

THE “DEMOCRATIC” SELECTION OF LEADERS IN BRAZILIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES: APPOINTMENTS IN THE BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT

A ESCOLHA “DEMOCRÁTICA” DE DIRIGENTES DAS UNIVERSIDADES FEDERAIS BRASILEIRAS: AS NOMEAÇÕES NO GOVERNO BOLSONARO

LA ESCUELA “DEMOCRÁTICA” DE DIRECTORES DE LAS UNIVERSIDADES FEDERALES BRASILEÑAS: LOS NOMBRAMIENTOS EN EL GOBIERNO DE BOLSONARO



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ABSTRACT: In Brazil, since the administration of Michel Temer (2016-2018), the management of Federal Universities has been subjected to a weakening of financial, administrative, and political autonomy. During Jair Messias Bolsonaro's presidency (2019-2022), this situation intensified and significantly eroded constitutional principles in education, including democratic governance. In this context, this research aimed to analyze Brazilian legislation concerning the democratic management of Federal Universities and its implications during the Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022). Through a qualitative approach, bibliographic research, and document analysis, it was observed that over 25 Federal Universities experienced direct intervention through the appointment of their leaders by the then-President, disregarding the choices made by their respective academic communities. This outcome indicated that, in addition to an authoritarian profile of the government in question, it also benefited from the historical weakness of legislation related to this issue, which does not ensure the full guarantee of the election of leaders by the university community.

KEYWORDS: Democratic Management. Federal Universities. University education. Educational politics. Bolsonaro government.

RESUMO: No Brasil, desde o Governo de Michel Temer (2016-2018), a gestão das Universidades Federais foi alvo de fragilização de autonomia financeira, administrativa e política. Na gestão de Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), esse quadro se intensificou e resultou em um grave enfraquecimento aos princípios constitucionais da educação, dentre eles, a gestão democrática. Nesse contexto, essa pesquisa objetivou analisar a legislação brasileira referente à gestão democrática das Universidades Federais e seus desdobramentos no Governo Bolsonaro (2019-2022). Mediante abordagem qualitativa, pesquisa bibliográfica e análise documental constatou-se que mais de 25 Universidades Federais sofreram intervenção direta da nomeação dos dirigentes pelo, então, Presidente, que desconsiderou as escolhas das respectivas comunidades acadêmicas. Esse resultado indicou que, além de um perfil autoritário do referido governo, o mesmo se beneficiou da fragilidade histórica da legislação atinente ao tema, no qual, não prevê garantia plena de eleição dos dirigentes pela comunidade universitária.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão Democrática. Universidades Federais. Ensino superior. Política educacional. Governo Bolsonaro.

RESUMEN: En Brasil, desde el gobierno de Michel Temer (2016 a 2018), la gestión de las Universidades Federales ha sido objeto de debilitamiento de la autonomía financiera, administrativa y política. En la gestión de Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019 a 2022) esta situación se intensificó y resultó en un grave debilitamiento de los principios constitucionales de la educación, entre ellos, la gestión democrática. En ese contexto, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar la legislación brasileña sobre la gestión democrática de las Universidades Federales y sus desarrollos en el Gobierno de Bolsonaro (2019-2022). A través de un abordaje cualitativo, investigación bibliográfica y análisis documental, se encontró que más de 25 Universidades Federales sufrieron intervención directa a partir de la designación de directores por parte del entonces Presidente, quien desconoció las elecciones de las respectivas comunidades académicas. Este resultado indicó que, además de un perfil autoritario del referido gobierno, se benefició de la histórica debilidad de la legislación relacionada con el tema, en la que no brinda plena garantía de elección de dirigentes por parte de la comunidad universitaria.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gestión Democrática. Universidades Federales. Enseñanza superior. Política educativa. Gobierno de Bolsonaro.

Introduction

The word university is of Latin origin - *universitate* -, which refers to universality, totality, set, body, company, corporation, and community. Therefore, it is understood that this space is not composed of an individual but of a group of people with multiple particularities. An area in which diverse individuals with numerous interests, aspirations, and dreams coexist presupposes that to ensure the equitable participation of all, the implementation of fully democratic management is necessary, which includes the election of their respective leaders.

