393, in 1945, grants administrative, financial, didactic, and disciplinary autonomy to the UB, and the rector is appointed by the President of the Republic, elected from a triple list by the University Council (FÁVERO, 2006).

However, with the military coup that began in 1964, the University Reform of 1968, even formally recognizing the principle of autonomy, was a democratic dissent, as the elected rectors were replaced by colonels, professors were dismissed, students were arrested, and the social sciences ended up being banned from universities (SAMPAIO, 1991).

Only with the slow opening of national democracy, and through the demands of university and social movements, the expansion of autonomy in universities materializes legally (PEREIRA, 2017). The inclusion of article 207 in the Constitution of 1988 guarantees autonomy to Universities, specifying that "they enjoy didactic-scientific, administrative, and financial and patrimonial management autonomy, and will obey the principle of indissociable nature among teaching, research, and extension" (BRASIL, 1988).

Despite this, article 207, at no time states that it enjoys political autonomy (CURY, 1991). Through this silence, it is possible to record "loopholes" for practices of interference in the choices of candidates, such as the choice of the least voted from the triple lists, as well as the appointment of *pro tempore* rectors and directors, as it occurred successively between the years 2018 and 2022.

If the restricted political autonomy interferes in the management of university democracy, there are still other limiting elements in Brazilian history, such as the tradition of chairs, which favored the formation of elites of the category of teachers in comparison to the other actors of the academic community (CUNHA, 1994). Fávero (2006) cites that the Statutes of 1831, which regulated the first higher education courses in Brazil, provided among other deliberations that the professors of the legal course would be contemplated with all the honors enjoyed by those of the University of Coimbra, leading the chairs for whose subjects they were deemed most apt. The privileges of the professor chair acquired a historical feature, presenting

the chair regime as the nucleus or *alma mater* of higher education institutions, and gaining strength with the creation of the first Brazilian Universities.

The examination of the minutes of the University Council of the URJ (1921-1937) and the University of Brazil (1937-1965) revealed how power was explicitly concentrated, until the 60s, in the hands of the professors. Analysis of the composition of the higher collegiate bodies and units showed a centralizing character, operating, most of the time, from top to bottom (FÁVERO, 2006).

Even when the chairs were abolished in the organization of higher education, through Law No. 5,540/68, the power centered on the teachers of the Universities over the other categories continued. According to Fávero (1996), this occurred due to the creation of the figure of the full professor – who maintained privileges, as well as organizational formats of departments, whose vast majority of professors were dispersed in individual relationships with holders of decision-making roles that could hardly be controlled and supervised by the base.

It is also worth highlighting the legal changes themselves, which little have altered the practices limiting the participation of other actors in the university environment. Law no. 9,394, of December 20, 1996, of National Education Guidelines and Bases, defined in Art. 56 that public institutions of higher education will obey the principle of democratic management, however it established that, in any case, teachers will occupy 70% of the seats in each collegial body and commission (BRASIL, 1996).

The majority presence of professors in the collegiate structures of Federal Universities, something that remains intact to this day, reinforces the legacy of academic centralism, which, consequently, hinders the advancement of more participatory and direct forms of democracy in the university environment.

Methodology

In order to problematize the possible challenges to the advancement of autonomy and democratic management of Federal Universities, a qualitative-quantitative research approach was chosen. The data collection process followed two paths: documentary and bibliographic research and the use of questionnaires. In the first stage, the aim was to analyze the bills sent and/or being processed in the National Congress, which aimed to regulate the theme in the context of Federal Higher Education Institutions.

In the second stage, documentary research was conducted in the regulations of university councils and field research to measure the representativeness of the three categories

of the academic community (teachers, administrative-technical staff, and students), as well as the gender breakdown within these categories.

Furthermore, during the field research, a structured questionnaire was used to understand the perception of university councilors from 10 Federal Universities in Minas Gerais regarding autonomy and democratic management. The choice of this research field is justified by the fact that Minas Gerais is the state in Brazil with the most Federal Universities installed and is a multifaceted state, which may allow an approximation with the various political conceptions existing in the country.

The online questionnaire, created using the Google Forms platform and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Vale do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri, under the number 39697420.8.0000.5108, was emailed to respondents on February 16, 2021, and remained open for responses until July 31 of the same year.

Among the various inquiries in the questionnaire, for this work, the degree of agreement of the respondents regarding the mandatory proportion of 70% of teachers in the composition of collegiate bodies was used, typifying the responses from each of the categories of the academic community.

