ARTICLES

Differences in anti-partyism among student youth, single youth, and young adults

Diferenças no antipartidarismo entre jovens estudantes, jovens solteiros e jovens adultos

Diferencias en el antipartidismo entre jóvenes estudiantes, jóvenes solteros y jóvenes adultos

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Abstract

This research investigates anti-partyism among young people, i.e., their rejection of political parties. For this purpose, responses from youth aged 16 to 29 concerning the evaluation of political parties and democratic institutions were systematized using data from the ESEB database (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022). The study shows that rejection of parties varies among student youth, single youth (who are already working), and young adults (who work and have their own family nucleus), classified according to the dynamics of production (labor market integration) and reproduction (family formation) in their lives. This phenomenon can be explained by young adults' closer alignment with the adult-centric world, with its norms (institutionalized politics) and opportunities (such as activism within parties). The results also demonstrated that adult-centrism and reactive anti-party sentiment are central elements for understanding young people's rejection of political parties.

Keywords: Youth: Anti-partyism, Youth condition, Political culture

Resumo

Esta pesquisa investiga o antipartidarismo entre os jovens, ou seja, a rejeição deles aos partidos políticos. Para tanto, sistematizam-se as respostas de jovens de 16 a 29 anos referentes à avaliação dos partidos políticos e das instituições democráticas, conforme dados do banco ESEB (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018 e 2022). Mostra-se no trabalho que a rejeição aos partidos é diferente entre os jovens estudantes, quando comparado aos jovens solteiros (que já trabalham) e o que chamamos de jovens adultos (trabalham e tem núcleo familiar próprio), classificados conforme a dinâmica da produção de suas vidas (inserção no trabalho) e reprodução (formação de núcleo familiar). Esse fato se explicaria pela aproximação dos jovens adultos com o mundo adultocêntrico com seus padrões (política institucionalizada) e facilidades (como a militância dentro de partidos). Os resultados também evidenciaram que o adultocentrismo e o antipartidarismo reativo são elementos centrais para compreender a rejeição dos jovens aos partidos.

Palavras-Chave: *Juventudes; Antipartidarismo, Condição juvenil, Cultura Política*

Resumen

Esta investigación examina el antipartidismo entre los jóvenes, es decir, su rechazo hacia los partidos políticos. Para ello, sistematizamos las respuestas de jóvenes de 16 a 29 años con respecto a la evaluación de los partidos políticos y las instituciones democráticas, utilizando datos del banco ESEB (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018 y 2022). En nuestro trabajo, mostramos que el rechazo a los partidos es diferente entre los jóvenes estudiantes en comparación con los jóvenes solteros (que ya trabajan) y lo que llamamos 'jóvenes adultos' (que trabajan y tienen su propio núcleo familiar), clasificados según la dinámica de producción de sus vidas (inserción en el trabajo) y reproducción (formación de un núcleo familiar). Este hecho se explicaría por la mayor afinidad de los jóvenes adultos con el mundo adultocéntrico, con sus normas (política institucionalizada) y oportunidades (como la militancia dentro de los partidos). Nuestros resultados también destacan que el adultocentrismo y el antipartidismo reactivo son elementos centrales para comprender el rechazo de los jóvenes hacia los partidos políticos.

Palabras clave: Juventud, Antipartidismo, Condición juvenil, Cultura política

pro·posições

Introduction

Data from 2022 shows that political participation among young people aged 24 and under in political parties accounts for only 1% of party members (TSE, 2023). These figures reveal the low engagement of youth with political parties in Brazil, highlighting the challenges parties face in attracting younger voters, who tend to be more active in non-institutionalized political participation spaces such as collectives, protests, and demonstrations (Groppo et al., 2023; Perez, 2021). To understand one aspect of this detachment from political parties, this study analyzes how the social markers of work, education, and family formation influence young people's rejection of political parties.

