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UNIVERSITY DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT: NEW FRACTURES, OLD WOUNDS¹

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ABSTRACT: In recent years, university democracy has joined the agenda of national debates, in view of successive interventions in the electoral systems of federal institutions of higher education. It is estimated that 45% of federal universities suffered some type of interference in the choice of deans, in addition to legal changes in their decision-making processes. In this scenario, marked by the weakening of democratic principles, the present paper sought to analyze the impacts of federal interference, in the democratic management practices of federal universities, between the years 2018 and 2022. As a methodological approach, the unit of analysis focused on 11 universities in minas gerais, complemented by document research and questionnaires with 167 members of university councils. The results showed that the interventions, via provisional measures and technical notes, revoked institutionalized democratic practices, such as parity in internal voting at universities. On the other hand, even though the majority of university counselors refuted federal discretion in choosing deans, discourses of faculty supremacy emerged when agreeing with the changes that reduced the participation of students and administrative technicians in electoral processes. The conclusions point to the need to debate the limits of recent interference, as well as the internal contradictions that historically cross university practices, in the search for more democratic paths.

Keywords: University Council. Democratic management. Federal Universities.

GESTÃO DEMOCRÁTICA UNIVERSITÁRIA: NOVAS FRATURAS, VELHAS FERIDAS

RESUMO: Nos últimos anos, a democracia universitária entrou na agenda dos debates nacionais, em vista das sucessivas intervenções nos sistemas eleitorais das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior.

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Estima-se que 45% das universidades federais sofreram algum tipo de ingerência na escolha dos reitores, além de modificações legais em seus processos decisórios. Nesse cenário, marcado pelo enfraquecimento de princípios democráticos, o presente artigo teve por objetivo analisar os impactos das ingerências federais nas práticas de gestão democráticas das universidades federais, entre os anos de 2018 e 2022. Enquanto recorte metodológico, recorreu-se à unidade de análise de 11 universidades mineiras, acompanhadas de pesquisas documentais e questionários com 167 membros de conselhos universitários. Os resultados apontaram que as intervenções, via medidas provisórias e notas técnicas, revogaram práticas democráticas institucionalizadas, como a paridades nas votações internas em universidades. Por outro lado, ainda que a maioria dos conselheiros universitários refutassem a discricionariedade federal para a escolha dos reitores, os discursos da supremacia docente emergiram quando da concordância com as mudanças que reduziram a participação dos discentes e servidores técnico-administrativos nos processos eleitorais. As conclusões apontam para a necessidade de se debater os limites das interferências recentes como também as contradições internas que atravessam historicamente as práticas das universidades, na busca por caminhos mais democráticos.

Palavras-chave: Conselhos Universitários. Gestão Democrática. Universidades Federais.

GESTIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA UNIVERSITARIA: NUEVAS FRACTURAS, VIEJAS HERIDAS

RESUMEN: En los últimos años, la democracia universitaria ha entrado en la agenda de los debates nacionales, en vista de las sucesivas intervenciones en los sistemas electorales de las Instituciones Federales de Educación Superior. Se estima que el 45% de las universidades federales sufrió algún tipo de injerencia en la elección de rectores, además de cambios legales en sus procesos de decisión. En ese escenario, marcado por el debilitamiento de los principios democráticos, el presente artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar los impactos de la injerencia federal, en las prácticas de gestión democrática de las universidades federales, entre los años de 2018 y 2022, acompañado de investigación documental y cuestionarios con 167 miembros de consejerías universitarias. Los resultados mostraron que las intervenciones, a través de medidas provisionales y notas técnicas, revocaron prácticas democráticas institucionalizadas, como la paridad en el voto interno en las universidades. Por otro lado, mismo que la mayoría de los consejeros universitarios refutara la discrecionalidad federal en la elección de los rectores, surgieron discursos de supremacía del cuerpo docente al estar de acuerdo con los cambios que redujeron la participación de estudiantes y técnicos administrativos en los procesos electorales. Las conclusiones apuntan a la necesidad de debatir los límites de la injerencia reciente, así como las contradicciones internas que atraviesan históricamente las prácticas universitarias, en la búsqueda de caminos más democráticos.

Palabras clave: Consejo Universitario. Gestión democrática. Universidades Federales.

INTRODUCTION

Those who wish to appoint the dean should secure fifty-eight million votes! (ESTADÃO, 2020)

University management has long suffered from historical interference and autocratic policies in its autonomy, since the first higher education institutions in Brazil (MARTINS et al., 2021). However, since 2018, there have been successive changes in the criteria for choosing the first names on the triple lists, in addition to legal changes that have affected the democratic dynamics of the institutions.

These actions are based on non-participatory arguments, as indicated in the sentence uttered in the preamble by Federal Congressman Bibó Nunes – PSL/RS, in September 2020, to justify the choice of the candidate with the fewest votes in the election of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) for Rector.

In a similar way, then-President Jair Messias Bolsonaro stated that those chosen from the triple could have only gotten a single vote in the election, as long as they had no ties to left-wing parties: “there are only names from the PT, PCdoB and PSOL and there is no way around it! That became their land. Now, whoever can escape, logically, can have only one vote in the election, we are opting on this matter” (URIBE, 2019, p.1).

If between 1995 and 2017 there was only one episode of interference in the selection of the triple list for rector, from 2018 onwards there were more than twenty appointments of rectors who were not among the most voted for in each institution. Added to this are the changes that reduced the participation of student categories, administrative technicians and the external community in the weight of votes for electoral contests.

In 2019, the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro issued Provisional Measure (MP) No. 914, of December 24, 2019, which changed some legal provisions regarding the election of rectors, making consultation with the university community mandatory and linking the triple list to the result of the consultation (BRASIL, 2019).

Subsequently, there was an attempt to take advantage of the circumstances imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic to enact Provisional Measure 979, of June 9, 2020. The aim was to suspend consultations within educational institutions and delegate to the Ministry of Education the task of appointing rectors and even *pro-tempore* vice-rectors for universities during the pandemic. The provisional measure did not come into effect, as it was ‘returned’ by the Speaker of the House of Representatives to the executive branch after mobilization by education entities (PEREIRA et al., 2022).

In this scenario, marked by the weakening of democratic principles, this article aimed to analyze the impacts of federal interference in the democratic management practices of federal universities between 2018 and 2022.

To this end, an analysis of 11 universities in Minas Gerais was used². The choice of this field of research is justified by the fact that Minas Gerais is the Brazilian state with the most Federal Universities and because it is a multifaceted state, which can consent for an approximation with the various political conceptions that exist in the country.

