



Emergency declaration related to disasters: the panorama of São Paulo state and its sociopolitical implications

Decretação de emergência relacionada a desastres: o panorama estadual paulista e seus desdobramentos sociopolíticos

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Abstract: An emergency decree is a legal instrument adopted by government authorities in response to a significant crisis. It supports extraordinary official provisions, ranging from altering the operational routine of institutional bodies and public resource management mechanisms to changing how governments interact with citizens. Activating the decree is an additional stressor for those living under it, who must adapt to new rules imposed on local social life. Despite aiming to provide support in extraordinary circumstances, these rules may increase rather than reduce other vulnerabilities. Frequent activation of this instrument indicates a chronic public management problem. Conversely, if it is not used, when necessary, this is a problem of equal magnitude. Taking this into account, this sociological study, based on mixed methods but with an essayistic character, begins with a brief portrayal of contemporary crises concerning the increasingly fragile relationship between the state and society. The aim is to support the description and analysis of the dynamics of emergency decreeing in São Paulo state, covering the period from 2003 to 2024, supported by statistical series and compared with national values. The results indicate that São Paulo state is immune to the need to use this instrument compared with the national scale and dynamics. It is concluded that there is widespread regional occurrence of recurrent emergency declarations among São Paulo municipalities, alongside an institutional tendency to avoid adopting this instrument and conceal disasters. This reveals that São Paulo's susceptibility to this type of crisis should not be disregarded.

Keywords: disasters; emergency declaration; socioenvironmental crisis; São Paulo State; Brazil.

Resumo: A decretação de emergência é um instrumento legal adotado por autoridades governamentais diante de uma crise vultosa. Este dispositivo embasa providências oficiais inusuais, que vão desde a alteração do modo de funcionamento do aparato institucional e dos mecanismos de gestão dos recursos públicos até a mudança na forma de interação dos governantes com os cidadãos. O acionamento deste instrumento, devido a um desastre, é um estressor adicional para os que passam a viver sob sua égide, pois precisarão se ajustar aos novos regramentos impostos à vida social local, o que pode ser providencial, mas acaba por agravar outras vulnerabilidades em vez de reduzi-las. Se é acionado com frequência, esse dispositivo indica um problema crônico na gestão pública. Se deixa de sê-lo, quando deveria ter sido adotado, é um problema de igual envergadura. Considerando essa problemática, esse estudo sociológico, baseado em métodos mistos, mas em caráter ensaístico, parte de uma sintética exposição sobre crises contemporâneas, no que tange ao esgarçamento da relação entre Estado e sociedade, para embasar a descrição e análise da dinâmica da decretação de emergências no contexto paulista, abarcando o período 2003-24, fundamentada em séries estatísticas e no comparativo nacional. Os resultados indicam que o Estado de São Paulo é, aparentemente, imune à necessidade de empregar esse dispositivo de controle, em comparação com a escala e a dinâmica nacionais que o adotam. Conclui-se, contudo, que tem havido um relativo espraiamento regional dos episódios de recorrência à decretação de emergências no conjunto de municípios paulistas, ao lado de

uma disposição institucional difusa para dispensar essa prática e escamotear o desastre, ambos revelando que a suscetibilidade paulista a este tipo de crise não está descartada.

Palavras-chave: desastres; declaração de emergência; crises socioambientais; Estado de São Paulo; Brasil.

1. Introduction

The final quarter of the 20th century saw a confluence of unprecedented political, social, economic, and environmental dynamics at multiple levels. Rooted in the neoliberal mainstream, the rapid process of globalisation spread the idea that it would reinforce democratic values, economic prosperity, and well-being for citizens around the world, particularly in emerging countries such as Brazil. As President Fernando Henrique Cardoso observed, adopting the theoretical approach and its expanded trade circuit would provide the nation with a unique opportunity to overcome its colonial mindset and dispel its reputation as a ‘backward’ country. This would entail departing from economic and cultural isolationism (Rila, 1996). Although public initiatives to promote internal development had been successful since the mid-1980s, as demonstrated by the state of São Paulo (Cano, 1988), the 1990s saw significant momentum gained in the internationalisation of the Brazilian economy. Adopted in 1994, the Real Plan expanded the scope of private investment planning in strategic sectors of the country, resulting in a more robust National Privatisation Programme (PND), adopted three years later (*Lei nº 9.491*, 1997). These measures facilitated the emergence of new private businesses that became increasingly integrated into global value chains and financial accumulation. In the political and social sphere, the 1980s were characterised by the heightened mobilisation of democratic forces within Brazilian society. These forces called for substantial political and institutional reforms in the face of a dictatorial regime whose credibility in terms of social and economic development strategies had already been depleted. This precipitated the formation of political parties that culminated in the drafting of a new constitution for the Federative Republic of Brazil, thereby establishing the rule of law (*Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil*, 1988). The foundational principles of this system have undergone continuous evaluation. Ongoing socio-political mobilisation ultimately led to the resumption of direct presidential elections in 1989. The victorious candidate was from the centre-right PRN (National Renewal Party), but he resigned from office in 1992 amid impeachment proceedings in the Federal Senate (Sallum & Casarões, 2011). Meanwhile, emergent social movements have gained recognition for advocating environmental issues, achieving institutional standing at the federal level, and spreading to other levels of government.

However, the first quarter of the 21st century revealed the detrimental effects of these contemporary entanglements at various levels of society.

The global institutionalisation of democratic values, including in Brazil, has transitioned from an era of growth to a period of decline. The ongoing expansion of national initiatives characterised by territorial expansionism and social cruelty has occurred despite the inability of multilateral forces to contain it. Trumpist neo-imperialism has also been observed to subvert codes of conduct among trading partners. Furthermore, despite the achievements of minority rights, there has been a regression to the normalisation of social intolerance. Finally, the summary breakdown of previously made multilateral environmental commitments, such as the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, has followed the meagre results of growing commitments (Balduino, 2020; Mota, 2025). These issues are intricately linked to a spiral of social marginalisation, collective fear, overt autocracies and the widespread spread of uncertainty and disaster. This phenomenon, often termed ‘collateral damage’ (Bauman, 2022), is a consequence of the contemporary global socio-spatial metamorphoses theorised by Beck (2016). The environmental and social implications of these changes have been inadequately assessed, as evidenced by the lack of consideration for environmental and social justice (Bauman & Bordoni, 2016). The intricate interconnection among diverse forms of crisis has emerged as a pivotal theme in contemporary life (Touraine, 2011). In such contexts, social exposure to a multitude of threatening factors tends to be asymmetrical, causing sub-citizens to experience disasters that dismantle the remaining social and material foundations of their daily lives (Ferguson, 2021).

Disasters can be represented as a dramatic expression of an occurrence in the sensible world involving disadvantaged subjects in a given locational and environmental context. They can also serve as a grim expression of the collateral damage caused by the mentality of those active in the commercial and concentrated control of territories, natural resources, technological apparatus, and rentier capital, which is petty and sordid. Politically, these phenomena are articulated in the public institutional fabric and its corresponding technical action to reflect a notion of public order that is erased in these dramatic episodes. However, the existing body of research on disasters obscures these relationships, hindering the identification of the fundamental characteristics of this phenomenon and its recurrence. Not only do these crises escalate in intensity and complexity, but they also expand the domain of uncertainty regarding future outcomes (Boin et al., 2013).