According to Cury (2002, p. 3), in Latin *gero*, management can be translated as: call to oneself, execute, exercise; and, from the same root, comes the term to germinate, to give birth. From this perspective, the author also states that "management implies dialogue as a superior way of meeting people and resolving conflicts" (CURY, 2002, p. 3, our translation). Given that the term management implies using dialogue as a conflict resolution mechanism rooted in democracy and participation, one can conclude that itself, by its etymological origin, carries a democratic bias.

Ferreira (2012) emphasizes that democratic management is a recognized value in Brazil and the world, and its importance is linked to the resource of human participation and the need to build a more just and humane society. However, Aranda (2004) points out that:

[...] even though its value is consecrated and publicized, it is not understood enough for the conquest of spaces and means that make it possible to overcome a list of determinants that have been implemented on society as a whole and, consequently, along with education Brazilian (ARANDA, 2004, p. 109, our translation).

In light of this, it can be understood that, for the partial realization of democratic management in Brazilian federal universities, a political struggle is necessary to effectively influence the reproduction of power and the alteration of norms in educational public policies. In this regard, Aranda (2004) asserts that democratic management still represents a:

[...] process of learning and political struggle that is not limited to the limits of educational practice, but envisions, in the specialties of this social practice and its relative autonomy, the possibility of creating channels of affective participation in learning the democratic 'game' (DOURADO, 1988 apud ARANDA, 2004, p. 109, our translation).

In this context, the analysis of the Brazilian situation, particularly regarding democratic management in Federal Universities, has become crucial for the development of this study. This is because, in Brazil, the selection of leaders for Federal Universities is regulated by Law No.

9.192/1995. As stipulated in Article 16, paragraph I, the Rector and Vice-Rector of a Federal University are appointed by the President of the Republic from a three-person list organized by the respective highest academic council. It is worth noting that candidates for Rectors must be professors who hold the highest two levels of the academic career or a doctoral degree (BRASIL, 1995).

Given this legislation, Federal Universities have conducted prior consultations with their entire academic community and endorsed the name of the slate with the most votes in their highest academic councils' three-person lists. This practice has been maintained since the beginning of the first term of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003, thereby ensuring respect for the choice of university segments. Despite recognizing the vulnerability of this methodology, as the three-person list leaves gaps for the realization of genuinely democratic management, previous governments have continued appointing the top candidate from the list.

However, this did not occur during the Bolsonaro administration, which, during its tenure (2019-2022) was described by researchers as "opposed to science, critical thinking, and public educational policies, which is why it supports practices of censorship against academic freedom [...] and undermines university funding and administrative autonomy" (DUARTE, 2020, p. 2, our translation).

The government of Jair Bolsonaro adopted a practice that goes against the principles of even minimal democratic management by appointing rectors in Brazilian federal universities based on ideological alignment with the government. In cases where no candidates aligned with their ideologies on the three-person list, the government chose to make pro tempore appointments. It is important to emphasize that, as mentioned by Cunha (2000, p. 29), the selection of interveners had only occurred in Brazil during the period of military dictatorship.

It is relevant to note that both researchers experienced the consequences of government intervention in management during Jair Bolsonaro's administration in their respective universities. At the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), between 2019 and 2022, two pro-tempore rectors were appointed by the federal government, which refused to set the winning candidate of the prior consultation due to a lack of ideological alignment with the Bolsonaro administration. This period at UFGD was characterized by authoritarian institutional dismantling and reconfiguration.

Therefore, this present study is justified by the need to comprehend the national legislation establishing the instruments for democratic management in Brazilian federal universities and the constraints imposed by these regulations on realizing this practice. Through

this discourse, the aim is to analyze the conjunctural reality resulting from antidemocratic actions by the Government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019 - 2022) concerning appointing leaders for these institutions.

