

Who Accesses Transparency? Inequalities and Policy Implementation in Brazil's Access to Information Law

Flávia Lemos Sampaio Xavier
PhD Candidate in Public Policy
ENAP – Brazilian National School of Public Administration (Brazil)
E-mail: flavia.lemos.assessoria@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8575-1062>

Júlio Cesar Andrade de Abreu
PhD in Administration
ENAP – Brazilian National School of Public Administration and UFF – Fluminense Federal University
E-mail: julioandrade@id.uff.br
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4716-3902>

Abstract: Transparency policies are often framed as instruments for democratization and accountability. However, critical approaches to public policy suggest that implementation processes may reproduce existing inequalities rather than mitigate them. This paper analyzes inequalities in the use of Brazil's Access to Information Law (LAI), combining administrative data from the Fala.BR platform (2021–2025) with demographic and social vulnerability data from IBGE and IPEA. The analysis focuses on education, age, gender, and territorial distribution to identify patterns of unequal access to public information. The study also incorporates the Equal Access Index (v2xeg_eqaccess) from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project to contextualize the Brazilian case within broader debates on democratic inequality. Findings suggest that access to public information remains concentrated among more educated and socially advantaged groups, while vulnerable populations remain underrepresented. The article argues that the digitalization of transparency policies may unintentionally reinforce existing asymmetries in citizens' capacities to access and use public accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: Access to Information; Transparency; Social Vulnerability; Digital Governance

1. Introduction

1.1 Delimitation of the Theme and Research Problem

The Access to Information Law (Lei de Acesso à Informação – LAI), Law No. 12,527, which entered into force in Brazil on May 16, 2012, established a landmark legal framework for transparency and accountability by guaranteeing the constitutional right of access to public information. To regulate the implementation of access to information within the Federal Executive Branch, President Dilma Rousseff issued Decree No. 7,724 on May 16, 2012. The decree establishes the procedures through which citizens may request information from federal government agencies and entities. It also designates the Office of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) as the authority responsible for overseeing the implementation of and compliance with the Access to Information Law (LAI) within the Federal Executive Branch (Brazil, 1988, 2011, 2012).

Since its implementation, the LAI has experienced continuous growth in demand. Over its first 13 years, more than 1.5 million information requests were submitted to the Federal Executive Branch. During this period, the average response time was 14 days, and federal agencies and entities provided a registered response in 99.67% of cases, resulting in an omission rate of only 0.33%. Furthermore, approximately 76% of requests resulted in full or partial disclosure of the requested information (Brazil, 2025). The law

has become an important instrument for data journalism and for interactions between the media and public authorities. It is widely used by diverse segments of society, including journalists, students, public servants, political parties, civil society organizations, and researchers.

However, the existence of the LAI and digital platforms such as Fala.BR—which integrated ombudsman services and access-to-information requests within the Federal Executive Branch—does not, by itself, ensure universal and equitable access to public information for all Brazilian citizens. Considering Brazil’s vast territorial dimensions, persistent social inequalities—including income disparities, illiteracy, functional illiteracy, and digital exclusion—and the institutional experience accumulated over 13 years of implementing the LAI, the concerns raised by Perrucci (2019) regarding the effectiveness of the model remain pertinent. To what extent have residents of rural areas without internet access, as well as individuals with limited economic resources and lower levels of education, been effectively incorporated into Brazil’s access-to-information regime? Alternatively, does the implementation of this policy continue to create barriers that disproportionately affect these groups, limiting their ability to exercise the right to information and, consequently, reproducing or deepening existing patterns of social inequality?

The central research problem of this study is whether the operationalization of Brazil’s Access to Information Policy continues, albeit unintentionally, to reproduce inequalities among citizens from different socioeconomic backgrounds. More specifically, the study examines whether the policy’s implementation design adequately accommodates the diverse realities and capacities of Brazilian citizens or whether it creates barriers that disproportionately affect socially vulnerable groups, limiting their ability to fully exercise the right of access to public information.

To address this question, the study updates the profile of users of Brazil’s access-to-information system by analyzing requests submitted through the Fala.BR platform between 2021 and 2025.

1.2 Rationale The rationale for this research encompasses academic, social, and managerial dimensions.

Academic: this study addresses an important gap in the literature by examining the profile of users of Brazil’s access-to-information system, particularly within the context of passive transparency at the federal level in recent years. A better understanding of who exercises the right to information may support future investigations into the factors that encourage or discourage the use of this policy by different social groups.