In Brazil, formally acknowledged disasters are associated with legal instruments and technical practices. Emergency decrees are one such instrument and are characterised by a concise description of the events that precipitated the crisis following the classification in force in the National Civil Protection and Defence System (SINPDEC) and the Brazilian Disaster Code (COBRADE). However, the prevailing COBRADE architecture does not facilitate the identification of the macrosocial processes that precipitate these crises within the content of emergency decrees. This omission

is a salient sociological aspect as it lends support to the characterisation of such decrees as a pivotal element of a control apparatus in the Agambenian sense (Agamben, 2006). Alternatively, they can be regarded as an institutional mechanism for producing and disseminating a technocratic structure of thought. This technocratic structure of thought is evident in discourses and practices that favour the systemic obliteration of broader discussions about the structural and dynamic factors that corrode social life and the social emancipation projects contained within (Harvey, 2020).

São Paulo, the country's most economically prosperous Federative Unit, is an emblematic territory of developmental monstrosities (Harvey, 2020), amidst which disasters emerge. The spatio-temporal segmentation of occurrences – each of which is framed within the respective emergency decree and under autonomous legal-administrative authority, usually municipal – relieves local public managers of responsibility. Consequently, the classification system of events associated with emergency decrees dehistoricises disasters, a problem that is examined from a critical perspective in this sociological essay.

2. Results and discussion

From a sociological perspective, emergency decrees are defined as legal instruments employed by governments at various levels to facilitate the implementation of extraordinary official and technical measures in response to crises, including disasters. Such decrees encompass a wide range of changes, including alterations in the operational mechanisms of institutional apparatuses and public resource management systems, as well as shifts in the modes of interaction between rulers and ruled entities (Valencio, 2021).

Brazilian legislation dictates that the declaration of a state of emergency in the context of a disaster is an act that falls under the purview of the Chief Executive. This declaration serves to indicate the intensity of this type of crisis, assessing it as an emergency (SE) or a state of public calamity (ECP). The objective of such a declaration would be to prevent the adoption of extraordinary measures by the local public administration to mitigate the crisis. This approach was adopted as a response and recovery measure to the disaster that occurred (*Decreto nº 10.593*, 2020). Furthermore, the Minister of State for Integration and Regional Development would be responsible for recognising the SE or ECP upon request by the federal entity of the locality where the disaster occurred (*Decreto nº 11.774*, 2023). In summary, the implementation of such a legal instrument at the local level is unfinished without the endorsement of a higher-level executive authority, thereby establishing a technopolitical relationship. The National Secretariat for Civil Protection and Defence (SEDEC) of the Ministry of Integration and Regional Development (MIDR) possesses the authority to

promptly recognise the SE or ECP, thereby circumventing the necessity for the affected federal entity to expeditiously submit the requisite documentation. This recognition can be made subsequently (*Decreto nº 11.774*, 2023). The counterbalance to the streamlining of bureaucratic procedures adopted by the federal entity is to be found in the curbing of any flaws in the documentation and the identification of any inaccuracies in the designation of that local crisis as an SE or ECP. In such cases, administrative and criminal sanctions may be applied (*Decreto nº 11.774*, 2023).

Conversely, the declaration of an emergency, accompanied by the recognition of the SE or ECP by the federal government, functions as an ancillary stressor for citizens within the affected region. In the context of this legal provision, individuals are confronted with novel regulations that are imposed on their social lives by the technopolitical entities that oversee the emergency. Such rules necessitate the implementation of adaptive strategies to address the challenges posed by the crisis, which frequently entail incompatibilities between the cultural repertoires of the affected social groups and the technical environment that adopts and imposes certain standards on the former (Valencio et al., 2011). The increasing number of emergency decrees pertaining to disasters has the potential to exert a detrimental effect on the social environment. Nevertheless, in instances where emergency decrees are limited and circumstances necessitate their implementation, the issue remains a cause for concern. The case of São Paulo offers a compelling subject for analysis, as it intersects with these aspects in a noteworthy manner.

A review of the records available in the Integrated Disaster Information System (S2iD) regarding emergency decrees issued in the country due to disasters between 2003 and 2024 reveals that the state of São Paulo was among the federal units (UFs) that exhibited the least restraint in issuing such decrees. This phenomenon stood in contrast to the patterns observed in other UFs. While the average number of Brazilian municipalities that declared a state of emergency during that period was 32.77%, with a peak of 83.43% in 2020 (mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a disaster related to a significant increase in cases of infectious disease caused by a viral agent [code COBRADE 1.5.1.1.0]), the average for municipalities in São Paulo was only 5.42%, with a peak of 27.29% in that year (see Table 1). The national and state comparisons for São Paulo in 2020, as previously referenced, suggest that the context in São Paulo exemplifies resilience in the face of imminent threats. However, this assertion is not entirely accurate, as the state's experience with the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has demonstrated. At the onset of the crisis, when experts recommended the implementation of prophylactic measures – such as maintaining physical distancing between individuals and restricting them to their homes to contain the spread of the virus while awaiting the development of a vaccine – it was anticipated that the municipal executive would issue an emergency

decree to ensure compliance with these measures. The declared emergency would also enforce complementary rules in the public intersectoral sphere, with practical effects on different dimensions of social life (e.g. employment, education, forms of leisure, traffic on public roads, etc.). The judicious employment of this pivotal element of social control was intended to counteract the denialist approach, which had the federal public machine taken unawares. The non-denialist mayors were the primary drivers in initiating this process, despite the potential for retaliation from the federal government. However, it should be noted that emergency decrees issued in the context of the pandemic also enabled the occurrence of illegalities related to the utilisation of public resources that were allocated for health and sanitation purposes. Considering the evident peril posed by the novel strain of the virus, certain municipalities in São Paulo declared a state of public health emergency on two occasions in 2020: in March and September. The pervasive sense of apprehension that engendered widespread societal concern was capitalised upon by certain far-right elements, albeit in a manner that contravened the prescribed health guidelines (Vassort, 2020). Mobilisations played a role in the decision of municipal mayors who shared this perspective to postpone the declaration of a public health emergency and/or promote social media content that encouraged reckless social behaviour. This was perceived as a gesture of appreciation for their leader, then-President Jair Bolsonaro. In the state of São Paulo, there was popular support and backing from state ministers for the motorcycle rallies promoted by Bolsonaro, including from the individual who would go on to become his candidate for governor of the state of São Paulo and who subsequently won the election. This occurred even when an overwhelming wave of the disease, in mid-2021, had already led to more than seventeen million cases and almost half a million deaths (Galf & Azevedo, 2021). Consequently, the presence of favourable figures, suggesting an absence of emergency declarations, does not necessarily signify effective public management practices in the context of civil protection.

A thorough examination of the case reveals that São Paulo's decision to use this legal mechanism was not solely influenced by the prevailing circumstances of the pandemic. Instead, it was informed by a broader socio-environmental context, one that was not insulated from the impact of critical events, including those of a meteorological, hydrological, or climatic nature. The decision by municipalities to discontinue this measure can be attributed to a range of technical, administrative, political, and partisan factors, or a combination thereof.

The intricate bureaucracy that underlays federal recognition of an SE or ECP from 2003 to 2011 is the primary factor in this situation.

Due to the political pressure exerted by the São Paulo state government on its municipal entities to refrain from declaring a state of emergency, even when the situation demanded it, the issue remained unresolved.