Youth is approached through various theoretical frameworks and conceptualizations (Pais, 1990). A common definition considers the age of individuals. According to the Statute of Youth (Law 12,852/13), youth includes individuals aged between 15 and 29. However, this definition is limited as it does not encompass the social traits characterizing this group. This study adopts a social and relational definition, as proposed by Pablo Vommaro (2015), which regards youth as a dynamic, historical, socially, and culturally constructed relationship, necessitating an analysis of youth conditions in each context and society based on these processes.

Youth often plays a role in processes of social and political change, as argued by Melucci (1994). Considering this engagement, analyzing the political behavior of these actors enables an early understanding of the paths that political culture may take within society. According to Almond and Verba (2015), political culture shapes voter preferences, adherence to institutional political rules, and the exercise and appreciation of citizenship. In this sense, studying the interface between youth, anti-party sentiment, and political culture is crucial, as analyzing young people's rejection of institutional channels for political participation provides insights into the legitimacy of political parties and, consequently, the robustness of democracy itself.

To understand the relationship between youth, political culture, and democracy, it is essential to delve into the specificities of youth, recognizing that they are not a homogeneous actor but express their sociabilities marked by social, economic, and cultural differences (Vommaro, 2015).

This study distinguishes youth according to social markers from the life cycle theory, particularly work integration and family formation, based on the teachings of Okado and Ribeiro (2015), who studied these markers in relation to youth political participation.

Considering the importance of the life cycle marker, the objective of this research is to evaluate how student youth differs from single working youth and young adults (those who work and have their own families) regarding their rejection of political parties.

For anti-party sentiment (i.e., anti-partyism), we adopt the classic definition by Poguntke (1996), which sees it as unfavorable orientations of intellectual or political elites and the general public toward parties. In a similar definition, Fuks, Borba, and Ribeiro (2018) classify anti-partyism as an extreme rejection of political parties.

However, there are various types of anti-partyism, and among these, we highlight the distinction between cultural and reactive anti-partyism. Cultural anti-partyism results from the historical process of forming Brazil's party systems, leading to a crystallized sense of distrust toward political parties (Baquero & Vasconcelos, 2013). In contrast, reactive anti-partyism arises when the actions of parties frustrate voters' expectations, whether due to corruption scandals or the failure to fulfill political promises (Baquero & Linhares, 2011).

While both anti-partyism and youth have been explored as separate fields of study, few works specifically address anti-partyism among youth. Generally, studies touch upon this relationship indirectly, showing, for example, that parts of contemporary youth reject the way politics is conducted in the institutional arena due to excessive hierarchies, bureaucracy, and inefficiency (Araújo & Perez, 2021; Perez & Souza, 2020). Additionally, there is criticism of party structures that tend to prioritize adults (Okado & Ribeiro, 2015). Other studies address the topic even more indirectly, such as those focused on political socialization and the internet (Morais & Baquero, 2018; Ramírez, 2016).

In an effort to contribute to the field of youth studies, this research posed the question: to what extent do the different conditions of youth, marked by the dynamics of production and reproduction, express rejection of political parties?

To answer this question, the study references works emphasizing the importance of social markers from life cycle theory to understand youth. These studies seek to examine how factors such as labor market integration, family formation, and leaving the parental home define

the life stages of individuals (Araújo & Perez, 2023; Okado & Ribeiro, 2015; Shanahan, 2000; Sposito, 2003). From these references, the hypothesis arises that social markers from life cycle theory—particularly young people's integration into the dynamics of production and reproduction—lead to a lower expression of anti-party sentiment, especially when compared to student youth. This can be explained by their closer alignment with the adult world, with its adult-centric norms, such as institutionalized politics and its highly hierarchical structure.

Adult-centrism can be understood as the structures and social practices that subordinate youth and other age groups, rendering them incomplete until they fit the adult profile (Vásquez, 2013). Thus, adult-centrism assigns youth a condition of deficit, rooted in a perceived lack of rationality, emotional maturity, responsibility, and seriousness (Vásquez, 2013).