Social: access to information is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of democratic governance, enabling citizens to monitor public action, evaluate public policies, and participate more effectively in public affairs. Although public trust in government and public institutions in Brazil has recently increased from 26% to 38%, according to the

latest survey by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2026), ensuring equitable access to information remains essential to sustain and further strengthen democratic legitimacy, promote accountability, and foster civic engagement.

Managerial: the analysis of the users' profile allows the government to identify who the requesters are, what information is most in demand, and what barriers may be preventing access. This understanding can guide the proactive availability of information (active transparency), reducing the burden on public servants with repetitive requests and facilitating access for citizens.

1.3 Objective:

This research aims to analyze the profile of individuals submitting access-to-information requests through the Fala.BR platform from 2021 to 2025 in order to identify barriers to access and examine whether inequalities in access to public information are being reproduced in Brazil.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the geographic distribution of access-to-information requests across Brazil.
2. To analyze the correlation between the volume of access-to-information requests and levels of social vulnerability and educational attainment in applicants' municipalities of residence.
3. To investigate the association between applicants' educational attainment and the effectiveness of access-to-information requests.

1.4 Hypotheses:

This study is guided by the following hypotheses, which seek to assess the potential reproduction of inequalities within Brazil's access-to-information policy:

Hypothesis 1: Requests for access to information submitted in person through Citizen Information Service (SIC) offices represent only a small proportion of the total number of requests.

Hypothesis 2: Online access-to-information requests are submitted predominantly by individuals belonging to socially privileged groups, characterized by higher levels of educational attainment, residence in large urban centers, and lower levels of social vulnerability.

Hypothesis 3: There is a negative correlation between the volume of access-to-information requests and the level of social vulnerability in the municipality where the requester resides.

Hypothesis 4: Applicants with lower levels of educational attainment and/or residing in municipalities with higher levels of social vulnerability are more likely to submit ineffective access-to-information requests, defined as requests that do not concern

public information, are incomprehensible, or are addressed to public bodies lacking competence over the subject matter.

1.5 Methodology and Data Sources

This study adopts an archival research design based on the analysis of historical data recorded on the federal government's access-to-information platform (Fala.BR Platform). Univariate descriptive analyses were conducted to characterize the profile of applicants. To test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships between variables, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed due to its robustness to outliers and non-normal distributions. In addition, Poisson regression models were used to analyze the frequency of requests as count data generated by independent events.

The main data sources are as follows:

Fala.BR Platform (formerly e-SIC) from the Office of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU): this database contains information on access-to-information requests submitted by individuals and legal entities, including applicants' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, and region of residence), as well as the classification of responses provided by public authorities. Previous studies have examined data covering different periods, ranging from 2012 to 2021 (Perrucci, 2019; Nasu et al., 2021). The present study primarily uses data from May 2021 to May 2025 (Brazil, 2025), particularly for analyses involving social vulnerability.

Atlas of Social Vulnerability (IVS), from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA): This source provides the Social Vulnerability Index (IVS) for Brazilian municipalities, based on indicators of urban infrastructure, human capital, and income and employment conditions. The index enables the identification and mapping of social vulnerability and social exclusion across municipalities.

2022 Demographic Census, from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE): Census data were used to characterize the Brazilian population, including age distribution and levels of educational attainment, allowing comparisons between the general population and applicants submitting access-to-information requests under the Access to Information Law (LAI).

In addition, the Equal Access Index ("v2xeg_eqaccess") from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (Coppedge et al., 2026) was employed as a contextual variable for institutional analysis. This indicator measures the extent to which different social groups have equal access to political power and public goods. The index was used to contextualize the empirical findings on inequalities in access to information within the broader framework of democratic quality, equal political access, and substantive citizenship.

The V-Dem project employs a Bayesian latent variable model to aggregate expert assessments and construct comparative indicators of democracy and governance (Pemstein et al., 2026).

