

## Law on Access to Information at the most important Brazilian federal universities

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442023112en>

Naiara Sandi Almeida Alcantara<sup>i</sup>

© <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3343-5097>

<sup>i</sup> (Universidade do Federal do Pará, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Política. Belém – PA, Brazil).

### Abstract

This article analyzes requests for public information aimed at Brazilian federal universities, between 2012 and 2019. The research questions that guide the investigation are: (i) what is the profile of individuals who request information from federal universities in Brazil?; (ii) what topics interested applicants the most?; (iii) how has the distribution of requests occurred over time since the implementation of the Access to Information Law in 2012?; The descriptive analysis of the e-SIC portal reports shows that requests to universities are made by federal civil servants, students, professors or researchers. The requests come from male individuals, with complete higher education and belonging to the same region of the institution investigated. The most prominent themes are associated with higher education. The data indicates a significant growth in the number of requests sent to universities during the period analyzed.

**Keywords:** Access to Information Law. Transparency. Federal universities.

### Introduction

Transparency has been one of the main demands directed to public institutions and agents in Brazil and other regions of the world. At a national level, the Access to Information Law (LAI) is the main legislation on the subject. Enacted in November 2011, Law 12,527 “regulates the constitutional right of access to public information” in the country. Given the contemporaneity of the subject, several studies still seek to understand its application in

the national context. However, there are few studies that focus specifically on the profile of individuals who use this new rule to request information from public educational institutions.

In this context, the research presented here analyzes the application of LAI in five Federal Universities in Brazil. The questions that guide the study are: (i) What is the profile of the individuals who request information from Brazilian federal universities?; (ii) Which topics aroused the interest of the applicants the most?; (iii) How have applications been distributed over time since the implementation of the LAI in 2012?

Although the LAI is theoretically open to access by the entire Brazilian population, through requests made through the e-Sic portal or in person – requests made in person are later on entered into the online portal by civil servants –, not all people, in fact, have access to information – due to numerous variables, such as lack of knowledge of the law, lack of access to the internet or the absence of expertise to manipulate databases (ANGELI, 2016).

Given what was mentioned above, it was decided to use the analysis of the information contained in the reports made available by the e-SIC portal on the requests directed to the five best Brazilian Federal Universities as a methodological means, the data are available in the digital appendix. The institutions were selected from the General Index of Courses (IGC) of the Ministry of Education (MEC), published in 2018. Thus, the analyzed universities are the following: Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Federal University of São Paulo, Federal University of Santa Catarina and Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

We believe in the relevance of the research for the area of Political Communication focused on Citizenship, as it addresses fundamental issues related to government transparency and citizen participation, as well as the analysis on how citizens, in different occupations, are seeking information. In addition, by investigating the evolution of requests over the years, the research contributes to the understanding of the impact of transparency policies in Brazil.

This article intends to respond to its proposed objectives through (i) the definition of a profile of individuals who used the LAI to request information from the universities listed above, between 2012 and 2019; (ii) the verification of the number of requests for access to information made in the time frame under analysis; and (iii) the analysis of the themes of the requests.

The work is divided as follows: first, a brief discussion is made about the conceptual differences regarding transparency, publicity and *accountability*. In the next section, we highlight the emergence of transparency and its adoption in public institutions in several countries, including Brazil. Based on this discussion, the findings of the present study are presented in the fourth section of the study. Finally, a debate is developed about the relevance of the regulation of transparency mechanisms in the country.

## **Transparency, publicity and *accountability***

In this section, we differ between the terms transparency, publicity and *accountability*, because despite being considered synonyms by some authors, as will be shown below, there are

studies that differentiate their concepts. We identified, in the literature, texts such as that of Angeli (2016) that demonstrate that not all individuals are able to access information that is publicly available, and for a better understanding of the reasons why this occurs, it is necessary to define each of the terms mentioned above (MOORE 2018; ABRUCIO AND LOUREIRO, 2004).

Baume and Papadopoulos (2016, p. 2-3) treat transparency and publicity as synonymous terms, but demonstrate that other literatures treat the terms with distinction, relating transparency to statements, speeches, or thoughts of an individual, while publicity would be the availability, accessibility, and dissemination of information in organizations. Therefore, it is possible that there will be transparency, but not publicity.