Out of the 642 constituted councilors, 185 responses were obtained, which corresponds to 28.8% of the total. In Table 1, the proportion of councilors and respondents of the research is illustrated, considering the division between students, teachers, and administrative-technical staff.

Table 1: Proportion between the total number of councilors and the total number of respondents

UNIVERSITY	TOTAL OF RECONDENT COUNSELERS			
	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
UFU	7	25	5	37 (22%)
UFLA	3	18	3	24 (34%)
UFJF	0	11	1	12 (18%)
UNIFAL	0	14	10	24 (42%)
UFMG	0	8	3	11 (20%)
UFVJM	2	14	2	18 (34%)
UFSJ	1	18	4	23 (46%)
UNIFEI	3	13	1	17 (34%)
UFV	1	9	0	10 (23%)
UFOP	0	9	0	9 (32%)
TOTAL	17 (27%)	139 (28%)	29 (37%)	185 (28%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

The return can be considered satisfactory, as, according to Vieira et al. (2010), the questionnaires sent to respondents, respecting the minimum levels of confidence, achieve, on average, a 25% (twenty-five percent) return rate.

The quantitative data generated from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, utilizing percentages through comparative methods. The data cross-tabulations were performed with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics 20 software.

Next, the analysis of the documentary and bibliographic research is presented, with the analysis of the bills sent or in progress in the National Congress regarding the subject. Afterwards, the results of the field research on the perception of university councilors are presented.

Description and analysis of results

Analysis of Bills (2011-2022) on autonomy and democratic management

In the three terms following that of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, while the proposal for a university reform did not make it onto the governmental agenda, various bills emerged in the legislative sphere that were submitted for consideration by the House of Representatives, aiming to establish changes in aspects related to the autonomy and democratic management of Federal Universities.

In a documentary analysis of the 14 Bills which were processed in Congress between 2011 and 2022, it is possible to determine that the organizational forms of electoral processes and internal representation among the categories present clear divergences. While certain proposals aim to expand autonomy and democracy, either through direct elections without triple lists (PL 4204/2019, PL 348/2019, PL 3094/2019, PL 4998/2019), or by choosing the most voted from the triple list (PL 4994/2019, PL 4220/2019, PL 426/2021), by equity among the categories in electoral campaigns (PL 4104/2012, PL 3211/2019) and/or in university collegiate structures (PL 2699/2011), others seek to end direct elections, assigning power to the Senate (PL 824/2021), a committee (PL 2699/2011) and/or even to the exclusive choice of the President of the Republic (PL 1929/2019) (BRASIL, 2021).

Among these, we highlight Bill No. 2.699/11, since it was archived and unarchived twice, with the latest version being antagonistic to the original, and it is still in progress in the National Congress. In the initial version, authored by then Federal Congresswoman Sandra Rosado (Workers' Party), when addressing the process of choosing university leaders, it proposes, in its Art. 16, clause III, that in cases of prior consultation with the university community, equal weights will prevail among teachers, students, and administrative technical

staff. It also establishes that all collegiate bodies will be constituted by segments of the internal and external community, with equitable composition among the three university categories (BRASIL, 2011).

As justifications, the analogy of changes that occurred in other Federal Higher Education Institutions, such as the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology, which, from Law No. 11.892, of December 29, 2008, established parity in electoral contests and councils and the end of triple lists (BRASIL, 2011). Moreover, it emphasizes that if Universities are formed by the three categories, the effective functioning of the institution is not possible with disproportion among them.

How can it be conceived that, in the 21st century, the public university, which has always been seen as a locus of change, coexists with archaic legislation that diminishes the importance and representativeness of fundamental groups for the support of the university community (BRASIL, 2011, p.3).

It is observed in the report that the proposal advances in terms of democratic management with current legislation and even with the proposals of the previous university reform, as it emphasizes parity among the three university categories in electoral contests. Moreover, it places the final decision of the most voted candidate at the choice of the academic community, without the requirement of a triple list, consequently expanding the political autonomy of the institutions. Finally, the proposal indicates the parity in the formation of collegiate structures, breaking with the hegemony of power in the teaching category and presenting itself as the only one among the 14 projects, in the period, that proposed such a change.

However, the original proposal did not advance in the legislature, being archived in 2015 and unarchived two more times. In the latter, in 2019, from the rapporteur, Congressman Mitraud (NOVO Party), it underwent profound changes with a substitute text. In a documentary analysis, it is possible to note that the substitute requires the presence of 70% of teaching representation in University Councils, including in Federal Institutes that established parity in the electoral campaigns and internal councils (BRASIL, 2021).