The methodology adopted is based on a qualitative approach, which, according to Souza and Kerbauy (2017, p. 31, our translation) "allows for the interpretation of the complexity of a particular social phenomenon." Data were collected through bibliographic and documentary research. Additionally, a survey was conducted from 2019 to 2022 regarding institutions that had pro-tempore management appointments or leaders who won the prior consultation of the academic community.

The regulation of the management of Brazilian federal universities

Understanding the paths through which some universities in Latin America sought to achieve a minimum degree of autonomy is essential for analyzing the legislative frameworks related to the selection of leaders for Brazilian federal universities.

The introduction of the university system in Latin America occurred in the early 16th century, resulting in the establishment of universities in various countries such as Peru, Cuba, Chile, and Argentina. However, these educational institutions did not enjoy autonomy. During this period, all universities founded on the continent were linked to initiatives of the Catholic Church. As noted by Ferreira Neto (2011), it was only at the end of the 16th century, specifically at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, that the first signs of democratic participation in South American universities emerged.

In 1918, two years after the start of Argentina's first democratic government, students inspired by the political reform in the country organized into student centers to demand the modernization and democratization of universities. This Argentine episode, known as the "University Reform of Córdoba," resulted, after significant student resistance, in the restructuring of the management of the University of Córdoba, becoming the most comprehensive university reform in Latin America up to that point (FREITAS NETO, 2011).

In the case of Brazil, as emphasized by Michereff Junior (2017) there were some initiatives between 1553 and 1920, but none of them materialized. It was only during the 18th century, with the *Inconfidência Mineira*³, that the idea of creating universities resurfaced, with

³The Inconfidência Mineira was a separatist movement in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the late 18th century. Its primary goal was the independence of Brazil from Portugal.

the foundation of the University in São João Del Rei being one of the aspirations of the conspirators. Finally, in 1920, the first university in Brazil was established.

According to Rothem (2008, p. 48), Decree No. 19.851, known as the "Statute of Brazilian Universities," Decree No. 19.850, which established the creation of the *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (National Council of Education) (CNE), and Decree No. 19.852, which dealt with the Organization of the University of Rio de Janeiro, all promulgated on April 11, 1931, during the administration of Francisco Campos, played a fundamental role in the consolidation of higher education (BRASIL, 1942a; 1942b).

The regulation of the selection of leaders for these universities was established by the Statute of the Brazilian Universities, also known as the Francisco Campos Law and Decree No. 19.851/31. Article 27 stipulates that the director of federal university institutes will be appointed by the government, which will choose one of the names from a three-person list consisting of three full professors. Article 93 of the same document addresses the rights and duties of students. In this context, the right to vote during the election of the university rector is not attributed to them.

Since the inception of university legislation, there has been an obstacle to realizing democratic management, as the process of selecting the university rector did not consider the direct vote of the entire academic community, including faculty, administrative staff, and students. Therefore, the need to reevaluate this election method has existed since the establishing of higher education institutions in Brazil.

Michereff Junior (2017) reminds us that this discussion has been present at various moments in history, such as in the agenda of the 2nd National Congress of Students, which led to the creation of the *União Nacional dos Estudantes* (National Union of Students) (UNE) in 1938, where the reform of higher education was one of the topics under debate.

In 1961, the University of Brasília was established through Law No. 3.998/1961, which stated that "The President of the Board of Directors shall perform the functions of President of the Foundation and shall hold the title of Rector of the University" (BRASIL, 1961, our translation). This decision sparked significant outrage among students at all Brazilian federal universities. In this political context, in May 1962, the *União Nacional dos Estudantes* (UNE) initiated the so-called 1/3 strike, demanding participation in the university's governance and in the councils responsible for overseeing its policies, specifically, the presence of 1/3 of student representation in university councils. According to Velasco and Cruz, "The 1/3 strike lasted for more than three months and affected most of the 40 universities in Brazil at the time. It was the

broadest and longest student strike ever to occur in the country" (VALESCO; CRUZ, 1994, p. 6, our translation).

