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COLLEGE STUDENTS AND DEMOCRACY: WHAT DOES SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION PROVIDE?

Os estudantes universitários e a democracia: o que a produção científica evidencia?

Estudiantes universitarios y democracia: ¿Qué muestra la producción científica?

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Abstract: Despite important advances, Brazilian democracy is once again surrounded by dilemmas and impasses. The ongoing attacks on the democratic system show that some members of society and political leaders do not legitimize and defend the legal and institutional framework of the Democratic Rule of Law. Recent political crises prompted a study on the role of educational institutions in the formation of democratic culture. As part of a broader study on the perception of young university students about the Brazilian democratic system, this article presents the results of research on scientific productions on the topic published in seven bibliometric indexes (Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Portal Periódico CAPES, Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES, Biblioteca Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD), Scopus, Web of Science, and Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ). The qualitative data were treated and analyzed using content analysis. The study showed, among other results, that scientific production (i) grew significantly from 2015 onwards, a context marked by deep political instability in the country; (ii) it is concentrated in some areas of knowledge, such as Psychology and Social Sciences; (iii) prioritizes themes such as human rights and social movements and, (iv) reflects different conceptions and theoretical-methodological approaches. The research indicates that there is a long way to go in strengthening democracy in various countries, particularly in Brazil.

Keywords: education; democracy; political culture; college students.

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Resumo: A despeito dos importantes avanços, a democracia brasileira está novamente envolta em dilemas e impasses. Os ataques constantes ao sistema democrático evidenciam que parte da sociedade e das lideranças políticas não legitima e defende o arcabouço legal e institucional do Estado Democrático de Direito. As crises políticas recentes motivaram a realização de um estudo sobre o papel das instituições educacionais na formação da cultura democrática. Enquanto parte de um estudo mais amplo sobre a percepção dos jovens universitários sobre o sistema democrático brasileiro, o presente artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa sobre as produções científicas sobre o tema publicadas em sete indexadores bibliométricos (SciELO, Portal Periódico CAPES, Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES, Biblioteca Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações, Scopus, Web of Science e Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ)). O processo de tratamento e de análise qualitativa dos dados foi realizado por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo. O estudo evidenciou, entre outros resultados, que a produção científica (i) cresceu significativamente a partir de 2015, em um contexto marcado por profunda instabilidade política no país; (ii) está concentrada em algumas áreas do conhecimento, como as Ciências Sociais e a Psicologia; (iii) prioriza temas como os direitos humanos e os movimentos sociais; e (iv) reflete diferentes concepções e abordagens teórico-metodológicas. A pesquisa aponta que há um longo caminho a ser percorrido para o fortalecimento da democracia em diversos países, especialmente no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: educação; democracia; cultura política; estudantes universitários.

Resumen: A pesar de importantes avances, la democracia brasileña está nuevamente rodeada de dilemas y callejones sin salida. Los constantes ataques al sistema democrático demuestran que parte de la sociedad y de los líderes políticos no legitiman ni defienden el marco legal e institucional del Estado Democrático de Derecho. Las recientes crisis políticas motivaron la realización de un estudio sobre el papel de las instituciones educativas en la formación de la cultura democrática. Como parte de un estudio más amplio sobre la percepción de jóvenes universitarios sobre el sistema democrático brasileño, este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación sobre las producciones científicas sobre el tema publicadas en siete índices bibliométricos (Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Portal Periódicos CAPES, Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES, Biblioteca Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD), Scopus, Web of Science y Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)). El proceso de tratamiento y análisis de datos cualitativos se realizó mediante el análisis de contenido. El estudio mostró, entre otros resultados, que la producción científica (i) creció significativamente a partir de 2015, un contexto marcado por una profunda inestabilidad política en el país; (ii) se concentra en algunas áreas del conocimiento, como Psicología y Ciencias Sociales; (iii) prioriza temas como los derechos humanos y los movimientos sociales; y (iv) refleja diferentes concepciones y enfoques teórico-metodológicos. La investigación señala que hay un largo camino por recorrer para fortalecer la democracia en diversos países, en particular en Brasil.

Palabras clave: educación; democracia; cultura política; estudiantes universitarios.

1 INTRODUCTION

As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2023, p. 31) wrote, "When parties learn to lose, democracy takes root. And when democracy takes root, the alternation of power becomes so routine that people come to expect it." The problem arises when the maturation and consolidation of democracy are threatened or interrupted. In such cases, a crisis or impasse occurs, as defined by academic literature. According to Avritzer (2016, p. 9), an impasse exists when democratic culture is profoundly undermined, and there is "a crisis in the growth and evolution of democratic culture in the country." In the author's interpretation, the impasses of Brazilian democracy have become increasingly evident in recent years, stemming from several fundamental factors: (i) the crisis of the coalition presidentialism model practiced since the promulgation of the Federal Constitution, (ii) systemic corruption permeating relations between the executive and legislative branches, (iii) voters' perception that the democratic political system disregards the popular will expressed through voting, (iv) the consequences of the middle classes' loss of status, and (v) the judiciary's new role in politics (Avritzer, 2016).

These factors help explain the emergence, especially since 2013, of anti-system, anti-politics, anti-institutional, and anti-corruption discourses put forth by political groups and parties labeled as "right-wing and far-right" (Pinelli, 2021; Chaloub; Perlatto, 2016; Casimiro, 2016). Recently, the Brazilian "new right" has advocated discontinuing the democratic political system, returning to a civil-military regime, destroying the state's social structures, and dismantling key social policies, particularly those related to education, health, social assistance, and the environment (Avritzer, 2021; Rocha; Solano, 2021). The election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018 and the increasing number of governors, senators, deputies, mayors, and city councilors aligned with the "new right" demonstrate that significant portions of society support conservative and anti-democratic agendas.

The January 8, 2023, attacks on the Three Powers Plaza in Brasília, which targeted the three institutions responsible for democratic governance (the National Congress, the Planalto Palace, and the Federal Supreme Court), demonstrate that authoritarianism remains deeply rooted in Brazilian political culture. Democratic values have not been firmly established among broad sectors of society. Frequent questions about electronic voting machines show that part of the electorate does not fully trust the institutions responsible for periodically electing officials in the legislative and executive branches at the federal, state, and municipal levels (Levitsky; Ziblatt, 2023; Matos, 2023; Melo, 2024). As Avritzer (2016, 2018) points out, the country continues to lack a solid democratic culture at the institutional level and in social and political relations.

