Original article

Challenges of citizen participation: on the institutional profile of Brazilian municipal councils

Desafios da participação cidadã: sobre o perfil institucional dos conselhos municipais brasileiros

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to understand the changes and continuities in the institutional profile of municipal councils in Brazil and analyze factors that have influenced these processes. We analyzed the IBGE/Munic databases and constructed the Municipal Councils Institutional Profile Indicator (IPICM), adapted from the work by Almeida et al. (2021). Based on descriptive and inferential statistics, we observed the strengthening of the councils' institutional profile, related, on the one hand, to a process of moderate convergence of participatory institutions in the municipalities and, on the other hand, to a process influenced by variables such as the Municipal Human Development Index and the Gini Index, population, mayors' political ideology, and the number of Civil Society Organizations. Despite this progress, we perceive that the distribution of these institutions still reproduces patterns of territorial inequality between Brazilian municipalities.

Keywords: institutional profile; municipal councils; inequalities; municipalities; participation.

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho é entender as mudanças e permanências no perfil institucional dos conselhos municipais no Brasil e analisar os fatores que influenciaram esses processos. Analisamos os bancos de dados do IBGE/Munic e construímos o Indicador de Perfil Institucional dos Conselhos Municipais (IPICM), adaptado do trabalho de Almeida et al. (2021). A partir de análise quantitativa, verificamos o fortalecimento no perfil institucional dos conselhos, relacionado, por um lado, a um processo de convergência das instituições participativas nos municípios e, por outro, da influência de variáveis como o Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano Municipal e o Índice de Gini, a população, a ideologia política dos prefeitos e o número de Organizações da Sociedade Civil (OSCs). Apesar desse avanço, percebemos que a distribuição dessas instituições ainda reproduz padrões de desigualdade territorial entre os municípios brasileiros.

Palavras-chave: *perfil institucional; conselhos municipais; desigualdades; municípios; participação.*

Introduction

Since the enactment of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution, numerous instruments have been incorporated into public management practices to strengthen democracy and promote citizen participation. Among the most prominent are hearings, conferences, participatory budgeting, and public policy councils, which are widely implemented across the country. These councils have been the focus of extensive research, particularly over the past two decades (Almeida et al., 2015).

Buvinich (2014), Lavalle and Barone (2015), and Almeida et al. (2021) show that councils addressing education, health, social assistance, and child and adolescent affairs have become nearly universal in Brazilian municipalities, established to comply with federal legislation and linked to the management of public designated funds. However, this is not the case for councils in other areas since municipalities have considerable autonomy in creating them. The literature highlights that the expansion of councils is marked by territorial inequalities (Lavalle & Barone, 2015; Antonietto & Severi, 2016), with smaller and poorer municipalities exhibiting significant disparities compared to larger and wealthier ones. This reality underscores the need to better understand and characterize these differences in political participation across Brazil.

Lavalle et al. (2016) note that the first generation of studies on participatory councils, conducted in the 1990s, was optimistic about the democratizing potential of participation. These studies "started from demanding expectations" (2016, p. 614) and identified inequalities within these spaces. A second generation of research, from the 2000s onward, produced "mixed" diagnoses, acknowledging that councils provided some degree of agency to civil society actors, albeit in a marginal capacity to influence public administration. Notwithstanding, gaps remain despite significant contributions to the field:

> The notable advance in the production of knowledge on councils was mainly qualitative [...] the characterization of the scope and limitations of such institutions, often based on case studies, assumed the status of conjectures or plausible implications – because they derive from rich diagnoses – but without solid foundations to allow generalizations. (Ibid., p. 617)

In recent years, the increasing availability of public data has facilitated more comprehensive analyses of council participation, offering a greater potential for generalization (Buvinich, 2014; Lavalle & Barone, 2015; Almeida et al., 2021). Despite these advances, analyzing citizen participation instruments still requires understanding their internal differences, regional variations, and the challenges and opportunities for strengthening them. Continuous reflection on this issue is also essential, as Brazil has experienced actions by conservative governments to dismantle participatory institutions, prompting analyses of the deinstitutionalization of participation at the federal level (Bezerra et al., 2024).

As part of this research agenda, we investigate the changes and continuities in the institutional profile of municipal councils in Brazil in recent years, as well as the factors influencing

these processes. We define the institutional profile as the general characteristics of the formal design of municipal councils, including their density, rules, and competencies (Almeida et al., 2021). Some of these characteristics can be visualized and operationalized through variables available in the Basic Municipal Information Survey (IBGE/Munic). Rather than examining a single point in time, we compare data from 2009 with data from 2019, 2020, and 2021 to assess the geographic distribution of observed changes. This comparative approach adds an innovative dimension to the study, as it allows for an updated diagnosis of the persistence or transformation of territorial inequalities in council participation, in line with previous research (Lavalle & Barone, 2015). The selection of these years is due to data availability constraints, with analyses conducted for all years for which information is accessible.

The next section of this article discusses studies on councils, focusing on their characteristics in the Brazilian context. The subsequent section presents the methodology, which involves descriptive and inferential statistical analyses based on IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021) survey data and the development of an institutional profile indicator for municipal councils, adapted from Almeida et al. (2021). The section of research analysis is divided into two parts: the first examines data distribution over time and space, while the second applies inferential statistics to test hypotheses regarding the determinants of councils' institutional profiles and their relationship to the reproduction of inequalities. We conclude by indicating that, although there has been a strengthening of councils' institutional profiles across the country, regional disparities continue to shape this progress.