The idea of organizing a strike had developed since the early debates on the University Reform promoted by the UNE in 1961. However, due to the staunch resistance of the educational bureaucracy and conservative veto in Congress, as highlighted by Valesco and Cruz (1994) in August 1962, the UNE declared the end of the 1/3 strike.

With the civil-military coup on March 31, 1964, the Military Regime declared the UNE illegal through Decree No. 4.464/64. Furthermore, Decree No. 228/67 restricted the activities of student organizations to the exclusive interests of the universities to which they were affiliated. Decree No. 477/69 imposed strict penalties for students, faculty, and administrative staff who engaged in hostile activities to the military regime (MICHEREFF JUNIOR, 2017).

The military regime imposed various obstacles to the development of democracy in the country, especially within federal universities. This fact is clearly illustrated by the creation of *Assessorias de Segurança e Informação* (Security and Information Advisory Boards) (ASI), whose purpose was to monitor the university community, censor research, and restrict the circulation of certain books. As observed by Motta (2014) during this period, the military and their civilian allies initiated long-lasting reforms in the university system, and although some changes towards democratization have occurred in recent years, certain aspects of these reforms persist.

Aranda (2004, p. 138, our translation) emphasizes that unilateral decisions reveal "the interference of personal projects, fads, particular interests, and authoritarian practices that do not allow for the improvement of the educational system". Regarding democratic management, Cury (2002) recalls that the 1964 coup interrupted an incipient social and political democratization process, introducing authoritarian controls in education. This resulted in another period in which universities moved away from democratic management, approaching authoritarianism advocated by the political-ideological spectrum of the extreme right.

In the face of this challenging political landscape in Brazil, in 1967, Costa e Silva assumed the presidency of the Federal Government with the promise to restore representative political processes and the responsibility to bring about changes in the university structures.

Valesco e Cruz (1994, p. 39, our translation) highlight that during this period, the student movement played an important role in political life, noting that "the students of that time [...] nourished the imagination of other young people in movement in other parts of the world [...] for his speech, for his style, turned against the representatives of the 'order'".

In this context, under pressure from the student movement and many faculty members, the Costa e Silva government found itself compelled to change the university structures, as observed by Vilmar Junior (2017). Thus, Law No. 5540/1968 was promulgated, which had as its main normative aspects: the abolition of the "cátedra" system (professorship), the division of undergraduate courses into primary and professional cycles, the establishment of a credit system per discipline, and the determination of a semester-based schedule.

Regarding governance, the third Article of this Law established that "universities shall enjoy didactic-scientific, disciplinary, administrative, and financial autonomy, which shall be exercised per the law and their statutes," and it determined that the choice of the Rector would be the responsibility of the President of the Republic (BRASIL, 1968, our translation).

Although there was progress with including the third Article of the Law, which legally recognized university autonomy and served as the basis for the future Constitution, this autonomy mentioned in Article 3 was ineffective regarding the appointment of the Rector and Vice-Rector. The process was still subject to the University Council, which formed a sextuple list, and from this list, the President of the Republic appointed the university leaders.

The Law that promoted the 1968 Reform considering the expectations and aspirations of the student movement and many professors of the time, should have been an instrument to establish democratic management in universities. However, it did not provide for the participation of the entire university community in selecting the Rector and Vice-Rector. In 1995, the provisions of this Law were modified by Law 9.192/1995, which established in the first clause of Article 16 that the President of the Republic would appoint the Rector and Vice-Rector of federal universities from a three-person list organized by the institution's highest collegial body.

This Law became known as the "Law 70/15/15" since the student body and administrative staff were granted 30% representation in the election, with 15% for each segment, while the faculty was allocated 70%. Furthermore, the list submitted to the President of the Republic was reduced from sextuple to triple.

This wording allows the President of the Republic to appoint the candidate who did not receive the highest number of votes in the prior consultation or even pro-tempore rectors who did not participate in the previous talk. Additionally, the weight of 15% for students and 15% for administrative staff is an obstacle to realizing democracy in federal universities since this consultation is not equal.