The adult-centric perspective is manifested as one of the structural elements of modern Western society, closely linked to patriarchy and the dynamics of capitalism (Cavalcante, 2021). As a result, social structures are designed around adult profiles, compelling young people to conform to these spaces' demands if they wish to be socially included (Cavalcante, 2021).

Methodologically, this research draws on data from the Brazilian Electoral Study (ESEB), which examines Brazilian political culture and its impact on national elections. This survey has been conducted by CESOP since 2002, under the coordination of Professor Rachel Meneguello. ESEB is part of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Project (CSES), coordinated by the University of Michigan (www.cses.org), and involves dozens of institutions from various countries. The ESEB selects respondents based on quotas for gender, age, education, occupation, and household bathrooms to reflect the Brazilian population as a whole (CESOP, 2023).

Among the variables available in the survey, the following stand out for analyzing party rejection: emotional identification with parties, party evaluation, institutional evaluation, and the perceived necessity of parties for democracy.

The temporal scope (waves from 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022) was defined to include all waves of the Brazilian Electoral Study, which began in 2002. This temporal scope also allows for a broader understanding of the development of anti-party sentiment in Brazil in the early 21st century.

As an electoral study, the ESEB only includes individuals aged 16 and older. The age of 29 was used as a reference, considering that youth is defined by interrelated biological and social factors. Based on these assumptions, the literature has set 30 years as the reference age marking the end of youth, as most individuals are socially perceived as adults by that point (Okado & Ribeiro, 2015). Additionally, in the Brazilian social context, individuals aged 30 or older are generally regarded as adults, partly due to institutional efforts to legally delineate youth (Groppo, 2017). Thus, our definition of youth includes individuals aged 16 to 29. Based on this definition, in 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022, there were respectively 642, 334, 505, 704, 608, and 536 young respondents, totaling 3,329 youth interviewed throughout the historical series analyzed.

Youth were categorized in this study into three types, based on their immersion in the dynamics of production and reproduction, according to the principles of life cycle theory: a) student youth (individuals dedicated to studying, not working, and without their own family nucleus); b) single youth (individuals who study and work but have not yet formed their own family nucleus); and c) young adults (individuals who may or may not be studying and working and who have established their own family nucleus). According to Okado and Ribeiro (2015), these variables delineate how the life cycle influences the social perception of actors, particularly in how they are recognized by society as either youth or adults.

To identify anti-party individuals, we initially used the variable "identification with political parties," which is measured on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents total rejection of the party and 10 represents maximum identification. Anti-party individuals were defined as those who scored between 0 and 3 for more than one party mentioned in the survey and also stated that they did not recognize the other parties listed. The inclusion of unfamiliarity with party names was necessary since Brazil's party system currently includes over 31 parties, many of which lack electoral prominence and are thus unknown to most of the population.

To more accurately identify anti-party youth, in addition to evaluating the parties mentioned in the survey, we cross-referenced these responses with the variables "Is there any party that represents your way of thinking?" and "Is there any party that you like?" These

variables have been used in other studies examining the position of parties within the electorate to measure ideological and emotional identification with party affiliations (Paiva, Krause & Lameirão, 2016; Samuels & Zucco, 2018). In 2018 and 2022, we used the variable "Do you feel close to any party?" to establish emotional identification, as the database did not include the same question about liking a party during those years. Consequently, anti-party individuals were restricted to those who demonstrated no form of connection or identification with any political party.

After this introduction, the next section presents and analyzes the research findings, followed by a synthesis of the results and proposals for future research agendas.

Youth Condition and Rejection of Political Parties

Considering the objective of this research—to analyze how the social markers proposed by life cycle theory influence the expression of anti-party sentiment among youth—Figure 1 presents the various youth categories based on the adopted markers, namely: labor market integration, education, and family formation. This differentiation stems from studies emphasizing the importance of the life cycle, explaining that youth stands apart from adulthood based on two conditions: production, represented by labor market integration, and reproduction, encompassing various types of stable unions and consequent family formation (Okado & Ribeiro, 2015; Shanahan, 2000).