Table 1 Comparative evolution of the number of emergency decrees in Brazil and in the state of São Paulo, 2003-24.

Year	No. of municipalities declaring a state of emergency in Brazil	% of municipalities declaring a state of emergency in relation to all municipalities in Brazil	No. of municipalities declaring a state of emergency in the state of São Paulo	% of municipalities issuing decrees in relation to all municipalities in the State of São Paulo
2003	1196	21.51	43	6.67%
2004	1343	24.14	24	3.72
2005	1587	28.52	63	9.77
2006	905	16.27	22	3.41
2007	1178	21.17	30	4.65
2008	992	17.83	10	1.55
2009	1749	31.43	31	4.81
2010	1280	23.00	56	8.68
2011	913	16.41	57	8.84
2012	2302	41.37	5	0.78
2013	1998	35.87	12	1.86
2014	1801	32.33	9	1.40
2015	1582	28.40	8	1.24
2016	1402	25.17	23	3.57
2017	1850	33.21	25	3.88
2018	1407	25.26	12	1.86
2019	1356	24.34	22	3.41
2020	4647	83.43	176	27.29
2021	4065	72.98	38	5.89
2022	2322	41.69	32	4.96
2023	2180	39.14	52	8.06
2024	2087	37.46	19	2.95

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2iD, the Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

The subordination of civil protection and defence of the framework and rationale of state public security policy is the result of institutional and cultural factors.

About the technical and administrative aspects, the federal government's stipulations regarding the declaration of a municipal emergency entailed a substantial amount of documentation, both in terms of volume and variety, until early 2012. The aforementioned process was distinguished by its protracted duration and cumbersome bureaucracy. Considering the logistical challenges associated with gathering this documentation, particularly in view of the limited availability of municipal technical staff in small municipalities who are already grappling with pressing disaster-related priorities, the mayors and their respective civil defence coordinators concluded that undertaking such an endeavour was not feasible. The hypothesis was put forward that the legal framework and administrative dictates that guided the federal government were too complex, or even confusing,

given the limited knowledge of the subject at the local level. This impeded the latter from aspiring to obtain the speed required for a timely response to the crisis faced locally. It is important to note that during the 2000s, civil defence agencies in small municipalities in the interior of São Paulo state – as well as throughout the country – were non-existent. At the time of their establishment, these agencies were in the initial stages of developing their technical staff composition and qualifications. Furthermore, the subjects were found to be under-resourced regarding facilities and equipment. This situation engendered a high degree of dependency on the state civil defence agency. In the event of a disaster within a specific municipality in São Paulo, the state agency is responsible for aiding the applicant, in collaboration with its technical partners, including the Institute for Technological Research (IPT). These agencies collaborate to evaluate the damage and suggest suitable response measures. This link functioned as a providential shield at the local level, producing effects that, to a certain extent, dispelled the need for dialogue with the federal government. The Emergency Management Course (CAEM), administered by the State Coordination Office for Civil Protection and Defence (CEPDEC) in all regions of the state of São Paulo, has been demonstrated to be a successful strategy in encouraging the establishment of analogous agencies at the municipal level. The course had a significant impact, resulting in the participation of all 645 municipalities in São Paulo. This participation fostered enhanced technical collaboration between these two levels of government.

In the context of Brazilian party politics, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and the Workers' Party (PT) have historically demonstrated an explicit rivalry in electoral processes at the federal, state, and municipal levels. This rivalry has been characterised by a contrasting of their respective visions and development policies, which are positioned within the ideological spectrums of the centre-right and the left, respectively. A significant period of this animosity transpired following the PT's victory in the 2002 presidential election against the PSDB candidate, the party that had held power for the previous two terms. In the period following its victory over its rival, the PT (Workers' Party) maintained its dominance over the federal government from 2003 to 2016 (during the administrations of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, the latter of which was brought to an end by the impeachment of the former president). Concurrently, the PSDB attained repeated electoral victories at the state level in São Paulo, accumulating a total of twenty-eight years in power across seven consecutive elections from 1995 to 2022. The period of dominance by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in the state of São Paulo further exacerbated the existing animosities between the federal and state levels of government. In this political context, the government of São Paulo under the PSDB party understood that declaring a state of emergency – and, consequently, requesting federal recognition – would express a certain level of incompetence on

the part of local and state public management to avoid it. This finding was made by the first author through their observation of numerous statements by mayors who, despite pressure from their respective PSDB governors, turned to the then National Secretary of Civil Defence (SEDEC) between 2003 and 2009 to request support in the face of the emergency they were forced to declare. Consequently, the reduction in the necessity to declare a state of emergency was advantageous for state governments led by the PSDB, including the São Paulo state government, as it enabled them to circumvent the potential embarrassment of soliciting assistance from a PT federal government. For the federal government, led by the PT, recognising the failure of a PSDB state or municipal government to protect its citizens in the face of such disasters was, no less, a political currency that could not be wasted in its constant rivalries with the PSDB. In the context of São Paulo, this perpetually tense political configuration constrained municipal governments to exercise restraint in the face of a disaster, without declaring the corresponding emergency. Furthermore, a multitude of economic and economic factors influence the decision to refrain from declaring an emergency. Among these factors is the impact on security assessments, which serve as a guide for investment decisions within a specific locality (Valencio, 2010).

In the context of civil protection and defence, it is noteworthy that, in the case of São Paulo, the CEPDEC is structured and has been directed by Military Police personnel, operating under the auspices of the Military House of the Governor's Office. A comparable phenomenon has been observed in the context of municipal civil defences in São Paulo, where the coordinators of these systems also hail from the aforementioned institutional matrix. In certain instances, these agencies are structurally subordinate to the local public security secretariat. This institutional design has resulted in a bifurcation regarding the meanings of the world deemed valid for addressing disaster risks. The fundamental ethos of military police is to identify suspects and approach them with the intent to use force against them at the slightest sign of resistance. Conversely, the ethos of civil protection and defence should be predicated on the approach, listening to, and unconditional welcoming of individuals identified as socio-spatially disadvantaged. Furthermore, it is essential to provide them with the necessary public material and immaterial means to preserve their lives in the face of foreseeable threats and/or to restore their dignity in the event of disasters that were not properly prevented. It has been observed that territoriality and suspicion, understood as susceptibility to threats of a different nature (e.g., hydrogeological events) and as traits associated with a lack of trust in public security criteria, frequently intersect. This phenomenon gives rise to an ambiguous institutional approach in the context of this socio-spatial interaction. Furthermore, the militarised design of civil protection and defence engenders heightened structural friction with the sociocultural

repertoires of local residents, who are stigmatised and deprived by the state. It is submitted that, once the subordination of the civil protection and defence apparatus to public security has become a societal norm, the latter will determine the conception of society and social order deemed valid. The proposed study will establish the criteria for evaluating the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of demands arising from underserved territories, as well as the appropriate (or inappropriate) means to address such challenges faced by these populations and the priority in serving them.