Councils' institutional profile and participation

Councils are institutions linked to the executive branch that permanently and interactively expand the participation and representation of organized civil society in various stages of the public policy cycle (Wampler, 2011). Although they are connected to the executive branch, councils can also be seen as hybrid institutions (Avritzer & Pereira, 2005) since they operate in the public sphere, capturing civil society's demands to encourage greater responsiveness from state agents across different policy areas. In Brazil, councils exist within a broader political, economic, and social environment, shaped by an institutional architecture that both constrains and enhances their capacity to act. Different arenas of participation may operate in isolation or be interconnected within specific policy areas (Lüchmann, 2020). This architecture – comprising conferences, hearings, participatory budgeting, and ombudsman offices – is understood in the literature through the concept of participatory institutions (Wampler, 2011). The combination and integration of these mechanisms foster more structured and enduring forms of citizen participation in public administration (Lüchmann, 2020).

In recent years, research on participatory councils has expanded significantly, deepening our understanding of their characteristics, institutional designs, weaknesses, potential, and trajectories across different policy areas (Almeida et al., 2015). However, this body of work has also challenged the assumption of a direct and automatic link between council participation and more democratic or effective public policies, cautioning that "one should not expect, from their mere presence and action, dramatic transformations in the observed outcomes" (Wampler, 2011, p. 152).

A survey conducted by Almeida, Cayres and Ttagiba (2015) highlights the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches used in council analysis, ranging from broad generalizations to more specific case studies. However, the latest wave of research has taken a more pragmatic view of participatory practice, in contrast to the optimism of previous decades (ibid, 2015). Studies from the 1980s and 1990s often emphasized the potential of these institutions – expectations that frequently remained unfulfilled – while relying on theoretically biased frameworks and case-study-based analyses (Lavalle & Swako, 2015). Recent research has adopted a more measured perspective on participatory institutions, pointing out the need for broader and contextualized analyses of councils in Brazil:

> [...] we still lack an overall view that shows us what the operating conditions of these bodies are at subnational levels and in which aspects of their attributions they vary jointly across the Brazilian territory, despite the significant differences in the local contexts in which they operate. (Almeida et al., 2022, p. 392)

In a pioneering study on the subject, Buvinich (2014) identified 43,156 municipal councils in Brazil in 2009.[1] By that year, councils for Social Assistance, School Feeding, Health, and the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (Fundeb) were already widespread, covering more than 94% of Brazil. Geographically, the highest concentration of councils was found in the South and Southeast, where institutions were older, while the lowest concentration was in the North and Northeast, where councils were more recently established. Most municipal councils were parity-based, ensuring balanced representation between the public sector and civil society. However, parity-based councils were least prevalent in the South and most common in the Northeast. Buvinich (2014) also highlighted the recent expansion of councils at the federal level. Among the 36 national councils analyzed, 44% were created between 2003 and 2010, 38% between 1990 and 2002, and only 16% before 1990.

This rapid growth reflects the councils' increasing importance in public administration and their central role in academic research across various fields. Lavalle and Barone (2015) describe this expansion in the 1990s and 2000s as a second generation of participatory institutions (PIs) following the rise of participatory budgeting. Before the 1988 Constitution, "there were practically no councils" (ibid., p. 56). Since then, three patterns of council development have emerged in Brazil: (1) universalization, (2) medium and uneven expansion, and (3) low and uneven expansion, which is the case for most councils. This perspective emphasizes a concern regarding the reproduction of territorial inequalities,

grounded on the fact that more prosperous municipalities with higher socioeconomic indicators and Human Development Indexes (HDI) witnessed a more substantial expansion in the number of councils.

Almeida et al. (2021) identify the councils for education, health, social assistance, and child and adolescent affairs as the oldest and most widespread, present in nearly all Brazilian municipalities. These councils are universal, parity-based, and deliberative, and they rank among the most active since they were established by federal legislation to manage designated funds (ibid.). Lavalle and Barone (2015) note that municipal health councils expanded across municipalities with both high and low HDIs between 1990 and 1996. By contrast, councils for education and child and adolescent affairs initially expanded at a slower pace, primarily in municipalities with higher HDIs. From the 2000s onward, however, their growth accelerated, eventually covering most of the country.

A second wave of councils emerged in the late 1990s and experienced moderate expansion. This group includes councils for older people, housing, culture, and the environment. Lavalle and Barone (2015) found that these councils generally had limited influence – except for housing councils – and were more prevalent in municipalities with high HDIs. Finally, there are councils with low and uneven expansion, such as those addressing human rights, youth, the rights of people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, racial equality, public safety, and food security (Almeida et al., 2021, p. 77).[2] According to an analysis by Lavalle and Barone (2015) for 2009, municipalities with the lowest HDI had almost no councils in these areas, which were created only in municipalities with the highest HDI. When analyzing federal induction based on specific legislation for each area and its relationship with the number of councils existing in 2014, Antonietto and Severi (2016) make this contradiction clear:

> [...] we found a smaller number of municipal councils for people with disabilities, women, human rights, youth, racial equality, and the LGBTT population, which are precisely those aimed at policies to directly combat inequality and, therefore, require greater institutional support to be effective. (Antonietto & Severi, 2016, p. 571)

Therefore, although the literature confirms the general expansion of councils, this process is complex and multifaceted, following different patterns that require continuous and updated reflection in academic research.