Michereff Junior (2017) highlights that after the end of the Estado Novo regime, President José Linhares enacted Decree-Law No. 8.393 in 1945, granting administrative, financial, didactic, and disciplinary autonomy to the University of Brazil (UB). In this legal provision, Article 17, paragraph 1, stipulated that the rector should be appointed by the President of the Republic, chosen from influential or retired full professors, elected in a triple list, and by individual vote by the University Council (BRASIL, 1945).

Therefore, the selection of leaders for federal universities was already a matter of concern long before the 1968 reform and continued to be addressed in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF-88). The following section will present the normative landmarks related to this issue in educational policies after promulgating the Federal Constitution of 1988.

Regulations for the Management of Brazilian Federal Universities After the Federal Constitution of 1988

Before delving into the specific regulations of university management in Brazilian legislation following the 1988 Constitution, it is crucial to consider how this topic was addressed in previous constitutions. The first Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (BRASIL, 1891) prioritized the autonomy of federative units, addressing education in a limited manner. Thus, it was implied that the regulation of this matter was the responsibility of the states. Only in the 1930s did education begin to be handled by the National Department of Education, linked to the Ministry of Justice. It was not until 1931 that the Ministry of Education was created to address educational issues specifically.

In the 1934 Constitution, an entire chapter was dedicated to education. Article 5 established that the responsibility for setting the guidelines for education was assigned to the Union (BRASIL, 1934). However, due to the political contingencies in Brazil since then, this topic lost prominence and was only addressed again in 1946 with the so-called Restorative Constitution. With the Military Coup (1964), the educational issue ceased to be treated with due attention, and, above all, the authorities suppressed the agenda of democratic management in power.

Only in 1988, after a period of intense struggle for the democratization of Brazil, the current Constitution was promulgated, also known as the Citizen Constitution. This Constitution (Carta Magna Brasileira) dedicated special attention to education. According to Moreira, Moreira and Soares (2018), Article 207 of the CF/88 establishes that "universities shall enjoy didactic-scientific, administrative, financial, and patrimonial autonomy, and shall obey

the principle of the indissociability between teaching, research, and extension" (BRASIL, 1988, our translation), represents the fulfillment of a historical struggle waged by teachers and the scientific community in general in favor of academic freedom and self-management. The student movement played a fundamental role in this fight, as in previous years, students were a symbol of resistance in the face of repression.

Article 207 was a remarkable achievement for the academic community, especially for Brazilian society as a whole, as the university refers to totality, unity, and community. Regarding management, Article 206 stipulates that public education must be based on the "democratic management of public education as provided by Law" (BRASIL, 1988, our translation)

The novelty of democratic management as a principle of national education in a Brazilian constitutional text represents a significant advancement. However, 33 years after the promulgation of the Citizen Constitution, it is crucial to remember that, as pointed out by Cardoso (2009), significant obstacles still need to be examined and overcome.

In this regard, despite Article 206 being seen as an achievement for the segment committed to the democratic management of education, this achievement appears to be partial, as its practical realization is still limited. Oliveira and Adrião (2007, p. 5) emphasize that:

[...] the generic expression 'in the form of the law' delegated its feasibility to complementary legislation. In other words, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) and all other legal expressions tasked with regulating the constitutional provision would define the meaning and mechanisms for the implementation of such a principle (OLIVEIRA; ADRIÃO, 2007, p. 5, our translation).

Although democratic management was established as a principle in the Federal Constitution of 1988, its assurance was deferred, leaving room for its implementation to be regulated in future legislative texts. The idea of democratic management was not elaborated on in the rest of the Constitution. In light of this, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) No. 9.394 of 1996 established in Article 56 that "public institutions of higher education shall comply with the principle of democratic management, ensuring the existence of deliberative collegiate bodies, in which the segments of the institutional, local, and regional community shall participate" (BRASIL, 1996, our translation).

The topic began to be addressed in various contexts, and the provision that teachers must have a 70% representation in each collegiate body committee, and in the prior consultation to

compile the triple list sent to the Presidency of the Republic also remained in LDB 9.394/1996, following Law No. 9.192/1995.