From an environmental perspective, factors related to the increased frequency and intensity of severe and extreme events affecting municipal territories in São Paulo have been examined by different technical and scientific experts. The present study does not concentrate on this particular dimension; rather, it focuses on the sociopolitical dimension of disaster-related emergency decrees, in which a multitude of other relationships are implicated. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the national context, where the recurrence of emergency decrees by the same municipality over an extended period of years has become commonplace and is spreading, as if contagious, among municipalities (Valencio, 2024), in the case of São Paulo, there have been exceptional peaks in recurrence in a small group of municipalities, although the discontinuity of this practice prevails (Figure 1). Among the 645 municipalities in the state of São Paulo, 170 declared a state of emergency only once in the 22-year period covered by this study (2003-2024), while 207 declared it more than once, without exceeding nine emergencies. This places the municipalities of São Paulo in contrast to what occurs in the country as a whole, where recurrences in the same locality exceed this threshold and reach a frequency of forty-four activations of this mechanism in the same period (Figure 2).

With regard to the recurrence of emergencies in the municipalities of São Paulo as a whole, those that declared a state of emergency in 2010 and reiterated it in 2012 (60%) stand out; in 2014 (66.7%); in 2016 (31.8%); in 2018 (30%); and in 2019 (40.9%), suggesting that these municipalities have normalised the adoption of this procedure (Figure 3).

A considerable number of recurring emergency decrees were issued by municipalities in the state of São Paulo due to disasters associated with intense or prolonged rainfall and analogous events. Those who initially adopted the practice in 2003 subsequently reiterated it in 2008 (40%) and 2021 (38.5%), while those who embraced it in 2009 repeated it in 2014 (33.3%). Furthermore, a significant number of individuals who initially adopted the practice in 2010 subsequently reiterated it in 2012 (60%), 2014 (66.7%), and 2019 (40.9%) (Figure 4). Conversely, with respect to protracted drought occurrences, there was a complete congruence between the list of municipalities that declared a state of emergency in 2005 and subsequently did so again in 2021 (100%); a 25% congruence was observed between those that declared a state of emergency in 2005 and subsequently did so again

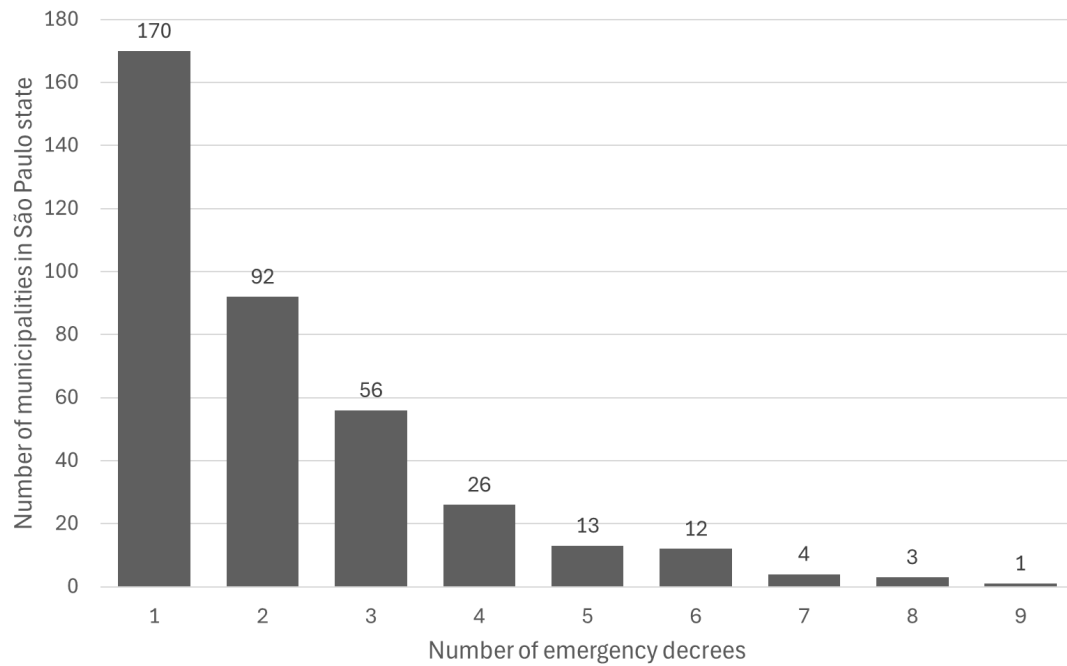


Figure 1

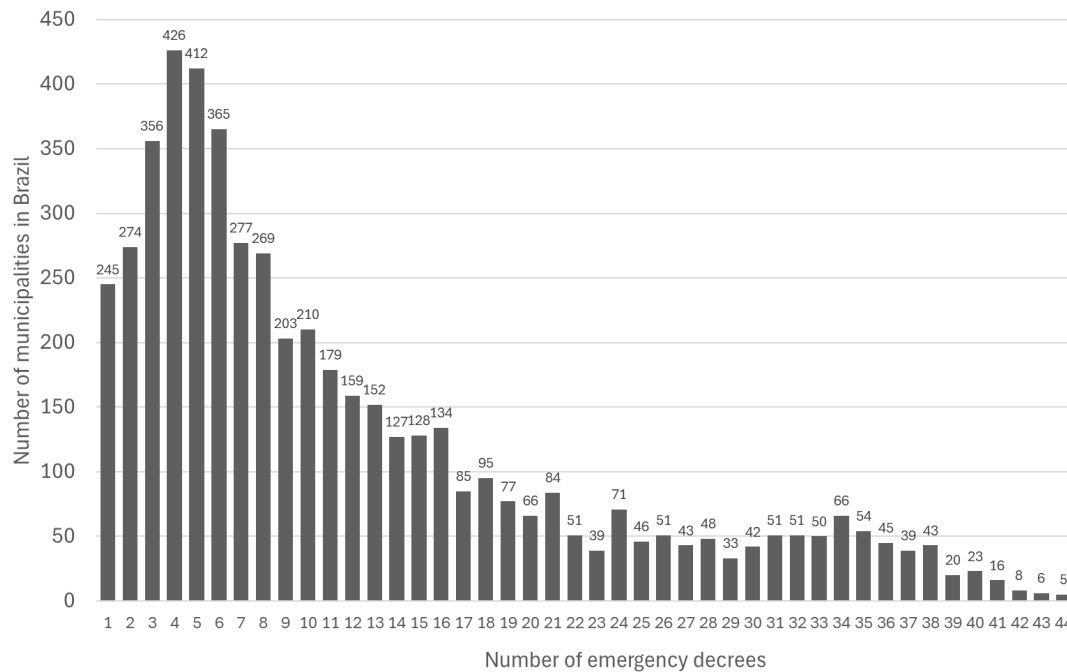
Histogram of the number of emergency situations and states of public calamity decreed by municipality in the state of São Paulo between 2003 and 2024.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2ID, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

in 2024; and finally, a 33.3% congruence was identified between those that did so in 2005 and repeated it in 2014 (Figure 5). Notwithstanding, there has been no resurgence of emergency decrees pertaining to this climatic occurrence in the municipalities of São Paulo, with cases exhibiting a dispersed distribution.

The persistent declaration of emergencies is not solely attributable to the severity or extreme nature of the events themselves; it is also a consequence of the ongoing social vulnerability engendered by these phenomena within the territory. The phenomenon under discussion can be attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, the public administration's failure to implement measures aimed at mitigating the losses and damages incurred by the affected groups. Secondly, the institutional vulnerability arising from the persistent fiscal crisis has hindered municipalities from allocating resources to enhance their urban drainage and slope containment infrastructure through internal means. Moreover, the technical personnel within these municipalities have confronted difficulties in identifying and accessing external resources to support these initiatives. The São Paulo state government is currently experiencing a period of significant public debt with the National Treasury, necessitating the renegotiation of payments over an extended period (Tomazelli, 2025). This phenomenon is characterised by financial constraints that impede the initiation and execution of structural and non-structural projects aimed at enhancing civil protection in municipalities, particularly in the context of anticipated risks and imminent dangers. A salient aspect of these challenges pertains to projects related to water scarcity or excess.

