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# Citizen Participation and Municipality Size: Findings in Light of Demonstrations between 2015 and 2017

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## Abstract

Internet democratization and the natural outspread of news reports and information in social media have been changing citizen's participation at public sphere. The complexity of the current scenario takes to reflections about how participation practices have been taking place in municipalities. Thus, the aim of the present study is to assess what demonstrations show about municipality size and citizen participation within the Brazilian context. A quantitative-qualitative research schedule was developed in order to do so. The qualitative stage of it aimed at facing information gotten from effective participation in demonstrations carried out in municipalities. Results have shown that structural discrepancies among municipalities translate differences seen in citizen participation. If one takes into account what would be the best municipality size for the democratic exercise, the herein analyzed contextual aspects point toward the coexistence of fruitful environments to participation either in small- or large-sized municipalities, although there is the trend of concrete participation in larger municipalities.

**Keywords:** Citizen participation; municipality size; protest; demonstrations.

## **Introduction**

Opportunities to encourage participation lead to society's control over public administration, and it, in its turn, helps reducing both corruption and the bad management of public resources. According to Welch (2012), participation regards the amount, quality and diversity of contributions by external actors to governmental decision-making.

Escorel and Arouca (2016) highlight that despite the reinforcement of institutional participation mechanisms observed after the 1988 Federal Constitution, in Brazil, such as municipal councils and participatory budget, there is still persistent democratic deficit in representative democracy. This factor has given birth to new ways of doing politics and participation like demonstrations, protests and online signed petitions. These new participation forms stand out for the presence of new political actors and for its easy organization in the internet or in social media. On the other hand, it has short duration, as well as does not find institutionalization mechanisms that make the solution of its demands effective.

According to Avritzer (2019), demonstrations in June 2013 emerged from a political crisis context outlined by representativeness and participation crises. Representativeness crisis is often linked to the fact that society no longer recognizes itself in their representatives, in the Federal Parliament and in the Senate. It is essential highlighting that the number of representatives elected for the National Congress who belonged to social movements has decreased between 2003 and 2014, mainly due to rise in expenses with political campaigns, which were often financed by private agents, at that time.

Participation crisis, in its turn, is associated with reduced participation mechanisms. The presence of participatory institutions in the so-called national forums mobilized millions of people between 2003 and 2013, and it had significant impact on social policies, mainly on those concerning healthcare and social assistance. Results of these forums were mostly legitimized by representatives in the National Congress in the form of Bills, such as the one that has created the Unified Social Assistance System, also known as SUAS. However, after the political crisis, these forums were emptied; in 2013, Brazilian Congressmen questioned the informal entanglement between participation and representation (Avritzer, 2017).

The aforementioned context reinforces the belief that authentic representation is rarely found, since several public managers are often reluctant to include external actors in decision-making processes and, when they do it, it only happens after questions and decisions were already made. Oftentimes, society gets frustrated with the shallow participation efforts that, actually, lead to more rage towards the government and to distrust in public managers' skills and competence. However, governments criticize citizens for lack of competence, skills, ability, time and interest in exercising significant participation (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

Based on such dichotomy between public managers and effective citizen participation, it is possible assuming that municipality size can present elements that contribute to the best understanding of factors leading to political participation. According to McDonnell (2020), local governments are the spaces for democracy training, since citizens lacking political experience can effectively and significantly contribute to local politics.

The literature remains inconclusive when it comes to the democratic implications of municipality size. The ones who advocate for small-sized municipalities argue that citizens in them

perceive a higher level of political effectiveness; consequently, they will have more participation in local politics. On the other hand, those who advocate for large-sized municipalities state that participation must increase based on population size, because the greater the importance and reach of political issues, the more incremented the party-political mobilization (McDonnell, 2020). Authors like Denters, Goldsmith, Ladner, Mouritzen and Rose (2014), and Saglie and Vabo (2009) believe that municipality size does not have any effect on participatory attitudes and behaviors, and that any perceived effect results from indirect factors, such as socioeconomic status and the dissemination of on-line communication technologies.

If one takes into consideration that local-government size has implications in participation, the number of intermediate organizations at municipal scope can lead to society's participation (Oliver, 2000), since it gives opportunities to the acquisition of civilian skills. Such a process has, in itself, an important encouragement element, because the acquisition of these skills encourages effective participation (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

Thus, differences typical to municipalities have influence over individuals' political participation chances (Rubenson, 2005). Studies must consider differences in municipal contexts at the time to analyze participation; it is so, because of its significant predictor effect on participatory behaviors. Municipal configurations influence participation in systematic and predictable ways; however, most studies about participation do not take into consideration municipal environment features, since they only prioritize individual aspects (Oliver, 2000).

Citizens' active participation in Brazilian municipalities acquired relevance from June 2013, onwards, at the first wave of demonstrations. Protests are seen as the new citizen-participation form, and as political intervention focused, at first, on citizen's individual need of having their demands seen and heard in times of representativeness and participation crisis (Avritzer, 2019; Tatagiba & Galvão, 2019). Tatagiba and Galvão (2019) highlight that protests and demonstrations have taken place in Brazil in 2011 and 2012, and that they reached their peak in 2013. The 2013 demonstrations also showed significant changes in protests' elements, such as social groups joining them, besides the rise of both new political actions and conservative right-wing groups. There were also changes in their grievances and claims, which stopped focusing on urban life conditions and started highlighting the government and the political system.

The 2013 demonstrations echoed on international scenarios and called the attention of scholars aimed at investigating the factors boosting this social mobilization, which focused on blaming politicians and on asking for better public-management outcomes. However, by analyzing Brazil, one must be aware that different features help the rise of regional discrepancies in a country with continental territory, such as the simultaneous existence of poverty belts and municipalities seen as excellent (Costa, Ferreira, Braga, & Abrantes, 2012).

The aforementioned scenarios shine light on the relevance of knowing municipal features capable of promoting citizen participation in developing countries like Brazil, because society's active participation can be an essential component to ensure that governments would reach the targets set for long-term public bureaus, programs' efficiency and effectiveness, based on the legal principles of the democratic order (Silva, 2002).

Accordingly, the question leading to the present study was, "what do protests that have taken place between 2015 and 2017 indicate about municipality size and citizen participation? Thus,

a quantitative-qualitative research was carried out in order to answer this question. The quantitative stage of the research lied on investigating differences in the distribution of elements promoting participation among municipalities. It was done to help better understanding the association between municipality size and participation. The qualitative stage of it has identified the municipalities experiencing demonstrations, as well as focused on making an in-depth description of protests and on performing comparative analyses to assess the connection among the recorded results.

Differentiating the distribution pattern applied to the main protest organizers observed at municipal scope is essential to better understanding the reason why these spaces present greater or smaller will to participate in demonstrations. On the other hand, it is possible seeing that citizens' active participation through protests is a way to control and put pressure over public management. Thus, an analysis to point out municipalities' reality can help developing actions aiming at reinforcing social mobilization, since they could strengthen local civil society and, consequently, broaden the democratic exercise.

## **Citizen participation promoters**

Democracy in Brazil has been going through constant changes since the re-democratization process triggered in 1984. According to Avritzer (2018), Brazilian democracy was formed by pendulum movements that have resulted from the fact that national institutions forming democratic structures use different non-electoral or counter-electoral ways to access power – these mechanisms are used from time-to-time.

Representative democratic structures' reinforcement is closely linked to effective citizen participation. Avritzer (2018) points out that Brazil became a reference in social participation after the successful participatory budget launched in the 1990s. Escorel and Arouca (2016) added to this statement by saying that the institutionalized participation set by the 1988 Federal Constitution, such as that resulting from municipal councils, is a good example of changes in political and deliberative space designed to give voice to the population in public-policy discussions.

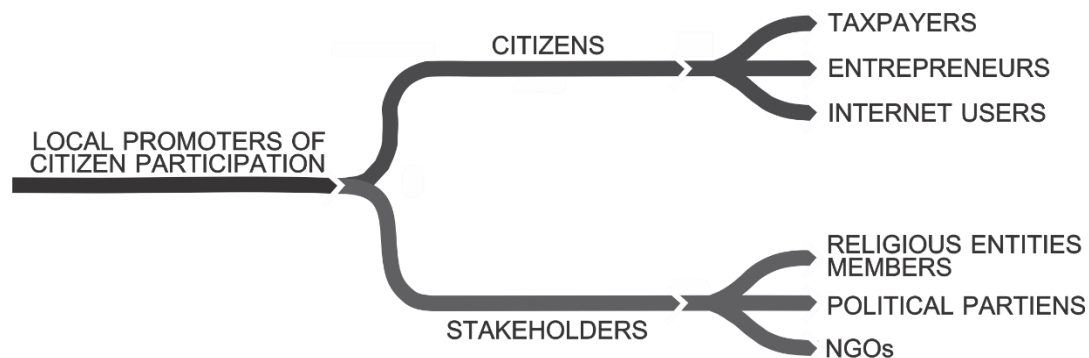
However, as pinpointed by Avritzer (2018), Brazil witnessed significant changes either in participation or in representativeness since 2013. With respect to representativeness, one could observe increase in conservative forces in the Congress, due to increase in electoral campaigns' private financing – allowed until 2016. It was also possible observing that participation, in itself, cannot change the composition of the representation system.

Escorel and Arouca (2016) clarified that traditional participation means, like participatory budget and municipal councils, were not effective in encompassing social wills. Municipal councils, which were designed to make popular participation feasible, became management bureaus based on technical discussions substantiated by managers, whose users' representatives cannot significantly intervene with. The representativeness and participation crises ended up opening room for new forms of doing politics and for new political subjects, a fact that made citizen participation practices socially dynamic. Thus, it is essential understanding factors promoting participation to reinforce democratic structure in this scenario of representative democracy transformation and changes in participation forms.