Almeida et al. (2021) provided a detailed analysis of management councils in Brazil using IBGE/Munic data from 2013 and 2014. Their study was based on the concept of institutional strength, which defines well-functioning PIs as those with broad territorial implementation, stability over time, and strong institutional design. Examining data from 14 different types of municipal councils in the selected years, the authors highlighted the universalization of federally induced councils, the moderate presence of some councils, and the low prevalence of others nationwide, in a pattern similar to that identified by Lavalle and Barone (2015).

To further explore institutional strength, Almeida et al. (2021) developed the Index of Participatory Potential of Councils (IPPC), which is central to our study. This index measures the institutional profile and participatory capacity of councils based on four variables: (1) number of councils per municipality, (2) parity structure, (3) deliberative nature, and (4) number of meetings. The authors found that in 2013 and 2014, large municipalities had a high IPPC, medium-sized municipalities had a moderate IPPC, and most small municipalities had a low IPPC. The average score of the index, ranging from 0 to 1, was 0.152. The average number of councils per municipality, considering the 14 analyzed councils, was six – four of which were mandatory and two established at the municipality's discretion. Additionally, they observed that non-mandatory councils held more meetings than mandatory councils and those with moderate capillarity. According to Almeida et al. (2021), councils with low federal influence tend to exhibit higher levels of participation than those heavily shaped by federal policies, as they are often driven by grassroots mobilization and activist networks rather than government mandates. In other words, different from traditional councils primarily induced by federal legislation, the institutional strength of these non-mandatory councils stems from active civic engagement.

It is also important to highlight the significance of the Regulatory Framework for Civil Society Organizations (MROSC – Law 13019 (Brasil, 2014). This framework enabled councils to propose collaboration agreements with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for public administration. However, the broader implications of this legal change remain an open area of inquiry, requiring further research.

Although their study focused on participatory budgeting, Fedozzi, Ramos, and Gonçalves (2020, p. 1) also examined the explanatory variables that facilitate or hinder the adoption of PIs, leading to the following conclusions:

> The results indicate that ideological orientation, geographic region, social development, economic inequality, and municipality size affect the chances of adopting participatory budgeting. On the other hand, relative economic wealth and associationism do not have significant impacts.

Contrary to the prevailing literature on councils, Fedozzi et al. (2020) identify greater adherence to participatory budgeting in municipalities in the Northeast of Brazil, particularly those governed by the Workers' Party (PT) and with stronger socioeconomic indicators. However, associationism and income were not found to be significant variables. Despite the numerous differences between participatory budgeting and public policy councils, the authors provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the institutionalization Pis in the country.

The literature reveals diverse institutional configurations and distinct temporal and territorial distribution patterns of councils across the country (Almeida et al., 2021; Buvinich, 2014; Lavalle & Barone, 2015; Wampler, 2011). A key feature of this research agenda is the effort to construct levels, indices, and indicators that facilitate comparisons between

councils and municipalities. Analyses highlight various operational aspects that distinguish the institutional profiles of councils, such as their year of establishment, organizational structure, existence of internal regulations, frequency of mandatory meetings, designated meeting locations, and the characteristics and duration of councilors' and presidents' terms, among other factors (Almeida et al., 2022).

Similarly, Bezerra et al. (2024) outline several critical aspects of councils' institutional design, including their deliberative or consultative nature, specific budgetary allocations, dedicated technical teams, clearly defined authority, policy influence, the role of the presidency, and equal representation of civil Society (parity-based). Mayka (2019), in turn, argues that strong institutional designs develop and adapt over time, characterized by clearly defined prerogatives, formal deliberative authority in relation to other government instances, and sanctions for noncompliance with council decisions. Almeida et al. (2021, p. 73) affirm that "[...] the institutional profile is an important predictor of the councils' institutional strength [...] the rules of institutional design are important conditions for their effectiveness".

Our research aims to contribute to this discussion by updating the institutional profiles of municipal councils in Brazil, considering both temporal changes since 2009 and possible geographical shifts over this period. Councils are privileged spaces for this analysis. On one hand, they occupy an intermediary position between civil society and government, reflecting movements that have attained a degree of institutionalization through their very existence. On the other hand, they help expand this legitimacy by enabling the connection of diverse actors who share common goals and mutual understandings and are recognized as legitimate by society. We believe our study can offer valuable insights into both the vulnerabilities and the potential of these institutions in Brazil.

Methodological procedures

This study uses descriptive and inferential statistics methods to analyze data from the IBGE/Munic Survey for the years 2009, 2019, 2020, and 2021. This survey covers a wide range of demographic, socioeconomic, and infrastructure data from municipal administrations. However, it has limitations, including:

1) Time lag: although conducted annually, the data is not made available in real-time and may be outdated.

2) Self-reporting and data quality: since municipalities provide the information, discrepancies in data accuracy may arise due to variations in registration systems.

3) Underreporting and underestimation: data collection challenges, missing information, or informant resistance may lead to underreporting and underestimation.

4) Methodological changes: modifications in research methodology across different editions may hinder direct data comparability.