As for the university staff interviewed, the actors of the University Councils were used, since they correspond to the materialization of the aforementioned constitutional and legal provisions, as they are deliberative collegiate bodies, whose composition, in theory, includes the participation of the institutional and external community.

In addition, these Councils are the highest collegiate bodies of the Federal Universities. They are established by the Statute of each university, which already specifies their attributions. In general, they are in charge of the main strategic and practical decisions related to the political and administrative ongoing\ of the institution, such as, for example, drafting the Statute and the General Regulations of the university and organizing the list of three names for choosing its top leader.

Regarding contributions to the area, despite the vast literature in the field of democratic management in the educational context, there are still few studies that analyze the ways in which higher

² It is worth noting that there are eleven Federal Universities installed in Minas Gerais, namely: Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Federal University of Lavras (UFLA), Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP), Federal University of São João del Rei (UFSJ), Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU), Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), Federal University of Jequitinhonha and Mucuri Valleys (UFVJM), Federal University of Alfenas (UNIFAL) and Federal University of Itajubá (UNIFEI).

education institutions organize democratic processes in different instances and sectors (SCHMITZ JUNIOR, 2019), with exceptions for those that explore the dynamics of functioning and representation in university councils (GONZALEZ; CONTRERAS, 2021; SILVEIRA, 2020), power struggles and internal elections in higher education (MICHEREFF JUNIOR, 2017; CARVALHO, 2011), as well as the limited performance of technical-administrative staff (SANTOS, 2019; DENICOLI, 2016) and students (CARVALHO, 2022; FERRARO, 2011) in relation to teachers in the institution's participation. Regarding studies that deal with interference in federal universities, investigations that explore the impacts of the State and/or market logic on financial autonomy (SILVA, CRUBELLATE, 2022; BURNES; WEND; TODNEM, 2014), didactic-scientific autonomy (MAS, 2018) and administrative autonomy (ATAIRO, LUQUES, 2023; ACOSTA SILVA, 2022) stand out, indicating, however, a lack of research.

AUTONOMY AND DEMOCRATIC UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

The etymology of *universitas* traces back to the concept of association or professional corporation, which began to represent, from the 8th century onward, organized groups of masters and students. These groups operated in defined territories, focusing on the study of liberal arts, law, medicine, and theology (NUNES, 1979).

The earliest universities sought intellectual independence, including administrative autonomy, from the political and religious authorities of the time. They possessed rights such as recruiting members, establishing control systems, organizing activities, and granting statutes (FERRARO, 2011).

According to Dal Ri (1997), even acknowledging the differences in the political and social statutes of the pioneering universities, it can be inferred that they were founded with ideals of autonomy and embryonic democratic elements in their organizational practices.

However, autonomy is not absolute. It is shaped by circumstances and is historically determined (GADOTTI, 1992). For public universities, which are funded by external resources, autonomy does not imply complete independence (CARDOSO, 2009).

University autonomy is conditional upon the institution's interests and is limited by the legal framework that grants it such status. It is a constitutional provision alongside others and, therefore, cannot contradict the broader purposes of education (GARMUS, 2021).

Thus, it is possible to distinguish the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty. Autonomy involves creating internal regulations and self-governance (*ad intra*), but its limits are defined by higher laws, such as the political framework of the state. Sovereignty, on the other hand, is the external public right of a people to self-determination and self-governance (CURY, 1991).

Tensions arise at the intersection of autonomy and sovereignty, underpinning the principles of university democracy. While the university must comply with the state's legal framework, it simultaneously subjects the state to public societal norms, that is, to the public *ethos*. However, if the state becomes authoritarian, university democracy may weaken, with a tendency to succumb to a centralizing legal order (SILVA JUNIOR & SGUISSARDI, 2005). This makes university autonomy a prerequisite for university democracy.

The concept of democratic management is open to interpretation, depending on the assumptions about human ontology and organizational practices. Broadly, democratic management can be defined as governance that expresses the power of the people through the participation of those

involved. In the university context, the extent of participation in decision-making varies (PINHEIRO et al., 2020).

Elitist views of democracy argue that the masses are "ignorant" and should therefore limit their involvement to electing representatives who will govern society. In contrast, radical democracy emphasizes active public participation in electing representatives and making societal decisions (WERLE, 2013).

Aligned with radical democracy, Freire (1991) asserts that effective participation is inherent to human beings striving to become more fully realized. No one knows everything, and no one is entirely ignorant. Moreover, the theory of knowledge itself is not an individual phenomenon but occurs through dialogic relationships between cognizant subjects reflecting on knowable objectives.

Bordenave (1983) adds that participation is a skill that can be learned and improved, as no one is born knowing how to participate. Opportunities to practice participation foster critical consciousness, empower claims, and prepare individuals to acquire greater societal power.

Ariosi and Dal Ri (2004) emphasize that collective decision-making requires dialogue and the creation of spaces for community participation in significant matters. For governance to be truly democratic, it must be shared, allowing all segments to partake in decision-making with delegated authority. Participating in decisions is not a spectator's act of mere observation but an engaged action (LIMA, 2000).

In the university context, democratic management concepts not only deepen civic awareness but also enhance decision-making dynamics within educational organizations. Research by Burnes, Wend, and Todnem (2014) on collective decision-making in European universities found improvements in trust, job satisfaction, and commitment to decisions.

Similarly, Gonzalez and Contreras (2021) highlight the importance of diverse collegiate structures in Latin American universities, emphasizing gender representation for more inclusive and representative decision-making compared to traditionally homogenous groups.

Conversely, a study by Larrauri et al. (2019) in Spanish universities noted that the erosion of collegiality led to diminished professional satisfaction among faculty and poorer work quality assessments.

In Brazil, Denicoli (2016) found that the management model at the Federal University of Tocantins often ignored participatory elements, leading to staff disconnection and weakening the institution's social responsibilities.

To better understand the organizational structures that enable or limit participation and autonomy in federal higher education institutions, it is essential to revisit their historical institutionalization, as discussed in the following section.

ADVANCES AND BREAKS IN THE DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES

The first Latin American universities emerged three centuries before Brazilian institutions. Here in Brazil, higher education was only established with the arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808, marked by a centralized structure. Organizationally, Cunha (1994) notes that from Pombal to Dom João VI, course management was conducted by provincial governors, and professors had to be accredited by

Lisbon's Royal Censorship Board (Real Mesa Censória). Even after Brazil's independence, institutional autonomy was minimal, as universities served to meet the government's centralizing objectives.