According to Bordenave (1994), pointed out that participatory democracy should allow the population to become increasingly active in decision-making, eliminating the division of functions between those who plan and decide at the top and those who execute and bear the consequences of decisions at the bottom. In this context, the prior consultation, in which only 30% is dedicated to student representation and technical-administrative staff, and the fact that the most voted name depends on the decision of the Presidency of the Republic to be appointed, does not make this process an effective form of participatory democracy.

In this sense, rethinking the legislation related to management is an apparent demand, as the existing provisions, up to this point, allow the country's Presidency to disregard a prior consultation that, in the way it has been conducted, cannot be considered a fundamental pillar of democratic management.

During the administrations of Lula (2003–2011) and Dilma (2011–2016), Law No. 9.192/1995, created during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), remained unchanged. However, during Lula's presidency, with the creation of the Federal Institutes (2008), direct elections for their leaders were introduced, defined by Decree No. 6.986/09. Concerning the appointment of the rector of federal universities, a tradition was established in 2003, during the first term of Lula's government, to always appoint the first-place candidate from the triple list, respecting the prior consultation with the academic community. However, this tradition did not become a definitive normative instrument.

Lenz (2014) highlights that some universities recognized that the 70/15/15 weighting did not constitute effective participation of all segments and, therefore, adopted the so-called parity model for prior consultations. This model assigns one-third (33.33%) weight to the votes of the three academic segments: professors, students, and technical administrative staff, abandoning the 70% weight for the teaching category. They were supported in this by Circular Letter No. 005/2011, which stated that "[...] the conduct (...) of informal consultations with the university community, configuring the votes of each category as established, including parity voting, does not contravene any established norm" (BRASIL, 2011, our translation).

Since the inception of Brazilian universities, this note was the first instrument that enabled effective democratic management, as the 30% weight divided between students and technical administrative staff was no longer legally required. Although a triple list was still

submitted to the Presidency of the Republic, the first name on the list would unquestionably be appointed as the university's rector.

Between 2003 and 2016, the achievements went beyond the scope of democratic management. Marques, Ximenes and Ugino (2018) assert that Brazil witnessed an unprecedented expansion of access to public higher education during this period, with a significant increase in free spots for students from public schools, low-income students, and self-declared Black, Brown, and Indigenous individuals.

However, in August 2016, amid a crisis in Dilma Rousseff's government, her impeachment took place. Keller (2018) highlights that three factors were fundamental to this event: the economic slowdown process, the difficulty in dialogue with other branches of government, and the wave of protests that initially focused on resisting increases in public transportation fares. According to Freixo and Rodrigues (2016), what occurred in Brazil during this period was a coup:

[...] Despite this process following the procedures outlined in the country's legislation and its legal frameworks having been defined by the Federal Supreme Court, from its inception, with each piece of evidence not accepted by the impeachment commission that the President did not commit 'a crime of responsibility' and with every statement from bodies like the Court of Auditors clearing Rousseff of irregularities, ignored by the senators judging her, it became increasingly clear that it was a coup. A coup orchestrated by the most conservative sectors of Brazilian society, supported by a significant portion of the judiciary, the national congress, and the most extensive media groups in Brazil (FREIXO; RODRIGUES, 2016, p. 9, our translation).

After the coup, the presidency was assumed by the then vice-president, Michel Temer, whose inauguration was contested as illegitimate. He implemented political and administrative measures with implications for social policies, including higher education. There were several projects aimed at dismantling public education, such as the *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without Party)⁴ project, the reform of High School Education⁵, and Normative Ruling No. 20, promulgated on October 13, 2016 (BRASIL, 2016), which established a reduction in the number of spots in undergraduate courses offered by the Federal Education System.

⁴ "To allegedly [...] avoid indoctrination or ideological harassment,' the project, in its materiality, envisions the exclusive reproduction of dominant values, excluding debate and other possibilities for reflecting on reality (SOARES; NOBRE, 2018, p. 17, our translation).