In recent years, Brazilian democracy has oscillated between consolidation and retreat. The country has oscillated between democratic enthusiasm, characterized by the expansion of popular sovereignty and social rights, and anti-democratic reversals. Avritzer (2018, p. 277) notes that "the structures for the defense of rights in Brazil are fragile and linked not to institutional guarantees, but to an intra-elite arrangement that

traded a rights-based structure for an idea of cordiality that imploded in the current crisis." The existence of rights and adherence to the law are the backbone of democracy. As Bobbio (2004) points out, without recognized rights, there is no democracy; without democracy, there is no peaceful resolution of problems.

Political scientist and historian José Murilo de Carvalho (2008) asserts from this same perspective that, despite the major advances achieved in the 1988 Constitution, which established "citizenship for all," the intertwining of democracy and rights in Brazil still faces obstacles due to the existence of a statist political culture anchored in a fragile democracy. According to Carvalho, "If there is anything important to be done in terms of consolidating democracy, it is to strengthen the organization of society to provide a social foundation for politics, that is, to democratize power" (2008, p. 227). Defending and guaranteeing citizenship rights enables participatory democracy (Brabo, 2021).

The ongoing impasses of the Brazilian democratic system are closely related to the unequal structure of our society. The tense and conflictual relationship between democracy and capitalism in countries on the periphery of the "world system," such as Brazil, limits and undermines policies aimed at reducing social inequalities. As Miguel (2022) points out, democracies become "facade" democracies when they fail to challenge the reproduction of social inequalities. Democracy is constantly strained by the inequalities produced by the capitalist system. According to the author:

To understand how existing democracies function, one must understand the significance of the tension between their rules and the persistence of deep inequalities—of wealth, class, gender, race, and others—that affect people's ability to participate in the public sphere and to advance and defend their own interests (Miguel, 2022, p. 12).

The challenges facing Brazilian democracy are also linked to its fragile democratic culture. In addition to strengthening democratic institutions, it is essential to invest in fostering a democratic culture based on respect for human rights and the promotion of equal relationships among citizens. According to Brabo (2021, p. 130):

All of this underscores the importance of education for both citizenship and democracy. Understood as the assimilation of historically produced knowledge, education is the means by which societies ensure that humanity's cultural heritage is not lost, but is passed down from generation to generation.

In this sense, the development of democratic personalities is essential to strengthening the normative and procedural dimensions. Democracy encompasses more than just procedural aspects and adherence to the "rules of the game." It also involves a wide range of values, ideas, intentions, and practices (Avritzer, 1996; Bobbio, 1997; Habermas, 1997).

The crises facing the democratic system in Brazil and countless other countries highlight the need to reconsider the role of educational institutions, especially schools and universities, in fostering a democratic culture. As John Dewey (1979) and Anísio Teixeira (1971) pointed out, educational institutions are micro-societies where democracy can be experienced as a way of life.

In this sense, schools and universities cannot limit themselves to preparing children and young people for the labor market. They must be continually challenged to fulfill their role in fostering democratic values and citizenship (Saviani, 1999). As Laval (2004) and Apple (2013) point out, educational institutions are not businesses and cannot be subservient to the market or serve neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies.

This context motivated a study on the role of educational institutions in fostering democratic culture. As part of a broader study on university students' perceptions of the Brazilian democratic system, this article presents the results of a survey of scholarly publications on the topic indexed in seven major bibliometric databases: The Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the CAPES Journal Portal, the CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Catalog, the Brazilian Thesis and Dissertation Library (BDTD), Scopus, the Web of Science, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Specifically, the study aimed to: (i) identify the main themes and subthemes present in the scientific output, (ii) analyze the temporal evolution of the scientific output over the analyzed period, (iii) determine the areas and fields of knowledge in which the subject has been addressed, (iv) categorize the output by publication type, and (v) identify the main methodologies adopted.

With these objectives in mind, the "state of the art" presented here by Morosini, Kohls-Santos, and Bittencourt (2021) serves a dual purpose. In addition to providing insights into the predominant theoretical and methodological aspects of studies on the topic, it helps us understand the historical context of the subject. The body of dissertations, theses, articles, and books on the subject reflects the historical, sociological, political, and institutional dimensions of the consolidation of Brazilian democracy in recent decades. To paraphrase Kosik (1969), scientific production is part of a broader concrete totality, within which research is a product of the relationships and contradictions of socio-historical reality. Thus, meta-analytic studies help clarify objects, themes, and fields of study by examining their historicity. They highlight the dialectical relationships between science and history.

The underlying issue that motivated this research is the dialectic between scientific production and the concrete whole. Meta-analytic studies on the state of knowledge are relevant insofar as they help us understand the historicity of objects, themes, and fields of study. Analyzing scientific production reveals how it has evolved and the main epistemological, theoretical, and methodological characteristics it has exhibited over time. In terms of structure, the article follows this outline: The first section presents the methodology adopted to assess the state of the art. The second section covers the results of the content analysis conducted alongside bibliometric indicators. Finally, in the conclusion, we present our final considerations and perspectives on building a democratic culture among young people.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND RESEARCH POPULATION

To conduct this study, we employed a qualitative, bibliographic research method (Silva, 2013; Lima; Mioto, 2007). Specifically, we conducted a "state of the art" study (Morosini; Kohls-Santos; Bittencourt, 2021) or a "state of the issue" study (Plá, 2022).

These types of studies allow for an understanding of topics based on their historical context, specifically their epistemological, theoretical, and methodological characteristics (Morosini; Kohls-Santos; Bittencourt, 2021; Plá, 2022).

According to Morosini, Kohls-Santos, and Bittencourt (2021, pp. 19–20), the state of knowledge is:

[...] involves the identification, cataloging, and categorization of scholarly output in a given field over a specific period of time, bringing together journals, theses, dissertations, and books on a specific topic.

According to Plá (2022), "state-of-the-art" reviews help formulate the research problem, clearly define the research scope, and identify advances and gaps in different fields of research.

In light of these definitions, data collection was conducted using seven main bibliometric databases of scientific output in Brazil and abroad: The Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the CAPES Journal Portal, the CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Catalog, the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), Scopus, Web of Science, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). All works on the topic, in Portuguese and other languages, were considered for cataloging. Data collection prioritized the period between 1999 (when the first study on the topic was published in the databases) and 2023. The search used Boolean operators and commands (Silva, 2013).