Evidence of this centralization is found in the university project proposed by Homem de Mello in 1881, which indicated its centralizing nature by subordinating universities entirely to a higher council, itself completely dependent on the Minister of the Empire. This council would comprise directors of faculties and schools affiliated with the university, a federal government delegate, a municipal delegate, and alumni, but it excluded the participation of students and administrative staff in democratic management (SAMPAIO, 1991).

Another unique aspect of the Brazilian system was the cathedra regime (professorial chair system), created by Prince João upon his arrival in Brazil and maintained until 1968. While the cathedra system minimized external pressures on academic matters, it also perpetuated the dominance of individuals tied to local oligarchies, without fostering intellectual debate. The privileges of cathedric professors were a historical inheritance, embodying the core of higher education (*alma mater*) (FÁVERO, 2006).

According to Vlasman and Castro (1985), during this period, the power of cathedric professors went unchallenged, as they were akin to feudal lords ruling their knowledge domains, shared only with their disciples. Relations among the cathedras reflected a type of corporatism where each professor controlled their specialized "fiefdom," legitimizing the fiefdoms of their peers.

While the cultural elements of the cathedras were incorporated into the first state-created universities, the most politically and democratically liberal period in Brazil saw initial proposals aimed at granting greater autonomy to federal universities. Influenced by the ideals of the Córdoba University Reform in 1918, student participation began to emerge in calls for increased democracy in university management throughout much of Latin America.

These proposals sought to establish university management rules formulated and enforced by the university community. However, the first Statute of Brazilian Universities in 1931 failed to encompass the ideals of autonomy and democratization. Regarding the election of rectors, the Statute did not require that they be cathedric professors but stipulated they must be members of higher education teaching staff, selected from a tripartite list (*lista tríptica*) prepared by university councils via single-member voting (CUNHA, 1994).

After the *Estado Novo* period in 1945, universities gained administrative, financial, and disciplinary autonomy through Decree No. 8,393/45. Rectors were once again chosen by the President of the Republic from a tripartite list, and unit directors were appointed by the rector with prior presidential approval.

In December 1961, the creation of the University of Brasília presented the most advanced framework for student participation and university autonomy within the limits of the prevailing legislation. Among its propositions, the university eliminated *cátedras*, and formal power was divided among normative, coordinating, and directive bodies (FÁVERO, 2006).

These initiatives, however, were interrupted by the 1964 Military Coup. The 1968 University Reform, while recognizing university autonomy and abolishing the cathedra system, did not advance democratic management. Elected rectors were replaced by military colonels, professors were dismissed, students were imprisoned, and social sciences were marginalized (SAMPAIO, 1991).

Only with the gradual opening of Brazil's democracy was the debate on democratic management revisited in the university context. By the late 1970s, administrative staff began to organize politically to challenge the concentration of power held by faculty (CARVALHO, 2011).

In this same context, some universities independently adopted informal consultations for rectors, using parity voting. Notable examples include the Federal University of Santa Catarina in 1983 and the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco in 1990, which were the first to consult their university communities, electing rectors with equal voting weights for faculty, students, and administrative staff (MICHEREFF JUNIOR, 2017).

Advancements in demands for greater university autonomy and democracy were reflected, albeit sporadically, in the 1988 Federal Constitution. For the first time, the term "democratic management" appeared in legislation. Article 206, Clause VI, states that public education must be conducted based on the principle of democratic management, as defined by law (BRASIL, 1988). Despite this achievement, the law did not specify what "democratic management" entails. While its broad nature allowed institutions to develop their own democratic practices, it also left room for participation to be limited to representative democracy.

Under this representative and hierarchical philosophy, Law No. 9,394 of December 20, 1996 (Law of National Education Guidelines and Frameworks), stipulated in Article 56 that public higher education institutions must adhere to democratic management principles. However, in all cases, faculty would occupy 70% of the seats in collegiate bodies and committees, including those responsible for statutory and regulatory changes, as well as leadership selection (BRASIL, 1996).

The legal emphasis on faculty power was justified by meritocratic logic and academic hierarchy. In a speech, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso explained that these changes were crucial for redefining university autonomy, emphasizing the necessity of academic hierarchy. He stated, "The hierarchy of knowledge must exist in the university. Those who know, know; those who don't, must adjust" (FRANÇA, 1995, p.1).

The Fernando Henrique Cardoso administrations were marked by setbacks in the promising gains of parity voting in universities. Conversely, the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Vana Rousseff did not advance democratic management and university autonomy but also did not create significant barriers.

Between 2003 and 2016, of the 54 federal universities in Brazil at the time, 37 (68%) adopted parity voting in elections, reducing the weight of faculty votes from 70%. The Federal University of the Southern Frontier (UFFS) notably included regional community members in its electoral process (MICHEREFF JUNIOR, 2017).

However, the situation worsened under the administrations of Michel Temer (2016–2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2018–2022). By revoking informal consultations and reinstating the 70% voting weight for faculty, these governments increased interference in rector selection and intensified long-standing power conflicts between faculty and administrative staff.

It is essential to note, however, that while these legal regressions are emblematic in Brazil, they are not an isolated phenomenon. Internationally, especially in North America and Europe, institutional pressures have altered university structures, undermining their democratic aspects.

As Burnes, Wend, and Todnem (2014) illustrate, in the 1990s, universities, under cost-reduction demands and pressure for efficiency-oriented organizational structures, began replacing collegiate systems with centralized power models.

Amid arguments that participatory university structures hindered swift decision-making, collegial spaces were controlled, consolidating university authorities' power (ATAIRO; LUQUES, 2023).

This trend led to a decline in collegiality in universities across France, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States, and Oceania (AMARAL; TAVARES; SANTOS, 2013). In the U.S. and South Africa, for instance, rectors began to be appointed by external actors rather than elected, reflecting state and market influences on these institutions' autonomy (MCKENNA, 2020; ATAIRO; LUQUES, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the impacts of federal interferences on the democratic management practices of federal universities, a quantitative-qualitative multiple-case study was adopted. The choice of this methodology is justified by the detailed description of the analyzed context, which enables reflections based on connections to prior knowledge (STAKE, 2008).

The data collection process followed two paths: document research and the use of questionnaires. Documents addressing laws, statutes, and internal regulations of universities in Minas Gerais between 2018 and 2022 were reviewed. Documentary research aligns with the objectives of this study, as it draws on historical analysis to understand events within organizations (SÁ-SILVA et al., 2009).

As for the questionnaires, they were chosen for their potential to explore themes, describe processes, and understand the perspectives of the subjects involved (DUARTE; BARROS, 2006). The research project and questionnaire were approved by the Ethics in Research Committee under number 39697420.8.0000.5108.