The declaration of emergency powers enables the federal entity that instigates it to exercise concentrated authority. This provision enables the



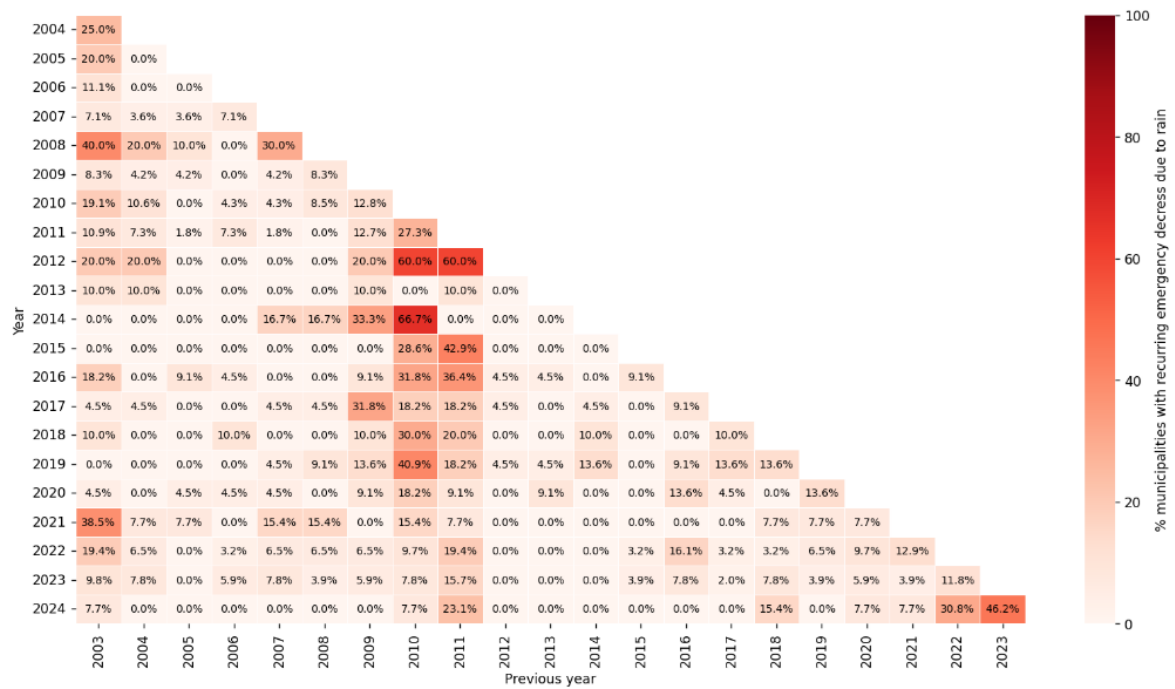
entity concerned to expedite public administration procedures in the utilisation of conventional resources and to gain access to exceptional ones. These procedures are in accordance with current legislation. The purpose of these measures is to facilitate the timely response and recovery of the affected territories. The concept under discussion may also be considered a technopolitical and technocratic instrument, the function of which is to frame new forms of sociability between state agents and society. The aforementioned forms are predicated on a number of factors, including centralised decision-making, the empowerment of institutional civil protection and defence commands with rigid hierarchies – often of military origin – and an absence of public input. A critical aspect of this instrument pertains to its capacity for populist exploitation, which has the potential to distort the allocation of resources for electoral campaigns during periods of disaster or even for the purpose of intimidation. This phenomenon functions to suppress societal criticism of the prevailing authorities, thereby diverting attention from the potential misuse or misallocation of resources allocated to the response and/or recovery efforts in affected regions. When considered in its logical conclusion, the declaration of a state of emergency has the potential to normalise political architectures similar to regimes of exception during the period of validity of the instrument. The public administration that engages in this practice risks becoming accustomed to a centralised and non-dialogical management style.

The context in São Paulo, during the period studied, exhibited a low incidence of emergency decrees in comparison to the national context. A preliminary analysis suggests that local public management is capable of addressing circumstantial risks, maintaining them at a level commensurate with the local capacity to respond autonomously. Nevertheless, this

Figure 2

Histogram of the number of emergency and public calamity declarations by municipality in Brazil between 2003 and 2024.

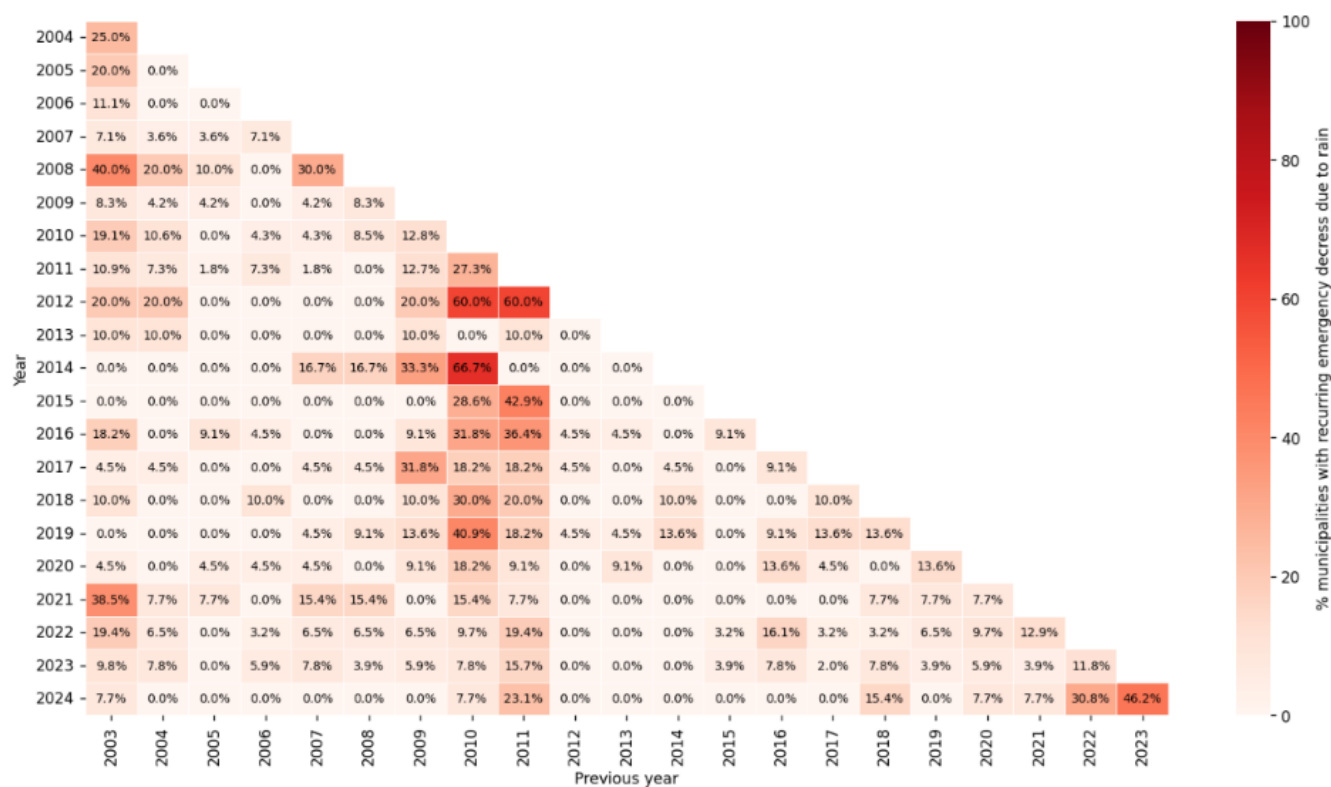
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2ID, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