According to Souza (2019), Boolean operators are based on set theory and use the terms "AND," "OR," and "NOT" to expand or narrow a search. In addition to these operators, quotation marks were used to ensure search accuracy because they narrow the search to the exact descriptor rather than its variants (Souza, 2019).

The following chart shows the number of items found in each bibliometric database.

Chart 1 – Total number of items identified in various bibliometric databases between 1999 and 2023

Catalogs	Keywords	Quantity
Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)	Education	84.218
	Democracy	7.725
	Political culture	856
	College students	2.509
Portal de Periódicos CAPES	Education	402.874
	Democracy	52.417
	Political culture	5.720
	College students	7.335
Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES	Education	178.712
	Democracy	16.107
	Political culture	3.201
	College students	2.878
Biblioteca Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD)	Education	71.525
	Democracy	2.553
	Political culture	311
	College students	732
Scopus	Education	2.651.818
	Democracy	128.963
	Political culture	72.827
	College students	191.643
Web of Science	Education	3.825.591
	Democracy	200.808
	Political culture	123.812
	College students	368.647
Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ)	Education	937.256
	Democracy	19.656
	Political culture	11.382
	College students	19.799
Total:		9.391.875

Source: prepared by the authors (2025).

Regarding the refinement protocol (search terms and strings), we applied the Boolean operator "AND" to the descriptors "democracy" and "university students." In Portuguese-language databases (SciELO, CAPES Journal Portal, CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Catalog, and BDTD), we used the terms "democracy" and "college students." For international indexes (Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ), we used the command: ("Democracy" AND "College Students") NOT Database: Research Commons. The use of quotation marks in the strings (descriptors) was deliberate, intended to search for the exact terms rather than semantic variants of the words.

Chart 2 summarizes the initial cross-referencing of data performed in the bibliometric indexes.

Chart 2 - List of items obtained through a Boolean search on scientific output between 1999 and 2023.

Catalog	Keywords	Quantity	Selected
SciELO	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	6	6
Portal de Periódicos CAPES	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	46	13
Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	39	10
BDTD	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	1	1
Scopus	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	206	30
Web of Science	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	245	23
DOAJ	"Democracy" AND "College Students"	17	8
Total:		560	91

Source: prepared by the authors in (2025).

The items listed above were then analyzed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria described in Table 3. Reviewing the abstracts of each selected study was essential for applying the criteria listed below.

The following chart details the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the final selection of studies for analysis.

Chart 3 - List of inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selected scientific publications

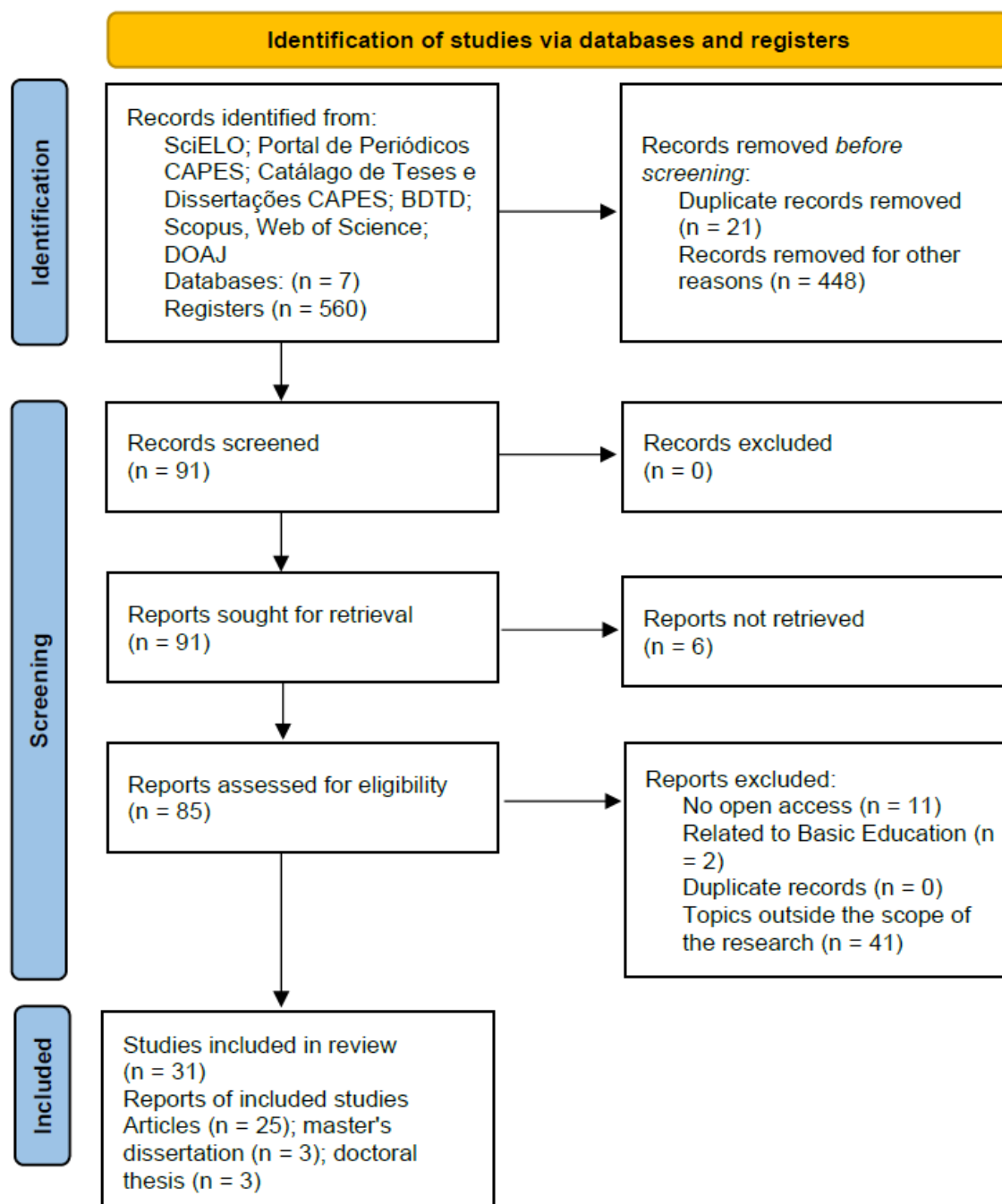
Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Available online and open access	No open access
Related to undergraduate studies	Related to basic education
Related to young people	Duplicate submissions
Related to the topic of democracy	Topics unrelated to the research objectives

Source: prepared by the authors (2025).