Moore (2018) presents the idea that transparency alone may not be enough, because valuing visibility over intelligibility can cause more obscurantism than clarification. Moreover, governments are increasingly driven to make public data of social interest, because when this does not happen, eventually hacker groups can act by invading government systems and anonymously disclosing state information. Therefore, transparency alone, according to authors such as Moore (2018), does not allow people to act, publicity, on the other hand, means that the information is really understood.

Accountability, on the other hand, according to Abrucio and Loureiro (2004), would be the government's accountability for voters. For example, concerning elections, it is understood that this is an essential moment for accountability, as it relies on a broad accountability of public agents, strengthening the foundations of democracy

However, the existence of accountability alone *does not guarantee a good performance of democracy, because according to the definition used in this paper*, accountability can be divided into two types: the vertical, which occurs during the electoral process and the government answers directly to the people; and the horizontal, in which accountability occurs throughout the mandate through the supervision of the people and, through the Legislative and the Judiciary branches. It should be noted that in order for there to be adequate accountability, the transparency and the publicity are necessary, because it is through information and understanding that citizens organize themselves and act in favor of public affairs.

It is believed that the Access to Information Law (LAI) is a mechanism that can generate accountability, if used appropriately by the entire population, that is, if everyone has access to the LAI request mechanisms, they can clear their doubts, observe public behavior and, also, generate accountability.

Opposed to the aligned idea, transparency is important for citizens to better understand the functioning of public policies and build trust in public power, therefore, transparency is a form of publicity and accountability, because through it, it will be possible to reduce corruption and assist in the accountability of civil servants (TEJEDO-ROMERO and ARAUJO, 2018). However, Etzioni (2018) demonstrates that transparency alone is not enough, it is necessary to also have regulations, as transparency is generally taken by policymakers as a greater good, while regulation is understood in a negative way because it is considered coercive.

## Emergence of transparency and the Access to Information Law

According to Tejedo-Romero and Araujo (2018), interest in transparency increased in the 1990s, when international organizations aimed at reducing corruption and abuses of power began to recommend that governments be more transparent and use more responsive practices (*accountability*).

Academics, policymakers, activists, among others, call for greater transparency when it comes to various issues, such as campaign expenses (ETZIONI, 2018). However, while transparency can serve as an alternative means to accomplish much of what regulation is supposed to achieve, it is possible that in certain contexts it will be inferior to regulation. Researcher such as Angeli's (2016) demonstrate the importance of transparency in democratic regimes<sup>1</sup>, but in representative democracies it cannot replace regulation. Because social groups can be for or against, but the change will effectively only occur at election time, because at that moment each citizen has the right to one vote. That is why regulation is still necessary, so that throughout the mandate, candidates necessarily have to comply with certain rules (ETZIONI, 2018).

One of the forms of regulation is the access to information laws, which Relly and Sabharwal (2009) demonstrate that they have already been approved almost everywhere in the world, with the USA as the precursor of the law (1966).<sup>2</sup> Access to Information laws are taking over and, currently, more than 16 countries in Latin America have them already. It is believed that what led to the rapid adoption of the LAI is its dissemination in various sectors and its defense by the following bodies: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization of American States (OAS), among others, which put pressure on countries that did not have the law yet. such as the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Panama (MICHENER, 2015).

Also, according to Michener (2015), the World Bank also helped several weak nations without humanitarian aid to implement the Law. However, some countries, such as Bolivia and Argentina, do not have a complete law, only a presidential decree. Costa Rica and Venezuela are the only countries in Latin America that still do not have any type of access to information law.

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1 The research conducted by Janssen, Charalabidis and Zuiderwijk (2012) identified several potential benefits from public transparency initiatives, which were presented grouped into three sets: political and social benefits; economic benefits; and operational and technological benefits. The authors observed that the results of the "political and social benefits" group were perceived by the interviewees as those of greater importance, among which the following stand out: access to data by any citizen; possibility of scrutiny of data; citizen participation and engagement; improvement of public policy formulation processes; improvement of public services; creation of innovative services; greater visibility to data providers; stimulating the development of knowledge; discovery of new perspectives in the public sector. When asked about the preponderant reasons for encouraging open data policies, the interviewees pointed to the "increase in transparency" and the "improvement of *accountability mechanisms*" (ANGELI, 2016).