1.6 Structure of the Article

In addition to this introduction, the article is organized into three further sections. Section 2 reviews the literature on access to information, accountability, information-seeking behavior, the reproduction of social inequalities, and digital governance. Section 3 presents the empirical analysis of applicants' profiles, comparing user characteristics with demographic census data and examining the relationship between access-to-information requests, social vulnerability, and educational attainment. The analysis highlights patterns of underrepresentation among specific social groups and assesses the extent to which inequalities may be reproduced in the exercise of the right to access information. Finally, Section 4 concludes the article by discussing the main findings, their implications for public policy and democratic governance, and avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

Understanding the barriers to access to public information in Brazil requires a review of the key analytical concepts that underpin this study. These include the right of access to information and its institutionalization through the Access to Information Law, the concept of accountability, theories of information-seeking behavior and barriers to information access, the reproduction of inequalities in public policies, and the emerging literature on digital governance. Together, these perspectives provide the theoretical framework for analyzing how social and institutional factors may influence the exercise of the right to access public information and contribute to the persistence of inequalities in access.

2.1 The LAI and Transparency

Brazil's Access to Information Law (Lei de Acesso à Informação – LAI), which entered into force in 2012, institutionalized transparency as a core public policy principle and strengthened citizens' right to access information held by public authorities, including information produced, collected, or held by private and non-profit entities performing public functions or managing public resources (Brazil, 2012). The law seeks to safeguard fundamental rights, enhance government accountability, and enable citizens to monitor public action and evaluate public policies.

Literature commonly distinguishes between two dimensions of transparency: active transparency, which refers to information proactively disclosed by public authorities through official channels such as institutional websites, and passive transparency, which refers to information made available in response to specific requests submitted by citizens (Peres et al., 2020; Sasso et al., 2017). While both dimensions are essential to the effectiveness of access-to-information regimes, passive transparency constitutes a

particularly demanding test of governmental openness, as it requires public institutions to respond to unforeseen information requests and address the specific information needs of citizens.

As the focus of this study is on requests submitted through the Fala.BR platform, the analysis concentrates on passive transparency and its role in ensuring the effective exercise of the right to access public information.

2.2 Accountability and Information

Accountability refers to the obligation of public officials and elected representatives to explain and justify their actions and to be held responsible for their decisions before society (O'Donnell, 1994). Literature generally distinguishes three complementary dimensions of accountability.

Horizontal accountability refers to oversight exercised by state institutions over other public bodies, including audit institutions, courts, and control agencies such as the Office of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) and the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU).

Vertical accountability is exercised by citizens through electoral processes, whereby voters evaluate the performance of political representatives and governments.

Social accountability encompasses the mechanisms through which citizens, civil society organizations, the media, and other societal actors monitor public action, demand explanations, and seek to influence government behavior beyond electoral channels.

Access to information is a fundamental condition for the effective functioning of all three dimensions of accountability, particularly social accountability. Without access to accurate, reliable, and timely information on government activities and public policies, citizens are unable to assess governmental performance, compare outcomes with expectations, or engage meaningfully in public oversight. Information asymmetries therefore weaken the capacity of society to monitor public authorities and hold them accountable.

However, the mere availability of information does not guarantee its effective use. The exercise of the right to information depends on citizens' awareness of that right, their ability to formulate requests and interpret responses, and the existence of accessible channels through which information can be obtained. Factors such as low levels of education, limited digital literacy, socioeconomic vulnerability, and digital exclusion may therefore restrict the effective exercise of accountability, even in contexts where formal transparency mechanisms are available. These barriers are particularly relevant to understanding inequalities in the use of access-to-information systems and constitute a central concern of this study.

2.3 Information Search Behavior

Wilson's (1981) model of information-seeking behavior provides a useful framework for understanding how citizens and representatives of legal entities seek access to public information. According to the model, information needs are not primary in themselves but emerge from more fundamental physiological, affective, cognitive, or social needs. Information-seeking behavior is therefore triggered when individuals perceive that obtaining information is necessary to achieve a particular objective, solve a problem, reduce uncertainty, or make decisions.

A central contribution of Wilson's framework is the recognition that the search for information is often constrained by a variety of barriers. These barriers may be personal, interpersonal, or environmental, affecting both the motivation and the ability of individuals to seek and obtain information. In the context of public transparency, barriers may arise on the demand side, including limited digital skills, low levels of literacy, lack of awareness of the right to information, and difficulties in formulating requests. Barriers may also emerge on the supply side, such as insufficient staff training, bureaucratic resistance, inadequate information management systems, limited institutional capacity, and budgetary constraints within public organizations.