**Figure 3**

Cohort matrix of municipal emergency decrees, 2003 to 2024.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2ID, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

standpoint does not fully encapsulate the intricacies of the scenario under consideration. In the context of disaster scenarios, particularly those of catastrophic proportions, each more forceful response and recovery action taken by state and municipal government officials and their candidates in the upcoming elections serves as a platform for the validation and augmentation of their political and ideological capital. In the case of São Paulo, the centre and centre-right parties were revalidated in power under these circumstances, but the far-right parties also began to emerge. An analysis of the municipalities of São Paulo that did not declare a state of emergency during 2020 reveals that a considerable proportion of these municipalities are affiliated with the political parties that emerged victorious in the 2016 mayoral elections ($n = 456$ municipalities) and the 2020 mayoral elections ($n = 451$ municipalities). This observation underscores the predominance and revalidation of the authority wielded by governors affiliated with the centre (PSDB, PMDB – now MDB – and PSD) and the centre-right (PTB and DEM, now, respectively, under the aegis of the PRB and União Brasil parties) ideological spectrum (Figures 6a and 6b). However, among the municipalities that declared a state of emergency in 2020, there were changes in the winning parties in the 2016 mayoral elections ($n = 172$ municipalities) and in comparisons with the 2020 election results ($n = 171$ municipalities). In 2016, the five most prominent municipal subsets of emergency declarers were aligned with the ideological spectrum of centre (PSDB, PSD, and PMDB), centre-right (PTB), and centre-left (PSB). In the 2020 mayoral elections in São Paulo, municipalities that declared a state of emergency exhibited a particular shift in electoral trends, thereby maintaining the established precedent of the centre (PSDB and PSD), while concurrently bestowing authority upon the far right (PL) and expanding its influence



within the centre-right (PTB and DEM) (Figures 7a and 7b). Furthermore, candidates from military corporations and affiliated repressive forces have been elected to positions of state governor and mayor of municipalities in São Paulo. These individuals leverage their affiliation with these entities to exercise control over civil power. The governor who emerged victorious in the 2022 election, having been nominated by then-President Bolsonaro, is a graduate of the Agulhas Negras Military Academy (Aman) and holds a degree in engineering from the Military Institute of Engineering (IME). The deputy mayor of the state capital, who was also nominated by Bolsonaro, is a retired colonel in the Military Police and former commander of the Tobias de Aguiar Ostensive Patrols (ROTA). In the 2020 elections, a captain in the Military Police won the mayoral race in the municipality of Valinhos, whose centrist party (PSD) lost in the subsequent contest, in 2024, to a far-right candidate (PL). The PL secured an additional 113 mayoral seats in São Paulo municipalities, constituting 17.67% of the total, with these seats distributed throughout the state and predominantly concentrated in the Paraíba Valley region. It is worthy of note that a number of these mayors are also holders of the rank of colonel in the Military Police, a notable example being the mayor of São José do Rio Preto.

Furthermore, there are other obscured aspects, such as silent disasters, which affect densely populated areas of social disaffiliation. These regions are now designated as risk areas. The rapid economic growth experienced by the São Paulo economy in recent decades has had a significant impact on specific rentier, extractive, and productive economic segments. This

Figure 4
Cohort matrix of municipal emergency decrees related to rainfall and related meteorological and hydrological events (COBRADE codes 1.2.1.0.0 (floods); 1.2.2.0.0 (torrential rains); 1.2.3.0.0 (flooding); 1.3.1.1.1 (cyclones); 3.1.1.2 (storm surges); 1.3.1.2.0 (cold front) and from 1.3.2.1.1 to 1.3.2.1.5 (storms)). Period from 2003 to 2024.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2ID, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

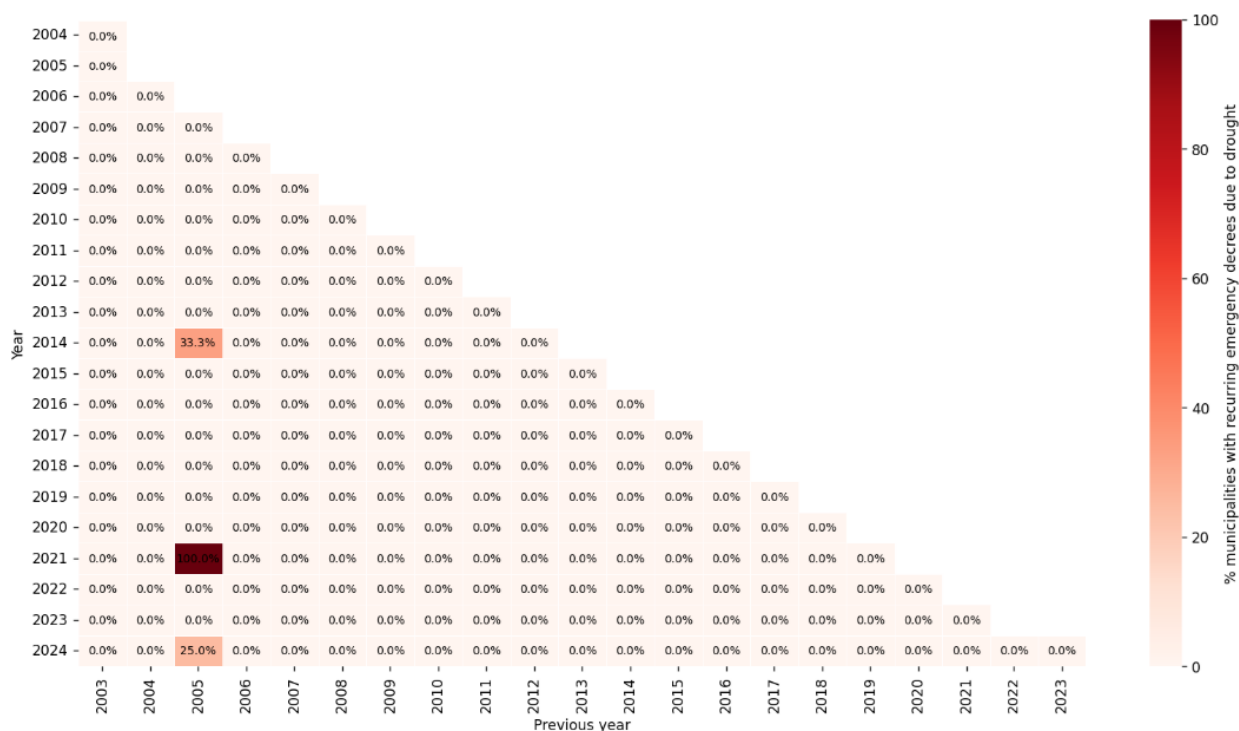


Figure 5

Cohort matrix of municipal emergency decrees related to prolonged droughts. Period from 2003 to 2024.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from S2ID, Ministry of Integration and Regional Development.