Regarding the electoral campaign, it restores the triple list, with the choice of any of the names under the power of the President of the Republic and eliminates consultations through direct voting. The bill places the choice of candidates at the end of a Search Committee, composed of only 05 titular members and 05 alternates. Its formation is composed of 03 members, external to the institution, being 01 from Capes,

01 from CNPq and 01 from the Civil Society, and two internal positions composed of teachers (BRASIL, 2021).

Thus, it becomes evident that the Bill places greater weight on actors external to the institution, infringing on university autonomy twice, since the final decision will be made by the President of the Republic, and also completely excludes the participation of administrative technicians and students in the election.

the most prepared to "win" are the professors with political access, trajectory, and knowledge, and, as a consequence, they will manage based on a political model: with the goal of obtaining political gains and not institutional ones (BRASIL, 2021, p.7).

However, the justification lacks any empirical foundation that could indicate that the majority of rectors affiliated with political parties will consequently have their management forms less committed to institutional interests. Moreover, the argument incurs a contradiction: since the triple list is mandatory, wouldn't the President of the Republic, affiliated with a particular party, make the final choice? Therefore, wouldn't he also be subject to political gains to the detriment of institutional ones?

These elements further reinforce Carvalho's (2011) criticism of neoliberal ideas in the university context, as it tends to obscure the political dimension in technical aspects, transforming political-social issues into technical-instrumental ones.

Having made these considerations, the 14 Bills, although still in progress in Congress, have not advanced to the point of being considered for voting, which may indicate a possible "political disinterest" and/or even difficulties in forming majorities for their approval. Nevertheless, the differences evidenced between the bills indicate that the visions of democracy and autonomy are often seen as antagonistic, and depending on the political context, they may lead to setbacks in aspects already achieved.

In an ideal of advancing democratic management, in addition to political articulations, it is also necessary to deal with the internal resistances that cross the university categories, as will be presented next, based on data from an investigation with university councilors.

Counselors' conception of democratic management and autonomy

During the field research with the Universities of Minas Gerais, it was recorded, through investigations in the Statutes, Regulations, and Minutes, that the total number of members of the University Councils totaled 642 vacancies, in the universe of the ten

Universities participating in the research. When establishing an analysis of the distribution by categories, it is observed that the effective representation of students and administrative technicians, compared to the total number of council members, was only 10% and 12%, respectively. Thus, the representation of external members, compared to the total number of members constituted, corresponded to approximately 1% of the total constituted, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Proportion referring to the members constituted in each University

UNIVERSITY	TOTAL OF MEMBERS CONSTITUTED				(N)
	STUDEN TS	TEACHE RS	TECHNIC IANS	EXTERN AL	
UFU	23 (13%)	125 (74%)	23 (13%)	0 (0%)	171 (100%)
UFLA	5 (7%)	58 (82%)	7 (10%)	1 (1%)	71 (100%)
UFJF	8 (12%)	47 (72%)	10 (15%)	3 (1%)	65 (100%)
UNIFAL	5 (9%)	44 (77%)	8 (14%)	0 (0%)	57 (100%)
UFMG	0 (0%)	47 (87%)	7 (13%)	0 (0%)	54 (100%)
UFVJM	6 (11%)	38 (72%)	8 (15%)	1 (2%)	53 (100%)
UFSJ	5 (10%)	38 (76%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	50 (100%)
UNIFEI	5 (10%)	39 (78%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	50 (100%)
UFV	5 (12%)	32 (74%)	5 (12%)	1 (2%)	43 (100%)
UFOP	2 (7%)	24 (85%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	28 (100%)
TOTAL	64 (10%)	492 (77%)	78 (12%)	8 (1%)	642 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

It is noted that the current legislation establishes that the collegiate bodies of Federal Universities must be composed of at least 70% of teachers, which according to Pereira et al. (2022), already indicates the elitist and hierarchical vision of the Public University.

However, in the data found, it is observed that the accumulated number of positions in the respective Universities remained higher than required, with an average of 77% of the seats for this category. In addition, in all 10 Universities investigated, the percentage remained above the minimum established by law, with emphasis on the cases of UFLA, UFMG, and UFOP, whose numbers showed more than 80% representation of teachers (TABLE 02).