The data analyzed was partially obtained from a field study that used a questionnaire comprising 57 questions, of which 54 were objective and 3 were subjective. The online questionnaire, created using *Google Forms*, was sent to respondents via email between February 16, 2021, and March 30, 2021, remaining open for responses until July 31 of the same year.

Through a census sent to all council members of universities in Minas Gerais (a total of 642 members), 185 responses were received, corresponding to 28.8% of the total, as detailed in Table 1. This response rate is considered satisfactory, as questionnaires sent to respondents, when meeting minimum confidence levels, achieve an average return rate of 25% (VIEIRA et al., 2010).

Table 1 - Proportion between the Total Number of Council Members and Respondents³

UNIVERSITY	TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDING ADVISORS			
	STUDENTS	FACULTY	ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF	TOTAL (%)
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%)

³ UFTM was the only University that participated only in documentary research, as its Research Ethics Committee required a new assessment of the project by its own committee, which made data collection unfeasible..

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

Quantitative data from the research were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on percentage and frequency distributions. Data was tabulated with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

For open-ended questions, thematic analysis was employed, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method aims to understand the implicit meanings conveyed in narratives. The data obtained were grouped into categories based on the university and/or the representation segment of the respondent (student, faculty, or administrative staff). These categories were derived from variables related to opinions on federal interferences in universities and their impact on the dynamics of democratic management.

As analytical categories, the research findings were divided into four main themes. First, through document research, results were compiled regarding the legal impacts of interferences and ruptures in the universities of Minas Gerais. Second, the profile of university council members was established to analyze the representativeness of members and their views on democratic management and autonomy. Third, council members' perceptions of federal interference in the tripartite lists were categorized. Finally, the data allowed for the examination of tensions and contradictions in council members' opinions on the parity voting system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impacts of Federal Interferences and Legal Changes in Universities Between 2018 and 2022

One of the first interferences in the democratic management of universities occurred with Technical Note No. 400/2018, issued on December 10, 2018. This note mandated that any electoral consultation for rectors must follow the 70% rule, regardless of whether the consultation was informal or formal. Thus, parity voting or any system in which the weight of faculty votes differed from 70% would be deemed illegal and annulled, along with all resulting actions (MEC, 2018).

This technical note was justified by the argument that Law No. 5,540/1968 and Decree No. 1,916/1996 did not distinguish between formal and informal consultations with the community, meaning all consultation procedures must adhere to the previously established rules (MEC, 2018).

As a result, Technical Note No. 437/2011 was annulled. The earlier note had clarified that informal consultations conducted by associations representing university members did not violate regulations and could adhere to parity or other voting criteria (MEC, 2011).

In the context of universities in Minas Gerais, Technical Note No. 400/2018 marked a regression in electoral equity. Before its implementation, seven out of the eleven universities in Minas Gerais (63%) employed parity practices. Following this legal interference, all universities were compelled to substantially reduce the participation of students and administrative staff in the election of rectors, as detailed in Table 02.

Table 02 – Electoral system of universities before and after Technical Note no. 400/2018

UNIVERSITY	DEAN ELECTION MODEL	
	Before the Technical Note n.400/2018	After the Technical Note n.400/2018
UFU	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UFLA	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UFJF	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UNIFAL	70/15/15	70/15/15
UFMG	70/15/15	70/15/15
UFVJM	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UFSJ	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UNIFEI	70/15/15	70/15/15
UFV	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UFOP	<i>Parity</i>	70/15/15
UFTM	70/15/15	70/15/15

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

The phenomenon undermines traditional ideas of administrative autonomy, which have been present since the Córdoba Reform. This reform advocates for the right of Latin American universities to elect their own authorities without external interference and to govern the institution through their own decision-making bodies (CASTILLO; CONTRERAS, 2021).

Furthermore, according to Santos (2019), such actions enhance the dominance of the faculty in decision-making processes within the university, thereby intensifying existing tensions in the traditional division of labor and power among the categories that comprise the academic community. Ultimately, it serves to increase conflicts within the university, weakening the democratization process and shared governance of federal higher education institutions (IFES).

Regarding how the most recent rectors of these universities were chosen, it was observed that, in three of the eleven institutions studied—27%—there was interference in the electoral process for selecting the highest-ranking official. This is an atypical phenomenon in the democratization of the country, as, between 1995 and 2018, the only recorded instance of interference occurred during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration, in 1998, when the third-ranked candidate from the tripartite list (*lista tríplice*) was appointed at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

In the case of universities in Minas Gerais, such as UFMG, UNIFEI, and UFTM, rectors were appointed who were not the top-ranked names on the tripartite list submitted to the President of the Republic, as shown in Table 03.

Table 03 – How the last dean was chosen by the president of the republic

UNIVERSITY	THE ELECTED RECTOR WAS CHOSEN BY THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY BETWEEN 2018-2022	
	YES	NO
UFU	X	
UFLA	X	
UFJF	X	
UNIFAL	X	
UFMG	X	
UFVJM		X
UFSJ	X	
UNIFEI		X
UFV	X	
UFOP	X	
UFTM		X

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

At UFTM, the interference began in 2018 under the government of Michel Miguel Elias Temer. At the time, the slate of the then-rector sought reelection but was defeated in the informal consultation (2,649 votes against 3,187) and in the University Council election (24 votes against 31). However, when the tripartite list was submitted to the Ministry of Education, the response alleged irregularities in the procedure for composing the list (DIAS, 2018). As a result, the rector remained in office as a *pro tempore* until June 2019, when, under the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, her vice replaced her, even though he was the second-ranked candidate on the tripartite list.

At UFVJM, the rector elections took place in 2019, and the candidate appointed by the Ministry of Education received only 8% of the votes compared to the first-place candidate in the informal consultation, who obtained 27.37% (CRUZ, 2019). However, during the ratification by the University Council, the elections were marked by a peculiarity: the composition of the tripartite list prepared by the council did not respect the three most-voted candidates by the academic community, replacing the third candidate on the list with the fourth-ranked candidate. Ironically, Jair Bolsonaro chose the last-ranked candidate on the tripartite list, who was included separately by the council.

Finally, at UNIFEI, the informal consultation occurred in 2020, with the appointed candidate receiving 22.6% of the valid votes compared to 53.2% for the first-place candidate and 21.1% for the third-place candidate. After the consultation, in the University Council, the appointed candidate obtained only 3 votes compared to 36 votes for the first-place candidate and 10 votes for the third-place candidate (UNIFEI, 2020).