The application of these criteria resulted in the definition of the study's *corpus*, consisting of thirty-one works: twenty-five articles, three master's theses, and three doctoral dissertations.

The following flowchart, based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, details the selection process for the analyzed works, from their initial identification in bibliometric databases to the final stage of selecting the 31 included studies.

Figure 1 – Flowchart used to identify and select the research *corpus* (PRISMA 2020)



Source: adapted by the authors from Page *et al.* (2021).

The flowchart ultimately identified the list of scientific publications submitted for content analysis.

Chart 4 - List of scientific publications submitted for content analysis

Catalog	Title	Author(s)	Type of work and year	Objective
SciELO	Representaciones sociales de la democracia en estudiantes universitarios iberoamericanos	José Ignacio Ruiz-Pérez, Angélica Pineda-Silva	Article (2021)	To understand the structure, basic cognitive schemas (BCS), and dimensions of social representations (SR) of democracy in various Latin American contexts.
	Malas relaciones: prensa y movimiento estudiantil universitario en Chile a fines de la dictadura e inicios de la transición democrática (C. 1988-C. 1998).	Pablo Toro Blanco	Article (2018)	To interpret key milestones in the relationship that developed between the print media and the university student movement.
	Entre la movilización estudiantil y la lucha armada en Colombia. De utopías y diálogos de paz	Álvaro Azevedo Tarazona, Gabriel David Samaca Alonso	Article (2015)	To link a segment of the university student generation of the 1960s and 1970s with armed struggle as a method of political participation and social transformation.
	(Des)Igualdad socioespacial y justicia espacial: nociones clave para una lectura crítica de la ciudad	Ana María Álvarez-Rojas	Article (2013)	Conceptually discuss the study on the spatial practices of college students in processes of social mobility.
	Sistemas de valores e atitudes democráticas de estudantes universitários	Cícero Pereira, Ana Raquel Rosas Torres, Taís S. Barros,	Article (2004)	Analyze the value systems of college students and the relationship between these systems and democratic attitudes.
	Sistemas de valores e atitudes democráticas de estudantes universitários de João Pessoa	Cícero Pereira, Marcos Eugênio Lima, Leoncio Camino	Article (2001)	Analyze the relationship between value systems and democratic attitudes among college students.
Portal de Periódicos	O conceito de democracia entre estudantes universitários	Carlos A. K Hoffmann	Article (2015)	Assess the meaning of democracy and its values among college students.

CAPES	Comunicação, democracia e consumo de mídia: o despertar das audiências juvenis	Laura Lizeth Campos, Guido, Juan Antonio Sánchez	Article (2015)	To analyze how young audiences have shifted from mere spectators to active participants in their community's social and political life.
	"Credo democrático" dos Jovens universitários de Salvador: liberdade, igualdade, tolerância e propensão para o diálogo	Maria Victória E. González	Article (2006)	To analyze certain values within the political culture of university students in Salvador.
	Autoritarismo e adesão a sistemas de valores psicossociais	Thaís S. Barros, Ana Raquel R. Torres, Cícero Perreira	Article (2009)	Investigate the relationship between authoritarianism and adherence to value systems.
	Adesão ao fascismo e preconceito sutil contra negros: um estudo com universitários na cidade de São Paulo	Luis Guilherme G. Silva	Article (2016)	Compare manifestations of racial prejudice and their tendency toward fascism.
Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações CAPES	Estudo comparado dos movimentos estudantis universitários no Brasil e na Venezuela, a partir das Teses de Doutorado e dissertações de Mestrado apresentados no Século XXI	Luis Jesus T. Navarro	Dissertation (2020)	Compare university student movements by examining theses and dissertations from the 21st century.
	Relações e interações raciais entre universitários negros e brancos no curso de pedagogia e direito da UFMT: (re) construção de identidades na contemporaneidade	Michelangelo H. Batista	Thesis (2019)	To understand the construction and reconstruction of identities among Black college students in the context of their relationships and interactions with white college students.
	Políticas educacionais inclusivas como expressão dos direitos humanos: um estudo sobre a saúde mental na educação superior	Beatriz G. Vaz	Dissertation (2019)	To explore the relationship between mental health, inclusive higher education, and human rights.
	Jovens de camadas populares em instituições de ensino superior de prestígio: dinâmicas e contradições na construção de uma trajetória universitária	Felipe S. Grisolia	Thesis (2020)	To analyze how young people from working-class backgrounds may be drawn to attending college and the potential subjective effects of this experience.

	Formação em responsabilidade social na universidade: análise de uma experiência	Paulo B. Villagran	Thesis (2012)	Understand whether the project to train professionals with specific values, attitudes, and behaviors has succeeded in fostering measurable changes in the behaviors, attitudes, and values of Chilean students.
BDTD	Sistema democrático e relações autoritárias: um estudo entre universitários	Ana Lúcia Campos Brizola	Dissertation (1999)	Understanding university students' perceptions and political behavior.
Scopus	Active civic education using project-based learning: Israeli college students' attitudes towards civic engagement	Osnat Akirav	Article (2023)	Investigates the effect of active civic education using project-based learning (PjBL) on attitudes towards civic engagement in a heterogeneous society.
	Why There Has Been No Anti-Regime Movement on College Campus in China for Three Decades? A Survey Study at Thirty-Five Universities (2015–2018) and Its Implications	Wanfa Zhang Sugumaran, Narayanan Feng, Sun, F	Article (2023)	Intend to solve the tranquillity mystery by investigating what the student thinks and how they think about a series of social, political, economic, and national security issues, to evaluate the possible impact of the CCP regime's policies on them and other possible social consequences.
	The Mobilization Potential of Political Parties among Hungarian Students	Annamária Sebestyén	Article (2020)	Discusses the mobilization potential of political parties among the youth in light of research conducted among Hungarian university and college students
	Activists, Non-activists, and Allies: Civic Engagement and Student Types at MSIs	Kyle T. Fassett, Christen Priddie, Allison BrckaLoren, Jillian Kinzie	Article (2018)	Analyze college students' participation in civic engagement activities at 24 minority-serving institutions from 2013 to 2017 using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
	Youth and political participation: #Yosoy132 and the struggle for	María Elena Meneses Rocha,	Article (2017)	Explores the habits and perspectives around political participation, freedom of expression, and