2 "In the United States of America, legislation on the right of access to information is consolidated in the *Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA), which dates back to 1966. The Law covers the Federal Executive Branch and establishes administrative and procedural rules. It is an administrative rule, focusing on procedures, deadlines and means of access to information. The structure and language used in the norm are technical, aimed at guiding the bureaucracy rather than the citizen" (PAES, 2011, p.410).

### *LAI in Brazil and previous research*

Michener (2015) demonstrates that Brazil has a very sophisticated transparency infrastructure, and that, in this case, the imposition of the LAI was positive, in addition, it is one of the four countries in Latin America that has online platforms to make information available. Angeli (2016) demonstrates that Brazil has a history of policies that preceded the LAI, so it is possible that these policies have created a culture of transparency, allowing them to be used by citizens as soon as they came into force.

The LAI came into force in November 2011, through Law No. 12,527/2011, which “regulates the constitutional right of access to public information.” Its use can be at the federal, state and municipal levels<sup>3</sup>. The law states that everyone should have access to any information, with the exception of classified information<sup>4</sup>. But since the Federal Constitution of 1988, in article 5, item XXXIII, it was already expressed that government information should be open to the population, however, as what is expressed in the CF are programmatic norms, it would be necessary to create infra-constitutional laws for the effectiveness of these norms.

The first infra-constitutional law was Complementary Law No. 101 of 2000, which complemented the Fiscal Responsibility Law regarding the issue of transparency in electronic media, such as “(...) plans, budgets and laws of budgetary guidelines, as well as accountability and reports of budget execution and fiscal management (...)”. Subsequently, another complementary law, No. 131, was created in 2009 on transparency in fiscal management, with regard to the public budget. In addition, in 2004 the federal government had created the “Transparency Portal” and after the implementation of these complementary laws, states and municipalities began to create other portals aimed at disseminating information from public agencies, such as the Agreements Portal, Brazil Portal and others (ANGELI, 2016, p.30).

Angeli (2016) proclaims that due to the creation of these aforementioned laws, municipalities, states and the entire federation began to get used to transparency to some extent, so after the creation of the LAI in November 2011, the period of *vacatio legis* began, which in some countries lasted for years, as is the case of the United Kingdom (five years), in Brazil, the law came into force in 180 days (May 2012). So, even though Brazil was one of the last democratic countries to create a law aimed at transparency, as soon as it came into effect, part of the population started to make use of the e-SIC portals.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, access: Manual of the Access to Information Law for States and Municipalities. Available at: <[http://acessoainformacao.talisma.to.gov.br/res/docs/manual\\_lai\\_estadosmunicipios.pdf](http://acessoainformacao.talisma.to.gov.br/res/docs/manual_lai_estadosmunicipios.pdf)>. Accessed on: 01 Apr. 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The LAI applicant does not need to explain the reasons for their request; All provision of information will be free of charge, except in cases where the reproduction of the data incurs some cost; Requests must generate a protocol and, through it, it is possible to verify the entire process until its completion. “As for the processing of access requests, it is worth highlighting the detail provided by the Law, which guarantees the applicant the right to obtain the content of the decision to deny access, by certificate or copy. But the Law innovates especially in the section on appeals, which creates a separate procedural appellate instance. In this section, the Office of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) was ordered to deliberate on: the denial of access to information not classified as confidential; on the quality of the decision to deny access to information; the quality of procedures for classifying sensitive information; and on non-compliance with deadlines or other procedures provided for by law” (PAES, 2011, p.414).

On the other hand, authors such as Paes (2011) understand that before the LAI, Brazil had only scattered laws on the right to information, as a result of which there were multiple interpretations of each legal system, causing losses in the transmission of information. This leads to a situation of inferiority in the country in relation to other countries with well-consolidated legislation. However, there were problematic issues right in the implementation of the law, which left a large amount of data available, but did not concern itself with the quality or form of publication of this data. Although the text of the LAI has only one legislation, all the provisions inserted in scattered laws, as well as suggested the repeal of conflicting norms, thus ensuring a better and easier application of the law (PAES, 2011).

Although there is no vast literature on the subject, especially one that investigates LAI in federal universities, as is the purpose of this article, the recent studies, even those carried out shortly after the law came into force, had a very significant (large) number of observations for their analyses.