The consequences of these appointments went beyond breaking with democratic processes of academic consultation; they also created divisions within the collective actions of universities in Minas Gerais. The rectors of UNIFEI and UFVJM, citing their lack of acceptance and support, withdrew from the National Association of Directors of Federal Higher Education Institutions (ANDIFES). Founded in 1989, this association represents the rectors of 65 federal higher education institutions, aiming to coordinate rectors in addressing institutional demands and establishing agendas with other educational stakeholders (APUFPR, 2021).

In addition to voluntarily leaving ANDIFES, on January 10, 2023, the rector of UFVJM was removed from the Forum of Public Higher Education Institutions of the State of Minas Gerais (FORIPES) after publishing videos on social media supporting the anti-democratic acts of January 8, 2023, in Brasília (FIGLIAGI, 2023).

These institutional ruptures also led to the creation of a parallel organization in 2022, the Association of Rectors of Federal Universities (AFEBRAS). Comprised of eight rectors, including those from UNIFEI and UFVJM, who were appointed by Jair Messias Bolsonaro but were not the top-ranked candidates on their respective tripartite lists (PALHARES, 2022). This association was established to oppose the actions of ANDIFES.

Based on the findings from the documentary research, it can be inferred that these elements hinder federal universities from working collaboratively and developing the synergy that, in theory, could unite them against policies that promote setbacks. These include federal interferences and legal changes that universities have historically faced, with increased intensity in recent years, particularly in the realms of university autonomy and democracy.

Mapping the Profile of Council Members at Federal Universities in Minas Gerais

To understand the profile of the members of the university councils in Minas Gerais and compare it with their opinions on electoral interferences, an initial step was to categorize them by gender. It was observed that, within the group, 64% are male and 36% are female. Empirical research demonstrates a predominance of men in the categories of students and faculty. The exception is the category of administrative staff, as shown in Table 4.

Tabela 4 – Sexo dos respondentes divididos por categoria

GENDER	RESPONDING ADVISORS			
	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Male	12 (71%)	94 (68%)	13 (45%)	119 (64%)
Female	5 (29%)	44 (31%)	16 (55%)	65 (35%)
Blank	0	1 (1%)	0	1 (1%)
TOTAL	17	139	29	185

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

These data place the percentage of women on the council below the average within the university context. In Brazilian federal universities, male faculty members predominate over female faculty members, with men representing 53% and women 47%. However, among the categories of administrative staff and undergraduate students, the results are reversed: the percentage of women ranges from 50% to 59%, while men account for 41% to 50% (INEP, 2020).

Despite the democratization of political spaces in universities, these results show that women's representation does not align with their overall presence in universities. This indicates structural gender issues that permeate the political and social history of the country.

Similarly, Silveira's (2020) research at the Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA) found that the university's management is still predominantly male, even though the number of women in the university's workforce has grown significantly in recent years. Although women are a minority in senior management, they participated almost equally in commissions and committees, reflecting the patriarchal stigma that they are useful for work but not for leadership roles.

Regarding the respondents' self-declared race/ethnicity, 76% identified as white, and only 22% as Black or mixed-race (*brown*). Whites dominate all respondent categories: students, faculty, and administrative staff, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 – Color/race of respondents divided by category

COLOR/RACE	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
White	11 (65%)	112 (81%)	17 (59%)	140 (76%)
Brown	5 (29%)	20 (14%)	9 (31%)	34 (18%)
Black	1 (6%)	5 (4%)	2 (7%)	8 (4%)
Yellow	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	1 (3%)	3 (2%)
Indigenous	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

According to IBGE (2019a), although Black and mixed-race (*brown*) individuals make up the majority of the country's workforce, representing 54.9%, they also account for two-thirds of the unemployed and underemployed population. They constitute most informal workers in Brazil (47.3% of Black and mixed-race individuals compared to 34.6% of whites working informally).

When comparing this national reality with the survey respondents, it can be inferred that the dominance of white individuals in University Council seats similarly reflects the dominance of whites in the most prestigious positions in the labor market. This becomes even clearer when data show an increase

in the proportion of white individuals in the faculty category, which is generally associated with the highest prestige and remuneration within universities.

Another important aspect for characterizing the profile of council members is age range. The majority of faculty and administrative staff, representing 51%, fall between 36 and 55 years of age. Meanwhile, most students are aged between 16 and 25 years, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 – Age of respondents divided by category

AGE	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
36 and 45 years old	0 (0%)	53 (38%)	12 (41%)	65 (35%)
46 and 55 years old	0 (0%)	42 (30%)	6 (21%)	48 (26%)
56 and 65 years old	0 (0%)	32 (23%)	5 (17%)	37 (20%)
26 and 35 years old	5 (29%)	8 (6%)	6 (21%)	19 (10%)
16 and 25 years old	12 (71%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (7%)
66 and 75 years old	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

In the 2020 municipal elections, 63% of the elected candidates were between 35 and 54 years old (TSE, 2020), suggesting an equivalence between the age of politicians and that of council members. On the other hand, according to a report from the House of Representatives on January 22, 2019, while the majority of the Brazilian population averages 34 years of age, most congressmen elected in 2018 were between 51 and 60 years old, representing 145 of the 513 elected (CÂMARA DOS DEPUTADOS, 2019).

The similarity between the age range of University Council members and Brazilian political representatives highlights the issue of young people's participation in politics. Universities are spaces filled with young individuals, yet their highest deliberative and decision-making bodies comprise only 17% of representatives under the age of 35. Including young people in politics is a democratic necessity akin to the demand for the political inclusion of women and Black individuals in democratic spaces. Such inclusion can foster intergenerational dialogue, enabling plural representation as required by the ideal of radical democracy.

Regarding the qualifications of council members, data analysis shows that 96% of faculty members hold doctoral degrees. Among administrative staff, 50% have master's degrees, and 28% have only specialized training. Meanwhile, most student representatives have undergraduate degrees, and none hold doctoral degrees, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 – Qualifications of respondents divided by category

EDUCATION	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Doctorate	0 (0%)	134 (96%)	2 (7%)	136 (73%)
Master's degree	3 (18%)	4 (3%)	15 (52%)	22 (12%)
Graduation	9 (53%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)	13 (7%)
Specialization	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	8 (27%)	9 (5%)
High School	4 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)
Elementary School	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		0 (0%)
Blank	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

The 2019 Higher Education Census shows that 66% of faculty members in Public Higher Education Institutions hold doctoral degrees, 25% hold master's degrees, 7% hold specialization certificates, and 2% hold undergraduate degrees (INEP, 2020).