Aware of these limitations, we created a database with information extracted from IBGE/Munic to understand the changes in the municipal councils' institutional profile. This research provides data with high coverage for most municipalities and different years, allowing comparisons over time and space. The year 2009 constitutes the first point in time, while 2019, 2020, and 2021, due to restrictions on data availability,[3] were aggregated to become the second time point of the analysis. We found 14 types of councils in 2009 that were repeated in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (human rights, children and adolescents affairs, people with disabilities, LGBTT, public safety, and racial equality, tabulated for 2019; environment, housing, and transportation, 2020; and health, education, culture, and sports, 2021). The time interval of approximately 10 years allows us to compare the institutional profiles of the councils in the municipalities over time. Therefore, supported by the literature already cited, this study tests two main hypotheses:

H0: Inequalities in the distribution of councils' institutional profiles across the country remained unchanged during the analyzed period.

H1: the inequalities changed over the years and gave way to a more uniform distribution of the councils' institutional profile.

To test these hypotheses, and following Almeida et al. (2021), we replicated the municipal councils' institutional profile indicator, defined as:

$$IPICM_{(i,t)} = Cons_{(i,t)} + Part_{(i,t)} + DEL_{(i,t)} \quad (1)$$

where $IPICM_i$ is the municipal councils' institutional profile indicator for municipality *i* in year *t*; *Coun*, the total number of councils per municipality; *Part*, the number of parity-based councils per municipality, and *DEL*, the number of deliberative councils per municipality.

The $IPICM_{(i,t)}$ was normalized by defining an ideal case with a maximum value of 1.0, assuming the municipality has all analyzed councils, all of which are parity-based and deliberative:

$$IPICM_{(it)} = (X_{(it)} - X_{(it)}min)/(X_{(it)}max - X_{(it)}min) \quad (2)$$

Using this indicator, we sought to understand the most general characteristics of the data, such as the average number of councils, their distribution by types, and the average $IPICM_{(i,t)}$. It was compared between Brazil's regions, aiming to generate initial impressions about the geographical changes of the councils in recent years. Thus, $IPICM_{(i,t)}$ was developed for the year 2009, $IPICM_{(i,2009)}$, and for the aggregated period 2019-2021, $IPICM_{(i,2019)}$. It is worth noting that this indicator cannot analyze the institutionalization or the participatory and deliberative potential of these councils. Due to its own limitations,

which are also limitations of the databases, it only measures the strengthening or weakening of specific aspects of the institutional design.[4]

Finally, we estimated regressions, using the Ordinary Least Squares Method, for 4,436 municipalities, to formally test the hypotheses:

$$\Delta IPICM_i=\alpha_0+\alpha_1 IPCIM_{(i,2009)}+\sum^{k}_{(j=2)}\alpha_{(1+k)}X_{(i,k)}+\epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where $\Delta IPICM_i$ represents the variation in *IPICM* between the two points in time under analysis ($\Delta IPICM_i=IPICM_{(i,2019)}-IPICM_{(i,2009)}$); $X_{(i,k)}$ is a vector composed of the k variables supported in the literature; α_0, α_1 e α_k are the parameters to be estimated, and ϵ_i is the error term. If $-1<\alpha_1<0$ and is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, then $IPICM_i$ converged over

Chart 1 – Variables added to the regression

	Variable	Description	Source	Year	Type of variable
1	North	Binary variable for the North region, compared to the Southeast	IBGE	2009	Geographic
2	Northeast	Binary variable for the Northeast region, compared to the Southeast	IBGE	2009	–
3	South	Binary variable for the South region, compared to the Southeast	IBGE	2009	–
4	Central-West	Binary variable for the Central West region, compared to the Southeast	IBGE	2009	–
5	$IPICM_{2009}$	Indicator of the Institutional Profile of Municipal Councils	IBGE	2009	Temporal
6	HDI-M	Municipal Human Development Index	Firjan	2009	–
7	CSOS	Civil Society Organizations per thousand inhabitants	FASFIL/IGE	2010	–
8	Pop	Estimated municipal population, in logarithm	DataSUS	2009	–
9	Gini	Gini Index	DataSUS	2010	–
10	Ideology_2012	A continuous variable that assumes the value of six for far-right mayors and the value of zero for far-left mayors*	TSE	2012	Political
11	Ideology_2016	A continuous variable that assumes the value of six for far-right mayors and the value of zero for far-left mayors*	TSE	2016	–

*Ideological classification carried out according to Bolognesi et al. (2023).
Source: elaborated by the authors.

the period (which supports hypothesis H1) and inequality reduced over the years and led to a more uniform distribution of the institutional profiles of the boards. The independent variables can be seen in Chart 1.

The inclusion of each of these variables is justified by academic literature and specific hypotheses formalized below:

• Geographic region: the expansion of councils is characterized by inequalities, with lower levels of institutionalization in municipalities in the North and Northeast regions (Buvinich, 2014; Lavalle & Barone, 2015; Antonietto & Severi, 2016).

• Time (IPICM_2009): a municipality's position in relation to the indicator in 2009 is associated with its growth in 2019.

• HDI-M: the expansion of councils with lower federal induction occurs more strongly in municipalities with higher human development indicators (Lavalle & Barone, 2015).

• CSOs: the growth of the institutional profile mainly results from the advancement toward the universalization of low-induction councils, for which the presence of movement networks exerts a positive influence (Almeida et al., 2021).

• POP: larger municipalities tend to have a better institutional profile indicator, as their size facilitates the mobilization and participation of more segmented groups in society (Lavalle & Barone, 2015; Antonietto & Severi, 2016).

• Gini: income inequality hinders some citizens' participation in political-representative arenas, negatively affecting institutionalization (Fedozzi et al., 2020).

• Right_2012 and Right_2014: the election of right-wing mayors leads to reduced support for social participation (Bolognesi et al., 2023).