	freedom of expression in Mexico	Enedina Ortega Gutiérrez, Gustavo Urbina Cortés		the use of social networks among these university students.
	Is there social capital in a social network site?: Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and participation	Sebastián Valenzuela NamsuPark, Kerk F. Kee	Article (2009)	Examines if Facebook, one of the most popular social network sites among college students in the U.S., is related to attitudes and behaviors that enhance individuals' social capital.
Web of Science	Racial democracy myth and the (non) support for race-targeted policies in Brazil: evidence from a survey list-experiment	Nathalia F. F. Porto, Robert Vidigal	Article (2016)	Understanding the strength of the main arguments of the racial democracy myth and its application in shaping Brazilian college students' opinions on the adoption of affirmative action in public universities.
	Students' pre-college preparation for participation in a diverse democracy	Sylvia Hurtado, Mark E. Engberg, Luis Ponjuan, Lisa Landreman	Article (2002)	Sought to increase understanding in this area by means of a multi-institutional study of the influence of students' pre-college experiences on three measures identified as democratic outcomes: ability to see the world from someone else's perspective, beliefs about whether conflict enhances democracy, and views of the importance of engaging in social action activities during college.
	The long-term impact of social movements and repression on democratic attitudes	Scott Desposato, Gang Wang	Article (2020)	Investigate the long-term impact of one of the largest and most important of failed democracy movements: the Chinese student movement of 1989.
	Gobernanza y universidad: estudio iberoamericano sobre la participación estudiantil	Isaac Calduch, Juan Llanes, Alejandra Montane,	Article (2020)	Delves into the modes of student participation and the factors that inhibit it.

	en las instituciones de educación superior	Jorge Luis Mendez-Ulrich		
	Civic education in Ukraine: a qualitative study of students' experiences of civic engagement (on the example of Kyiv National Linguistic University)	Iryna Sieriakova, Ganna Kokoza	Article (2019)	Studies civic engagement experiences of students of Kyiv National Linguistic University.
DOAJ	Variaciones para una ciudadanía rococó	Betsy Perafán Liévano	Article (2014)	It presents an educational approach to the teaching of law aimed at fostering ethical and civic development among university students.
	Democracia, instituciones cívico-políticas y desarrollo individual: un estudio con estudiantes universitarios	Gisela I. Delfino, Narciso Benbenaste, Elena M. Zubieta	Article (2005)	To understand their conceptualization of democracy, their assessment of how civic and political institutions currently function in Argentina, and their perspective on individual development.
	The Study of the Relationship between Social Capital and Political Tolerance	Jahangir jahangiri, Khalilallah Sardarnia, Ghasem Alizadeh	Article (2016)	Investigating the relationship between social capital and political tolerance.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

After the initial processing of the collected items, the full texts were read in their entirety for relevance to the study's subject.

The selected bibliographic material was then categorized, interpreted, and analyzed using content analysis (Moraes, 1999). The review revealed that the published scientific literature addresses six central themes: (i) human rights, (ii) student movement, (iii) political culture, (iv) psychosocial values, (v) political participation, and (vi) social representations of democracy.

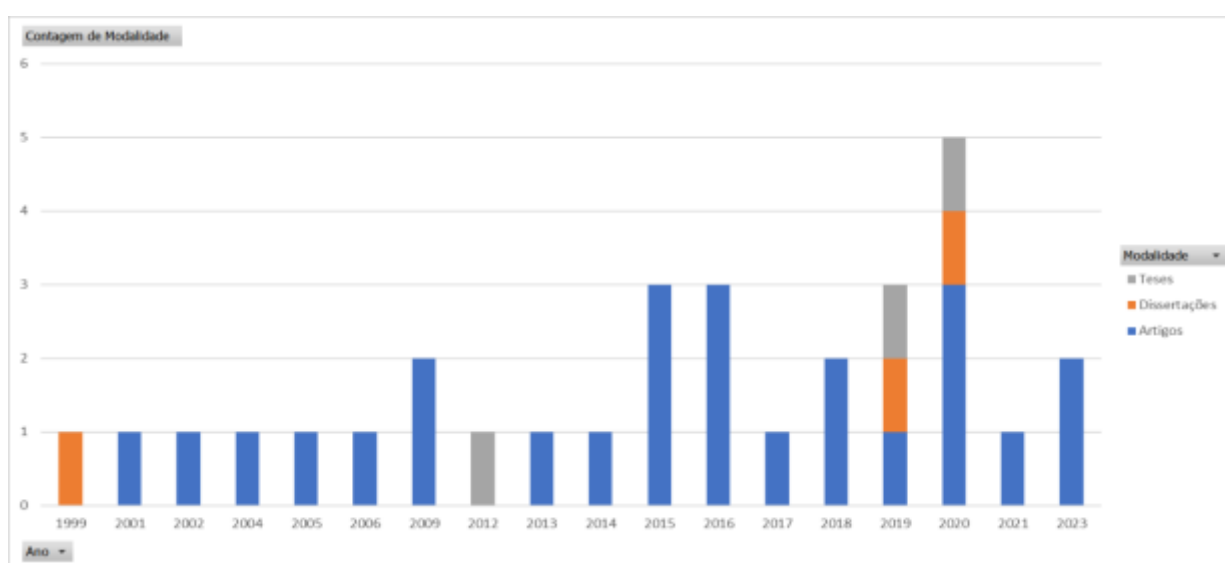
3 Analysis of scientific output

This is a list of studies conducted in Brazil and numerous other countries, including Chile, Venezuela, the United States, Hungary, and Iran. Due to the heterogeneity of the social, political, and cultural contexts described and analyzed in the selected studies, a brief description and analysis of the main aspects (objectives, methodology, and results) of the analyzed works is presented below.

First, the research showed that approximately 19.35% of the works were published in SciELO; 19.35%, in Scopus; 16.13%, in the CAPES Journal Portal; 16.13%, in the CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Catalog; 16.13%, in Web of Science; 9.68%, in DOAJ; and 5.88%, in BDTD.

Graph 1 shows the temporal evolution of the analyzed scientific output. There was an increase in output, particularly in dissertations and theses, starting in 2015, with the years 2019 and 2020 standing out most prominently. The oldest cataloged work was published in 1999 as a dissertation.

Graph 1– Shows the evolution of publications on the topic between 1999 and 2023



Source: prepared by the authors (2023).

