

3. Institutional Background

Since this paper examines the dynasties in Brazilian local politics, it is important to describe some aspects of Brazilian municipalities. It is also crucial to understand the electoral rules that are enforced in local elections, the types of public services offered by municipal governments, and what are local governments' financial sources.

There are 5,565 municipalities in Brazil. Each one of them is governed by a mayor, who is elected by direct elections for a 4 year mandate. These mayors may run for reelection since the 2000 electoral races, but only once. In municipalities with less than 200,000 voters, the elections happen in one round. In municipalities with a higher number of voters, the two candidates with the highest number of votes run for the office in the second round, unless a candidate obtains the majority of the valid votes in the first round.

The Brazilian constitution makes the relatives of politicians in executive positions ineligible, if these politicians hold their office in the six months prior to the elections. However, the six months window given to dynastic successions was frequently used in Brazil. Among the 5,592 municipalities in the country, direct dynastic candidatures occurred 2,064 times among 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections, which correspond to 4.46% of the candidates.

The Brazilian municipal governments are responsible for a broad set of public services which embrace elementary education, health care and urban infrastructure, and are partially responsible for the sanitation and for the administration of cash transfers programs. This means that mayors have autonomy to change public policies in different ways. However, the separation of power in Brazilian local politics gives legislative power to the municipal councils.

A great proportion of the municipalities' revenues comes from federal government transfers, and on a smaller scale from the state government. An important source of

money for the municipalities is the *Convênios da União* (Discretionary Transfers). These are block grants given by other tiers of government (State or Federal) to the municipalities for specific projects. The approval of these grants relies on the capacity of the mayor to negotiate with members in the State or Federal government.