In light of the foregoing, participation is the basis of active control, since it broadens transparency and highlights the means to put pressure over public management. According to Yang and Callahan (2007), decisions about society's involvement in participatory processes are responses to pressure exerted by different external actors. Besides, although public managers have significant control over managerial outcomes and processes, their attitudes and actions can be influenced by expectations and pressures from the most prominent external actors.

Therefore, the joined participation of citizens and stakeholders leads to a straighter and more transparent form of influencing decision-making in public management (Kahane, Loptson, Herriman, & Hardy, 2013). However, despite the relevance of society's actions guided to public management control, there is the need of better understanding the profile and interests of actors seeking to act in a participatory way (Platt Neto, Cruz, Ensslin, & Ensslin, 2007).

There is a key distinction between external actor types working at municipal level, namely: citizens who are individual participants without affiliation to any organization, and stakeholders who are representatives of a formally constituted group or organization. This external-actors' classification – i.e., non-governmental actors – results from differences in how they play their part in deliberative participatory processes (Kahane et al., 2013). Accordingly, it is possible identifying different actors in the literature capable of leading to citizen participation, be it in an individual or collective way (Figure 1). According to Brady et al. (1995), the presence or lack of civilian skills significantly contributes to individual differences in participation processes; these civilian skills are organizational communications and competences that make effective participation easier. The acquisition of civilian skills takes place throughout individuals' life, and they become essential for political activities in their adult life; they can be acquired and enhanced in non-political organizations – at work, in voluntary associations and in churches, for example.



**Figure 1.** Participation promoters in municipalities

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

According to Brady et al. (1995), besides making it possible for their members to acquire civilian skills, these non-political organizations – companies, NGOs and religious entities - are potential actors to control public management processes. Thus, business organization members, and their leaders, form a distinct group of individuals who have their own interests when it comes to participation. Employees in business organizations have their interests as tax-payers who aim to

have knowledge to participate and to claim for better performances in the application of public resources.

Entrepreneurs, in their turn, seek useful information as indicators for the future decisions to be made about their business by taking into consideration changes in taxes rates, as well as seek influential opportunities to rise incentives to their economic activities (Platt Neto et al., 2007). Yang and Callahan (2007) highlight that communities where businessmen are more participative in putting pressure over the administrative office in place often make these spaces more susceptible to stronger efforts by the public power to gather different external actors in strategic decision-making processes.

Electronic means are among the main channels used to disclose public accounts and information about the government's performance, besides allowing access to investigative news and information published by the media (Platt Neto et al., 2007). Therefore, internet users define a group of individuals who seek to access governmental portals to follow up the public actions they are interested in. Furthermore, the internet is a channel often used to mobilize people, mainly for protests.

On the other hand, it is also important pointing out the role of religious entities and of their members as relevant stakeholders at municipal level. Avritzer (2012, p. 394) states that "the Brazilian civil society has a strong group of religious associations that participate in self-help activities and in organizing urban poor individuals to claim for public assets". Moreover, churches, as mentioned by Brady et al. (1995), can be the environment for political activity training since they enable the acquirement of civilian skills.

Political parties aim at exerting active control over the public sector to gather subsidies to support their critiques to the administration in office and to elaborate future propositions, such as governmental plans (Platt Neto et al., 2007). NGOs, in their turn, are seen as groups struggling for collect interests; they are identified in the literature as the main elements boosting citizens' involvement in strategic governmental decision-making (Yang & Callahan, 2007). Pinto (2004) reinforces NGOs' relevance in the Brazilian context when he states that "in scenarios of political participation by different instances, such as in councils, conferences and participatory budgets, NGOs have been having active voice as representatives of fractions of civil society or as assessors of social movements" (p. 655). Thus, it is possible observing the diversity of external actors and the range of their interest in exerting political participation.

Escorel and Arouca (2016) make it clear that, with respect to the Brazilian context, the June 2013 demonstrations happened in different and heterogeneous ways that, not always, followed an organization process in compliance with traditionally known patterns. The involved actors have not always expected to fight for a position in the institutional logic; they sought changes, but did not put aside demonstrations' party-like, carnival-like, profile. The heterogeneity of actors allowed observing collective participation, but also the participation of individuals who did not show any party-political bond, who did not integrate unions or organizations aimed at planning future actions, or who did not show traces of final-goal strategies.

Escorel and Arouca (2016) highlight individuals in the protests who, besides claiming for their individual and collective rights, also called attention to themselves as political subjects. These individual actors wanted to be seen and heard by the State, by the media, by their friends and by

social media. This would be one of the main elements of change in individual participation, since it gave birth to a new relationship between acknowledgement and visibility.

Tatagiba and Galvão (2019) corroborated this perception by analyzing protests in Brazil between 2011 and 2016; they pointed out the heterogeneity of actors and claims. According to them, some middle class segments, such as wage earners in the education sector and public servants, joined their forces to precarious workers and popular movements to fight for rights and democracy, whereas other segments, mainly the ones encompassing self-employed professionals and middle class wage earners in management positions, joined forces to dominant sectors to selectively report policies put in place by the Workers Party (PT) administration, and their corruption. Thus, the conciliation of classes opened room for political polarization on the PT/anti-PT axis.

## **Participation and municipality size**

A hard question has been intriguing some scholars for a long time: what is the ideal size of a municipality for democratic exercise? This discussion shows that municipality size indirectly forges participation because it changes the opportunities for society's involvement in it (Oliver, 2000). It evidences that participation opportunities are not the same for all. Among the several arguments emphasizing the importance of participation, one finds that it provides the opportunity to influence municipal management in benefit of society during decision-making processes (Nguyen, Le, Tran, & Bryant, 2015).

However, not all citizens get involved in participation in decision-making processes or in mechanisms aimed at controlling public actions. Those who participate are not representatives of a major population. It is known that participants differ from non-participant ones in fundamental aspects – schooling, income, race, gender and a series of other individual features – that separate active from inactive citizens. Nevertheless, it is not that participation is the same among all rich and well-educated individuals, for example. It is not just a matter of who is the individual in question, or of who it is connected to, but of where this individual is inserted in; it is essential taking into account the context where the political action takes place, i.e., municipalities (Rubenson, 2005).

The international literature is conflicting when it comes to the definition of what would actually be the best municipality size for democratic exercise. According to Dahl (1967), this topic “holds a wide variety of conflicting answers” (p. 953). Actually, approximately 50 years later, questions about what would be the best municipality size for a democratic government remain splitting opinions in the public administration field, mainly in political sciences. There are the ones who advocate that smaller municipalities allow greater participation based on social interaction, whereas some others state that the bigger ones favor the formation of a strong civil society.

According to Kelleher and Lowery (2009), most of this conflict results from lack of an accurate definition about what aspects of the municipal context actually matter, and how. These authors highlight that size is often measured based on municipal population size, and that it influences participation opportunities in matters observed in political agendas, in diversity of interests and in how citizens get mobilized.

McDonnell (2020) points out that the core argument of those who advocate for small municipalities potentiating democratic participation lies on political effectiveness. It is so, because citizens in smaller municipalities understand that their interference is more effective; consequently, their participation rate gets higher than that of those who live in smaller municipalities. Lassen and Serritzlew (2011) explain that political issues in smaller municipalities are closer to citizens' reality, to their more immediate concerns, to the less abstract scope elements; therefore, they are more accessible to people lacking political expertise.

Another factor assumingly boosting participation in small municipality lies on the lower complexity of their political process, since it tends to make participation less intimidating and to lead to the perception that results can be reached. Citizens in a community with synergy among its members, for example, are more prone to be aware of who to get in touch with, and it reduces costs with participation in information sharing and allows the easiest formation of political groups that end up gaining prominence (Heinisch, Lehner, Mühlböck, & Schimpf, 2018).

It is also possible observing the expectation that governance and administration in smaller municipalities are faster and more responsive. This argument is substantiated by the fact that, by increasing the governmental scale, one finds increased organizational needs, and hierarchic and bureaucratic organizational structures. Citizens can feel the effectiveness of their reduced participation if these structures are considered non-responsive. It is also important highlighting that having a smaller number of, and greater easiness to access, elected representatives makes citizens feel that their claims are being heard and approached (Denters et al., 2014; McDonnell, 2020).

On the other hand, those who advocate that participation will prevail in bigger municipalities support their argument over two assumptions. First, they take into account that the widest scope of responsibility and the most significant issues are often discussed in bigger municipalities; they mostly comply with the political concerns and interests of most citizens. Second, as municipalities grow, citizens get more heterogeneous, social and political matters get deeper and political inclusion grows. Thus, the combination of the growing importance of political issues to greater political preference diversity opens room for higher interest for, and competition in, local politics (Denters et al., 2014; Heinisch et al. 2018; McDonnell, 2020). If one takes into account the resources model by Brady et al. (1995), the acquisition of civilian skills can be easier in bigger municipalities where there are higher concentrations of non-political organizations. Local democracy can be supported by companies, NGOs and by access to the media, mainly in bigger localities. This process reinforces residents' influence on local public life and helps controlling the actions of elected representatives (Gendźwiłł & Swianiewicz, 2016).

Based on the aforementioned, individual resources to promote political participation must be more effectively translated into real political behavior in bigger municipalities, and it suggests a larger number of actors interested in claiming for better outcomes from municipal management in them. Bigger-sized municipalities would also be more prone to encourage mobilization efforts by political agents who subsidize individual resources and interests in politics to promote participation (Kelleher & Lowery, 2009).

According to Dahl (1967), municipalities must be big enough to be autonomous and manage their own issues, as well as small enough for its citizens to broadly participate in public decisions, since the larger the population in the municipality, the lower the rate of citizens who would be able



to have effective political participation. Thus, Dahl points out that the ideal municipality would house between 50 and 200 thousand inhabitants (in the North American context).