Thus, in Figure 1, we present the distribution of youth according to the relevant markers of life cycle theory. This data is highlighted to provide an overview of the youth conditions that will be examined in conjunction with anti-party sentiment throughout this study.

Figure 01

Youth Condition Distribution (%)
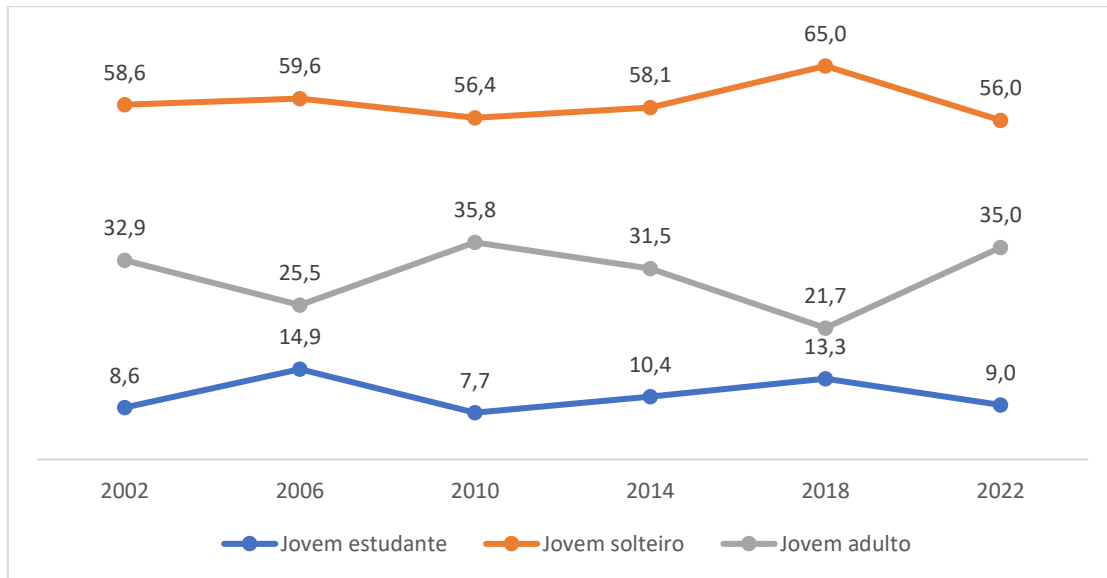
Source: Author's elaboration based on ESEB data from 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022

(Jovem estudante= student youth; Jovem solteiro= single youth; Jovem adulto= young adults.)

Figure 1 illustrates the different youth conditions in which youth can be classified, considering life cycle markers. Among these, single youth represent the most prevalent youth condition in the database (accounting for more than 50% throughout the historical series). Young adults form the second largest group, ranging from 21.7% to 35.8%, and finally, student youth score between 7.7% and 13.3% across the ESEB waves of 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022.

The high percentage of youth in the single and young adult categories demonstrates how labor dynamics are a pervasive aspect of most youths' lives, considering that both categories may or may not be employed, distinguishing themselves through the establishment of their own family nucleus (young adults). This data underscores the importance of considering labor market dynamics when analyzing youth, both as a factor that influences their political culture and as a determinant of these actors' quality of life.

Thus, as highlighted by studies in the field of youth sociology, labor dynamics are a central factor in understanding youth. This marker demonstrates that, contrary to common assumptions, most young people are not free from labor responsibilities or the obligation to support their families (Pais, 1990). The research data supports this perspective, emphasizing

that youth cannot be viewed through the lens of a period with fewer responsibilities. Therefore, youth is diverse, and understanding its relationship with political culture requires considering how and why it diverges.