As for the disciplinary fields that make up the areas of knowledge, the study showed that 40% of the works analyzed are in the Social Sciences; 26% in Psychology; 19% in Education; 6% in the Interdisciplinary field; and 3% in the fields of History, Applied Social Sciences, and Journalism.

Analysis of the records revealed the predominance of at least six central themes.

Chart 5 – Main themes analyzed in scientific output during 1999–2023

Topics	Percentage
1- Human rights	22,60%
2- Student movement	22,60%
3- Political culture	22,60%
4- Psychosocial values	12,90%
5- Political participation	12,90%
6- Social representations of democracy	6,40%

Source: prepared by the authors (2025).

Although the three initial themes have the same frequency rates, we decided to begin the qualitative analysis with the theme of human rights.

3.1 Human Rights

Human rights are one of the most frequently addressed topics in these studies, accounting for approximately 22.6% of the works (four articles, two theses, and one dissertation). Despite their different natures, all of these studies relate to the field of human rights in some way.

The articles by Álvarez-Rojas (2013) and Silva (2016) examine the debate on social inequalities from different viewpoints. The former study is a conceptual analysis of socio-spatial inequalities and social justice among university students in relation to social mobility in Chile. The study found that economic growth and access to consumption tend to mask existing social inequalities, affecting everything from students' access to the city's symbolic goods to broader issues of equality and democracy. Silva's (2016) study also addresses inequalities, specifically racial democracy, subtle prejudice, and fascist principles. Using a Likert-type questionnaire with university students, the study revealed a correlation between adherence to fascist principles and subtle prejudice against Black individuals.

On the other hand, the articles by Akirav (2023) and Porto and Vidigal (2016) address the theme of human rights from different perspectives. Akirav (2023) investigated the effects of project-based civic education in a multi-ethnic society. Their study, conducted with Israeli medical students in 2016 and 2017, showed that this approach increases political engagement and understanding of accountability and civil/human rights. The second study analyzed the myth of racial democracy and its impact on university students' opinions regarding affirmative action in public universities (Porto; Vidigal, 2016). Based on a questionnaire administered at two Brazilian federal public universities, the study showed that the myth of racial democracy

downplays the explanatory power of racial attributes for inequalities. This leads to greater opposition to racial quotas than to social quotas (Porto; Vidigal, 2016).

Batista's (2019) doctoral dissertation in education examined racial relations and interactions between Black and white university students. The study aimed to understand the process of identity reconfiguration in an academic context for quota students and through their interactions. Using questionnaires and interviews, the author conducted a case study and demonstrated that racial identities are constructed within social and racial relationships and interactions permeated by power dynamics. These relationships encompass more than domination; they also include a counter-hegemonic force within the anti-racist struggle itself (Batista, 2019). Furthermore, the results pointed to identity construction based on multiple notions of identity and how university students navigate between them.

On the other hand, Grisolia's (2020) study sought to understand how young people from working-class backgrounds are drawn to the possibility of attending university and what their experience is like. The study used focus groups and interviews to highlight the importance of family in this process. However, the author revealed contradictions and conflicts in these decisions, primarily related to class and the unstable nature of prior schooling, which affects higher education. Furthermore, the study revealed that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds view university as an opportunity for social mobility, despite recognizing that a degree does not guarantee it.

Finally, Vaz's (2019) dissertation, which falls within the fields of human rights and public policy, sought to understand the relationship between mental health and education, specifically among university students. To this end, the author conducted a bibliographic and documentary study, examining the content available on the selected universities' websites. The research revealed a substantial rise in mental health concerns among students, significantly affecting their academic performance. Consequently, the study emphasizes the importance of establishing an inclusive approach to educational equity that links mental health and education to promote a democratic society.

3.2 Student Movement

The student movement is the second-most-studied topic, accounting for 22.60% of studies (six articles and one dissertation). These four studies are connected by their focus on the importance of analyzing the student movement for understanding democracy.

The articles by Blanco (2018), Tarazona and Alonso (2015), and Guido and Sánchez (2015) analyze the student movement in relation to the media. Blanco (2018) highlights the stereotypical portrayal of student movements promoted by the media, which characterized them as violent, drawing on an approach rooted in the history of education. According to the author, the student movement aimed to raise awareness of social issues, contradicting the press's claim that these issues are invisible or associated with increased violence.

Tarazona and Alonso (2015) also take a historical approach, noting that the media transfer the image of Colombian student guerrillas from the 1960s and 1970s to the present without accounting for historical changes. According to the authors, this movement contributes to the subversive portrayal of university students promoted by media outlets. This analysis aligns with Guido and Sánchez's (2015) research on young people in Mexico. They analyzed the shift of young people from spectators to active participants in social and political life. The study indicated that young people and changes in the media system contributed to increased political participation and a desire for media democratization.

In a different study, Meneses-Rocha, Ortega-Gutiérrez, and Urbina-Cortés (2017) examined the online and offline political activities of college students during the emergence of the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico City. Their survey research showed that digital media facilitated hybrid political participation among students (online and offline).

Zhang, Narayanan, and Sun (2023) and DeSpoto and Wang (2020) both address the student movement in China. Zhang, Narayanan, and Sun (2023) analyzed the lack of anti-regime or pro-democracy student movements in China. Through a survey of 35 universities from 2015 to 2018, they found that Chinese university students highly approve of the country's status quo. Unlike previous generations, they seem less inclined toward political change. Desposato and Wang (2020), on the other hand, examined the long-term impact of social movements on democratic attitudes. Focusing on the 1989 Chinese student movement and the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre, the study used a diffuse regression discontinuity methodology applied to two groups of former university students and found significant differences in the attitudes of students who were in university during the movement and those who enrolled afterward. Those exposed to the movement showed greater support for democracy and the system of rights.

Unlike previous studies that focused on the relationship between the media and the student movement, Navarro's (2020) dissertation conducted a comparative study of university students in Brazil and Venezuela, using content analysis of 23 Brazilian and 5 Venezuelan theses and dissertations. The research highlighted similarities in the dictatorial and democratic experiences of both countries despite their different historical contexts. Thus, elements such as political participation by university students in marches, assemblies, and community activities emerged as part of the students' actions in support of their social demands.

3.3 Political culture

The political culture category accounts for 22.60% of the selected works, or seven articles. These articles use university students as a sample to understand the concept of democracy, drawing on the conceptual framework of political culture.