Nevertheless, Oliver (2000) argues that the ideal democratic municipality cannot only be determined by size, but also by social economic and demographic diversity. Accordingly, Kahane et al. (2013) highlight the need of having the participation of different individuals, so that multiple identities and interests can be represented; the higher the diversity of external actors, the greater the participation effectiveness.

It is important highlighting that most of the 5,570 municipalities in Brazil are in the small-sized category. Population estimated data provided by IBGE in 2016 point out that approximately 70% of Brazilian municipalities house less than 20 thousand inhabitants. Veiga (2002) highlights dialectics in Brazilian urban societies' development, since it stands out for the production of a deeply unequal reality. There is power domination in big cities, the so-called metropolises, which set the new taxation standards from inside out, due to the construction of the consumption society. This society is based on behavior models and values seen as universal; they are mostly supported by the media and by communication networks that make men closer to places within a differentiated space-time. This inequality context featuring the construction of Brazilian societies implies the existence of inequality in participation ways among municipalities.

## **Methodological trajectory**

### *Quantitative procedures*

Minas Gerais State was used as analytical cut for the present study in order to assess whether there are differences between numbers of actors boosting participation; it was done by taking into consideration data from 2010 about its 853 municipalities. Option was made to analyze municipalities in this state because, based on Costa et al. (2012), the observed discrepancies among Brazilian municipalities can be mainly perceived in most federation units; among them, one finds Minas Gerais State, which stands out for its large number of municipalities and for its regional differences. Therefore, knowing the reality of this state enables best understanding a significant fraction of the Brazilian scenario.

In order to best understand the herein assessed phenomenon, we applied the cluster analysis to Minas Gerais municipalities' data, based on the amount of main local promoters. It was done to distinguish how these spaces can present more or lesser inclination to participation. The Euclidean quadratic distance was the adopted dissimilarity measurement, since it is recommended when one uses the Ward agglomerative hierarchical method to set the groups.

It is necessary confirming that groups are really different from each other at the time to validate the formed sets; univariate statistical tests can be applied to assess whether there is statistical difference between the means recorded for the groups. With respect to the present research, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test (U test) was adopted to assess the existence of two independent samples because the used data did not follow a normal distribution. U test was applied to also investigate some hypothesis.

The bibliographic review allowed elaborating two hypotheses. The first one aimed at best understanding how participation promoters are distributed among Minas Gerais municipalities; it

was done to assess whether there are divergences in the structures of opportunities boosting participation. Analyzing how these promoters are distributed allows observing whether there is any difference between municipality size types. Accordingly, the analysis of the first hypothesis is expected to point out whether there are differences in inclination to actively act in municipalities due to their size:

**H<sub>0</sub> = Municipalities with different sizes present similar concentrations of participation promoters.**

**H<sub>1</sub> = Municipalities with different sizes present different concentrations of participation promoters.**

If one has in mind that citizen action is a process demanding interaction among different promoters, the aim was to better understand outcomes from these likely interactions, based on the analysis of variables that show how citizen action can be developed at municipal level. Thus, the second hypothesis comes up:

**H<sub>0</sub> = Citizen action does not differ between groups featured by participation promoters.**

**H<sub>1</sub> = Citizen action differs between groups featured by participation promoters.**

On the other hand, in order to operationalize the cluster analysis, it is necessary making a careful selection based on the theory of classification criteria (variables) linked to the purpose of the investigation (Pfeiffer, 1980). At this point, the focus was to classify Minas Gerais municipalities according to number of participation promoters. The literature introduced in the first section of the present article was taken into account to select the following variables: X1 = rate of occupied people (proxy of tax-payers); X2 = rate of companies; X3 = rate of number of fix internet users; X4 = rate of non-profitable private foundations and associations (FASFIL and NGO); X5 = rate of members from religious entities; and X6 = total number of political parties.

Variables used in the first test of hypotheses about municipal size are X7 = total population; X8 = population density; and X9 = urbanization rate. Two variables of political-institutional character were used to analyze citizen action in municipalities, namely: X10 = total number of active managerial councils; and X11 = rate of voters affiliated to political parties. Although these variables were used as citizen action proxy, it is known that it is not possible reducing participation only based on these features, due to the concept of multi-dimensional participation. However, it was important analyzing these aspects if one takes into account the little availability of information about participatory processes based on official data in Brazil. Secondary data sources that have worked as basis for the collection of a set of variables that, in their turn, have allowed the conduction of these analyses are (a) Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE); (b) Electoral Supreme Court (TSE); (c) Annual List of Social Information (RAIS); and (d) Ministry of Communications.

### *Qualitative procedures*

The aim was to assess protests organized in Minas Gerais municipalities in order to check how the recorded results in the quantitative stage actually represented participation's reality in municipalities, since it is understood that such demonstrations are acts of political citizen participation. Accordingly, investigation universe was determined based on the lists of

municipalities that have confirmed their adhesion to protests summoned by *Vem Pra Rua* and by *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), and on information available at Portal G1, in the Map of Demonstrations, in Brazil:

1. ***Vem pra Rua***<sup>1</sup> – Supra-partisan movement mainly focused on struggles against corruption. It was launched in October 16, 2014 and fought for “Democracy, Ethics in Politics, Efficient State and Smaller State Structure”. It was featured as the main organizer of protests against the federal government. Two of its demonstrations, one in March 2015 and another in March 2016, got to history as the biggest demonstrations ever organized by civil society, in Brazil.

2. ***Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT Brazil)***<sup>2</sup> – It was launched in August 28, 1983 as the biggest union in Brazil and in Latin America, and the fifth biggest union in the world. CUT’s mission is to represent workers in the country and to articulate their unions, federations and confederations. It was featured as the main organization to summon for demonstrations to support the impeached President Dilma Rousseff; however, after her impeachment, and the inauguration of President Michel Temer, it became one of the oppositions to the government in office.

3. **G1**<sup>3</sup> – Media leader in category news report; this portal belongs to Globo Group, the biggest media and communication conglomerate in Brazil and in Latin America.

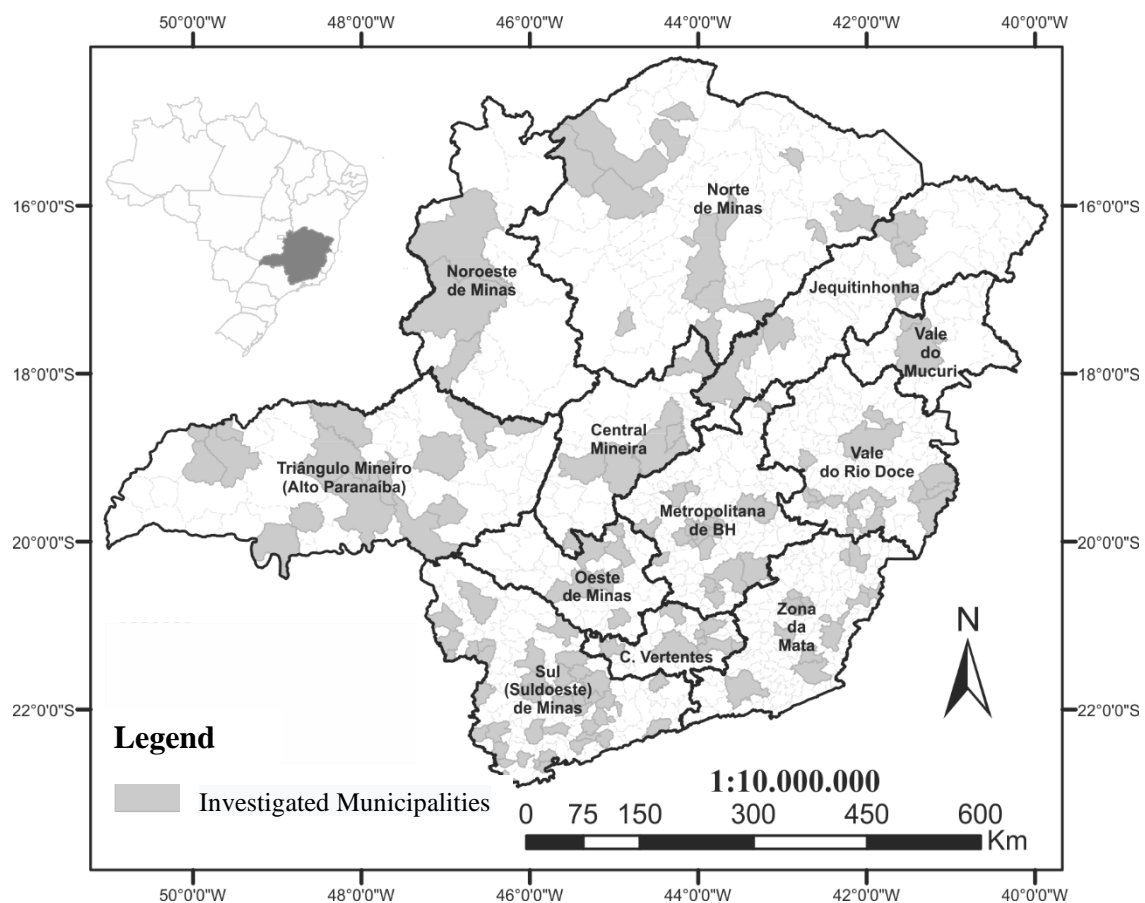
Overall, protests were investigated in 142 municipalities distributed within 12 mesoregions; in other words, 16.65% of Minas Gerais municipalities were assessed (Figure 2). The time interval set for the investigation ranged from March 2015 to June 2017 (27 months, in total). According to Tatagiba and Galvão (2019), demonstrations got to their peak in 2013 and returned even stronger in 2014 and 2015 – this period stood out for strong political and representativeness crises, in Brazil.