The expansion of digital technologies and the widespread use of the internet have profoundly transformed information-seeking behavior by reducing search costs and expanding access to government information. However, these benefits are not distributed equally across society. Access to digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and the skills required to locate, evaluate, and use information remain unevenly distributed among social groups. Consequently, the digitalization of transparency policies may simultaneously expand opportunities for access while reproducing or even reinforcing existing social inequalities. Understanding these barriers is therefore essential for assessing whether access-to-information systems effectively promote inclusion or disproportionately benefit citizens with greater educational, economic, and technological resources.

2.4 Implementation of Public Policies and Reproduction of Inequalities

The implementation of public policies may unintentionally reproduce existing social inequalities. Public policies are designed and implemented within heterogeneous social contexts characterized by unequal distributions of income, education, digital access, and other resources. Consequently, even policies intended to promote universal rights may generate unequal outcomes when such disparities are not adequately considered during their design and implementation.

According to Pires (2018), the reproduction of inequalities in public policies can occur through two main dimensions.

(i) Institutional design and governance. This dimension concerns how policy arrangements define who is able to participate and benefit from public programs, as well

as how assumptions, values, and biases regarding users become embedded in policy instruments, administrative procedures, and information systems. Institutional designs that fail to account for differences in citizens' capacities and resources may create barriers that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.

(ii) Everyday practices and interactions. This dimension refers to the daily implementation of policies by frontline public servants and other state actors. The analysis of the interfaces between citizens and the state (Long, 1989) is particularly important because these interactions are shaped by power relations, organizational routines, and broader cultural structures that may reinforce or exacerbate existing social inequalities. As a result, formally universal policies may produce differentiated outcomes across social groups.

These considerations are particularly relevant in the context of digital public services. The mere existence of an electronic channel is not sufficient to guarantee universal access. Policymakers must avoid assuming that all citizens possess access to digital technologies or the skills required to use them effectively. Likewise, they should avoid overestimating users' technological, informational, and bureaucratic capacities. When the specific circumstances of vulnerable populations are not considered, digital policy instruments may inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities rather than reduce them.

Recent literature on democracy and inequality has emphasized the importance of distinguishing the formal existence of political rights from the effective social capacity to exercise them. In this sense, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2026) developed the Equal Access Index (`v2xeg_eqaccess`), which forms part of the egalitarian component of democracy and measures the extent to which political power and influence are distributed equally across different segments of society. The index ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater equality in substantive access to political and institutional influence. Its construction is based on three dimensions: the distribution of political power by socioeconomic position, by social groups (such as ethnic, religious, racial or other historically salient groups), and by gender. Together, these dimensions capture the degree to which citizens from different backgrounds possess comparable capacities to influence political decisions and access public institutions. As such, the indicator serves as a proxy for the equitable distribution of democratic capabilities within society and is particularly relevant for analyses of institutional inclusion, democratic inequality, and differentiated capacities for political participation. This perspective is especially important in contexts of increasing digitalization of state–society relations, where the exercise of rights increasingly depends on technological, informational, and civic resources that are unevenly distributed across social groups.

2.5 Digital Governance and Sociotechnical Reengineering of the State

According to Filgueiras (2025), digital governance represents a new paradigm in public administration in which organizational processes, decision-making, and public service

delivery are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. In this perspective, digital transformation constitutes both a necessity and an opportunity for the sociotechnical reengineering of the State, reshaping administrative structures, routines, and interactions between governments and citizens. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), digital platforms, and blockchain have the potential to reinvent public services by reducing transaction costs, eliminating intermediaries, increasing administrative efficiency, enhancing transparency, and expanding opportunities for citizen participation.

However, digital transformation is neither politically nor socially neutral. The increasing datafication of society enables large-scale collection, processing, and analysis of data, creating opportunities for more personalized and responsive public services. At the same time, it raises concerns regarding surveillance, profiling, algorithmic bias, privacy, and the concentration of informational power. Profiling—the classification of individuals, groups, or situations based on behavioral, socioeconomic, or demographic characteristics—can improve service targeting but may also reinforce discrimination and existing social inequalities when embedded in automated decision-making systems.