The predominance of this category, on the other hand, is accompanied by the low representation of the others in the university context. The case of UFMG is observed, which at the time of the consultation did not have students represented, and in UFOP with only 4% of technicians in the participation of the councils. As for the cases of UFU, UNIFAL, and UFMG, the presence of external members was not even registered (TABLE 02), confronting

the guidelines of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, which establishes the guarantee of participation of segments of the institutional, local, and regional community in university management (BRASIL, 1996).

The findings indicate that the principle of democratic management, which deals with breaking the perspective of power centralization, according to Cardoso (2009), is not present. Furthermore, this concentration of the teaching category in the highest body of the university institution reinforces Fávero's (2006) inference that even when abolished, the culture of chairs presents continuities, due to the maintenance of privileges for teachers.

Another representative limitation in the highest body of higher education institutions is the gender breakdown. It was observed, through documentary research in the minutes of the councils, that out of the universe of 642 seats, 64% are male and 36% are female, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender of College Counselors

GENDER	TOTAL OF MEMBERS CONSTITUTED				(N)
	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	EXTERNAL	
Male	32 (50%)	332 (67%)	43 (55%)	7 (88%)	414 (64%)
Female	32 (50%)	160 (33%)	35 (45%)	1 (12%)	228 (36%)
No answer	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	64	492	78	8	642

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

It is noted that, while the proportion of male and female students is equivalent in the categories of students and administrative technicians (with a higher percentage of women), among teachers, who represent the largest universe of counselors, the percentages reach 67 % of men.

It is important to consider that the university space, in itself, already represents a disproportion in relation to the Brazilian female population. According to data from the Higher Education Census of the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2020), among students, the majority are already female, with 59% of total enrollments and Administrative Technicians in Education, Administrative technicians, with 54%. However, in the areas with the greatest social prestige, the teaching category, this percentage reduces to 47%. The numbers become

even smaller in the universe of Federal Universities in Minas Gerais, with 42% of female professors (TABLE, 04).

Table 4: Gender of Higher Education professionals

UF	Total Teachers		Total Technicians		Total Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Brazil	212.614 (53%)	186.814 (47%)	173.718 (46%)	205.419 (54%)	382.516 (41%)	551.521 (59%)
Minas Gerais	24.512 (55%)	20.092 (45%)	21.267 (45%)	25.495 (55%)	40.581 (42%)	56.920 (58%)
Federal Universities of MG	10.310 (58%)	7.514 (42%)	9.317 (50%)	9.391 (50%)	10.058 (45%)	12.241 (55%)

Source: Higher Education Census (INEP, 2020).

From these data, it is possible to infer that the structural gender problems that permeate the country's political-social history also manifest themselves in the underrepresentation of women in the most powerful structures, as recorded in the highest university councils. This represents what Caldas and Picanço (2019) point out, that the contradictions experienced by democratic construction in a nation tend to also manifest themselves in the internal practices of the most diverse institutions and social spaces.

Having made considerations about the general composition of vacancies in the University Councils of Minas Gerais, the actors who participated in the research were questioned about the degree of agreement regarding the mandatory proportion of 70% of professors in the composition of higher collegiate bodies. The survey data indicated that, in almost all institutions, counselors were in favor of the disproportionate system (Table 05).

Table 05: Degree of agreement regarding the mandatory proportion of 70% of teachers in the composition of higher collegiate bodies of Federal Universities by University

UNIVERSITY	Completely Agrees	Partially Agrees	Totally Disagrees	Partially Disagrees	Total
UFU	13 (35%)	14 (38%)	6 (16%)	4 (11%)	37 (100%)
UFLA	9 (37,5%)	8 (33%)	4 (17%)	3 (12,5%)	24 (100%)
UFJF	6 (50%)	5 (42%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%)
UNIFAL	7 (29%)	4 (17%)	10 (42%)	3 (12%)	24 (100%)
UFMG	3 (27%)	5 (46%)	3 (27%)	0 (0%)	11 (100%)
UFVJM	3 (17%)	9 (50%)	2 (11%)	4 (22%)	18 (100%)
UFSJ	10 (43%)	6 (26%)	7 (31%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)
UNIFEI	7 (41%)	3 (18%)	2 (12%)	5 (29%)	17 (100%)
UFV	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
UFOP	4 (44%)	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	1 (12%)	9 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

It is possible to note that the exception was UNIFAL, where 52% of respondents disagreed with the collegiate composition made up mostly of teachers. However, in cases such as UFV, UFMG, UFLA and UFU, the percentages of agreement exceeded 70%, and in some cases, such as UFOP and UFJF, more than 80% agreement (TABLE 05).