Research stages were followed to systematize data prospection, collection, organization and analysis. The adopted procedures, as shown below, methodologically aimed at seeking pertinent information that, oftentimes, are not available, or that are hardly found, in official databases:

- **Data prospection criteria definition** – used to investigate protests against or pro federal government, in Minas Gerais municipalities; punctual searches were carried out on the occurrence of these events – it was necessary switching between terms “protest” and “demonstration” to broaden the investigation scope. Search meshes were “protest/demonstration + municipality name + date of the event”; “protest/demonstration against Dilma + municipality name”; “protest/demonstration in favor of Dilma + municipality name”; “protest/demonstration against Temer + municipality name”; and “protest/demonstration in favor of Temer + municipality name”.
- **Data systematization and collection** – tables are a standardized form to record the collected data. The pre-test of the form was simultaneously carried out with the evaluation of selected terms for information searching, and it allowed making the necessary adjustments in it. No software was used for data collection purposes. Google Search was the applied search mechanism due to its performance in recovering information; location of passages and subsequent information extraction were the search procedures applied to the texts. Because searches had defined goals, based on the adopted criteria, it was possible implementing them to help collecting specific information about protests in Minas Gerais. Searches were carried out between October

and November 2017, and they generated one datum to each localized valid information. All sources – information links – were properly stored in data spreadsheets.

- **Data processing** – after all data were collected, it was possible start processing them. At this stage, a preliminary assessment was performed to find irregularities and uncommon information that could affect the quality of the data set. Subsequently, the transformation activity was carried out; data were added to generate study variables. Therefore, the amount of information was reduced for variables' construction purpose. Variables were (a) total number of protests happening in municipalities over the analyzed period-of-time; (b) number of municipalities that have adhered to each one of the summoned demonstrations; (c) estimated population in each demonstration; (d) estimated mean population in each demonstration.
- **Result analysis** – tables, graphics and maps were elaborated to introduce information and to make the understanding of the assessed phenomenon easier.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of investigated municipalities at the qualitative stage of the current study

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

## Results presentation and discussion

As already defined, there herein presented results are based on the analysis of Minas Gerais municipalities. This state accounts for the largest number of municipalities in the country: 853, in total. Based on population estimates by IBGE for 2016, approximately 78% of them house population smaller than 20 thousand inhabitants. This state is featured by outstanding regional differences similar to the Brazilian regional configuration. According to Peles, Santos and Rodrigues (2014), it is likely observing clear differences between the North, Jequitinhonha Valley and Mucuri Valley macro-regions, which hold the highest rates of poverty, illiteracy, infant deaths, among other socioeconomic indicators, and Triângulo and Central macro-regions, that, in their turn, account for the lowest rates for these indicators. Similar to Brazil, Minas Gerais State has clear divisions between the North-Northeast and South-Southeast regions; it presents division between its Northern regions and the Jequitinhonha/Mucuri regions, which are the less economically dynamic ones; its Central areas and Triângulo region are the most dynamic in the state.

According to data of Minas Gerais Social Accountability Index, also known as IMRS, provided by João Pinheiro Foundation, Northern Minas Gerais region, and Jequitinhonha Valley and Mucuri Valley, recorded the lowest income *per capita* rates in 2010, R\$ 455.33 and R\$ 431.75, respectively. Other socioeconomic indicators presented similar behavior in the comparison of Minas Gerais regions.

### Composition of municipality groups

The grouping analysis was firstly carried out with six variables linked to number of participation promoters in the municipality. It was done in order to investigate the hypotheses introduced in the quantitative stage. All variables were standardized through Z score to avoid likely scale mistakes. With respect to correlation pattern between the herein adopted variables, the correlation matrix showed most coefficients with values lower than 0.30; there were only few exceptions to it, as shown in Table 1. This finding points out that data were not closely correlated to each other; therefore, there were no distortions in grouping results.

Table 1

### Pearson's bivariate correlations of the standardized variables

Variable	Prop. companies	Prop. Occupied people	Prop. Internet users	Prop. Religious entities	Prop. NGOs	N. political parties
Prop. companies	1					
Prop. Occupied people	0.539*	1				
Prop. Internet users	0.444*	0.511*	1			
Prop. Religious entities	-0.022	-0.119*	-0.101*	1		
Prop. NGO	0.213*	-0.031	-0.024	0.098*	1	
N. political parties	0.248*	0.439*	0.363*	-0.241*	0.014	1

\*Significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Since there is “no imposition or limitations to the number of groups taken into consideration, the selection of the number of groups was carried out based on criteria proposed by Mingoti (2007), the so-called ‘Behavior Analysis at Fusion Level (Distance)’, depending on the researchers’ judgement about study aims”. Such a criterion suggests that huge jumps from one stage to the other in the dendrogram point out a likely cut-off point and the definition of the final number of groups.

Therefore, if one takes this criterion into account, the cut-off point for groups’ selection reached point 1000 in the dendrogram applied to the adoption of the Ward method, which identified two groups. The other groups were tested, but there was no variability capable of justifying the extraction of more than two groups.

However, Calinski and Harabasz’s Pseudo-F statistical calculation was carried out to make sure that these two clusters were the ideal partition found for Minas Gerais municipalities. Basically, this criterion tests difference in groups, at each grouping stage; one must seek the pseudo-F value, since it indicates the partition accounting for the greatest heterogeneity among groups – it corresponds to ideal data partitioning (Mingoti, 2007). The highest pseudo-F value in the current study was 263.34, and it pointed towards the selection of 2 groups – the most distinct ones -, a fact that confirmed the previously selected groups. Table 2 shows differences between each one of the generated groups.

Table 2

**Descriptive statistics of the generated groups**

Variables	Group 1 (n = 681)				Group 2 (n = 172)			
	Mean	Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Prop. companies	207.62	84.25	42.26	680.94	335.65	132.10	140.90	1,661.17
Prop. Occupied people	649.41	489.70	14.78	3017.53	2,068.41	847.94	237.23	6,851.41
Prop. Internet users	208.17	173.22	2.73	1,011.94	832.88	540.31	57.33	4,170.70
Prop. Religious entities	9,554.38	425.54	3,164.86	9,993.32	9,458.55	278.20	8,167.88	9,946.31
Prop. NGOs	19.82	11.55	0.00	81.61	20.43	7.08	3.44	41.60
N. political parties	13.98	3.99	2	27	19.97	4.29	9	27

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Mean values recorded for each group showed that the 681 municipalities forming group 1 have smaller numbers of protest organizers in comparison to group 2, which comprised 172 municipalities with high concentration of external actors encouraging participation.

U test was performed to assess whether the means of analyzed features were statistically different between the two groups in order to validate the formed groups (Table 3). Results in the U test pointed out differences between the means of all analyzed variables, and it validated the conducted cluster analysis. Thus, it is possible stating that the distribution of citizen participation promoters among Minas Gerais municipalities is unequal.

Table 3  
Results of U test applied to independent variables

	Prop. companies	Prop. Occupied people	Prop. Internet users	Prop. Religious entities	Prop. NGOs	N. political parties
Mann-Whitney U	16,595.000	5,598.000	8,312.000	41,052.000	50,940.500	18,831.000
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.000

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

A graphic (Figure 3) with the mean of posts for each variable, based on data in the ordinal scale, was plotted to better cover features of groups resulting from the cluster analysis. Thus, it was possible clearly identifying the profile of each of the formed groups. Figure 3 shows that group 2 presents the highest indicator for presence of participation promoters in almost all measured variables, except for variable “proportion of religious entities members”. Therefore, there are two likely explanations for it. The first one lies on the fact that this group is featured by smaller-sized municipalities (as shown below); the time available in these cities for personal activities is shorter, since individuals spend longer in traffic jam, in queues waiting to be attended, among other factors, and it can lead to smaller numbers of individuals attending any religious organization.

The second explanation may lie on the fact that the biggest fraction of religious entities' members is Catholic. According to Brady et al. (1995), the Catholic Church has a fix hierarchical structure that does not favor the development of civilian skills. However, when one only analyzes those who declare themselves as members of other religious entities - other than the Catholics -, it is possible observing that group 2 emerges as having the highest concentration of these actors. In any case, the Catholic Church is a religious organization accounting for significant mobilization power in the Brazilian context, as stated by Avritzer (2012).

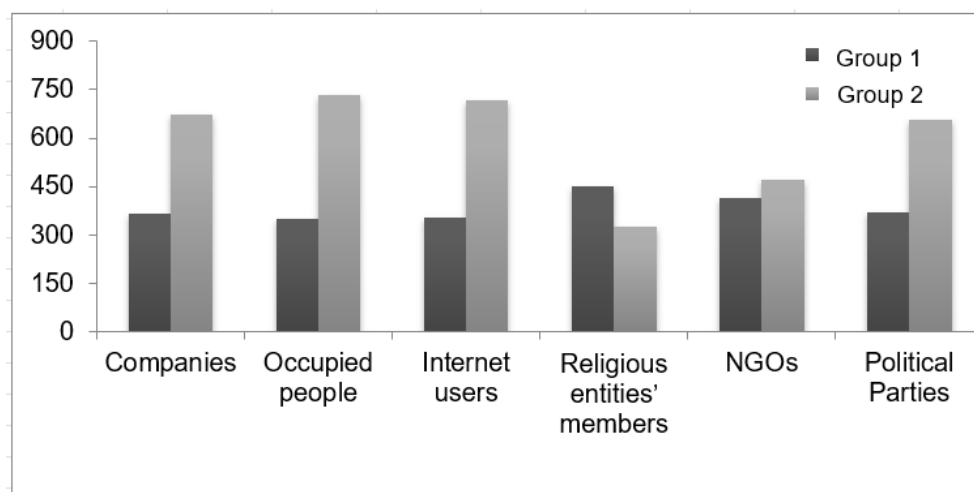


Figure 3. Groups' profile

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

On the other hand, differences between number of NGOs in these two groups is small; however, if one takes into account association aimed at municipal management control, focused on stopping corruption, it is possible observing that the smallest municipalities (Group 1) almost do not have organizations in this field. One of the possible explanations for such a scenario is the fact that small municipalities present greater social interaction among residents. Therefore, it can be annoying to create and join organizations focused on management control, since citizens, themselves, can exert coercion means against members of this organization type.