For example, González (2006) analyzed the "democratic beliefs" of university students in El Salvador, revealing the aspects of the democratic system that students

consider most important, such as engagement with social justice and freedom of expression. However, the author noted that respondents placed little value on institutional functioning, which is "a worrying phenomenon in terms of consolidating democracy because it may lead to the acceptance of more authoritarian models of democracy" (González, 2006, p. 437). Furthermore, young people strongly believed in the myth of equal opportunity. Overall, González's research revealed that, despite their rejection of its limitations, such as obstacles to egalitarianism, university students' conceptions of democracy align with the liberal model—that is, representative democracy.

In their article, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) sought to determine if Facebook use is related to an increase in social capital among students, as defined by Robert Putnam. A 2007 questionnaire administered to 2,603 Texas college students revealed a positive relationship between social media use and social trust, civic engagement, and political participation. However, the authors emphasize that the association between Facebook use and social capital was weak. In a different context, Jahangiri, Sardarnia, and Alizadeh (2016) examined the relationship between social capital and political tolerance. Based on a survey of 390 Iranian university students, the study found that most students had average or low political tolerance. The study also revealed that variables such as community involvement, social awareness, trust, place of birth, and gender significantly impact political tolerance (Jahangiri; Sardarnia; Alizadeh, 2016).

Sieriakova and Kokoza (2019) analyzed students' experiences with civic engagement in Ukraine. In a qualitative study using a questionnaire and a focus group of 24 participants from Kyiv National Linguistic University (KNLU), the researchers found that students who engaged in civic activities for intrinsic motivation showed improvements in communication and teamwork skills compared to those with extrinsic motivation. The authors associate civic engagement with enhancing political experiences among university students. From another perspective, Liévano's (2014) article addresses teaching law and ethical-civic education to students. Based on John Elliott's 2012 action research, the study concluded that Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed techniques, particularly those involving the body and emotions, contribute to learning legal issues and developing ethical-civic education among university students.

Hoffmann's (2015) study of the concept of democracy among university students confirmed the positive findings that teaching democracy shapes young people's democratic beliefs. The author conducted the study using a closed-ended questionnaire and data from the Latinobarómetro. A total of 42 students from two universities—one public and one private—were surveyed. Drawing on the concept of political culture from José Álvaro Moisés's work, Hoffmann concluded that "there was no rejection of democratic values and principles, but rather an increase in critical thinking regarding how the democratic system is established and yields benefits for society" (p. 17). Finally, Delfino, Benbenaste, and Zubieta's (2005) article also addresses students' conceptualization of democracy. Using a questionnaire administered to 1,070 Argentine university students in the early 2000s, the study found lower evaluations of

the political regime/system regarding the quality of democracy, with significant variations in the concept of democracy across academic programs. The study revealed that students in technical and economic fields tend to value individual and private initiative more highly.

3.4 Psychosocial factors

Psychosocial values account for 12.90% of the analyzed works (three articles and one thesis). All of the works are in the field of psychology and use psychosocial value theory to analyze students' democratic values.

The articles by Pereira, Lima, and Camino (2001) and Pereira, Torres, and Barros (2004) both use this theory, differing only in their sample selection. Both articles use Milton Rokeach's (1918–1988) hierarchy of values, Shalom Schwartz's (1940–) motivational types scale, and Ronald Inglehart's (1934–2021) thesis on materialist and post-materialist values. They used the Psychosocial Values Questionnaire and the Attitudes toward Democracy Scale as data collection tools. Both studies revealed that students hold a hegemonic view of democracy, emphasizing hedonistic, religious, and materialistic values (e.g., social, individual, and professional well-being) as well as post-materialistic values (e.g., authority, wealth, profit, and status).

Perreira, Torres, and Barros (2004) emphasize the significance of reinterpreting Inglehart's theory on materialist and post-materialist values. According to Inglehart, materialist values are associated with societies that have not yet resolved basic social problems. Conversely, societies that have overcome these problems focus on post-materialist values. Criticism of this idea is linked to the assumption that social problems are increasing in developing countries, which in turn leads to the defense of materialistic values. Furthermore, the relationship is not bipolar; adherence to post-materialist values does not imply a reduction in materialist values—quite the contrary. One does not presuppose the negation of the other (Pereira; Torres; Barros, 2004). Despite these nuances, they argue that post-materialism creates an environment conducive to democratic participation. Materialism, on the other hand, is essential in cultures with undemocratic systems (Pereira; Torres; Barros, 2004).

However, the work of Barros, Torres, and Pereira (2009) explores the issue of authoritarianism more emphatically. Using the Psychosocial Values Questionnaire (QVP-24) and a sample of 284 university students from Goiânia, the study found consistency with psychosocial research indicating that authoritarianism varies across political contexts. Broadly speaking, psychosocial values fall into four groups: hedonistic, religious, materialistic, and post-materialistic, as well as individual and professional well-being (Barros; Torres; Pereira, 2009).

Finally, Villagran (2012), drawing on the frameworks of Piaget and Kohlberg, sought to determine whether a training program designed to instill values, attitudes, and behaviors in professionals led to changes in the values, attitudes, and behaviors of Chilean students. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study revealed that students demonstrated partial progress in their value systems,

political culture, and social responsibility. The author notes that, although participants became more aware, this did not translate into a broader sense of global social responsibility (Villagran, 2012).

3.5 Political participation

The theme of political participation accounts for 12.90% of the analyzed works (four articles). This theme encompasses a variety of methodological perspectives and analytical contexts.

Sebestyén's (2020) article analyzes the relationship between political party mobilization in Hungary and its role in encouraging student political engagement. Using data from the "Active Youth in Hungary" survey, which was conducted in 2019 with 800 university students, the study revealed that political parties are important for youth political participation, though not in isolation but rather in conjunction with other institutions, such as families. Meanwhile, the study by Fassett et al. (2018) analyzed university students' participation in civic engagement activities at 24 institutions between 2013 and 2017, using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The study identified three types of students: (i) activists, who are highly engaged in civic activities; (ii) non-activists, who have lower levels of civic involvement and engagement; and (iii) allies, who are informed about civic engagement but have little involvement in such activities.

Conversely, Hurtado et al. (2002) examined how students' pre-university experiences influenced their democratic attitudes. Their analysis of a survey administered at three American universities in the early 2000s indicated that participation in discussions, clubs, and volunteer work is an important predictor of democratic attitudes. However, there are considerable challenges regarding conflict resolution in a diverse democracy.