Another factor evidenced by Figure 1 is that most young Brazilians assume elements considered part of adults' social roles (such as work and the formation of their own family nucleus) early on. This data is significant as it shows that Brazilian youth are not primarily composed of individuals without commitments or solely focused on their studies. The data also reaffirms the need to distinguish among Brazilian youth to better understand their relationships with politics.

These findings further underscore how adult-centric dynamics obscure the living conditions of youth, as their social image is associated with irresponsibility and leisure time (Vásquez, 2013). More importantly, the research data demonstrates that work and family are not exclusively adult domains but are also experienced by youth in their unique ways.

In Figure 2, we present the distribution of anti-partyism among different youth categories in 2022, comparing them to adults.

Figure 2
Anti-partyism: Youth and Adults
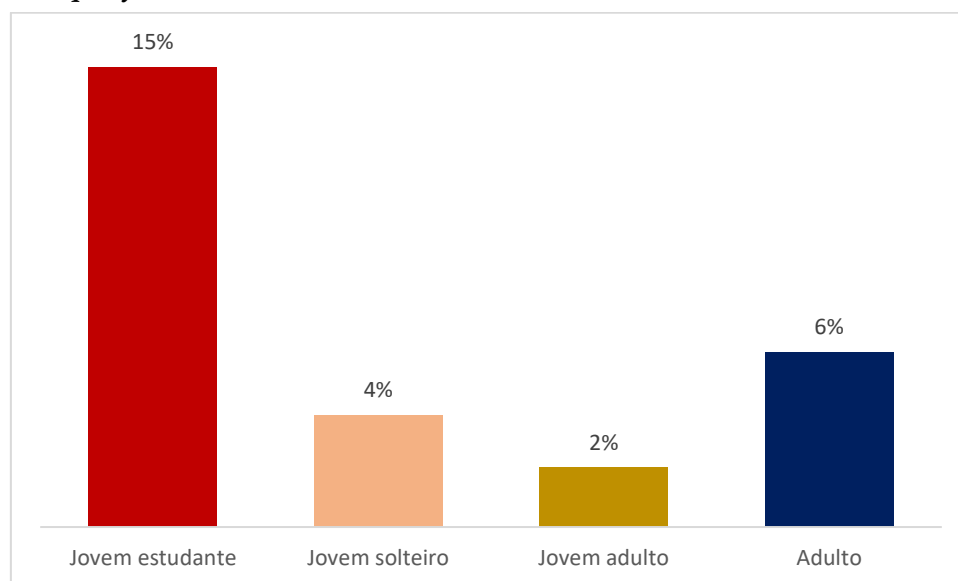
Source: Author's elaboration based on ESEB 2022

(*Jovem estudante* = Student youth; *Jovem solteiro* = Single youth; *Jovem adulto* = Young adults; *Adulto* = Adults.)

According to Figure 2, 15% of student youth reject political parties, while 4% of single youth and 2% of young adults express anti-party sentiment. Among adults, 6% were identified as anti-party in 2022.

The data from Figure 2 initially corroborates studies that point to the detachment of youth from institutional channels of participation (Perez, 2021). This observation is further supported by recent data from the Electoral Superior Court (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral), which shows that only 1% of young people are affiliated with political parties (TSE, 2023). However, it is essential to consider that the lack of youth affiliation with parties is also related to adult-centric norms, which hinder their participation (Okado & Ribeiro, 2015). Consequently, as youth face difficulties integrating into parties and reject them, they seek participation spaces where they can exercise their right to voice in a more inclusive manner, such as political organizations known as collectives (Perez & Souza, 2020).

For the purposes of this research, it is worth highlighting that student youth are the most anti-party (15%). Thus, anti-party sentiment is neither equal between youth and adults nor uniform among all youth—it is highest among student youth. This finding validates the decision to differentiate youth according to life cycle theory in this study.