U test was once more performed to help better understanding the features of these two groups of municipalities. It was done by taking into account the demographic and political-institutional variables to analyze differences in municipality size and in citizen action configurations, as suggested at the time to develop the hypotheses. Table 4 shows the results recorded during this test.

Table 4

#### U test results for samples' independent demographic and political-institutional variables

	Total Pop.	Pop. density	Urban rate	N. active councils	Prop. voters in political parties
Mann-Whitney U	2,027.000	31,743.000	18,067.000	25,798.000	36,167.000
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Thus, it is possible partially rejecting H0 of the two hypotheses in the current study and assuming that, on average, municipalities with different sizes present different concentrations of local promoters, just as there are significant differences in citizen participation promoters. Results in Table 5 highlight the recorded differences. Based on the presented results, one can observe that group 2 - the one with the largest number of actors promoting participation -, is also the one holding the biggest municipalities.

Table 5

#### Descriptive statistics of the generated groups

Variables	Group 1 (n = 681)				Group 2 (n = 172)			
	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Total pop.	10,870.75	17,934.65	815.00	296,317.00	70,897.37	199,047.77	2,537.00	2,375,151.00
Pop. density	42.45	164.35	1.40	2,528.90	157.57	610.06	2.90	7,192.40
Urban rate	63.58	17.78	18.56	100.00	85.09	12.91	38.07	100.00
N. councils	7.22	1.95	2.00	15.00	9.91	2.79	5.00	17.00
Affiliated voters	1,288.55	616.36	131.65	4,798.61	959.52	470.88	292.27	2,977.84

Source: Elaborated by the authors.



These results were also corroborated by studies by Kelleher and Lowery (2009), who pointed out that bigger municipalities have a larger number of actors interested in claiming for better public management outcomes. They are more prone to mobilization efforts by political agents who subsidize individual resources and who are interested in politics in order to promote participation. Besides, as highlighted by Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016), and McDonnell (2020), the concentration of more complex political issues and greater diversity of political preferences lead to higher interest and competition levels in local politics, in the biggest municipalities - a fact that encourages citizen participation.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the complexity of the Brazilian context also stands out in the herein formed clusters. Although group 2 was mostly formed by bigger-sized municipalities (in terms of number of inhabitants), the least total of 2,537 inhabitants proves that there are small-sized municipalities in the groups featured by having the largest number of citizen participation promoters.

In order to deeply explore differences in municipality sizes, Table 6 presents municipalities' population size classification (n. of inhabitants), as proposed by IBGE, as well as the rate of municipalities in each assessed size, in groups 1 or 2.

Data have evidenced that 14.74% of the total number of municipalities with up to 50 thousand inhabitants were placed in group 2: high concentration of external actors. Size 4 holds municipalities housing from 20,001 to 50,000 inhabitants. It shows transition between the two groups and suggests that from this population rate onwards, municipalities can provide more opportunities to residents and, therefore, improve the number of participation promoters.

These results show that small-, mid- and big-sized municipalities coexist in the Brazilian context; they are featured by the presence of citizen participation promoters. Thus, it is possible restating the positions taken by Denters et al. (2014), Heinisch et al. (2018) and McDonnell (2020), according to whom, citizen participation can find a fertile land either in small municipalities - that can face political complexity - or in big-sized municipalities, where the presence of individual facilitators, such as internet users, as well as the number of institutional ones, like NGOs, can be larger.

Nevertheless, despite the presence of small municipalities in group 2, most of them were in group 1 – small number of participation promoters. It is worth pointing out the statement by Veiga (2002) about the complexity of urban reality formation in Brazil, since it leads to unequal formation of municipalities, mainly when it comes to the small-sized ones. Accordingly, while Dahl (1967) discusses how one could control municipalities' growth, so they would not exceed the maximum limit of 200 thousand inhabitants in the Brazilian reality, mainly in Minas Gerais State; the main concern should lie on guiding how to develop the nano and micro municipalities, since 79.13% of Minas Gerais municipalities are smaller than 20 thousand inhabitants. If one takes into consideration the author's suggestion that the ideal municipality size for democratic exercise would range from 50 thousand to 200 thousand inhabitants, it is possible observing that 45 out of the 53 Minas Gerais municipalities within this limit are placed in group 2 (84.9% of the total) – group with the highest concentration of participation promoters. It is also interesting observing that 800 municipalities in the state (94.79% of the total) are outside Dahl's limit.

**Table 6**

Rate of municipalities in each cluster based on population size

Groups	Population size classes (n. of inhabitants)	N. of municipalities based on size	% of municipalities in group 1	% of municipalities in group 2
Size 1	Up to 5,000	240	95	5
Size 2	from 5,001 to 10,000	251	90.44	9.56
Size 3	from 10,001 to 20,000	184	84.78	15.21
Size 4	from 20,001 to 50,000	112	53.57	46.43
Size 5	from 50,001 to 100,000	37	10.81	89.19
Size 6	from 100,001 to 500,000	25	24	76
Size e 7	More than 500,001	4	0	100

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Moreover, results in the study by Arbache (2014), who have aimed at analyzing participation in demonstrations, petitions and boycotts in Brazil, suggest that bigger municipalities not just provide more opportunities for political cation, but that they are also more susceptible to this action type due to other factors, such as cultural variables that are not usually included in participation models.

Avritzer (2006), in its turn, introduces four reasons for small Brazilian municipalities not to have the same effectiveness in participatory budget processes than bigger municipalities, a fact that helps better understanding the problem with these municipalities, when it comes to exercising participation. First of all, smaller-sized municipalities have small participatory tradition or community organization; therefore, the existing organizations end up not influencing participatory processes. Secondly, managerial authorities tend to influence deliberative processes, because, oftentimes, participatory council advisers are members of local administrations. Thirdly, participatory processes are often simpler in small- and mid-sized cities. Fourthly, some of these municipalities lack resources to support significant deliberative processes.

Furthermore, municipalities in group 2 (with the highest concentration of external actors) are also the biggest ones; they have the highest population density and urbanization rates, a fact that leads to the thesis that developmental level generates positive externalities for society's active roles. Accordingly, Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz (2016) highlight that bigger local governments can promote local economic development, because they have the right size to the elaboration of complex and coherent plant. It makes the financing of large and expensive projects for investment in infrastructure easier; these projects are essential to promote economic development.

With respect to the political-institutional features used to analyze citizen action development in groups of municipalities, one can observe that variable "number of active advisers" is significantly larger in group 2 than in group 1. According to Teixeira (1997), institutional mechanisms, such as managerial councils, can be permanent and regular, as well as sometimes submit external actors to State control, a process that reverses the herein analyzed control-type logic.

Although there is such likely reversion, which is taken into account by some authors, there are authors, like Castro (2003), who state that even if councils' constitution is a legal duty, at all federation levels, there is no functioning standard to them. Moreover, differences can be analyzed as local society's mobilization and participation condition indicators. Diegues (2013) believes that municipal councils, "besides their limitations and challenges, [are] a potentially fertile space for dialogue between public power and society" (p. 1).

On the other hand, the number of voters affiliated to political parties is proportionally larger in small municipalities. The Brazilian scientific literature presents a likely explanation for such a fact. Speck (2013) evidences in his study about party affiliation in Brazil that one of the main party-affiliation reasons in the country – often before election years – lie on the process to recruit possible candidates, mainly for city councils. These parties seek new adhesions to increase their power inside it. Thus, affiliation embodies different features depending on more parish or metropolitan municipalities. Affiliation in smaller municipalities seem to be more often motivated by the need of intra-party positioning in disputes for candidates' nominations, whereas, with respect to bigger municipalities, although affiliation happens at this same time, one finds a lesser personalized environment. This environment has positive impact on electoral disputes and shows more political activism.

Thus, results allowed identifying two groups of municipalities: group 1, low inclination to active participation - it is featured by housing small-sized municipalities, with smaller numbers of external actors and limited citizen action; and group 2, with high active participation inclination - it is featured by housing mid- and big-sized municipalities that have greater presence of external actors who can promote and legitimize society's participation.

It is worth highlighting that group 1 represents 79.84% of Minas Gerais municipalities. This finding points out that participation promoters in most part of Minas Gerais State are incipient or do not exist, a fact that makes it harder to have mobilization by different actors.

However, one must observe that the new participation forms, such as demonstrations and online petitions, are featured by individual needs of actors who want to have their claims and complains seen, heard and acknowledged by friends, politicians or in social networks. Furthermore, mobilization focused on these new participation forms mainly takes place in the internet, through social media (Escorel & Arouca, 2016). In order to face these results based on participatory practices, the next section introduces the qualitative investigation of participation in protests that have happened in Minas Gerais municipalities.

### *Overview of protests: what can we learn about municipality size and citizen actions?*

It is essential making some methodological reasoning before introducing the herein recorded results. The data processing stage accounted for preliminarily assessing the collected data to find flaws or uncommon information. This stage has shown that citizens in ten municipalities that have confirmed their adhesion to some events did not make protests in their cities, but they went to bigger neighbor municipalities. Almost all citizens in cities with less than 25 thousand inhabitants have decided to go somewhere else for the protests; just one of them had population larger than 80 thousand people.

