

# INCLUSION OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS IN PARTY POLITICS: ANALYSIS OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTORAL DISPUTES

## INSERÇÃO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE ENFERMAGEM NA POLÍTICA PARTIDÁRIA: ANÁLISE DA PARTICIPAÇÃO NAS DISPUTAS ELEITORAIS MUNICIPAIS

## INCLUSIÓN DE LOS PROFESIONAIS DE ENFERMERÍA EN POLÍTICA PARTIDARIA: ANÁLISIS DE SU PARTICIPACIÓN EN LOS COMICIOS MUNICIPALES

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**How to cite this article:** Mourão Netto JJ, Silva Júnior VR, Rodrigues ARM, Aragão OC, Porto AR, Thofehn MB, Silva MLS. Inclusion of nursing professionals in party politics: analysis of their participation in the municipal electoral disputes. *Rev baiana enferm.* 2022; 36: e46966.

**Objective:** to analyze the participation of professionals from the Nursing field in the electoral processes to hold offices in the Municipal Legislative and Executive powers. **Method:** a descriptive and retrospective study based on data from the Superior Electoral Court regarding the last five elections for city councilors, mayors and deputy mayors in Brazil between 2004 and 2020, considering gender, state, professional category and success in the election. **Results:** Nursing professionals presented an increase in the number of political candidacies in all the states. Nursing technicians and assistants were the professionals that most put themselves forward. Nurses represented the largest number of elected members; however, Nursing professionals had the lowest electoral success rates when compared to physicians, dentists and pharmacists. **Conclusion:** in relation to the other categories, Nursing professionals had a higher number of candidacies, although given the number of workers, this number is considered small.

**Descriptors:** Nursing, Politics, Local Government

*Objetivo:* analisar a participação dos profissionais do campo da enfermagem nos processos eleitorais para os cargos dos poderes legislativo e executivo municipais. *Método:* estudo descritivo, retrospectivo, realizado a partir dos dados

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*do Tribunal Superior Eleitoral das últimas cinco eleições para vereadores, prefeitos e vice-prefeitos no Brasil entre 2004 e 2020, considerando sexo, estado, categoria profissional e êxito no pleito eleitoral. Resultados: os profissionais de enfermagem apresentaram aumento de candidaturas em todos os estados. Técnicos e auxiliares em enfermagem foram os que mais se candidataram. Os enfermeiros corresponderam ao maior número de eleitos, no entanto, os profissionais de enfermagem apresentaram as menores taxas de sucesso eleitoral, quando comparados com médicos, odontólogos e farmacêuticos. Conclusão: em relação às outras categorias, os profissionais de enfermagem apresentaram maior quantitativo de candidaturas, embora esse número, diante do contingente de trabalhadores, seja considerado pequeno.*

*Descritores: Enfermagem, Política, Governo Local.*

*Objetivo: analizar la participación de los profesionales del campo de la Enfermería en los procesos electorales para cargos de los poderes legislativo y ejecutivo a nivel municipal. Método: estudio descriptivo y retrospectivo realizado a partir de los datos del Tribunal Superior Electoral de las últimas cinco elecciones para concejal, alcalde y vicealcalde en Brasil entre 2004 y 2020, considerando sexo, estado, categoría profesional y éxito en los comicios. Resultados: los profesionales de Enfermería presentaron un aumento en la cantidad de candidaturas en todos los estados. Los técnicos y auxiliares de Enfermería fueron los que más se postularon. Los enfermeros representaron la cantidad más elevada de candidatos electos; sin embargo, los profesionales de Enfermería presentaron índices de éxito electoral más bajos en comparación con médicos, odontólogos y farmacéuticos. Conclusión: en relación con las otras categorías, los profesionales de Enfermería tuvieron mayor cantidad de candidaturas, aunque dado el contingente de trabajadores, dicha cantidad se considera reducida.*

*Descriptores: Enfermería, Política, Gobierno Local.*

## Introduction

Nurses, nursing technicians, nursing assistants and midwives comprise professional categories that are part of the Nursing field in Brazil, and this field represents the largest contingent among the health professions, performing activities that are indispensable for maintenance and development of health systems worldwide<sup>(1)</sup>. However, even in the face of the essentiality of their work, these professionals have faced a reality marked by precarious working conditions and compensations not compatible with their activities and responsibilities, in addition to modest social recognition<sup>(2)</sup>.