⁵ This measure was imposed without any debate with society and sent to Congress by Temer under an urgent regime. This MP includes curriculum flexibility, making 60% of the curriculum composed of mandatory courses and 40% elective classes (SOARES; NOBRE, 2018, p. 17, our translation).

In 2018, during the final days of the Temer government, democratic management in Brazilian universities also became the target of the government's recklessness, with Technical Note 400/2018 signed by then Secretary of Higher Education (SESU), Paulo Barone. This note stated: "parity voting or adopting a different weight for faculty members other than 70% will be illegal and must be annulled, as well as all acts derived from it" (BRASIL, 2018, our translation).

In this scenario, the advances achieved in universities during the governments of Lula and Dilma were not maintained, and education faced setbacks due to the political reforms of Michel Temer's illegitimate government, which had the dismantling of the state and privatization as its pillars from the outset. This situation paved the way for a more conservative political agenda represented by the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019–2022), which will be discussed further.

Selection of Leaders in Federal Universities during the Bolsonaro Government

In January 2019, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a former military officer and advocate of the 1964 Military Dictatorship, assumed the presidency of the Brazilian Republic. According to Duarte and Cesar (2020), Bolsonaro's candidacy benefited and exacerbated a firm rejection of traditional politics and politicians.

The fight against corruption led many Brazilians to overlook the speeches made by Bolsonaro, such as: "Let's shoot the '*petralhada*'⁶ here in Acre" (2018); "Minorities must bow to majorities"; "Minorities either adapt or simply disappear" (2017); "If I want to enter here armed, I'll enter" (2016). These statements, reflecting positions of intolerance, conveyed a narrative of opposition to traditional politics and primarily attacked center-left parties. This movement resulted in Jair Messias Bolsonaro's election as President of the Republic in 2018.

During his 4-year term, Bolsonaro demonstrated a lack of respect for the principles of humanity, democracy, science, and human rights, guiding his government with authoritarianism as the objective. In the field of education, this characteristic was evident through the ideological dispute related to the *Escola sem Partido* (School Without Party) project, the promotion of entrepreneurship, the initiative to regulate Homeschooling, the support for civic-military schools, the endorsement of projects privatizing primary and higher education, such as the

⁶ "Petralhada" is a pejorative term certain political groups use to refer to members of the Workers' Party (PT) or sympathizers of left-wing politics.

"*Future-se*⁷" project, budget cuts for Federal Educational Institutions, and direct interference in the management of these institutions, namely, in the selection of their leaders.

In 2019, upon assuming the presidency of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro presented an educational program based on the ideas of Olavo de Carvalho – an intellectual closely associated with Bolsonaro's family circle – in the 'liberalizing economic' model advocated by the Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes, and steeped in the principles of the new right. The program emphasized a cultural war against the alleged sexualization of children and left-wing indoctrination in Brazilian schools and universities. The basic proposal for Science, Technology, and Innovation (ST&I) was to reduce the state's participation. This also applied to public universities, especially the Federal ones, responsible for over 90% of Brazilian scientific production. [...] The program, grounded in the discourse that the resources allocated were already sufficient and needed better management, projected a role closer to that of the private sector. As a consequence, **the period was marked by the construction of anti-university narratives and direct attacks on Federal Universities, following a script similar to that of other countries governed by the ultra-right** (PILATTI *et al.*, 2022, p. 555, our translation).

This perspective created a conducive political context for intervention in Federal Universities, supported even by Technical Note No. 400/2018 from the Temer Government. Bolsonaro, with his authoritarian inclination, made undemocratic decisions regarding federal educational institutions from 2019 to 2022. Professors were appointed who did not occupy the top positions on the list sent to the Presidency of the Republic and educators who did not participate in the prior consultation were selected.