For example, the research carried out by Angeli (2016) that aimed to verify the citizen who provides access to information in Brazil, and what are the factors that explain the use of the right of access to public information. All agencies and entities of the federal executive branch from the beginning of the law until August 2016 were analyzed. The sample consisted of 203,521 individuals and the only individuals analyzed were the citizens themselves<sup>5</sup>. The purpose of the research was to outline the profile of the applicants and verify the relationship between this profile and the use of the LAI. Through the analyses, the data showed that the profile of the individual who makes the most requests would be one: “male, approximately 42 years of age, complete higher education, different profession from those offered in the registration, residing in the southeast region of the country” (p.38). In order to understand more specificities of the applicants’ profile, the author also performed some standardized residual tests and found that men with high school and higher education use the access to information law (LAI) more than women with the same level of education, but there is a higher concentration of post-graduate women who use the LAI more than men with the same education. (ANGELI, 2016).

On the other hand, the researchers Medeiros *et al.* (2014) demonstrated that access to information laws serve as a mechanism of democratic control, as they help to prevent private interests from overriding public interests. That is, to the extent that civil servants can be observed with constancy, they tend to act according to the occupied position. Starting from the assumption that corruption would be a deviation from the formal duties imposed by the civil service, which comes from a political arrangement that includes several factors such as the lack of transparency, the authors that the LAI represents an advance in the right of access to

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5 The following were excluded from the research: legal entities, since the unit of analysis was individuals, as well as the records of applicants who did not fill in most of the personal information. Paragraph 3 of Article 10 of the Access Law states that “Any requirements relating to the determining reasons for the request for information of public interest are prohibited.” (BRAZIL, 2011)

information, but this mechanism alone is not enough to combat corruption, the creation of what the authors call “citizen consciousness” is essential (Medeiros *et al.*, 2012, p.71).

In view of the above-mentioned research in Brazil, it is also intended to carry out an analysis of the LAI at a national level to verify its insertion in higher education institutions and respond to the proposed objectives. It is believed that it is interesting to carry out this analysis in the area of Communication, more specifically Political Communication and Citizenship, according to the arguments presented in the introductory section.

## Methodology

After the implementation of Law 12,527, in 2012, portals were created in Brazil to facilitate access to information, such as the Electronic System of the Citizen Information Service (e-SIC). More precisely, the e-SIC portal enables individuals or legal entities to “[...] forward[s] requests for access to information, follow up on the deadline and receive[d] the response to the request made to agencies and entities of the Federal Executive”.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the platform also provides, annually, reports with data on requests made to different federal institutions.

In the research presented here, the reports of the aforementioned portal, between 2012 and 2019, on the requests directed to the five best Brazilian Federal Universities, were analyzed<sup>7</sup>. It is argued that, although it is not a representative sample of all public educational institutions in the country, such choice can provide clues about the relationship between Brazilian public universities and the transparency mechanisms in force in the country – it is worth emphasizing that the time frame of the study, considering the entire period since the implementation of the measure, offers significant coverage of the profile of information seekers from federal universities over time.

The five best universities (Chart 1) were selected according to the 2017 General Index of Courses (IGC), published by MEC in 2018<sup>8</sup>. The IGC is one of the main quality indicators that evaluates Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Brazil (BITTENCOURT *et al.*, 2009). Its calculation is carried out annually and considers a profusion of variables that impact the final result of the index, such as, for example, the Preliminary Concept of Courses (CPC) of each entity, the number of enrollments and the average concept of the graduate programs of

6 Available at: <<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/dados-abertos/indicadores-educacionais/indicadores-de-qualidade-da-educacao-superior>>. Accessed on: 23 Oct 2023. We used the updated report named “IGC 2017/7z” and filtered by: 1st organization: we put University, 2nd administrative category: we put Federal Public. The spreadsheet is in the digital appendix.

7 The option for the five best institutions was made in order to provide a better comparison between the entities involved, which would be less feasible with a very large number of universities. However, the possibility of aggregating information from other institutions in future research is not excluded.

8 At the time of writing this article, the 2018 version of the IGC, published in 2019, was already available. However, the analysis undertaken here began before the publication of the above-mentioned more up-to-date index. Therefore, the most recent data at the time was from 2017.

the institutions, and the distribution of students among various levels of education<sup>9</sup>. Despite the criticism directed at this evaluation mechanism regarding its origin (BARREYRO, 2008; DIAS SOBRINHO, 2008), the IGC is currently a fundamental tool for monitoring the quality of the services provided by HEIs and the prestige attributed to each entity (although it is not the only available indicator) (CERVI; BLÜMKE, 2019).