growth has resulted in phenomena that Gudynas (2019) terms “spillover effects”, which have the effect of naturalising socioeconomic inequalities and spatialising them in areas that have been designated as sacrifice zones. In these regions, residents encounter a multitude of daily risks that are both pervasive and enduring (Kowarick, 2009). This dynamic is further compounded by the adoption of cognitive frameworks that are socially and politically exclusionary (Lerner, 2010). These frameworks, in their tendency to obscure rather than address the prevailing crises, are further exacerbated by the absence of adequate public measures to support these regions, particularly in terms of infrastructure and service provision. The quotidian socio-spatial dramas persist in silence until their cumulative effect is revealed in full through catastrophic disasters triggered by extreme events. The incident that transpired in Vila Sahy in 2023 – a sacrifice zone within the municipality of São Sebastião – which resulted in the loss of over sixty lives, served as a poignant example in this regard. The right-wing party, the Republicans, emerged victorious in the mayoral election, thereby assuming control of this domain, which had previously been under the jurisdiction of the centre (PSDB).

While the representativeness and proportionality of the municipalities in São Paulo that declare a state of emergency may be considered low in relation to the state federation to which they belong – and in proportion to those that do so on a national scale – it is imperative to acknowledge the potential for extreme and severe climatic events to alter this picture. Furthermore, structural issues such as recurring distributive injustice, the inadequacy of welfare policies to alleviate multifaceted poverty, the hous-

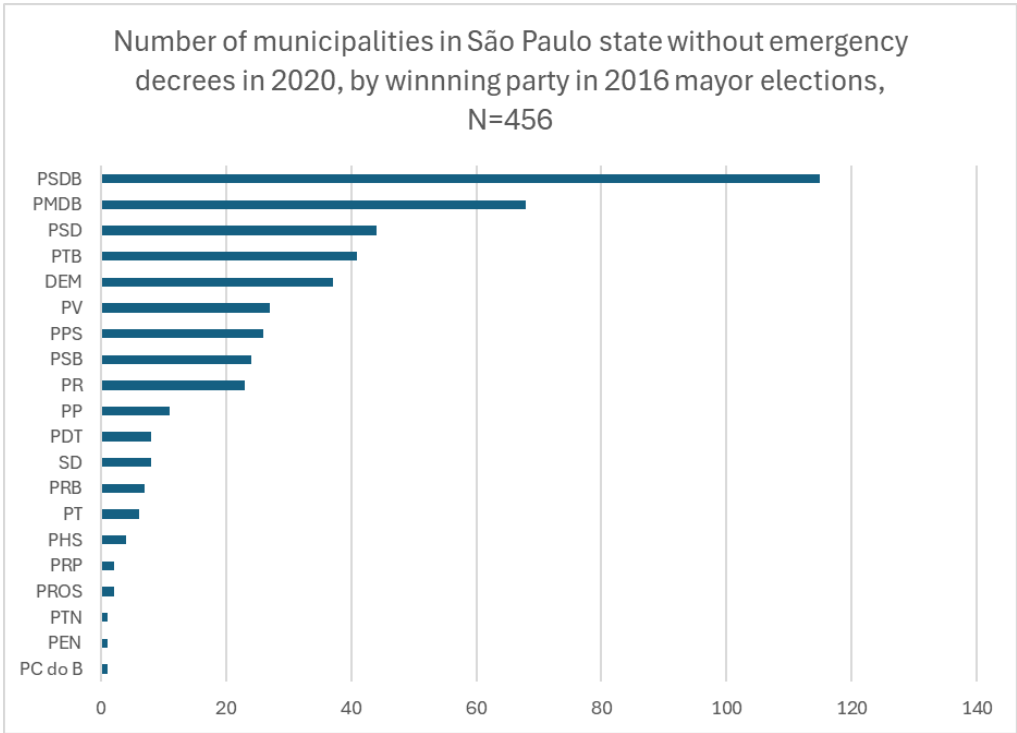
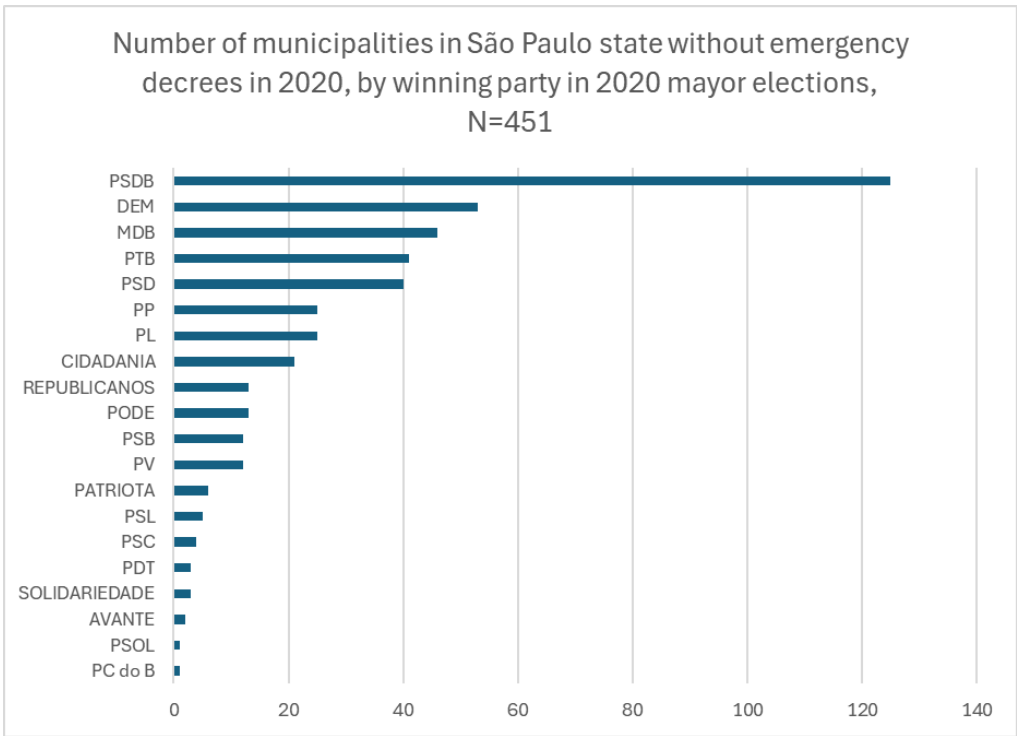


Figure 6
Histograms of the party acronyms of mayors elected in 2016 and 2020, in municipalities in the state of São Paulo that did not declare a state of emergency, in the period from 2003 to 2024.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).



ing and health crises, and the fiscal crisis, which erodes public finances at all levels of government, should not be overlooked as contributing factors to the heightened risk of disasters. This underscores the necessity of implementing sectoral interoperability in the context of prevention and preparedness, thereby augmenting the intricacies inherent to civil protection and its implementation within a more democratic framework.

Finally, emergency decrees and the concomitant SE and ECP recognitions effectively dispel any remaining illusions concerning fiscal austerity.