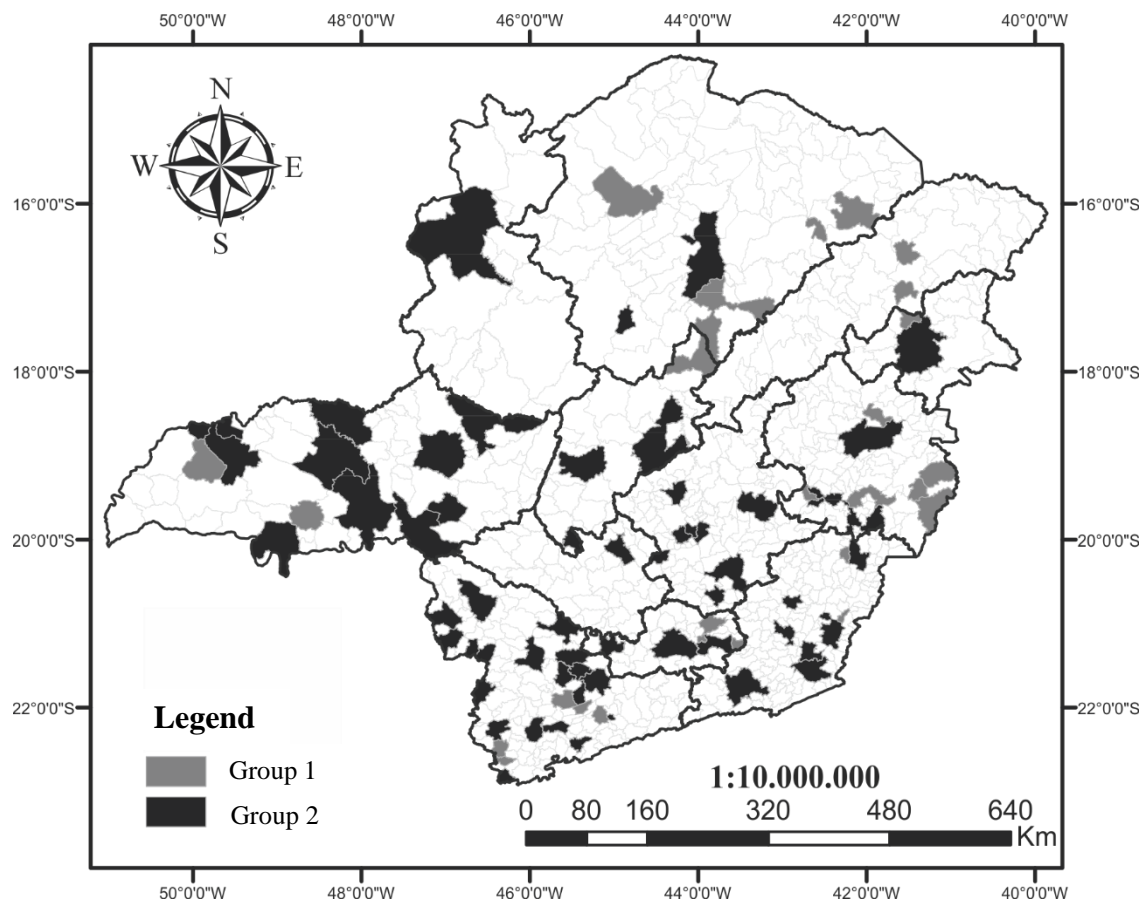
Although small municipalities might not have enough citizens, or mobilization, to organize protests, it did not stop their residents from expressing their dissatisfaction and from exercising their political participation. The way they found to do so lied on setting partnerships with other municipalities by organizing convoys to neighbor cities. Authors such as Swianiewicz (2018) and Silvestre, Marques, Dollery and Correia (2020) show that cooperation among municipalities has become a way to improve public services' supply both in Brazil and in Europe. It may represent a way to make the citizen participation of individuals living in small Brazilian municipalities easier and feasible.

Convoys were not taken into account for methodological purposes, since they were organized in participants' municipality of origin. This option aimed at avoiding double counting, since citizens joining the convoys were accounted in estimates of population attending the protest in the municipality they were in. On the other hand, road interdictions by citizens were taken into account, because they were carried out in municipalities participants live in.

After that said, results in this investigation point towards the registration of protests in 60.56% of the analyzed municipalities (86 out of 142). Approximately 73.21% of municipalities that have confirmed their adhesion to some of the protests, but that did not take part on them, have population smaller than 30 thousand inhabitants (41 out of 56). Only 7.14% (4) of the municipalities that have adhered to some of the demonstrations, but that did not take part on them, were in the big-sized category; i.e., they had population larger than 100,001 inhabitants. These four municipalities were properly allocated in group 1 by the herein adopted model; these municipalities have low inclination to participation. It reinforces the thesis that only municipality size is not enough to encourage citizen engagement, but it is essential having individuals to motivate citizens' engagement in municipalities. Moreover, small municipalities can also be fertile environments to participation, since they house individuals capable of motivating engagement. However, their size is not imperative, since they can set partnerships with other municipalities, such as the case of convoys that make participation in mobilizations feasible.

In total, 37 (66.07%) of the total number of municipalities in group 1 (low inclination to participation) did not carry out protests, besides their adhesion to a summon; 19 (33.93%) were in group 2 (high inclination to participation). All municipalities that actually carried out demonstrations, and that were in group 2, had less than 100 thousand inhabitants – 13 of them had less than 50 thousand inhabitants.

The total universe of municipalities that have actually held manifestations represents 10.08% (86 out of 853) of the total of municipalities in Minas Gerais State. However, 30.23% of them (26 out of 86) were in group 1 – low potential to participation -, whereas 69.77% of them (60 out of 86) were in group 2 – high potential to participation (Figure 4). Group 1 encompassed 79.84% (681 out of 853) of the total number of municipalities in the state, whereas group 2 only comprised 20.16% (172) of them. In total, only 63 of 142 herein assessed municipalities were in group 1; 79 formed group 2; in other words, of the total of analyzed municipalities, 44.37% were in group 1 and 55.63% were in group 2. If one takes into consideration the total universe of group 1, the investigated municipalities represented only 9.25% (63 of the 681) of the total, whereas group 2 held 45.93% (79 of 172) of it.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of municipalities that held protests per group

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

If we have in mind that the investigated municipalities refer to those that have confirmed their adhesion to demonstrations summoned by some of the main organizers of these events, it is possible observing greater intention to participate in them, in municipalities in group 2, which have higher inclination to participation – 60 out of the 79 municipalities (75.95%) in group 2 held some demonstrations.

However, when municipalities that actually held protests were assessed, one could observe that 26 of the 63 municipalities (41.27%) in group 1, that have confirmed their adhesion protests, actually participated in them. Accordingly, it is likely concluding that, although participation promoters are associated with greater adhesion to demonstrations, they are not their only determinants. Municipalities in group 1, which lack these promoters, still account for significant participation in protests. This finding shows that small municipalities can present a favorable context to participation, as pointed out by McDonnell (2020), be it because of the lower complexity of their political system or of their greater sense of effectiveness towards political participation.

Table 7 shows differences related to municipality size, as well as the quantitative results in order to deeply assess the consistency of results from the model applied to the cluster analysis. However, it highlights data about municipalities that have actually protested. It is possible observing that the total rate of municipalities that have adhered to protests in Minas Gerais State grows as

population size increases, but it does not mean that protests were not observed in small-sized municipalities, as well.

The comparison between groups 1 and 2 - which took into account the rate of municipalities that have protested and that are in one of these clusters, as well as the total number of municipalities allocated in these groups - showed that group 2 held the highest rate of municipalities that have held demonstrations, at all municipality sizes. It was possible recording the total number of 339 protests in 86 municipalities throughout the 27 investigated months. As shown in Table 7, size 4 emerges as the transition limit, in which municipalities start to provide more opportunities to their citizen, who get mobilized and claim for their rights over public administration. When one assesses the average of demonstrations taking place in municipalities based on population size, it is also possible observing that the average of protests increases as population size grows; 92.63% of protests happened in over size-4 municipalities. The general average of protests in municipalities reached 3.94, whereas the average of demonstrations in municipalities in group 1 reached 1.42, and 5.03 in municipalities in group 2. In total, 10.91% of the total number of protests in Minas Gerais State (339) during the assessed period happened in group-1 municipalities and 89.09% of them took place in group-2 municipalities.

Table 8 shows regional differences concerning protests taking place in Minas Gerais State. The following mesoregions accounted for municipalities that mostly held protests: Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba (19.70%), Campo das Vertentes (16.67%) and Southern/Southwestern Minas Gerais State (15.75%). Jequitinhonha (3.92%) and Western Minas Gerais State (4.55%) were the mesoregions proportionally accounting for the smallest number of municipalities whose residents have joined protests. Northwestern Minas Gerais State only had one municipality (5.26%) that held demonstrations throughout the whole assessed period. Most municipalities that have protested in these mesoregions were in Group 2, which accounted for high participation potential; only Jequitinhonha (100.00%), Northern Minas Gerais State (66.67%) and Vale do Rio Doce (60.00%) had greater participation among municipalities in group 1 (higher than 50%).

The highest or lowest occurrence of protests in Minas Gerais regions meets the state's regional inequalities – there was higher concentration of demonstrations in regions seen as more developed; their occurrence was lower in regions presenting lower socioeconomic indicators. This finding depicts the Brazilian reality. It is worth highlighting that, despite the smaller number of participation promoters and worse social issues, cities in Northern Minas Gerais State, Jequitinhonha Valley and Mucuri Valley, also organized demonstrations to express their dissatisfaction.