In more detail, we now turn to the aim of this research, which is to understand how the various youth conditions (student youth, single youth, and young adults) express the most extreme form of rejection of political parties: anti-party sentiment. To this end, we compiled data in Figure 3 in the form of a timeline showing variations in anti-party sentiment among youth conditions from 2002 to 2022.

Figure 03

Anti-party Sentiment and Youth Conditions
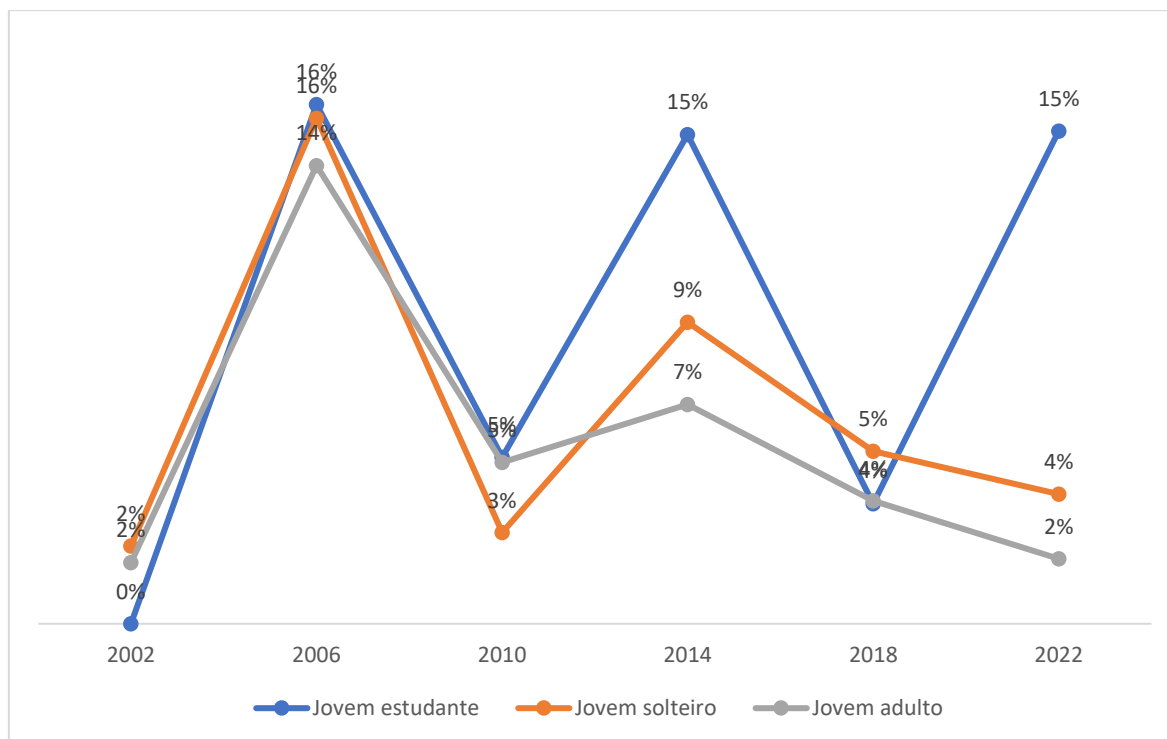
Source: Author's elaboration based on ESEB data from 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022

(*Jovem estudante* = student youth; *Jovem solteiro*= single youth; *Jovem adulto*= young adults.)

Figure 3 presents a more specific analysis of youth expressing anti-party sentiments. Each line in the chart illustrates the variation across the historical series for each youth condition (student youth, single youth, and young adults). There is significant mobility in anti-party sentiment over the past decades, with notable peaks in 2006, 2014, and 2022. In 2006, there was an almost uniform increase in anti-party sentiment across youth conditions, with 16% of both student and single youth and 14% of young adults expressing such sentiments. In 2010, anti-party sentiment declined, registering 5% among student youth and young adults and 3% among single youth. In 2014, anti-party sentiment rose again, with a more pronounced increase among student youth, reaching 15%. The year 2018 saw a significant decline in anti-party sentiment, with none of the categories exceeding 5%. Finally, in 2022, there was a substantial increase in the historical series, with student youth returning to the 2014 level of 15%, while single youth dropped to 4% and young adults to 2%.