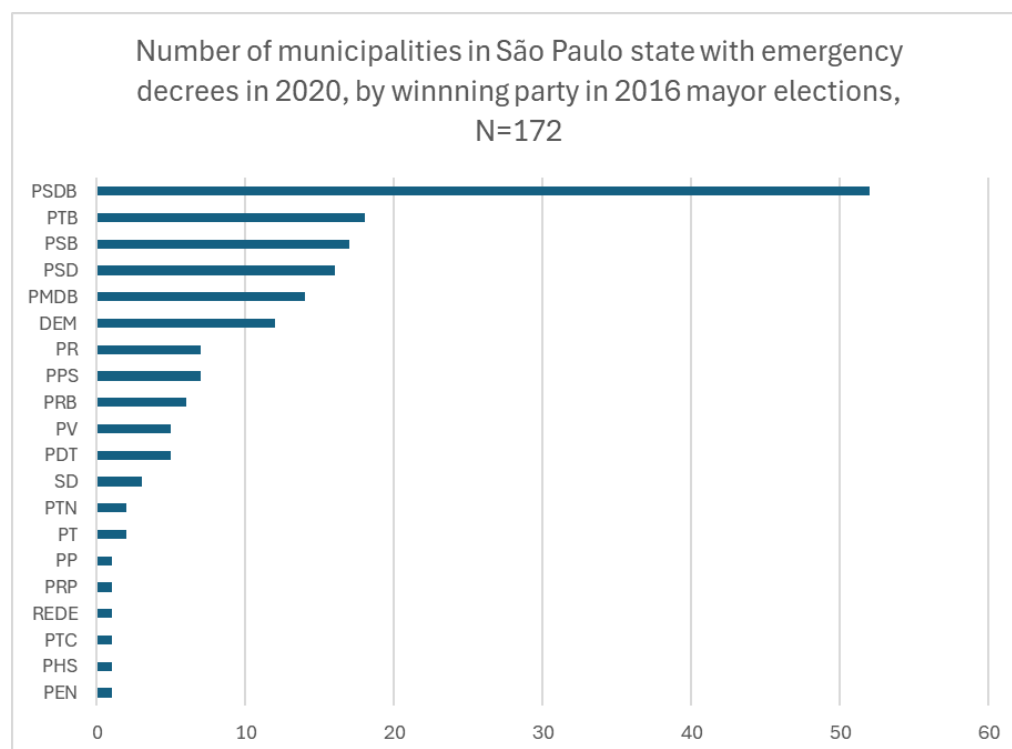
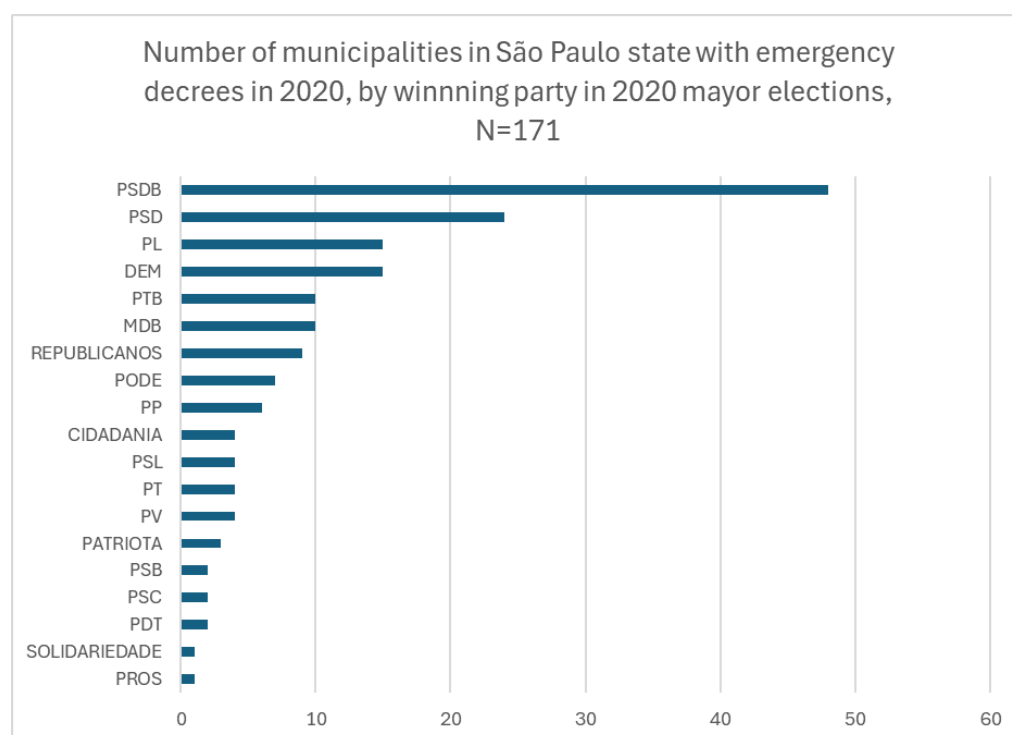


Figure 7

Histograms of the party acronyms of mayors elected in 2016 and 2020 in municipalities in the state of São Paulo that declared a state of emergency, in the period from 2003 to 2024.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).



Fiscal austerity was set aside in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic (Abranches, 2020), once again sidelined amid the disaster in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, when tens of billions of reais were allocated to state and municipal entities, as if this procedure – although permissible under the current fiscal framework rules – had no consequences on the actual monetary flows that are at risk of inflation. As scenarios of increased frequency and intensity of disasters are confirmed, the idyll of balanced public accounts tends to crumble more quickly. The challenges to democratic

institutions persist, remaining in a state of vulnerability and uncertainty (Abranches, 2017).

3. Conclusions

Over the course of approximately five decades, Brazil has undergone a transformation from a period of significant social unrest to a societal landscape characterised by militaristic tendencies and anti-democratic public order. Nevertheless, this transition has not resulted in a decline in the nation's political environment, which has undergone a revaluation process. The legal basis for this shift in public order is rooted in emergency decrees, which have been used in the context of disaster management and citizens' electoral choices. This shift has the potential to compromise the stability of democratic institutions.

The context in São Paulo, during the period studied, exhibited a low incidence of emergency decrees in comparison to the national context. Preliminary observations indicate that local public management exhibited proficiency in the management of circumstantial risks, maintaining them at levels commensurate with the local capacity for autonomous response. Nevertheless, this standpoint does not fully encapsulate the intricacies of the scenario under consideration. It is important to note that disasters occur in this state context without the corresponding emergencies being declared.

The fundamental discord between a civil protection ideology that is genuinely civil and its present institutional framework is rooted in the fact that the São Paulo state apparatus of security and public controls it. It is the same apparatus whose graduation ceremonies for its officers at the Barro Branco Military Police Academy in the state capital have repeatedly been attended by Jair Bolsonaro, either as President of the Republic or after his term in office, thereby amplifying his anti-democratic culture and social intolerance. This phenomenon is evidenced by the political-ideological alignment of members of its staff when they become candidates in the electoral processes that the country's redemocratization has made possible. However, an apparatus with a solid focus on the protection of civilians would require its staff to be guided by a historical context and construction oriented toward gains in citizenship, as opposed to institutional alignments that aspire to the opposite.

The significant disparity between the conceptualisations of public security and those of civil protection and defence, when the former encompasses the latter, carries profound ethical, practical, and logical-operational ramifications. In the context of predicted disasters, institutional visions attached to anachronistic modes of exercising power have the potential to significantly worsen the quality of the approach to socially vulnerable

segments of society. These segments will see the abyss deepen before their feet reach any viable bridge.

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