Analyzing the general education levels of the population, according to IBGE (2019b), the proportion of people aged 25 or older who completed high school was 48.8% in 2019, and 17.4% had

completed higher education. This indicates that the low educational level of the Brazilian population contrasts with the high educational level of University Council members.

In this sense, being situated in a capitalist context, although not necessarily creating the prevailing social production relations, universities tend to function as agents of reproduction and extended legitimation of these relations (CARDOSO, 2009).

When asked about their conceptions regarding the role of the State in the economy, 34% of respondents stated that they align with a hybrid model between the liberal ideal of a Minimal State and the social-democratic ideal; 22% identified with the social-democratic ideal of an Interventionist State; 19% aligned with a socialist/communist ideal; 13% did not align with any of the models; and 11% identified with the liberal ideal of a Minimal State, as shown in Table 08.

Table 08 – Advisor's position on the role of the State in the economy

	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Hybrid model between the liberal ideal of a Minimal State and the social democratic ideal of an Interventionist State	6 (35%)	46 (33%)	12 (41%)	64 (34%)
Social Democratic Ideal of an Interventionist State	1 (6%)	29 (21%)	10 (34%)	40 (22%)
Socialist/communist ideal	6 (35%)	23 (17%)	6 (21%)	35 (19%)
None of the models	3 (18%)	22 (16%)	0 (0%)	25 (13%)
Liberal ideal of a Minimal State	1 (6%)	19 (13%)	0 (0%)	20 (11%)
Blank			1 (4%)	1 (1%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

Regarding their stance on customs, and social and moral values, 39% consider themselves liberal, advocating for the modification of traditional values in Brazilian society; 29% align with a hybrid model between liberal and conservative views; 21% do not identify with any of the models; and 10% consider themselves conservative, supporting the preservation of traditional values in Brazilian society, as shown in Table 09.

Table 09 – Counselor's position regarding social and moral customs and values

	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Liberal from the modification of the traditional values of Brazilian society	14 (82%)	41 (29%)	18 (62%)	73 (39%)
Hybrid model between liberal and conservative	1 (6%)	46 (33%)	6 (21%)	53 (29%)
None of the models	1 (6%)	34 (24%)	4 (14%)	39 (21%)
Conservative based on the conservation of traditional values of Brazilian society	1 (6%)	17 (12%)	1 (3%)	19 (10%)
Blank		1 (2%)		
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

Data analysis reveals that faculty members are proportionally the category with the fewest respondents identifying as liberal based on the modification of societal values. Similarly, regarding the role of the State in the economy (Table 08), faculty members are the category least associated with socialist ideas and, despite the low percentages, are more likely to identify with a liberal economic model compared to other categories.

These analyses of the University Council members' profiles allow us to infer that the respondents belong to an elite segment of society, most of whom are white, male, adult, highly educated, and likely earning an income higher than the majority of the Brazilian population. The university community as a whole operates within a context that differs significantly from broader societal realities,

as it is not open to all who wish to be part of it, given the intense competition within its admission structures. Therefore, the data indicates that democratic management is being discussed by a privileged group of individuals, democratically speaking, compared to the general population's deliberative capacity.

Counselors' perception of federal interference in elections for rectors

In order to understand the opinion of the counselors on how the president of the republic should choose the rectors of the Federal Universities, it was observed that 89% of the interviewees believe that the choice of the academic community should be respected. Only 11% believe that the president of the republic should have discretion to choose the rector, considering any name from the list of three names, or from within the institution's staff (Table 10).

In an analysis of the data by categories, it is noted that the students are unanimous in declaring that the president of the republic should respect the choice of the academic community. As for the professors and technicians, although the vast majority are against interference in the choice of the most voted, 13% and 7% respectively, they agree that the president's opinion may go against the will of the university majority, simultaneously violating the principle of administrative autonomy and university self-government (Table 10).

Table 10 – How should the president of the republic choose the rector of Federal Universities?

	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
The president of the republic must respect the choice of the Academic Community	17 (100%)	121 (87%)	27 (93%)	165 (89%)
The president of the republic must have discretion to choose any name from the triple list	0 (0%)	16 (11%)	2 (7%)	18 (10%)
The president of the republic must choose any name, from among the University's staff, to be the rector	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
The president of the republic must choose any name, regardless of whether he or she is on the University's staff, to be the rector.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

When establishing a relationship between the profile of respondents who represent a sense of discretion in choosing any name from the list and/or the university staff, it is possible to note that they are men (90%), professors (90%) with a doctorate (90%), and between 46 and 65 years of age (75%). As for their political profile, it is observed that they adhere to a liberal model of a minimal State regarding its role in the economy (50%) and conservative regarding social and moral customs and values (30%).

The data indicates that this group represents proportions regarding the social and political profile, well above the average of the other university counselors who responded. On the other hand, it points to trends in terms of profile (male, white) and ideological affiliation (economic liberals and those with conservative agendas), which are similar to the government positions of the presidents of the republic between 2018 and 2022.

On the other hand, the profile of the 89% of councilors who were against interference in the processes of choosing rectors, although marked by men (61.2%), professors (73.3%), with doctorates (71.5%), indicates that these percentages are lower than the previous group. There is also a decrease in the average age of this group, with 61.9% being in the age range between 36 and 55 years old, in relation to the previous group. Regarding political issues, only 6.1% adhere to liberal economic ideas and only 7.9% to conservative social and moral values, compared to democratic social ideals (22.4%) and/or socialist ideals (21.2%), and liberal social and moral values (42.4%). These distinct profiles may indicate, as a hypothesis, that the phenomena of political divisions in the country in recent years are also manifest, with their particularities, in the academic sphere⁴.

When questioning respondents about the justifications for the president not necessarily nominating the most voted candidate in the poll, one of the arguments was based on the possible distrust of university electoral processes:

I have been linked to the federal university since 1979. We have had excellent rectors appointed by the Ministers of Education when they were so appointed. We have also had some terrible ones. Likewise, we have had good, elected rectors and some terrible ones. The election system guarantees absolutely nothing, except a fierce competition for positions, linked to the election of the rector. This has made the university much worse. The experience has definitely been a failure. (E1, 2021).

As can be seen, the interviewee's perception is that elections are more harmful to the university than external appointments. The basis of the argument is possibly based on democratic elitism, which is based on the perspective that participation does not need to be direct and by everyone, but rather on the effective accountability of those who make decisions to those who do not (WERLE, 2013).