Among the universities affected by these interventions are: the Federal University of Vale do São Francisco (UNIVASF); the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB); the Federal University of Fronteira Sul (UFFS); the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD); the Federal University of Ceará (UFC); the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES); the Federal University of the Recôncavo Baiano (UFRB); the Federal University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA); the Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM); the Federal University of Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri (UFVJM); the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS); the Federal University of Southern and Southeastern Pará (UNIFESSPA); the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB); the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI); the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS); the Federal Institute of Santa Catarina (IFSC); the Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN); the Federal Center

⁷ The *Future-se* program was formulated by the Ministry of Education (MEC). It was introduced in July 2019 with the primary objective of encouraging Federal Universities to attract private funding, potentially leading to the privatization of these institutions. The project was not well-received by the academic community.

for Technological Education of Rio de Janeiro (CEFET-RJ); the Federal University of Itajubá (UNIFEI); and the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO).

The Bolsonaro government significantly weakened the democratic management in several Federal Universities of Brazil to the extent that his government exhibited striking similarities with the governments of the Military Dictatorship in the country. "Intellectual and scientific, academic, and institutional freedom became points of conflict with the government and the 'cultural war' initiated by Bolsonaro." Thus, breaking the tradition of appointing rectors who had won the consultations held in the universities illustrates the lack of commitment to the autonomy and institutional freedom of the Federal Universities (PILATTI *et al.*, 2022, p. 565).

Therefore, the need for a normative instrument that ensures the election of leaders on a parity basis and, consequently, establishes democratic management in Brazilian Federal Universities is an undeniable urgency.

Due to the actions of the Bolsonaro government, thousands of students and professors at the 20 intervened federal institutions faced authoritarian management that did not allow for meaningful participation of the academic community, from the selection of leaders to decisions in the higher councils.

Since the first year of his term, Jair Bolsonaro has systematically disregarded democratic practices exercised in Federal public institutions regarding appointing the top-ranked candidate in the tripartite list, which is constructed through consultation with the university community and subject to deliberation in their Higher Councils. By the end of August 2021, 26 (twenty-six) Federal Institutions of Higher Education - IFES had been subject to intervention. In these institutions, the authoritarian, intimidating, and persecutory methods directed towards professors, administrative staff, and students have solidified an autocratic atmosphere and hindered the university ethos—a typical movement of irrationalism and obscurantism advocated by the ideological wing of Bolsonarism (CHAVES; ARAÚJO, 2022, p. 3, our translation).

Bolsonaro's government established itself as a political project whose main objective was to weaken public education to the maximum extent. In the context of Federal Universities, this government adopted authoritarian stances contrary to the maintenance and strengthening of democratic management, resulting in incalculable harm to the autonomy of these institutions and, consequently, to the full development of research, teaching, and extension activities.

Final considerations

Democratic governance in Federal Universities is fundamental to realizing democracy in Brazil. The primary objective of this study is to clarify the historical barriers that hinder the implementation of a tool that, in a Democratic State of Law, should be a consolidated right.

Brazilian legislation related to democratic governance in Federal Universities has limitations, ranging from the absence of participation of the academic community in the selection of leaders to the requirement for the formulation of a tripartite list for the President of the Republic to choose the leader.

It is important to note that during the administrations of Lula and Dilma, significant advancements were made in favor of democracy in the country, including university autonomy. However, the practice of appointing rectors from a tripartite list persisted, leaving the appointment of leaders subject to the decision of the President of the Republic. Furthermore, the consequences of the policies of Michel Temer and, especially, Jair Bolsonaro in education were impactful, as education was not considered a priority in both administrations. This made it vulnerable to frequent budget cuts and conservative policies based on interference, anti-science, and religious fundamentalism.

It is evident, therefore, that even in more progressive administrations, the regulation that would allow for the academic community's direct election of university leaders through elections has not been realized in Brazilian legal instruments. Consequently, appointing the Rector by the President of the Republic still prevails. This characteristic represents a fundamental obstacle to the realization of democratic governance in Federal Universities. Therefore, it is imperative to formulate a public policy that changes this dynamic so that democracy and university autonomy are not subject to authoritarian governments, as was the case with the administration of Jair Bolsonaro.

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