To better understand the particularities that affect the perception among counselors, the answers to the respective question were subdivided by respondent profiles, thus indicating that the divergences on the topic are more in relation to the categories, as seen in Table 06.

Table 06: Degree of agreement between the categories in relation to the mandatory proportion of 70% of teachers in the composition of the higher collegiate bodies of Federal Universities

	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Completely Agrees	1 (6%)	63 (45%)	1 (4%)	65 (35%)
Partially Agrees	4 (24%)	57 (41%)	1 (4%)	62 (34%)
Completely Disagrees	5 (29%)	9 (6%)	23 (78%)	37 (20%)
Partially Disagrees	7 (41%)	10 (8%)	4 (14%)	21 (11%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

It can be seen from what is presented that 86% of teachers support the idea of a majority proportion of their category on councils. On the other hand, 70% of students and 93% of administrative technicians disagreed with the current structure, which indicates a clear tension between categories in the university space.

In this sense, we understand that participation in a social institution such as the Public University takes into account existing political interests, being interested in, and marked by, conflicts and projects in dispute (CARVALHO, 2011). However, there are serious limitations to the advances of university democracy, since divergences are caused, fundamentally, by asymmetries of power and established by legal aspects that hierarchize the political space between university categories.

Not surprisingly, Santos (2019) maintains that the materialization of legal aspects that aim to maintain the dominance of the teaching class in the decision-making process within the University, tends to weaken the democratization process and the shared management of Federal Higher Education Institutions. This may occur, as they imply a division between classes or categories of community components, at the cost of struggles that could be collective and the strengthening of a university identity, especially at times when collective actions are relevant for the approval of legal changes.

Conclusions

Currently, in the face of a deeply conservative National Congress aligned with private interests, especially those of the financial market, maintaining coherence with the discourse of the re-democratization of public administration will depend on the government's negotiation skills, supported by organized popular power, which is circumscribed in the streets. Without the

strength of mobilization of categories and the support of popular struggle, it is unlikely that congressmen and senators will turn to the satisfaction of the most urgent demands for citizenship and democracy. Moreover, the defense for the re-democratization of public space and, consequently, of Federal Universities cannot be limited to respecting the choice of the most voted from the triple lists, since the absence of legal changes leaves them at the mercy of governmental interpretations that harm political autonomy, as occurred between 2018 and 2022.

In this sense, it became relevant to deal with the bills that are processed in Congress. Through a documentary investigation between 2011 and 2022, it was possible to identify the presence of 14 projects that, although not voted on, may indicate advances or setbacks for autonomy and democratic management, if some of their propositions are approved. For this, current times demand articulations, with the intention of forming a social and governmental base of support for university institutions, especially public ones.

On this point, in the field research with councilors from 10 universities in Minas Gerais, it became evident that the low representativity of student, administrative-technical categories, and women is aggravated by the agreement of teachers with the centralization of power asymmetries, becoming limitations for university unity. This phenomenon faithfully reproduces what happens in Brazilian society when considering class differences, projects, and interests of specific economic groups. A government of popular representation, with progressive ideas of equity and justice, will suffer the setbacks of a deeply unequal, divided society, in which part of the population, including the poorest, are manipulated by hatred and misinformation.

In this complex scenario, how do we overcome the contradictions that divide us, disorganize us, and weaken us? Therefore, if current times indicate, in discourse, that democratic winds are more favorable to the university context than the last years (2018-2022), the research data shows that there is still much to be overcome for its effectiveness to advance in terms of changes in legislation.

Finally, and as limitations of the present work, it is understood that, in discussing the theme of democratic management, a focus was established on electoral and collegiate dimensions. However, it is understood that these are just some of the issues that permeate the theme, since democracy is not limited to the formal question but also to the subjective and material aspects of the involved actors. Thus, it is understood that the advancement of democratic management should be accompanied by qualitative contributions in the participation of subjects. In the case of councilors, this also involves the wide circulation of information, consultation of their bases, rotation among representatives, elements that are often critical in the university context.

No less important are the objective dimensions, whose material conditions are central to effective participation. In this logic, how can a student, or even a staff member of the institution, who needs to supplement their income with extra activities, have conditions to act in the collegiate bodies, which demand time and dedication from their actors? It is in this sense and concluding that we share the Freirean reading that discussing democracy in a capitalist context, marked by deep inequalities, is always an antinomy. However, if to accomplish the impossible tomorrow it is necessary to create conditions from the possible of today (FREIRE, 2000), one path is to try to advance, even if partially, in the autonomy and formal democracy of Federal Universities.

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