Other arguments are based on the belief that there is a perpetuation of power by certain groups in universities, and that, therefore, external interference is beneficial to break the possible logic:

It is necessary to break a sequence of transfer of positions within the same group that always convinces the community to vote for them using the machine, internally financing projects for local leaders (E2, 2021).
The triple list is widely questioned, but it must exist. Few know how much the current administrations use the machine as a legal form of vote buying, similar to the negotiations for the release of parliamentary amendments made between the executive branch and Congress for the legal buying of votes from congressmen and senators. [...] In XXX⁵, for example, the same group has been in management for over 30 years! Only an external perspective can change this. The president of the republic, as much as we don't like him and didn't vote for him, was elected by Brazilians and represents them when it comes to deciding who to appoint. (E3, 2021).

It can be seen in the fragments that there is an idea that political groups perpetuate their power in universities by using the machine to finance and/or buy votes. Therefore, the president would have the legitimacy to intervene in management, in order to break a possible vicious cycle, since he was elected by the majority of the population.

The arguments agree with the slogan (from the preamble), according to which “whoever wants to choose a rector, must win the electoral contest for president”. However, based on this logic, it is assumed that university autonomy is secondary, since democracy is limited to a representative

⁴ No relevant similarities were observed in terms of race between the groups, nor in terms of the nature of the federal institution, which presented similar relative percentages between the profiles.

⁵ For ethical reasons, we have suppressed the name of the federal university mentioned.

dimension, by elected officials. Based on democratic elitism, democracies are not governed by the majority of the people participating in public and collective deliberation on the common good, but by politicians elected together with political parties and public servants (PINHEIRO et al., 2020). Finally, the sentences in favor of interference in the elections for rectors are highlighted, in view of combating the ideological biases of left-wing affiliation in public universities:

The matter at hand, specifically the formation of the triple list and the subsequent selection by the president of the republic, is already a passive matter in law [...]. However, in the STF, specifically Minister Edson Fachin, in an explicit bias in the exercise of his office, and perhaps due to an ethical lapse expressing his political-partisan sympathy for the left, felt entitled to resurrect a consolidated theme, even disagreeing with his own statement on a previous occasion, in a mistaken interpretation of university autonomy, according to the LDB/1996. [...] It is worth emphasizing that President Bolsonaro issued MP 914/2019 which defined the obligation of the academic community to be consulted and with legitimate authority to define the members of the triple list (democracy - direct election), and thereby eliminating the political interference of the Superior Councils of the Universities (where the left-wing militancy resides, ideological and doctrinaire, but not representative) (E4, 2021).

Similarities are recorded in the statements of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who posted on Twitter that the academic environment was being "massacred" by left-wing ideology, which "trampled on capitalism". Thus, one of the priorities of his government would be to "break the cycle of the hypnotized masses" (AGÊNCIA ESTADO, 2019).

In this logic, a supposed political neutrality is assumed, in which the federal government, as a non-ideological body, would fulfill the role of eradicating left-wing political groups, which, even if elected by the academic community, should have their autonomy curtailed.

Based on the arguments analyzed, it is possible to infer that interventions in the processes of democratic management and university autonomy were justified by a centralization of power, in favor of a discourse of greater good, of combating possible vices, disregarding, however, in a naive or ideological way, that the very idea of neutrality or counterpoint to the left is also a form of political ideology (FREIRE, 1991).

Tensions and contradictions in councilors' perceptions of electoral parity

One of the main interferences in the democratic management processes of federal universities was the requirement of a 70/30 ratio for the weight of faculty votes in relation to those of students and technical-administrative staff for the election of rectors, thus undoing a tradition, from the last decade, of autonomy for the election through informal consultation. However, when questioning the perception of Minas Gerais councilors regarding this change, it was observed that the majority (55%) of respondents were in favor (fully and/or partially) of the rule in force.

In a breakdown by categories, a split is observed among university actors: while 96.5% of administrative staff and 88% of students were against (fully or partially) the disproportion of votes, among faculty members 70% considered it pertinent (fully or partially) to give their category greater electoral weight (Table 11).

Table 11 – Perception of 70/30 for the weight of votes for choosing rectors

	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	TECHNICIANS	(N)
Totally disagree	9 (53%)	23 (16%)	27 (93%)	59 (32%)
Totally agree	0 (0%)	56 (40%)	1 (3,5%)	57 (31%)
Partially agree	2 (12%)	42 (30%)	0 (0%)	44 (24%)
Partially disagree	6 (35%)	18 (14%)	1 (3,5%)	25 (13%)
Total	17 (100%)	139 (100%)	29 (100%)	185 (100%)

Fonte: elaborado pelos autores (2023).

According to Santos (2019), Technical Note No. 400/2018 was not an isolated act but aimed to divide the categories by fragmenting decision-making power, thus facilitating the policy of “divide and conquer”. If the history of universities is marked by a legacy of centralization of power in the hands of professors since the emergence of chairs, reviving “old wounds” through a legal change can individualize the agendas of the categories to the detriment of demands for collective improvements.

As for the profile of the counselors in favor of a 70/30 electoral system, it is possible to note that it is mostly made up of men (70.3%), white (80.2%), between 36 and 55 years of age (65.3%), with a doctorate (95.0%), which indicates that they come mainly from the teaching category.

In the group of respondents opposed to the 70/30 weighting, although the majority are also men (57.1%), white (70.1%) and between 36 and 55 years of age (55.9%), these percentages are lower than the previous ones. The differences in profiles occur when it comes to level of education, since 52.4% have a degree lower than a doctorate, indicating, mostly, a category formed by students and technical-administrative staff.

When crossing the profile of these two groups with the previous opinion on interference in the triple list, it was observed that 84.5% and 95.5% of those in favor and against the 70/30, respectively, were critical of interference in electoral contests. In this sense, it is possible to register a contradiction to democratic aspects, since those who disagree with external interference, however, defend unequal distribution of power within the institution, as reported by one of the counselors:

As for the idea of democracy, as long as universities do not openly express their right to internally consider the distribution of seats on the councils, the impression remains that the discomfort only arises when the will of the community is not respected by higher authorities, such as the choice of rectors. In fact, the will presented in the consultation is already distorted by the overvalued representation of teaching staff. This point, however, does not seem to bother them so much. (E5, 2021).

Regarding the arguments in favor of the disproportion of votes for the electoral contest, a teacher emphasizes the supposed corporatism of the categories of administrative technicians and students.:

The participation of technicians in decision-making processes is often excessively focused on the immediate interests and demands of these employees, without a broader vision of the University's objectives and purposes. [...] In the case of students, student representatives are appointed by the Central Student Directory and are accountable only to this entity, that is, it is a form of indirect election that transforms student representation into entity representation (E6, 2021).