Digital governance therefore requires new institutional capacities, including robust data governance frameworks, ethical standards, technological expertise, cybersecurity safeguards, and adequate digital infrastructure. These challenges are particularly significant in Latin America, where technological dependence, asymmetries in digital infrastructure, and reliance on foreign cloud service providers may constrain digital sovereignty and limit the capacity of states to govern digital transformation autonomously.

From the perspective of access-to-information policies, digital governance presents a fundamental tension. On the one hand, digital platforms can significantly reduce barriers to access, increase the availability of public information, and facilitate interactions between citizens and public institutions. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these instruments depends on citizens' access to digital technologies and their ability to use them. Consequently, inequalities in internet access, digital literacy, education, and socioeconomic resources may result in unequal capacities to benefit from digital transparency mechanisms. As a result, digitalization may simultaneously expand opportunities for democratic participation while reproducing or even amplifying pre-existing social inequalities.

For this reason, reforms driven by digital governance should place democratic values, inclusion, and equity at their core. Maintaining “humans in the loop” in the design, implementation, and oversight of digital systems remains essential to ensuring accountability, preventing the automation of injustices, and safeguarding the effective exercise of rights in increasingly digitalized state–society relations.

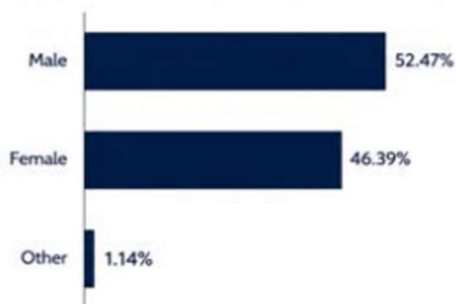
3. Analysis of User Profile Data in Relation to the Population Census

The analysis of data from the Fala.BR platform, together with information from the 2022 Brazilian Population Census and IPEA's Social Vulnerability Atlas, reveals a pattern of use of the LAI that, although growing, demonstrates underrepresentation of specific social groups, evidencing barriers to equitable access.

3.1 General Profile of Individual Applicants

The profile of individual applicants in the Federal Executive Branch, based on data from the Fala.BR (Source: LAI Panel – CGU, 2026) in the period from 2021 to May 2025, is predominantly male (figure 1), aged between 21 and 40 years (figure 2), with completed higher education and occupation as a public servant or academic (researcher and professor), and resides mostly in the Southeast region. These data confirm the continuity of a trend toward broader social reach of the LAI at the federal level, according to research by Perrucci (2019) and Nasu et al. (2021), who analyzed the data from 2012 to 2021, thus completing the historical series of the LAI since the law entered into force.

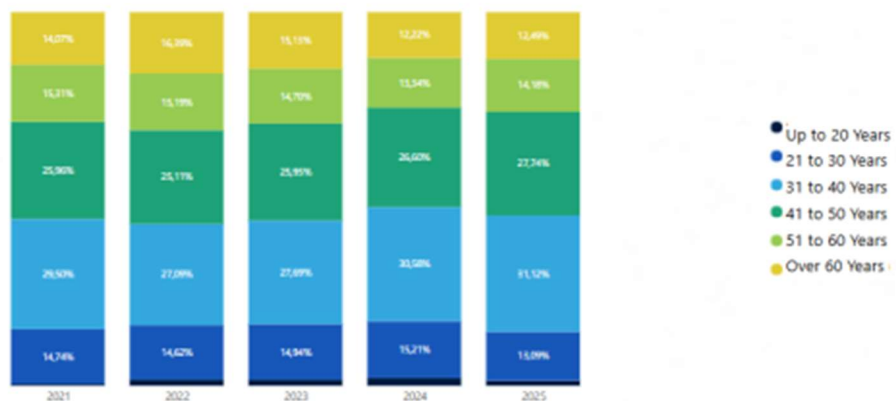
Figure 1: Gender Reported by the Requester (aggregated data 2021–2025)



Source: Fala.BR Platform (CGU, 2026).

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the Fala.BR Platform (May 2021–May 2025).

Figure 2: Historical Series of Age Reported by the Requester (2021–2025).



Source: Fala.BR Platform (CGU, 2026).

It is interesting to note the change in the profile when selecting people with a degree up to elementary school (3,760 people), because the composition of applicants shifts toward women (about 52%) over 50 years old (42%).