The time and space of councils in Brazil

Initially, it is important to highlight that the tabulated data from IBGE/Munic indicate the existence of 26,009 councils in 2009, a figure that increases to 35,260 in 2019–2021, reflecting a significant growth of approximately 35%. Table 1 presents the number of councils per municipality during the analyzed periods, the differences between them, and the categorization of councils according to the typology of Lavalle et al. (2016).

Table 1 – Characterization of the councils – 2009 and 2019-2021

Type of council	Period 1 2009	Period 2 2019-2021	Relative and absolute growth (periods 1 and 3)	Typology*
Health	5.417	5.526	2% (109)	C1
Children Adolescents	5.084	5.489	8% (405)	C1
Education	4.403	5.287	20% (884)	C1
Environment	3.135	4.375	40% (1240)	C2
Housing	2.373	3.018	27% (645)	C2
Older people's rights	1.974	4.030	104% (2056)	C2
Culture	1.372	2.804	104% (1432)	C2
Sports	623	1.458	134% (835)	C2
Public Safety	579	828	43% (249)	C3
Rights of Persons with Disabilities	490	1.389	183% (899)	C3
Transport	328	551	68% (223)	C3
Racial Equality	148	365	147% (217)	C3
Human rights	79	91	15% (12)	C3
LGBTT	4	49	1.125% (45)	C3
Total	26.009	35.260	35% (9.251)	

*Lavalle et al. (2016).
Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

As expected, councils with considerable influence through federal legislation (C1) exhibited lower growth rates, having already reached universalization in 2009. The number of C2 councils, which have an average yet highly unequal distribution (Lavalle & Barone, 2015), also increased, signaling a move toward universalization. This trend is particularly evident in councils for the environment (4,375) and for older people (4,030), for example. For comparison, in 2020, the number of environment councils equaled that of education councils in 2009; by ten years later, the latter had nearly achieved universalization across Brazilian municipalities. Consequently, C1 councils experienced a relative growth of 9% and an absolute increase of 1,398. Type C2 councils grew by 66%, resulting in the creation of 6,208, while type C3 councils saw a 101% increase, adding 1,645 new councils. Although these figures are sensitive to the initial baseline, they are valuable for identifying differences in council creation patterns and emphasizing a heterogeneous convergence process, particularly for C3 councils.

A clear pattern of growth in the number of C3 councils is evident, with the most notable increase occurring in the council for the rights of persons with disabilities, which rose from 490 in 2009 to 1,389 in 2019. The public safety and transportation councils demonstrated moderate growth, increasing from 579 and 328 in 2009 to 928 and 551, respectively, in 2019. The racial equality council, which had a moderate presence, experienced more significant growth, rising from 148 councils in 2009 to 630 in 2019. LGBTT councils remain limited in number but achieved a high growth rate, increasing from just four municipalities with such councils in 2009 to 49 in 2019. The expansion of C3 councils reflects their relatively recent establishment. Their uneven growth (Lavalle & Barone, 2015) can be attributed to limited federal influence and a lack of prominence in municipal public agendas, indicating considerable potential for further expansion in the coming years.

A comparison of the data in Table 2 shows that, over this 10-year period, Brazilian municipalities have not only made progress in establishing councils but have also become more uniform regarding the number of councils per municipality. In 2009, the average number of councils per municipality was 4.6, increasing to 6.3 in 2019. Furthermore, the coefficient of variation decreased from 42% in 2009 to 30% in 2019, indicating a reduction in data dispersion and variety. In other words, the number of councils per municipality has become closer to the arithmetic mean.

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics disaggregated from IPICM by municipalities 2009 and 2019-2021

		Number of Councils 2009	Number of Councils 2019-2021	Parity--based 2009	Parity--based 2019-2021	Deliberative nature 2009	Deliberative nature 2019-2021
Average		4.6	6.3	4.2	5.6	3.8	5.1
Median		4	6	4	5	4	5
Standard Error		1.95	1.90	1.85	1.88	1.89	1.80
Coef. Range		42	30	44	33	47	35
Percentage	25	3	5	3	4	3	4
	75	6	7	5	7	5	6

Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

It is important to highlight that this average of 6.3 for the years 2019 to 2021 pertains only to the 14 councils we are analyzing. This average may be higher because significant and nearly universal councils, such as social assistance, school feeding, and the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Fundamental Education and Valorization of Teaching (Fundef), are not included in our database. When analyzing 14 councils from the 2013 IBGE/Munic, Almeida et al. (2021, p. 80) found numbers similar to what we discovered for 2019:[5]

> Regarding the number of councils in municipalities, the average and median were both six; the first quartile was five, and the third quartile had seven. In other words, among the 14 types of councils, 50% of municipalities have between five and seven councils, 25% have more than seven, and 25% have fewer than five.

Regarding the data on the deliberative and parity nature from 2019 to 2021, of the 35,260 councils, 31,281 (88%) had equal representation from government and civil society, and 28,608 (81%) were deliberative. In 2009, of the 26,009 existing councils, 23,831 (91%) were parity-based, and 21,422 (82%) were deliberative. In percentage terms, we see that the numbers of parity-based and deliberative councils are similar throughout the period analyzed, indicating that as the number of councils increases, their profiles regarding parity and deliberative nature remain in similar proportions.