If we assume that the categories of students and administrative technicians are corporatists, defending the interests of their groups, what guarantees that teachers do not also follow the same logic? In contrast, according to another member of the council, the phenomenon is present in all categories,

but it tends to be even greater in those that control the decision-making bodies of the university, that is, teachers.:

Corporatism is a big problem. Obviously, the problem is more evident in the teaching category, since they control all decision-making bodies at the university. However, this does not mean that the same thing does not occur among technicians or students. The impression that remains is that the forces are not expected to balance each other out, but rather that the weight shifts. (E7, 2021).

Participation in a social institution such as a public university must be understood taking into account existing political interests, since it brings together the various segments of the community, sometimes as an expression of corporate interests, when there is a clash between the segments of teachers, students and TAEs. Therefore, no matter how broad it is, it will always be interested and marked by interests, conflicts and projects of society and education in dispute (CARVALHO, 2011), which makes the hierarchy of power for this reason illogical.

Another argument used to justify the weight of 70% in the teachers' votes refers to the differences in functions and knowledge about the role of universities and their consequent management.:

Regarding the process of choosing a rector, I consider 70/30 to be the appropriate proportion, since teachers are the category linked to all core activities (teaching, research, extension), and they also carry out several administrative support activities, while technicians are linked only to the support activity and often do not know the entire reality of the 3 core activities, while students are specifically linked to only one of the core activities (teaching), are temporary members of the community and have no knowledge of the backstage and administrative functioning. (E8, 2021).

Underlying this logic is the thought that places technical-administrative staff as hierarchically inferior to teachers, with an idea of lesser value given to the activities of TAEs compared to teaching activities, as reported by one of the critics of disproportionality.:

Democratic management is the breaking of the culture that the voice of the teacher is always worth more, the culture of demigods, which often makes the voice of other segments have less value and deserve less credit. It is not uncommon for the segments of TAEs and students to be delegitimized in university spaces simply because they belong to these segments, considered by many teachers to be less capable, because the teacher always knows more, after all, he has a "doctorate", "post-doctorate", and is a researcher.... (E9, 2021).

It is observed that knowledge is necessarily associated with power and this is seen as a result of the possession of knowledge, always appropriated in a particularized way. Thus, intellectual work is attributed a higher value than other types of work, establishing a kind of hierarchy between the different actors that make up the university scenario. (PIRES, LIMA, 2013).

However, the particularities regarding the specific levels of formal knowledge and ownership do not necessarily imply a lower capacity to participate in electoral processes, as reported by one of the counselors:

Democratic management must assume equity in choices. Understanding that each group within the university knows certain scenarios and experiences and therefore everyone must be able to participate in decisions with equal voting weight. (E10, 2021).

In line with this, Azevedo (2011) emphasizes that it is not correct to subjugate the class of students and the class of technical-administrative staff to the condition of being less able to understand and participate in the achievement of the institutional objectives of a University. Students, the most direct

recipients of academic work, also have the legitimacy to evaluate certain aspects of the academic experience that are unknown to the other classes that comprise it. In the case of technical-administrative staff, there is no evidence that they do not have a global vision of the Institution.

In this logic, radical democracy is based on the assumption that no one is so devoid of intelligence that they do not have contributions to make to the institutions and society to which they belong (FREIRE, 1991). In contrast, the aristocratic form assumes that intelligence is limited to a few, who will be able to bear the privilege of social responsibility, subordinating the others to their purposes (CARDOSO, 2009).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the parity model of consultation with the university community does not remove the leading role of professors in choosing the new Rector, which would only occur if a universal voting system was adopted. Since the parity model is nothing more than giving equal weight to the votes of professors, technical-administrative staff and students, and since professors theoretically make up the category with the smallest number of members at the university, in the parity model, each professor's vote would inevitably continue to have greater weight in the consultation.

As an example, it is possible to analyze the case of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, which, in 2011, held elections using the parity model. By adopting the calculation based on the universe of eligible voters, the vote of one professor was equivalent to that of 1.44 technical-administrative staff and that of 15.54 students. However, if the model attributed at that time had been the current one (70% to teachers), the vote of a teacher today would be equivalent to that of 6.74 technical-administrative staff and 72.50 students (MICHEREFF JUNIOR, 2017).

Therefore, a careful examination leads us to realize that the autonomy defended by certain categories is limited to external autonomy. This implies, as explained by Fávero (1996), the importance of considering the decision-making power in the university, so that discussing university autonomy also involves discussing internal autonomy in the sense of the democratization of university institutions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to analyze the impacts of federal interference on the democratic management practices of federal universities between 2018 and 2022, documentary research and interviews were conducted with the actors who made up the university councils of 11 universities in Minas Gerais.

The results showed that the interventions that took place between 2018 and 2022 were characterized by new fractures in the democratic construction processes of the institutions. The provisional measures and technical notes, in addition to appointing rectors who did not rank among the most voted in university polls, revoked institutionalized democratic practices, such as parity in internal votes at universities, thus indicating setbacks in the historic achievements of student movements and administrative technicians in the participation of universities.

At the same time, these interferences in the administrative autonomy of universities widened old wounds in the attempts at democratic organization of these institutions. The historical concentration of power in the teaching category saw actions increase substantially with the requirements established by technical notes, according to which professors now have 70% of the votes in all the institution's councils.

This research also pointed out a latent contradiction, when it was found that, although the majority of university councilors refuted the federal discretion in choosing rectors, their speeches about

the supremacy of teaching showed agreement with the changes that reduced the participation of students and technical-administrative staff in electoral processes and/or collegiate participation. In this sense, we emphasize that the arrival of the third government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2023-2026), founded on an agenda of re-democratization of the country, is an opportune moment to reinforce the importance of discussing democratic management and university autonomy. However, actions must go beyond simply combating the autocratic administration seen in recent years. Thus, it is necessary to point out that democratizing the university cannot be limited to the issues of the triple lists, since it also demands an effort to guarantee balance in electoral contests, as well as in representation in deliberative bodies and collegiate bodies, which has remained intact since 1995.

Regarding the limitations of this study, we point out that the investigation was restricted to the analysis of the dimensions of formal democracy. However, for the effective participation of the various layers of the academic community in decision-making, a minimum supply of objective and intersubjective questions is necessary.

Therefore, future research can contribute to the in-depth analysis of the distribution of material resources necessary to ensure university participants' independence and voice. Furthermore, it can explore the institutionalized patterns of cultural valuation that must express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunities to achieve social esteem in deliberation spaces. Under these tensions, discussing democratic management in the university context means understanding its concreteness, how it is produced and carried out.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.