3.2 Underrepresentation of Vulnerable Groups

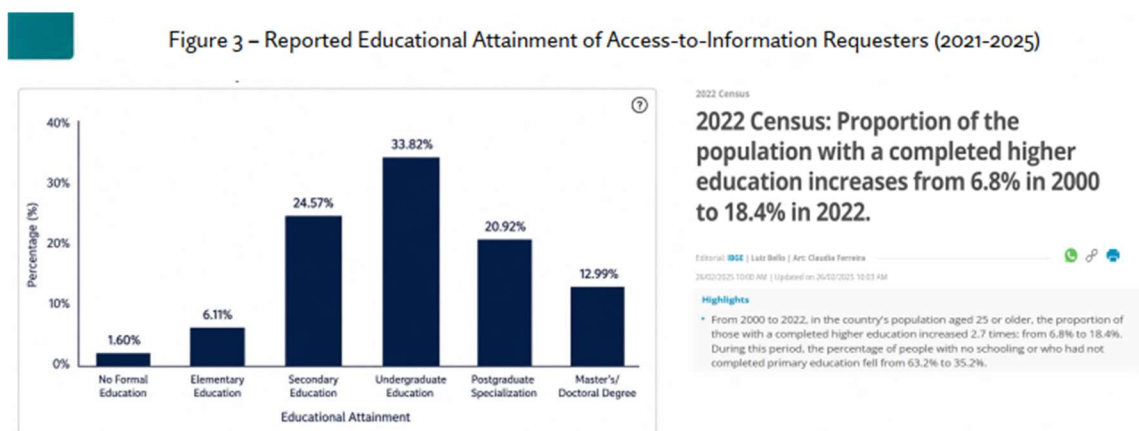
3.2.1 Seniors (60+)

The underrepresentation of individuals aged 60 and over among Access to Information Law (LAI) applicants is a relatively recent phenomenon. While this group represents 15.8% of the Brazilian population, their participation as requesters was much closer to this demographic weight in previous years, reaching 16.39% in 2022 and 15.13% in 2023. However, a significant decline began in 2024, with their representation dropping to approximately 12% of all applicants. It is important to investigate the underlying reasons for this recent shift and determine if it is directly correlated with digital barriers encountered when accessing federal platforms, such as Fala.BR or the integrated Gov.BR authentication systems. As noted in the sources (Filgueiras, 2025), while digitalization can expand access, it also has the potential to reinforce existing inequalities by imposing technological and cognitive hurdles on socially vulnerable groups, including the elderly. Future research should explore whether these barriers, or other factors such as a lack of awareness of rights, are driving this decline in engagement.

3.2.2 Illiterate and Persons with Low Education

The analysis of the education of LAI applicants versus the general Brazilian population of the 2022 Population Census (IBGE) reveals a clear disparity: the proportion of the Brazilian population with completed higher education is 18.4%, however, 67.73% of the applicants for access to information requests have completed higher education or more.

In addition, data from 2021-2025 show that adults with up to elementary education represent about 35% of the national population but are responsible for only about 10% of requests for access to public information (figure 3).



These figures indicate a clear overrepresentation of individuals with higher levels of educational attainment and a marked underrepresentation of people with low or no formal education among applicants using the Access to Information Law. Individuals with undergraduate education or higher account for roughly 68% of applicants, whereas those with only primary education or no formal education represent a much smaller share of requests.

When the same class definitions are compared over time, earlier data reported by Perrucci (2019) show a more pronounced underrepresentation: individuals with up to secondary education made up about 63% of the population but only 5% of applicants. Although this group remains underrepresented in the current period, the evidence indicates a gradual expansion in the use of this right among citizens with lower levels of educational attainment.

3.3 Barriers, Geographic Concentration and Social Vulnerability

Previous studies indicated that approximately 98% of requests were submitted online through the e-SIC/Fala.BR system, while only 2% were submitted in person through Citizen Information Service (SIC) counters. Currently, all requests are mandatorily registered through the Fala.BR platform.

While the online system expands access from anywhere with internet, it can impose a significant barrier for citizens without internet access or digital skills. A direct example of difficulty in accessing digital information is the report of a user who had “difficulties accessing and understanding” a “Power BI” system, a business intelligence tool for connecting, analyzing, and visualizing data. However, graphical interfaces are not always accessible to users of public services, particularly when accessed through mobile devices with limited usability and screen size.