**Chart 1** – General Index of Courses (GCI) (2017) of the five analyzed Universities

	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Note</b>
1	Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul	UFRGS	4,31
2	Federal University of Minas Gerais	UFMG	4,22
3	Federal University of São Paulo	UNIFESP	4,15
4	Federal University of Santa Catarina	UFSC	4,09
5	Federal University of Rio de Janeiro	UFRJ	4,07

Source: prepared by the author based on data from the IGC (2017) of the Ministry of Education (2020).

The collection of the material was carried out manually through direct access to the portal's website. The reports analyzed a range from 2012 to 2019<sup>10</sup>, covering a total of eight years of information<sup>11</sup>. The reports provide a set of data on the characteristics of requests addressed to federal institutions, divided into four dimensions: (i) number of requests for access to information; (ii) the status and characteristics of requests for access to information; (iii) responding to requests for access to information; and (iv) profile of the applicants.

The study considers the variables of these four dimensions that proved to be most important for the objectives and questions of the research. The variables are: (i) applicants' profession; (ii) the applicants' level of education; (iii) gender; (iv) origin; (v) subject matter of the requests; (vi) number of applications in each institution between 2012 and 2019. The categories of each of these variables are not the responsibility of the authors of the present investigation. The portal's own system provides applicants with the options to fit into the categories most aligned with their characteristics.

The analysis of the data is done, more precisely, through descriptive statistics, seeking to evaluate the specificities that stand out the most in each of the variables listed above.

9 Making the indicator one of the broadest when it comes to the analysis of higher education in the country. Available at: <[http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/guest/indice-geral-de-cursos-igc->](http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/guest/indice-geral-de-cursos-igc-). Accessed on: 19 mar. 2020.

10 At the time of research and submission of the article.

11 The 2012 reports, from all universities, offer data from May of that year. The previous months are not available as this is the period of implementation of the measure.

## Presentation of results

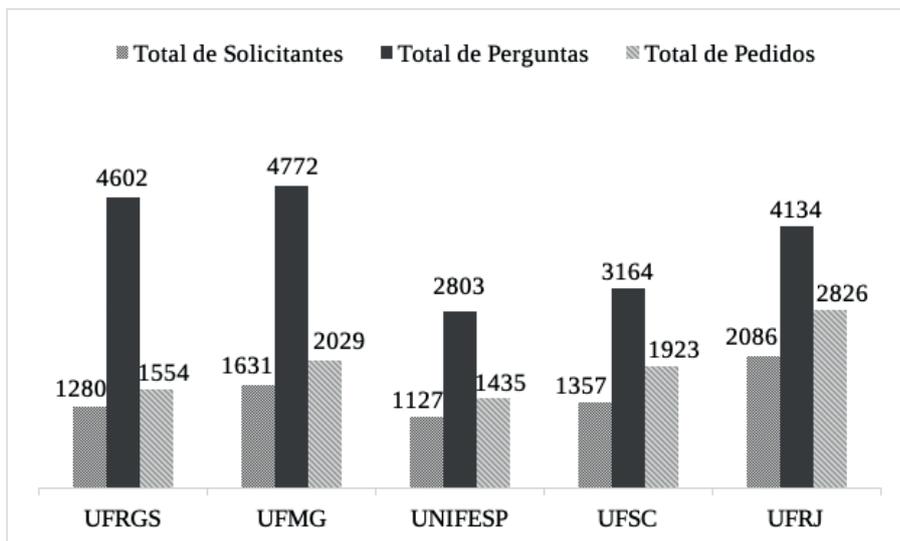
At first, Graph 1 highlights three pieces of information about the universities under analysis: the total number of applicants (individuals and legal entities); the total <sup>12</sup>number of questions; and the total number of applications received by each institution through the mechanisms available on the e-SIC portal, between 2012 and 2019. The total number of applicants refers to the number of individuals who made inquiries to the educational institutions. The total number of questions is the number of questions asked in each order (the same order can contain more than one question). The total number of requests concerns the content of the requests, for example, there may be a single request about education professionals, but with questions about the age and salaries of the teachers of an entity.