The article by Calduch et al. (2020) focuses on student participation and governance. A study conducted at 18 institutions across Ibero-American countries revealed significant differences in the nature of students' political participation, particularly with respect to age, class, and/or membership in minority groups. These differences pose a challenge to increasing student participation in governance.

3.6 Social representations of democracy

Finally, social representations of democracy account for approximately 6.4% of the analyzed works (one article and one dissertation). These studies are primarily based on the theory of social representations proposed by Serge Moscovici.

The article by Ruiz-Pérez and Pineda-Silva (2021) presents the results of a study on social representations of democracy among Ibero-American students from five Latin American countries. Using Moscovici's theory, the authors argue that these students associated democracy with a core concept of "freedom," "justice," and "equality." Despite the consistency and similarity of the results obtained in the five analyzed

countries, the authors highlight slight variations in the centrality of democracy in different contexts (Ruiz-Perez; Pineda-Silva, 2021).

Brizola's (1999) dissertation also draws on this theoretical framework, incorporating authors from the social sciences. The author's objective was to investigate the political and social representations and behaviors of university students, including their attitudes toward authoritarianism, discourse on democracy and politics, values for building an ideal society, and political participation and involvement in informal groups. The author used questionnaires and interviews to collect data.

As a result, Brizola (1999) notes that students generally preferred democracy, though there were variations in its content and form. The values of equality and freedom were significant in the responses. Brizola notes that students perceive the country's political culture as authoritarian and attribute two negative factors to democracy: poor performance by politicians and institutions, and low optimism about the country's future. However, a key finding of the study was that 70% of students would vote even if voting were not mandatory.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In recent years, the rise to power of leaders associated with authoritarian and anti-democratic agendas in various countries—including Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Donald Trump (USA), Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines), Iván Duque (Colombia), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Luis Lacalle Pou (Uruguay), Giorgia Meloni (Italy), Javier Milei (Argentina), and Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela)—along with the recent European Parliament and French National Assembly elections (June and July 2024, respectively), have shown that democratic culture and values are not as deeply rooted as we usually assume. Recent political events, such as the storming of the U.S. Capitol in January 2021, terrorist attacks at Three Powers Plaza in Brasília on January 8, 2023, and the ongoing political crisis in Venezuela, demonstrate that the principles of democracy are being challenged by groups on the political right and left. The spread of democracy across continents—a phenomenon that political scientist Samuel Huntington termed "third-wave democracies" in the early 1990s (Huntington, 1994)—appears to have stalled and come under suspicion.

This set of crises has revealed that democracy is not a stable political institution. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 20) point out, extreme polarization can "kill democracies." Like any living being, democracy requires monitoring, care, and nurturing. Current dilemmas have reignited the debate on the role of schools and higher education in fostering democratic values. Education is neither the sole nor the most effective antidote to the crisis. Still, it helps maintain the ideals of a democratic society, which are based on resolving conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and adherence to rules. Thus, the future of democracy depends on the political culture shared by institutions and citizens in both the private and public spheres (Levitsky; Ziblatt, 2023; Avritzer, 2023; Melo, 2024; Bobbio, 1997).

Taking into account the plurality of political, social, and cultural contexts, the research hypotheses and scholarly literature analyzed in this study reflect, to a certain extent, the enthusiasm that has prevailed in public opinion over the past few decades. Since the enactment of the 1988 Federal Constitution (CF), democracy has been considered inevitable and in a continuous process of consolidation and improvement. The small number of publications and their sporadic appearance during this period may indicate limited interest in the topic from the academic community. The first cataloged work dates from 1999, approximately a decade after the CF's approval. Furthermore, we did not identify any scholarly works during several years of the analyzed historical period. A slight increase in publications is observed starting in 2015. This leads us to conclude that the June 2013 protests and the subsequent political crises—which culminated in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018—sparked greater academic interest in the topic.

Secondly, the low number of studies produced in education (19%) is noteworthy. Most studies were conducted in the social sciences (40%) and psychology (26%). Based on these data, one hypothesis is that the relationship between higher education and democracy generates little interest among graduate programs and education researchers.

Third, the study revealed that the analyzed scholarly output prioritized topics such as human rights, social movements, and political culture, each accounting for 22.60% of the output. Studies on psychosocial values and political participation accounted for 12.90% of the total. Conversely, social representations of democracy accounted for the smallest percentage (6.4%) of the output. One hypothesis for this distribution of approaches to democracy is that interest in topics concerning the institutional aspects of democratic systems/regimes is limited and diluted among the analyzed subthemes.

Fourth, the study highlighted the use of various theoretical and methodological concepts and approaches. The predominant method is a combination of qualitative analysis and questionnaires. Furthermore, integrating methodologies with various research techniques aligns with the clarity of the theoretical framework. This finding corroborates Plá's (2022) argument about the importance of methodology in investigating and analyzing empirical data.

One of the study's greatest limitations was the selection of "open access" works. Additionally, due to the heterogeneity of national contexts, a deeper analysis of each country's institutional specifics was not possible. Finally, the small number of analyzed works—thirty-one—prevents generalizations. These are some of the indications that the most recent scientific literature reveals about university students. New research, Accessed on: As photographs do, meta-analyses of scientific literature reveal who we are—more precisely, our thoughts and proposals on a subject over the years. The presence and, particularly, the absence of certain topics help us rethink the role of science and education. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2023) point out, political crises and attacks on democracy require a more democratic response. Though imperfect, the

democratic system remains the most suitable framework for protecting societies against authoritarianism.

As Paulo Freire (2000, p. 136) stated, "[...] we are still in the process of learning how to practice democracy. The struggle for democracy involves the struggle against all forms of authoritarianism." Fear, resignation, and silence do not safeguard the rights that form the normative and institutional foundation of democracy.

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Contribution	Author 1	Author 2
1. Conceptualization	X	X
2. Data curation	X	X
3. Formal analysis	X	X
4. Funding acquisition		
5. Investigation	X	
6. Methodology	X	X
7. Project administration projeto	X	
8. Resources		
9. Software		
10. Supervision		
11. Validation	X	X
12. Visualization		
13. Writing (original draft)	X	X
14. Writing (review and editing)	X	X

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the article "College Students and Democracy: What the Research Shows."

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data underlying the research text are available in the article.

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