We now analyze the data in Figure 3, considering the various aspects revealed: 1) the type of anti-party sentiment identified; 2) the variations in anti-partyism across the years covered in the historical series; 3) the similarities in anti-partyism among youth; and 4) the differences between youth categories, considering the groups of student youth, single youth, and young adults.

Regarding the first aspect—the types of anti-party sentiment identified in Figure 3—it is important to note its volatility throughout the historical series (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022). The volatility of the Brazilian electorate's party sentiments was previously discussed by Samuels and Zucco (2018) in their study on anti-PT sentiment and anti-partyism. According to the researchers, Brazilians' party ties are fragile and more susceptible to contextual changes.

More specifically, the anti-party sentiments among youth revealed in Figure 3 vary according to context because they are reactive. Revisiting the definitions of anti-party sentiment types, cultural anti-partyism results from the historical process of forming Brazil's party systems, generating a crystallized distrust of political parties (Baquero & Vasconcelos, 2013). In contrast, reactive anti-partyism arises from frustration with parties (Baquero & Linhares, 2011), depending on political, economic, and social events. Figure 3 confirms that anti-partyism among youth is reactive, considering that in 2002, extreme rejection of parties was almost non-existent, but in 2006 and 2014, it reached percentages between 7% and 16% across youth conditions. Thus, this fluidity in anti-party sentiment highlights the connection actors make between the social context and the political arena, where political parties act as representatives.

We now proceed to explain the variation across the years covered in the historical series (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022).

Figure 3 highlights 2006 as a key year. The political context of 2006 explains the rise in anti-party sentiment, particularly due to political scandals widely debated in the media, most notably the "Mensalão" scandal. In addition to intensifying rejection of the Workers' Party (PT), the scheme directly implicated other coalition parties, which received "monthly payments" to ensure political support for the government's projects (Miguel & Coutinho, 2007).

This spike in anti-party sentiment is further understood considering the involvement of the Workers' Party, which was in its first term at the head of the national executive and had based its campaign on an anti-corruption platform. As Samuels and Zucco (2018) noted, the PT was seen by the electorate as a party that would lay the groundwork for a new approach to

politics. However, by being implicated in such a significant political scandal alongside various other parties, the dynamics of reactive anti-party sentiment were widely disseminated.

Another year that stands out in Figure 3 is 2014, which saw a peak in anti-party sentiment, especially among student youth. These results are linked to the June 2013 protests, when thousands of Brazilians took to the streets nationwide with diverse demands, ranging from maintaining bus fare prices to broader political reforms. During these protests, many demonstrators displayed hostility toward the presence of political parties (Perez, 2021). Youth were politically socialized during June 2013 with the idea that political institutions, being rigid and hierarchical, were inefficient and unable to include the diversity of Brazil's population in decision-making. This perception contributed to the proliferation of collectives among student youth (Perez, 2019).

There was a sharp decline in anti-party sentiment in 2018, which can be interpreted partly as a result of the atypical nature of that year's election. The far-right candidacy of then-presidential candidate Jair Messias Bolsonaro spurred a movement of party identification, reflected in the significant electoral success of the Social Liberal Party (PSL), the president's party at the time.

In 2022, the data reveal that student youth led anti-party sentiment with 15%, while single youth and young adults reduced their levels of anti-partyism to 4% and 2%, respectively. This anti-party panorama can be initially connected to the context of the 2022 election, where the confrontation between Lula and Bolsonaro resulted in the most closely contested election of the New Republic (Pinhoni, 2022). Political polarization emerged as a factor that increased levels of party identification, driven by the personalism of the candidates and reflected in the smallest vote margin among all elections since the country's democratic restoration.