In addition, the geopolitical distribution of requests for access to information is quite heterogeneous. According to Perrucci (2019), almost half of the requests (49.8%) in the 2012–2018 period came from the 15 Brazilian metropolises, which are home to only 20% of the national population. Municipalities with “very high social prosperity” and “high” (lower vulnerability) account for about 90% of access requests, despite representing only 46% of Brazilian municipalities.

A moderate to strong negative correlation between the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) of the municipality and the number of requests per thousand inhabitants was reported in previous research (BRAZIL, 2015). This means that the greater the social vulnerability of a municipality, the less frequently its inhabitants use the LAI. The correlation was particularly strong in medium-sized municipalities (–0.63) and metropolises (–0.73). An updated correlation using municipal vulnerability data was not possible here because there is no updated IPEA series available at the municipal level; although recent broad-scale updates exist via the National Continuous Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua), they lack the necessary municipal granularity. Therefore, the available local

figures are interpreted as contextual background rather than as updated estimates for the current period.

Taken together, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 2. Access-to-information requests are disproportionately submitted by individuals with higher educational attainment and by residents of large urban centers and municipalities with lower levels of social vulnerability. The evidence suggests that, despite the formal universality of the Access to Information Law, the exercise of the right to information remains socially stratified, reflecting broader inequalities in educational, territorial, and socioeconomic resources.

3.4 Substantive Equality of Political Access and Transparency

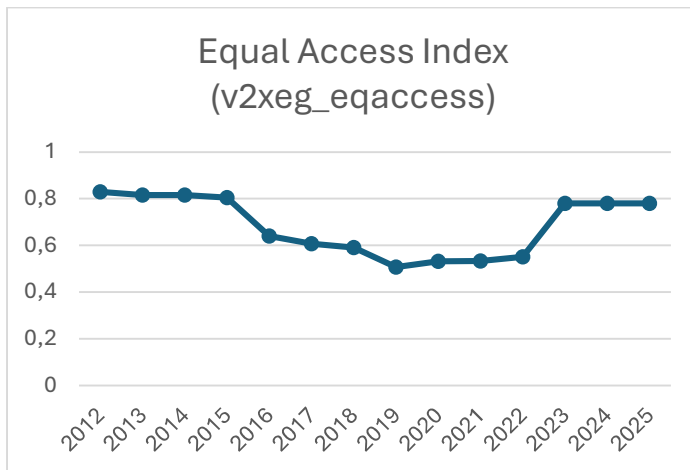
The patterns identified above can be further contextualized through broader debates on democratic inequality and substantive political access. In this regard, the Equal Access Index (`v2xeg_eqaccess`), developed by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2026), provides a useful contextual indicator. Unlike approaches focused solely on the formal existence of rights and institutional channels, the index measures the extent to which different social groups possess comparable capacities to access political institutions and exercise democratic citizenship.

Figure 4 presents the evolution of the Equal Access Index in Brazil between 2012 and 2025. The indicator shows substantial variation over the period, with relatively high levels of substantive political access in the early years following the implementation of the Access to Information Law, a decline after 2016, and a partial recovery from 2023 onwards.

Although the index does not measure the use of the Access to Information Law directly, it offers an important institutional context for interpreting the findings of this study. While the Fala.BR data reveal patterns associated with the profile of LAI users, the Equal Access Index provides a broader perspective on how capacities for political and institutional access have evolved among different social groups in Brazil over time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the formal availability of transparency mechanisms does not necessarily imply equal capacities to exercise the right to information. In increasingly digitalized state–society relations, informational, educational, and technological resources remain unevenly distributed, potentially affecting how different groups engage with transparency and accountability instruments.

Figure 4 – Evolution of the Equal Access Index in Brazil (2012–2025)



Source: V-DEM (2026)

3.5 Effectiveness of Requests and Schooling

The analysis of the effectiveness of the requests reveals that the applicant's education is directly related to the quality and relevance of the requests.

According to Perrucci (2019) and Nasu et al. (2021), the lower the applicant's level of education, the greater the likelihood that requests will be ineffective. Ineffective requests are those that do not refer to public information, are incomprehensible, or are directed to bodies without competence. According to the research carried out by these authors, 1 in 4 requests (25%) made by applicants without formal education or with complete elementary education are ineffective. In contrast, for applicants with master's/doctoral degrees, the ineffectiveness rate drops to just 8%.