The average of the Institutional Profile Indicator of Municipal Councils (IPICM) increased from 0.30 in 2009 to 0.40 in 2019, indicating a strengthening of the councils' institutional profile, both in terms of their overall number and their parity and deliberative nature. Additionally, the coefficient of variation

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics for the 2009 and 2019-2021 IPICM

		IPICM_2009	IPICM_2019
Average		0.30	0.40
Median		0.28	0.40
Standard Error		0.12	0.12
Coef. Range		40	30
Percentage	25	0.21	0.33
	75	0.38	0.47

Source: Elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

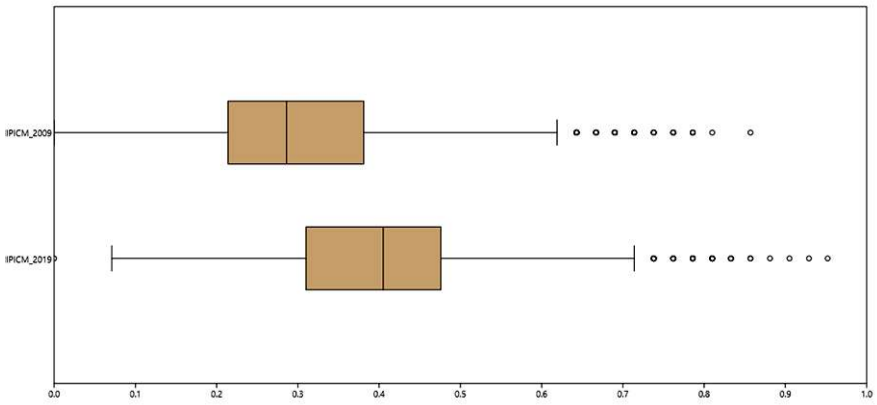
decreased from 40% in 2009 to 30% in 2019, confirming the reduced dispersion of the data relative to the average.

Ideally, each of the 5,570 municipalities with 14 parity-based and deliberative councils would reach a value of 1.0 for the IPICM. However, our analysis indicates that these municipalities are progressing from a low level of 0.30 in 2009 to an intermediate level of 0.40, as they approach the midpoint of 0.50. Therefore, we can conclude that over the past 10 years, the municipalities have enhanced their institutional profile, while inter-municipal disparities have diminished, as the coefficient of variation has decreased from 40% to 30%.

While there are differences among the various types of councils, comparing the selected years aids in understanding the changes in the institutional framework of councils in the municipalities, as illustrated in Graph 1.

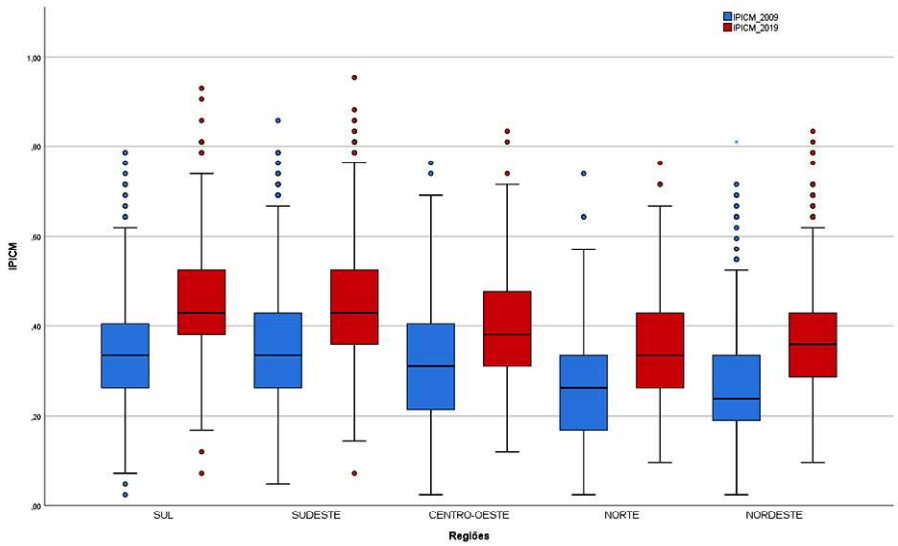
If the institutional profile is a significant variable in understanding the changes and permanence of the councils, we believe that space, given Brazil's vast territory, can also help to illustrate this process. Thus, regarding the geographic distribution of the IPICM shown in Graph 2, all regions of the country, according to the IBGE classification, experienced an increase in the indicator. However, it is crucial

Graph 1 – Box-plot of IPICM from 2009 and 2019-2021



Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Graph 2 – Box-plot of IPICM for the years 2009 and 2019-2021, by region



Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

to note that regional differences, as highlighted in previous studies (Lavalle & Barone, 2015), persist and are reflected in our analysis.

Table 4 summarizes the information, and given the caveat that the average may be sensitive to the number of observations, we observe that the regions with the highest average in 2019 are the South (0.45) and the Southeast (0.44). Next, we have the Central-West (0.39), Northeast (0.36), and North (0.34). This ranking is nearly identical to that of 2009, with the only difference being that in 2009, the municipalities in the South (0.33) ranked behind the Southeast munipalities (0.34), which held the top position. However, all regions experienced growth in the indicator.