Regarding the third aspect of this analysis—the similarities in anti-party sentiment among youth—it is worth noting that studies on youth conditions, particularly those by Okado and Ribeiro (2015), led to the hypothesis that there would be significant differences in how youth engage with political parties, based on their integration into the workforce and the formation of their own family nucleus. However, the youth groups proposed in this study (student youth, single youth, and young adults) exhibited similar levels of rejection toward political parties. This suggests that the distinction adopted here is not the most effective for understanding differences among youth.

Significant differences between the youth groups were observed only in certain years when anti-party sentiment peaked: in 2014, student youth demonstrated the highest levels of rejection of political parties (15%) compared to single youth and young adults (an average of 8%). In 2022, student youth again led in expressing anti-party sentiment, while single youth and young adults further reduced their levels of rejection.

Considering our hypothesis that anti-party sentiment tends to manifest more strongly in youth further removed from the adult profile, the years 2014 and 2022 align with expectations. Thus, in addition to reactive anti-party sentiment, the perspective of adult-centrism is also relevant to understanding youth distancing from and rapprochement with political parties.

Since the party environment is structured around hierarchical systems and entails costs for activism, as well as a specific profile for electoral campaigns typically associated with an untarnished reputation linked to profession and religion, youth furthest from this profile are often excluded from party spaces or have their roles restricted. Okado and Ribeiro (2015) reinforce this perception by describing how political parties are fundamentally adult-centric, presenting challenges for young members to attain decision-making or leadership positions, especially newly affiliated youth.

Adult-centrism and reactive anti-party sentiment thus constitute central elements in understanding youth rejection of Brazilian political parties. This is particularly true for student youth, who are further removed from adult-centric demands and immersed in movements of political and social renewal.

Conclusion

This research sought to understand aspects of the political culture of youth, particularly how they express and develop rejection of political parties. Although partisanship is a historic topic in political science, the discussion of party sentiments in conjunction with youth themes remains an underexplored field.

In the present study, we began by analyzing variations in anti-party sentiments expressed by youth over the past two decades using data from the Brazilian Electoral Study (ESEB). For this purpose, we analyzed variables related to the socioeconomic conditions of youth to define their youth condition. We hypothesized that life cycle factors influence the expression of anti-

party sentiment among youth. To analyze anti-party sentiment, we used variables pertaining to the evaluation of political parties, emotional identification with parties, and trust in institutions.

Throughout the historical series, the diverse youth conditions expressed anti-party sentiment in a heterogeneous and inconsistent manner, demonstrating that the dynamics of reactive anti-party sentiment are central to understanding youth rejection of political parties. The studies highlighted the student youth condition, which exhibited greater variation in anti-party sentiment compared to other categories, emphasizing the impact of adult-centrism on political structures and, consequently, on youth participation and evaluation of these spaces.

Thus, the research results reinforce how the dynamics of adult-centrism and reactive anti-partyism are central to analyzing the relationship between youth and democratic institutions. This is reflected in the data, which show that youth with a profile closer to the adult-centric understanding of adult roles exhibit less rejection of political parties, unlike student youth, who demonstrated greater rejection of party institutions.

This study demonstrated that youth conditions are plural and cannot be reduced to a single category, homogenizing actors who are so distinct from one another. For future research, we suggest considering other factors that equally influence the recognition of youth. For example, we highlight the importance of investigating differences in the political culture of youth in rural versus urban contexts. Territorial factors deserve emphasis to understand youth in a country as large as Brazil.

Another agenda involves the importance of developing more focused analyses on the expression of party sentiments, with data collection instruments specifically designed for this purpose. The relevance of party sentiments for the stability of democracy and voter mobilization provides a strong justification for encouraging a better understanding of how these sentiments develop.

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