Evaluating the main information contained in the graph, there is a low variation in the number of applicants among the universities, with an average of approximately 1500 individuals. The institution with the most applicants in the analyzed period is UFRJ (2086), followed by UFMG (1631), UFSC (1357), UFRGS (1280) and UNIFESP (1127).

In all entities, the number of applications exceeds the number of applicants; while the number of questions, in turn, exceeds the number of requests. This means that, in all cases, most individuals who inquire about universities look for information about more than one content and are willing to ask more than one question. Regarding the questions, the most inquired institution is UFMG (4772), followed by UFRGS (4602), UFRJ (4134), UFSC (2803) and UNIFESP (3164). Regarding the number of applications, UFRJ has the highest value among the universities, with 2826 applications. UFMG appears in second place, with 2029, followed by UFSC (1923), UFRGS (1554) and UNIFESP (1435). It is interesting to note that UNIFESP, an institution based in the largest population and economic center in the country, is the least inquired in the three dimensions (Graph 1).

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<sup>12</sup> Requests on the e-SIC portal can be made by both individuals and legal entities. The present analysis considers only individuals in the investigation because they are the majority of the group of applicants and because we intend to write about the profile of the interviewee.

**Graph 1** – Total number of applicants, questions and applications between 2012 and 2019 by university

Source: Author, 2019 based on LAI data.

As the objective is to evaluate the profile, in general, of those who request information from Federal Universities, the average number of individuals who fit into the categories offered by the portal is calculated in three specific variables: profession; sex; and schooling (considering the five universities together) (Table 1). It is argued that the average can offer a better view of the concentration of cases in each variable. In addition, there are practically no differences between the institutions when evaluating these three variables and each one separately.

**Table 1** – Average among the institutions of the applicants' profile (profession, gender and education)

Profession	N – average	Sex	N – average
Federal civil servant	426	Male	726
Student	279	Female	639,2
Teacher	102,2	Not informed	99,4
Researcher	85,6	<b>Total</b>	<b>7323</b>
Employee – Private Sector	82,6		
State Public Servant	45	<b>Schooling</b>	<b>N – average</b>
Liberal Professional/Self-Employed	42,2	Superior	1109
Journalist	30,2	Medium	208,2

Municipal civil servant	41,8	Fundamental	17,4
Businessman/Entrepreneur	18,4	Not informed	127,8
Member of a political party	1,25	No Instruction	5,5
Other	71,2	<b>Total</b>	<b>7373</b>
Not informed	172	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>7323</b>	-	-

Note: The total number of applicants in the investigated period was 7481, as can be seen if the values described in Graph 1 are added. However, 158 requests were made by legal entities, being separated from the analysis presented in the table above and in the following.

Source: prepared by the author.

It is possible to identify a well-defined profile of applicants. Most of the individuals who request information from the mentioned Federal Universities are federal public servants, students, professors and researchers. Although there is only a slight difference, most of the inquiries are made by males. Finally, the majority of applicants have completed higher education (for analysis purposes, the undergraduate and graduate levels available separately in the reports were aggregated).

With regard to the origin of the requests (Table 2), it was decided to investigate this aspect separately among the universities. The choice is justified by the fact that this characteristic presents greater differences between the institutions when analyzed separately – which did not occur when the variables addressed in the previous table were analyzed. The main information contained in the table in question is the fact that most of the requests addressed to educational institutions are made by individuals belonging to the same region as the entity in question (when analyzing the data by state, it is also noted that the requests are made, in their majority, by individuals from the same state as the university).

**Table 2** – Origin of applicants from each university analyzed

UFRGS		UFMG		UNIFESP		UFSC		UFRJ	
Origin	N (%)								
South	587 (46,5)	Southeast	930 (58,3)	Southeast	669 (60,8)	South	598 (45,2)	Southeast	1383 (67,7)
Southeast	211 (16,7)	Northeast	204 (12,8)	Northeast	131 (11,9)	Southeast	221 (16,7)	Northeast	180 (8,8)
Northeast	171 (13,5)	Midwest	140 (8,7)	Midwest	103 (9,3)	Northeast	169 (12,8)	Midwest	119 (5,8)
Midwest	119 (9,4)	South	77 (4,8)	South	66 (6)	Midwest	131 (9,9)	South	110 (5,4)