Mesoregions recording the largest number of protests in comparison to the total number of demonstrations are Southern/Southwestern Minas Gerais State (26.84%), Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba (17.70%), Belo Horizonte metropolitan region (13.86%), Zona da Mata (13.27%) and Vale do Rio Doce (11.21%). The ones accounting for the smallest numbers of protests in comparison to the total were Northwestern Minas Gerais State (0.59%), Jequitinhonha (0.88%), Central Mineira (1.47%) and Mucuri Valley (1.77%).

Table 7  
**Number and rate of municipalities that took part on protests, and number of demonstrations based on population size**

Municipality size	Population size class (inhabitants)	Municipality per cluster			Municipalities that have protested						N. of protests			
		Total	G1	G2	Total	G1	G2	% of the total	% of the G1	% of the G2	Total	G1	G2	Mean
Size 1	Up to 5,000	240	228	12	3	2	1	1.25	0.88	8.33	3	2	1	1.00
Size 2	from 5,001 to 10,000	251	227	24	9	8	1	3.59	3.52	4.17	11	10	1	1.22
Size 3	From 10,001 to 20,000	184	156	28	9	7	2	4.89	4.49	7.14	11	8	3	1.22
Size 4	From 20,001 to 50,000	112	60	52	19	7	12	16.96	11.67	23.08	39	10	29	2.05
Size 5	From 50,001 to 100,000	37	4	33	22	1	21	59.46	25.00	63.64	51	1	50	2.32
Size 6	From 100,001 to 500,000	25	6	19	20	1	19	80.00	16.67	100.00	144	6	138	7.20
Size 7	More than 500,001	4	0	4	4	0	4	100.00	0.00	100.00	80	0	80	20.00
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>853</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10.08</b>	<b>3.82</b>	<b>34.88</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>3.94</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

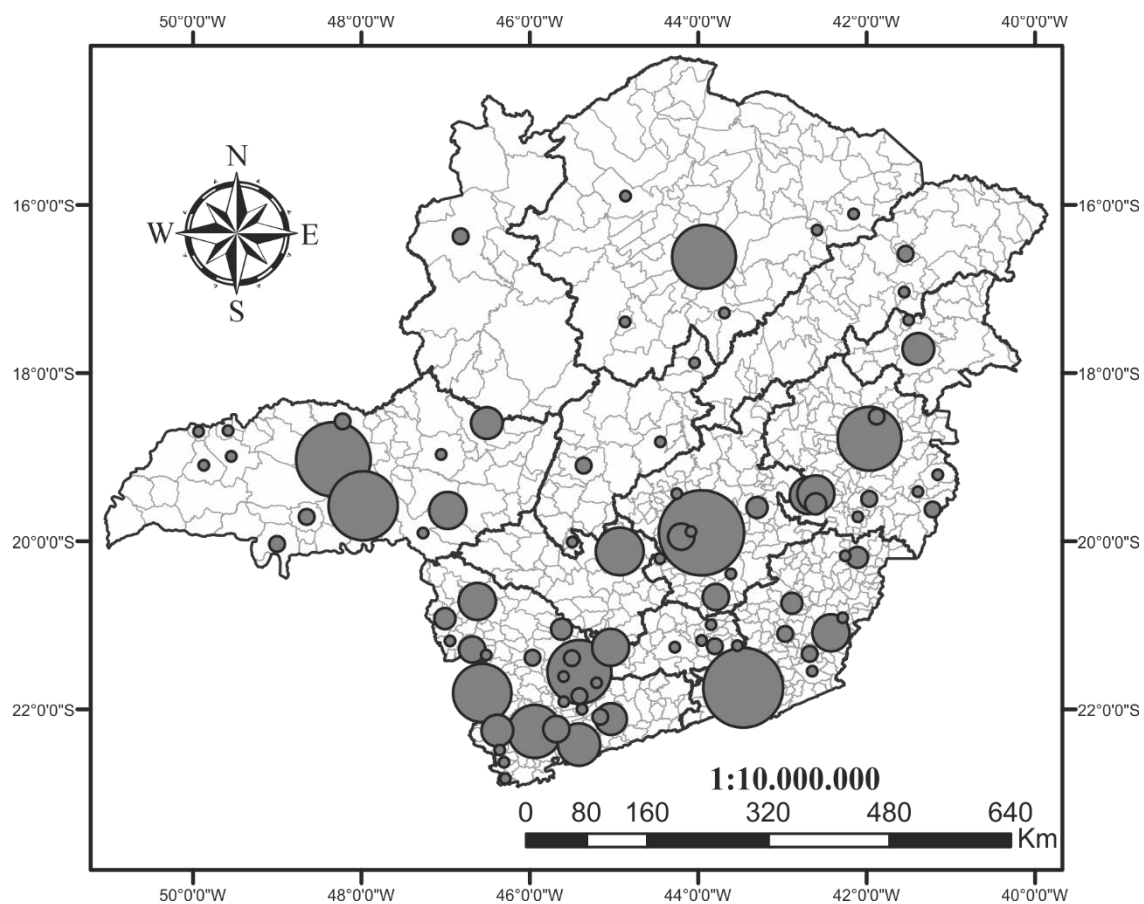
Table 8  
**Number and rate of municipalities that have participated in protests and of demonstrations taking place in each meso-region**

Minas Gerais Meso-region	N. of municipalities	N. of municipalities that have protested			% of municipalities that have protested			N. of protests			% of protests in comparison to the total		
		Total	G1	G2	Total	G1	G2	Total	G1	G2	Total	G1	G2
Campo das Vertentes	36	6	3	3	16.67	50.00	50.00	12	3	9	3.54	0.88	2.65
Central Mineira	30	4	1	3	13.33	25.00	75.00	5	1	4	1.47	0.29	1.18
Jequitinhonha	51	2	2	0	3.92	100.00	0.00	3	3	0	0.88	0.88	0.00
Belo Horizonte metropolitan region	105	8	0	8	7.62	0.00	100.00	47	0	47	13.86	0.00	13.86
Northwestern Minas Gerais State	19	1	0	1	5.26	0.00	100.00	2	0	2	0.59	0.00	0.59
Northern Minas Gerais State	89	6	4	2	6.74	66.67	33.33	19	4	15	5.60	1.18	4.42
Western Minas Gerais State	44	2	1	1	4.55	50.00	50.00	11	2	9	3.24	0.59	2.65
Southern/Southwestern Minas Gerais State	146	23	4	19	15.75	17.39	82.61	91	4	87	26.84	1.18	25.66
Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba	66	13	2	11	19.70	15.38	84.62	60	3	57	17.70	0.88	16.81
Mucuri Valley	23	2	1	1	8.70	50.00	50.00	6	1	5	1.77	0.29	1.47
Vale do Rio Doce	102	10	6	4	9.80	60.00	40.00	38	14	24	11.21	4.13	7.08
Zona da Mata	142	9	2	7	6.34	22.22	77.78	45	2	43	13.27	0.59	12.68
<b>Total</b>	<b>853</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>10.08</b>	<b>30.23</b>	<b>79.07</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>10.91</b>	<b>89.09</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors.



If one observes the municipalities that have mostly protested in the aforementioned meso-regions, it is possible seeing that the most active/engaged ones were in group 2 (high participation potential). The map in Figure 5 depicts the density of demonstrations per meso-region in Minas Gerais State; i.e., the number of protests per municipality over the assessed period. It is interesting observing that Northwestern and Northern Minas Gerais State, Jequitinhonha, Mucuri Valley and Central Mineira meso-regions accounted for the lowest density of demonstrations; they are acknowledged for their low socioeconomic development level. Moreover, a large fraction of their population lives under poverty conditions.



**Figure 5.** Density of demonstrations per meso-region in Minas Gerais State

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Accordingly, Kelleher and Lowery (2009) State that concentrated poverty impairs participation; residents in poor cities have less incentives to get involved in local matters. Among reasons for it to happen, one finds the fact that residents in these localities use their daily efforts to seek survival sources. Thus, Nguyen et al. (2015) ensured that poor individuals get less information about participation opportunities and, even if they seek to participate, their voices are less active and heard in governments' decision-making processes. Avritzer (2006) states that, when it comes to participatory budget in Brazil, poor people can even attend the assemblies, but they will not feel confident to speak up in comparison to high income individuals.

According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2006), policies help the transformation of an unequal environment into a virtuous circle of equity and development. Thus, it is essential reasoning about public administration actions, because, if opportunities offered to some individuals were more limited than those offered to others, and if it impairs development evolution as a whole, the public power still holds the legitimate role of seeking to broaden the opportunities of those facing more limited options.

Additional results deriving from the investigation were herein presented, although it was not the main aim of the current study. It was done in order to contextualize and enrich the discussion. In 2017, as observed in Table 9, there was lower media broadcast and follow up of summoned and carried out protests, as well as there was lower data collection and disclosure by the police about the number of demonstrators. After the 2017 demonstrations, the only update in Portal G1's Map of Demonstrations was recorded in April 28, 2017 – it was summoned by groups against the labor and social insurance reforms.

In 2015 and 2016, there were 28 national protests and the aforementioned portal only informed about 26 of them; in 2017, there were 9 national protests, but only 1 (April 28, 2017) was reported and updated in the portal. Similarly, in 2017, the total number of municipalities that did have their number of people in the protest estimated was much larger than that from 2015 and 2016, altogether. Between 2015 and 2016, only 32 of the 229 protests did not have their numbers broadcasted by the police – this number represents only 13.9% of the total, whereas in 2017, data of 71 out of 110 protests were not collected and outspread; it represents 64.54% of the total.