It is also possible to identify that the states in the South and Southeast regions have the highest values for the IPICM, which are very close to the midpoint (0.50), while at the same time exhibiting greater homogeneity among their municipalities. The Central-West region is intermediate regarding the indicator, followed by the Northeast, while the North region has the lowest IPICM. Comparatively, the North and Northeast regions currently have an IPICM

Table 4 – Descriptive statistics of IPICM by Brazilian region – 2009 e 2019-2021

Região		IPICM_2009	IPICM_2019-2021
North	Average	0.25	0.34
	Standard Error	0.11	0.11
	Median	0.26	0.36
	Coef_Range	44	32
Northeast	Average	0.26	0.36
	Standard Error	0.11	0.11
	Median	0.23	0.35
	Coef_Range	42	30
Southeast	Average	0.34	0.44
	Standard Error	0.12	0.12
	Median	0.33	0.42
	Coef_Range	35	27
South	Average	0.33	0.45
	Standard Error	0.12	0.11
	Median	0.33	0.42
	Coef_Range	36	24
Central-West	Average	0.32	0.39
	Standard Error	0.12	0.12
	Median	0.30	0.38
	Coef_Range	37	31

Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

similar to that of the South and Southeast regions in 2009. This suggests that Brazilian municipalities, as a whole, have made progress in terms of their institutional profile, although each region has its own particularities.

Similarly, when we observe the average value of the IPICM calculated for the population size groups of municipalities, according to the IBGE classification, we notice that the indicator increases for all groups, particularly highlighting the relationship between a high IPICM and larger population size, as shown in Table 5.

The results in Table 5 indicate that smaller municipalities have managed to advance pari passu with larger ones in institutional terms. The variation in the IPICM for municipalities with up to 5,000 inhabitants is similar to that observed for municipalities with a population greater than 500,000, at 0.1. Only for municipalities with a population of 5,001 to 10,000 inhabitants and 100,001 to 500,000 inhabitants is the pattern reported in the literature observed (Almeida et al., 2021), since the variation in the IPICM was 0.09 for the first group and 0.12 for the second, showing a gradual increase for the intermediate groups.

In short, these descriptive statistics suggest a process of strengthening the institutional profile throughout the studied period, during which different councils expanded in the municipalities. The evidence supports a trend that has been occurring since the 1990s, characterized by an increase in municipal councils. The regression presented below helps clarify these issues.

Table 5 – IPICM by population class – 2009 e 2019-2021[6]

	IPICM_2009	IPICM_2019-2021
1 – Up to 5.000	0,26	0,36
2 – 5.001 to 10.000	0,27	0,36
3 – 10.001 to 20.000	0,28	0,38
4 – 20.001 to 50.000	0,32	0,43
5 – 50.001 to 100.000	0,40	0,52
6 – 100.001 to 500.000	0,49	0,61
7 – More than 500.000	0,59	0,69
Total	0,30	0,40

Source: elaborated by the authors using data from IBGE/Munic (2009, 2019, 2020, 2021).

The IPICM conditions

Since our aim is to understand the influences on changes in the institutional profile of councils over the last decade, we employed a linear regression model to predict factors that may help explain the variation in the municipal-level institutional profiles. We identified 11 variables related to the literature findings and estimated the model across four different configurations for the explanatory variables, with the results presented in Table 6.

Overall, we can see that Model 4, with the assumptions respected, is significant and explains 41% (0.415) of the variation in $\Delta IPICM_i$ among municipalities. Most variables are significant for all estimated models except *Right_2016*. The most important relationship of the model with $\Delta IPICM_i$ can be seen in the variable related to $IPICM_{2009}$ for the coefficient α_1 in the OLS4 regression, whose correlation is strong and negative, -0.547. This indicates that the institutional profile of the councils expanded more in municipalities with lower IPICM in 2009, which emphasizes the presence of a moderate convergence regarding the average of the indicator among Brazilian municipalities. In other words, more councils were established where there was a greater opportunity for creating these institutions. This finding suggests that the elitist pattern of council dissemination from the previous period, as noted by Lavalle and Barone (2015), is changing, though gradually.

Although studies indicate a lack of clarity and well-defined competencies for most councils (Antonietto & Saveri, 2016), one explanation for this convergence is that more municipalities have implemented federal legislation in specific areas over the past decade. For instance, the Statute of Racial Equality (Law 12288/2010), the National Culture Plan

Table 6 – Results found for the estimated model

Variable	MQO1	MQO2	MQO3	MQO4	VIF
IPICM_2009	-0.314*	-0.416*	-0.421*	-0.547*	3.04
IDH-M	–	0.376*	0.356*	0.172*	2.82
Gini	–	0.107*	0.142*	-0.033*	1.72
OSCs	–	0.000	-0.004*	0.005*	1.68
Right_2012	–	-0.005*	-0.005*	-0.004	1.63
Right_2016	–	-0.001	0.000	0.000	1.62
North	–	–	-0.018*	-0.031*	1.42
Northeast	–	–	-0.007*	-0.032*	1.22
South	–	–	0.002	0.013*	1.11
Central-West	–	–	-0.03*	-0.022*	1.03
Populations	–	–	-	0.034*	1.03
Cons	0.194	-0.073*	-0.071*	-0.136*	–
R-Squared	0.221	0.286	0.295	0.415	–
Breusch-Pagan	11.41	0.81	0.08	3.35	–

Note: *p < 0.05 (Significant at the 95% confidence level).
Source: elaborated by the authors.