UFRGS		UFMG		UNIFESP		UFSC		UFRJ	
Origin	N (%)								
North	43 (3,4)	North	46 (2,9)	North	21 (1,9)	North	50 (3,8)	North	42 (2)
Other countries	10 (0,7)	Other countries	9 (0,5)	Other countries	9 (0,8)	Other countries	9 (0,7)	Other countries	18 (0,9)
Not informed	121 (9,6)	Not informed	190 (11,9)	Not informed	101 (9,2)	Not informed	145 (10,9)	Not informed	190 (9,3)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1262 (100)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1596 (100)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1100 (100)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1323 (100)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2042 (100)</b>

Note: the requests made by legal entities were distributed as follows among the institutions: UFRGS (18), UFMG (35), UNIFESP (27), UFSC (34), UFRJ (44). Source: Prepared by the authors (2020).  
Source: prepared by the author.

The predominant theme in the questions addressed to universities is Education. However, there are some distinctions when considering UNIFESP. This entity also presents a significant number of questions that fall into the categories referring to Work, with 23.4% of the cases, and Government and Politics, with 20% of the actions.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 3** – Themes of applications by university

THEMES	UFRGS	UFMG	UNIFESP	UFSC	UFRJ
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Agriculture, Extractivism and Fisheries	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Science, Information and Communication	28 (2)	67 (3,8)	43 (3,7)	8 (0,4)	153 (5,5)
Commerce, Services and Tourism	5 (0,3)	4 (0,2)	0 (0)	7 (0,3)	5 (0,2)
Culture, Leisure and Sport	0 (0)	8 (0,4)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Defense and Security	2 (0,1)	11 (0,6)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Economics and Finance	22 (1,5)	125 (7)	27 (2,3)	21 (1,1)	15 (0,5)
Education	1177 (85,2)	1535 (86,8)	561 (48,7)	1761 (94)	2471 (89)
Government & Politics	12 (0,8)	0 (0)	231 (20)	0 (0)	16 (0,6)
Housing, Sanitation and Urbanism	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Justice and Legislation	18 (1,3)	1 (0)	5 (0,4)	0 (0)	4 (0,1)

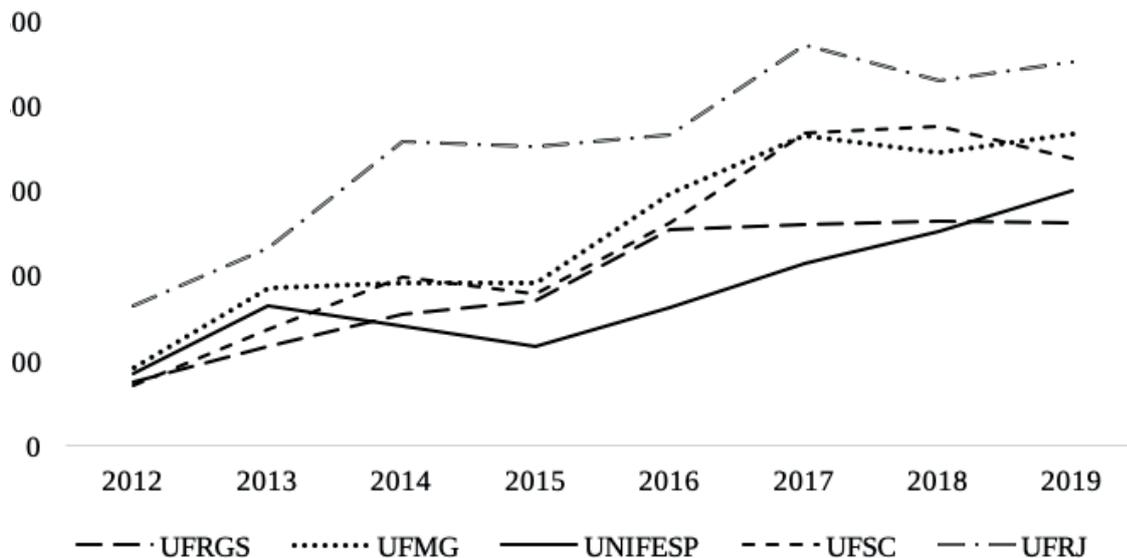
<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting, once again, that the categories in the table below are the categories already available in the reports consulted. The authors only aggregated the values associated with the years investigated, having no responsibility in the process of creating the categories – the portal itself makes these possibilities available for individuals to fit in.