Despite the limited will of both the media and the police to broadcast information about the protests, it is possible observing that mobilization to them remained strong, since demonstrations during the six months analyzed in 2017 (from January 1 to June 30) represented 32.45% of the total number of protests recorded during the whole assessed period. Even if small municipalities have an easier time accounting the number of people in demonstrations - since their number of residents is significantly smaller than that in bigger municipalities -, most municipalities that did not have any of their data outspread by the police were in the group of small-sized municipalities. In total, 22 (66.67%) of the 33 municipalities that held any protest, but that did not have their numbers outspread, had population smaller than 50 thousand inhabitants (size 4); eight municipalities (24.24%) had between 50,001 and 100,000 inhabitants (size 5), two (or 6.06%) had between 100,001 and 500,000 inhabitants (size 6), only one municipality (or 3.03%) had more than 500,001 inhabitants (size 7).

Table 9

**Overview of protests in Minas Gerais municipalities**

<b>N. of protests</b>	<b>Protest date</b>	<b>Act pro or against</b>	<b>N. of municipalities that have adhered to the protest in Minas Gerais</b>	<b>Estimated total population in protests in MG</b>	<b>Estimated mean population in protests in MG</b>	<b>N. of municipalities that did not have their estimated population numbers outspread</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	March 13, 2015	PRO	5	1,950	487.50	1
2 <sup>nd</sup>	March 15, 2015	AGAINST	30	86,480	3,088.57	2
3 <sup>rd</sup>	April 7, 2015	PRO	2	700	700	1
4 <sup>th</sup>	April 12, 2015	AGAINST	28	22,775	875.96	2
5 <sup>th</sup>	April 15, 2015	PRO	3	1,040	346.67	0
6 <sup>th</sup>	August 16, 2015	AGAINST	23	26,350	1,197.73	1
7 <sup>th</sup>	August 20, 2015	PRO	5	6,770	1,354	0
8 <sup>th</sup>	September 7, 2015	PRO	1	150	150	0
9 <sup>th</sup>	December 13, 2015	AGAINST	13	5,810	484.17	1
10 <sup>th</sup>	December 16, 2015	PRO	5	5,630	1,126	0
11 <sup>th</sup>	March 13, 2016	PRO	3	450	225	1
12 <sup>th</sup>	March 13, 2016	AGAINST	38	135,880	3,774.44	2
13 <sup>th</sup>	March 18, 2016	PRO	6	21,050	3,508.33	0
14 <sup>th</sup>	March 18, 2016	AGAINST	5	440	88	0
15 <sup>th</sup>	March 31, 2016	PRO	7	5,775	962.50	1
16 <sup>th</sup>	April 17, 2016	PRO	5	900	450	3
17 <sup>th</sup>	April 17, 2016	AGAINST	11	2,593	370.43	4
18 <sup>th</sup>	May 10, 2016	PRO	2	30	30	1
19 <sup>th</sup>	June 10, 2016	AGAINST	5	7,760	1,552	0
20 <sup>th</sup>	July 31, 2016	AGAINST	9	2,170	310	2
21 <sup>st</sup>	July 31, 2016	AGAINST	1	ND	-	1
22 <sup>nd</sup>	August 9, 2016	AGAINST	2	480	240	0
23 <sup>rd</sup>	August 31, 2016	AGAINST	4	1,200	600	2
24 <sup>th</sup>	August 31, 2016	PRO	1	ND	-	1
25 <sup>th</sup>	September 7, 2016	AGAINST	4	250	125	2
26 <sup>th</sup>	September 22, 2016	AGAINST	2	ND	-	1
27 <sup>th</sup>	October 17, 2016	AGAINST	1	1,500	1,500	0
28 <sup>th</sup>	December 04, 2016	AGAINST	8	5,330	1,066	3
29 <sup>th</sup>	February 15, 2017	AGAINST	1	ND	-	1
30 <sup>th</sup>	March 8, 2017	AGAINST	1	ND	-	1
31 <sup>st</sup>	March 15, 2017	AGAINST	29	5,050	721.43	22

<b>32nd</b>	March 21, 2017	AGAINST	4	200	200	3
<b>33rd</b>	March 26, 2017	AGAINST	11	1,150	287.50	7
<b>34th</b>	March 31, 2017	AGAINST	19	3,380	482.86	12
<b>35th</b>	April 28, 2017	AGAINST	26	8,890	808.18	15
<b>36th</b>	May 21, 2017	AGAINST	3	3,120	1,560	1
<b>37th</b>	30/6/2017	AGAINST	16	1,120	160	9

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Furthermore, 37 different national summons for protests were recorded during the investigated period. CUT and *Vem pra Rua* were some of the main organizers of these events in some dates; therefore, protests taking place at the same day had different agendas (PRO or AGAINST). In total, 12 of these 37 protests were PRO and 25 were AGAINST the federal administration in office at that time. There were 46 protests in 12 acts summoned PRO the government; it resulted in 3.83 municipalities per act. On the other hand, there were 293 protests in 25 acts AGAINST the federal government, be them summoned by *Vem pra Rua* or by CUT; it led to approximately 11.72 municipalities per act.

If one only takes into consideration municipalities whose numbers of protesters were outspread by the police, there were approximately 321,928 people in all protests against the federal government; but acts summoned in favor of it held approximately 44,445 people – this number represents 13.81% of people who have demonstrated against the government. Even before the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, at the time when only *Vem pra Rua* was organizing the summoning for the protests against the federal government, the number of municipalities and people joining them was much larger than the number of municipalities and people protesting in favor of the government.

These results are in compliance with findings by Tatagiba and Galvão (2019), according to whom, the 2013 demonstrations changed the Brazilian political context. They opened room for so far unique policies focused on a heterogeneous set of actors, from both the right and left wings, to express their divergence to the government. Demonstrations after 2013 followed a pattern featured by the combination of two different dynamics: political polarization, and heterogeneous actors and claims. These dynamics were materialized in the current study through summons made by CUT – traditional actor in the Brazilian political participation scenario – and by *Vem pra Rua* – actor that was successful in organizing demonstrations.

It is possible observing the rise of the extreme right in the country along with the emergence of these new actors. They used this political opportunity, and the new technologies, to mobilize their base and to fulfil a relevant gap in the political scene caused by the political representation and participation crisis experienced in Brazil, mainly after 2013 (Avritzer, 2018).

Approximately 280,328 people joined the protests - when only *Vem pra Rua* was organizing them - against the federal government. After the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, when two promoters were organizing counter-position acts, there were 41,600 people on the streets. At that time, there was lower rate of follow up by the police. Although all data are not complete and, therefore, they do not accurately depict the reality, yet it is clear that there was intense participation

and mobilizations, a fact that evidences Brazilian dissatisfaction with the administration in office during the herein assessed period.

## **Final considerations**

Results in the current study show that structural discrepancies among Minas Gerais municipalities translate differences in citizen participation. Thus, by taking into consideration that matters concerning what would be the best size for municipalities to allow democratic exercise, the herein analyzed aspects, which were confronted to empirical data about protests, suggest the existence of municipal contexts favorable to participation among smaller-sized municipalities, as well as among the larger-sized ones – participation is easily achieved by citizens and stakeholders living in mid- to big-sized municipalities.

Overall, bigger municipalities present higher development level; consequently, their citizens are more prepared to claim for, and to put pressure on, public administration – local, state and federal – for more efficiency and transparency. On the other hand, small municipalities can present lower political complexity and higher proximity to elected representatives, and it makes contact easier and generates greater sense of political participation efficacy.

Furthermore, future studies aimed at assessing other municipal features to favor or limit citizen participation must be carried out. Poverty level, be it of citizens or of the municipality, itself, is an especially interesting issue for developing countries like Brazil. Studies to get to know the effectiveness of participation in public actions would also be interesting; they could be carried out through surveys or qualitative research to analyze engagement quality in participatory institutions in comparison to small-, mid- and big-sized municipalities. Once it was possible observing that participation promoters, as well as demonstrations' organization, were also found in small municipalities, understanding the contextual features of these municipalities that make participation easier can be an interesting research topic.

It is important highlighting the limitations of the present study. Although there was concern with the accuracy of data about demonstrations in Minas Gerais State, the study was limited by the media's own disclosure of data about these events. Assumingly, there are municipalities that have held protests over the analyzed period but that did not have their data outspread in the local media or that their organizers were not informed about. In any case, the introduction of the analytical overview about this intense time of demonstrations in Brazil aimed at contributing to the best understanding of research about participation in municipalities.

Finally, lack of consensus in the literature about the ideal size of municipalities for the democratic exercise can point out that the herein recorded results could have been influenced by the scenario in the analyzed location, since context – social, political, demographic, institutional, among others – may show the municipality sizes that best favor or impair citizen participation in a giving municipality, region or country. However, it is possible concluding that, in a continental and complex country like Brazil, where different realities can be observed within the same region, state or municipality, participation can find fertile land either in small- or big-sized municipalities, despite the trend of easier participation in the bigger ones. However, given the prevalence of small

municipalities, it is essential finding mechanisms to promote participation, and to make it easier, within this scenario.

### *Practical matters*

- The enhancement and elaboration of data collection and outspread mechanisms to inform about different political action types by citizens - be it through direct (protests, public hearings, participatory budget, among others) or indirect participation (social media, debates in specialized blogs and in governmental channels) - will broaden knowledge about this topic and allow further in-depth studies.
- The development of actions aimed at encouraging citizens' active participation must take into consideration the context in each country. In other words, it is necessary knowing the structure of opportunities offered to residents in municipalities with different sizes in order to increase efforts in cities and regions that account for lower potential to citizens' engagement and mobilization.
- Civil society organizations acting in inspection actions applied to the use of public resources and in promoting citizens' qualification for engagement must be encouraged at regional level, so that they can cover a certain number of municipalities that account for history of low social mobilization and that, due to local configurations, cannot act in an isolated way.

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## Inclusive language

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