This suggests that educational attainment may influence applicants' ability to formulate requests and navigate access-to-information procedures effectively. Consistent with Wilson's (1981) information-seeking framework, lower levels of education may be associated with informational and cognitive barriers that affect the effective use of transparency mechanisms. The disparity in effectiveness rates signals a barrier to the exercise of the right to information by people with lower levels of education, which may discourage future requests and appeals.

4. Conclusions and Future Work

The Access to Information Law in Brazil is a vital instrument for democracy and accountability, promoting greater transparency and strengthening the state's capacity to guarantee the right of access to information. However, the analysis of the profile of the Fala.BR platform applicants and its correlation with demographic and social vulnerability data reveal that the operationalization of the LAI, even if unintentionally, has still reproduced and reinforced existing social and regional inequalities.

Access to and effective use of the access to information policy is concentrated in privileged groups, such as men, individuals with completed higher education or more, public servants/academics, and residents of large urban centers and regions of less social vulnerability. On the other hand, groups such as the elderly, illiterate or with low education, and residents in more vulnerable municipalities, are underrepresented in the use of the LAI. Digital platforms, although expanding their reach, still constitute a significant barrier for those without internet access or with low digital literacy. In addition, the effectiveness of the requests is directly influenced by the applicant's level of education, with a higher rate of ineffectiveness among those with less education.

The incorporation of the Equal Access Index (v2xeg_eqaccess) of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2026) made it possible to situate the empirical results in a broader discussion on substantive inequality of democratic capacities. The findings suggest that the formal expansion of transparency and institutional participation mechanisms in Brazil has not been accompanied by the effective universalization of social capacities to exercise the right to information. In other words, the existence of formally open institutional channels does not eliminate educational, territorial, technological, and information barriers that unequally condition citizens' access to digital public policies.

These findings indicate that the principle that "the LAI is for everyone" and programs with the same name, such as the "LAI for All Program" do not fully materialize in practice, because the current instrumentalization of public policy, by focusing predominantly on digital media and assuming certain skills and access, limits the exercise of the right of access to information by significant and already vulnerable portions of the Brazilian population. This creates a citizen–state interface (Long, 1989) between the citizens and the state that can perpetuate disadvantages, potentially reinforcing perceptions among less educated and digitally excluded citizens that the policy is not fully accessible to them.

To mitigate these inequalities and ensure that the policy of access to information is effectively universal and inclusive, future research agendas and policy actions are needed, such as:

- (i) deepen the investigation of profile changes, analyze the reasons for the recent substantial growth in requests made by women, with elementary and secondary education;
- (ii) explore informational needs, such as conducting studies focused on the informational needs of different groups, going beyond the applicant's profile, and associating variables such as gender and region, type of person (individual/legal) and region, or gender and age group, even allowing campaigns to be carried out for different segments of the population, with emphasis on the different needs for each segment;

- (iii) to research the level of knowledge and demand, that is, to investigate the level of knowledge, use and demand for policies of access to information in different social strata and at all levels of government (federal, state, district and municipal) and powers, in order to subsidize public policies to promote and disseminate the right of access;
- (iv) to study new forms of instrumentalization, carrying out in-depth studies of the citizen-Federal Executive Branch interfaces in different municipalities, seeking opportunities for the development of new ways of providing channels for requesting public information according to different contexts.
- (v) survey public agencies and autonomous public entities that receive federal resources in Brazilian municipalities to use this capillarity to expand face-to-face access channels where they do not yet exist;
- (vi) develop and implement instruments that consider the different Brazilian realities, such as education programs for access to information and channels adapted to populations with low education and/or without digital access, ensuring that the accountability mechanisms associated with the LAI are accessible to all Brazilians in an equitable manner.

In managerial terms, it is necessary to evaluate the availability of state capacity, including budgetary resources, so that future research and work such as campaigns and service provision aimed at the needs of population groups can be more effective in improving public policy.

In this sense, understanding transparency only as the formal availability of information can obscure persistent inequalities in the ability to use public accountability instruments. In contexts of increasing digitalization of relations between State and society, transparency policies depend not only on institutional openness, but also on substantive conditions of social, educational and technological inclusion. Public transparency, therefore, should be understood as a public policy whose democratic effectiveness is directly associated with the unequal distribution of capacities to access and use information in society.

5. References

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