THEMES	UFRGS	UFMG	UNIFESP	UFSC	UFRJ
	N (%)				
Environment	4 (0,2)	0 (0)	4 (0,3)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Person, Family and Society	8 (0,6)	6 (0,3)	11 (0,9)	7 (0,3)	2 (0)
International relations	3 (0,2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Health	0 (0)	9 (0,5)	0 (0)	1 (0)	8 (0,3)
Work	94 (6,8)	2 (0,1)	270 (23,4)	60 (3,2)	98 (3,5)
Transportation & Transit	7 (0,5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (0,2)	0 (0)
TOTAL	1381 (100)	1768 (100)	1152 (100)	1873 (100)	2774 (100)

Source: prepared by the author.

Finally, there is, in all cases, a significant increase in the number of requests directed to institutions over time (Chart 2). This aspect indicates greater use, over time, of the mechanisms made available by the LAI, such as the e-SIC portal, to promote inquiries to the public educational institutions in question. In addition, the result may indicate greater familiarity of part of society with the new tools currently available.

**Graph 2** – Distribution of applications through the e-SIC portal by year and university



Source: prepared by the author.

In the next topic, a discussion and conclusion about the findings of the research are provided in the light of the literature pertinent to the theme.

## Discussion and conclusions

We began the article differing between transparency, publicity and accountability so that it would be possible to understand both the literature that treats these terms in unison, and those that use each term to represent a part of the process of transparency to access public data. Through this topic, it was possible to infer that regardless of the theoretical approach, the core of the issue is the effective access to public data by the population.

It turns out that even when data is made public in a facilitated format, not all citizens access it. Although the discussion on transparency gave rise to the creation of the Access to Information Law, which currently exists in most democratic countries, we realize that in Brazil there is still no popular culture of requests for information from the public institutions targeted by this research, for example.

The article aimed to outline the profile of the applicants, investigate which topics are requested and the analysis of the number of requests since the creation of the LAI until the year 2019. Our analysis took place regarding five Federal Universities selected from the General Index of Courses (ICG) published by MEC in 2018, and the analyses referred to the time lapse of eight years, from May 2012 to 2019, as it was the last full year. The technique chosen was descriptive, based on the variables of interest.

The results showed that the institution that had the highest number of requests is UFRJ, followed by UFMG, USFC, UFRGS, and UNIFESP, we found that there are applicants who make more than one request, since the number of requests is in the five institutions greater than the number of applicants. Regarding the profile of the interviewee, we found that they are male, with high education (higher education) and are mostly public servants. Therefore, our research hypothesis was confirmed, there is indeed a predominant group that uses LAI, to the detriment of other groups, although the average number of women who apply is just a bit lower than that of men. Answering the last question proposed, the most requested topic is education, however, topics such as government and politics as well as work also present significant porcetes.

It was not possible to investigate the reasons why people who are not female, have a medium or low level of education and have professions other than public servants request less through the LAI or do not request it at all, because for this, it would be necessary to have another type of survey such as a survey to a sample of the population to know the reasons for not making requests through the LAI.

Through the article we conclude that the Access to Information law was an advance for national legislation, for the conformation of the international community, but the norm alone is not enough to generate real access to information, it is necessary that there are actions coming from the public power to educate citizens about the right to know what happens in the public sphere, with regard to the Federation, the States and their Municipality. This is one of the ways

to increase trust in institutions. In addition, more research is needed to investigate the non-use of the LAI by certain groups, only through this data can policies be created in the sense of encouraging a broader use of the law.

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### About the author

*Naiara Sandi Almeida Alcantara*

PhD in Political Science (UFPR), with post-doctorate in Political Science (UFPA). E-mail: [nayara\\_sandy@hotmail.com](mailto:nayara_sandy@hotmail.com).

### Data availability

The data supporting the research is available in a public repository, with or without DOI: <https://github.com/NaiaraSandi1995/ART.INTERCOM/tree/main>

### Conflict of interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

### Dados editoriais

Received on: 09/16/2020

Accepted on: 10/20/2023

Editor: Maria Ataide Malcher

Editorial assistant: Aluzimara Nogueira Diniz, Julia Quemel Matta, Suelen Miyuki A. Guedes and Weverton Raiol

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