(Law 12343/2010), the Statute of Persons with Disabilities (Law 13146/2015), and the Public Security Law (Law 13675/2018) outline national standards that favor the establishment of councils in municipalities by legally mandating the development of participation mechanisms in policies. Additionally, there may have been a delayed implementation of policies established before our research's scope, such as the Statute of Older People (Law 10741/2003), the Cities Statute (Law 10257/2001), and the National Environmental Policy (Law 6938/1981). Therefore, our analyses align with Mayka's (2019) study on health councils, suggesting that policy areas undergoing more substantial reforms tend to have councils with greater institutional strength and that these changes unfold over time rather than occurring immediately with the creation of legislation. In this context, the ongoing reinforcement of institutional profiles must be supported by specific regulations in policy areas to progressively empower the councils within the subsystems, as seen with health councils (ibid.).

Despite this, it is essential to consider this progress in light of other results, such as the HDI-M in 2009, which remains an important explanatory variable for enhancing the institutional profile of municipal councils (0.172), as indicated in the study by Lavalle

and Barone (2015). Although it shows a weaker relationship in our model, the number of CSOs (0.005) and population size (0.034) also appear important for strengthening the institutional profile in the years studied. These statistics support the findings of Almeida et al. (2021), which show, based on data from 2013 and 2014, that population size and social mobilization of civil society were key elements in the structuring of municipal councils.

The Gini coefficient is notable and demonstrates a weak, negative correlation (-0.033), indicating that municipalities with lower income inequality made more significant progress in enhancing their institutional profile. The estimated coefficients for the political ideology variables are statistically significant only for Right_2012, showing a negative sign and a 90% confidence interval. Thus, they suggest that municipalities that elected mayors with a right-wing political ideology in 2012 experienced less variation in the IPICM. This aligns with Lavalle and Barone's (2015) findings that Workers' Party governments have a higher average number of councils and with Fedozzi et al.'s (2020) conclusion that left-wing municipal governments are more likely to implement participatory budgeting practices.

Finally, by including the regions of Brazil as an independent variable, we can support what the descriptive analyses have reported. The binary variable for the South region is significant and indicates that the region has statistically grown relative to the Southeast in structuring its councils. Conversely, the Northeast, North, and Central-West exhibit negative coefficients, suggesting a relatively smaller growth in the IPICM compared to the Southeast. Since the South and Southeast regions have the highest socioeconomic development indices, we can infer that an uneven territorial pattern of convergence in the institutional profile persisted despite the general increase in parity and deliberative councils.

Thus, as a complex and multicausal phenomenon, the change in the institutional profile of the councils during this period appears to be, on one hand, a process of moderate convergence of the councils' institutional profiles and, on the other hand, a process primarily influenced by the HDI-M, followed by population size, the GINI Index, and social mobilization through CSOs. Therefore, we can observe that the institutional profile of municipalities improved nationally, showcasing an emerging homogenization process during the period defined in this study. Despite the persistence of regional differences, the analyses indicate growth in areas that delayed the development of their councils, influenced by socioeconomic variables, particularly the HDI-M. Thus, rather than exhausting the analytical possibilities of the data, we recognize the necessity of continuing to enhance and reflect on the explanatory variables and indicators that measure phenomena related to participatory institutions.

Final considerations

In this study, we aimed to provide an overview of changes and continuities in the institutional profiles of municipal councils in Brazil in recent years, examining the factors influencing this process. We employed descriptive and inferential methodologies using databases

provided by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Our analyses yield insights that corroborate existing literature and suggest avenues for future research.

The descriptive statistics show that in the municipalities, both by population size and regions of Brazil, all strata grew in the IPICM over the period studied. In turn, the estimated regression showed that the municipalities with the lowest indicators in 2009 grew the most in subsequent years. The analyses also indicate that this phenomenon occurred in municipalities with specific characteristics, notably those with higher Human Development Index (HDI) scores. Despite the overall strengthening of institutional profiles among councils, persistent disparities in their geographic distribution remain evident.

Thirty years after the 1988 Constitution and efforts to institutionalize participatory governance at national and subnational levels, our findings suggest a gradual transformation in municipal councils, marked by an increase in councils adopting parity-based and deliberative frameworks. Yet, persistent territorial inequalities in council distribution point to a prolonged process before achieving greater homogeneity.

Therefore, this research indicates paths for future studies, such as analyzing subareas of activity of public policy councils, visualizing the process of federal induction and diffusion (Shipan & Volden, 2008) of councils, and detailing the impact of MROSC and the importance of civil society organizations in this process. Recent literature on the effectiveness of participation (Nunes & Resende, 2022) highlights the importance of Participatory Institutions for improving public management indicators. However, it is necessary to reduce inequalities in access to participation to allow political opportunities where they do not yet exist, especially for vulnerable groups that demand access to public administration.

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Notes

(1) According to the author, this number is likely even higher, as the data drawn from the Basic Municipal Information Survey - IBGE/Munic (2009) did not encompass all policies that incorporate participatory councils in their design.

(2) Based on the definition offered by IBGE/Munic, councils identified by the acronym LGBTT refer to the councils for the LGBTQIA+ population.

(3) The IBGE/Munic survey does not collect data on all types of councils every year. Therefore, to ensure a sufficient dataset for comparing a reasonable variety of councils observed in 2009 with a minimum interval of 10 years, we included data from the types of councils surveyed between 2019 and 2021.

(4) Data that could be useful in this regard, such as the number of meetings in the last 12 months, are not available for 2009.

(5) Due to the data availability for the years analyzed, we were unable to examine the following councils mentioned in the work of Almeida et al. (2021): women's rights, social assistance, and youth. However, we included councils not examined by the authors, namely, culture, housing, sport, and transport.

(6) Population group data retrieved from IBGE/Munic (2021).

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