Although it is recognized that many factors are linked for this reality to be established, the weakness in the politicization of these professionals seems to maintain a relationship with this context, whether politicization in the sense of a critical and transformative category<sup>(3)</sup> or as the expression of their involvement with the political-partisan process<sup>(4)</sup>.

The word “politics” represents a polysemic term, which has been useful to designate several human activities: (1) the law and moral doctrine; (2) the theory of the State, (3) the art

or science of government; and (4) the study of intersubjective behaviors<sup>(5)</sup>.

Given this varied range of meanings, using the term “politics” can generate confusion, depending on the situation in which it is employed, which can hinder clarity of the phenomena analyzed and discussed in the text. Thus, it was decided to use its meaning denoting the art and science of government<sup>(5)</sup>, as it is strongly related to the area of the political-partisan process.

Aligned with the sense of politics already mentioned, political participation is understood as the set of acts and attitudes that aspire to influence, not always directly or legally, the decisions of the power holders political-partisan system or in particular political organizations, as well as their own choice, with the purpose of maintaining or modifying the structure of the dominant system of interests<sup>(6)</sup>.

As for politicization, although it can also assume other meanings, it has corresponded to a research axis that brings together topics related to constitution of the electoral body or to expansion of the electoral processes and gradual incorporation of the population, hitherto excluded from politics<sup>(4)</sup>.

The inclusion of Nursing workers in party politics has fostered discussions that signal a probable contribution to appreciation and development of the professional field<sup>(7-8)</sup>, which may affect the holding of decision-making positions in governmental structures, with the possibility of imposing legislative changes and arrangements capable of meeting the claims of these categories, such as the approval of Law bills considered as structuring for the profession, as well as changes that would benefit users of health systems.

Participation of these professionals in party politics, in a more comprehensive way, has the potential to encourage them to play a greater role in social struggles, for the rights of minorities and the vulnerable, elaborating Law bills that could be useful to society and of interest to the category, although not as a corporatist action, but so that Nursing professionals can meet the health demands of the population in a more qualified way. In summary, based on political-partisan participation, Nursing might contribute with a proposal of important projects for society.

A number of studies carried out in other countries such as the United States<sup>(9)</sup>, Ghana<sup>(10)</sup> and Portugal<sup>(11)</sup>, suggest limited political inclusion, with Nursing professionals' political activity restricted to voting and making contact with legislators about the demands of interest for the category, recognizing that there is a need for a broader involvement to cause changes in laws and regulations that limit professional performance.

There are few studies that investigated Nursing professionals' involvement with party politics<sup>(9-10)</sup>, which can suggest that they are possibly engaged in a limited way in these processes or that this topic has not aroused the interest of researchers in the area.

No studies were found that used the same methodology or had the same breadth of this research, as it is presenting a national panorama of Nursing professionals' partisan political involvement in the last five Brazilian elections, which total a 16-year period.

Thus, studies are needed that explore this aspect of Nursing professionals' work in order to know, both quantitatively and qualitatively, how political inclusion of the category has taken place, expanding understanding of this dynamic, which could subsidize new paths in the course of its politicization.

The objective of the study was to analyze the participation of professionals from the Nursing field in the electoral processes to hold offices in the Municipal Legislative and Executive powers.

## Method

This is a descriptive, retrospective and quantitative study carried out based on database of the Electoral Data Repository belonging to the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court<sup>(12)</sup> and on data about the number of health professionals in Brazil available on the websites of the Federal Council of Nursing (*Conselho Federal de Enfermagem*, COFEN), the Federal Council of Medicine (*Conselho Federal de Medicina*, CFM), the Federal Council of Dentistry (*Conselho Federal de Odontologia*, CFO) and the Federal Council of Pharmacy (*Conselho Federal de Farmácia*, CFF). These repositories are available with open access.

Data referring to the candidacies of nurses, nursing technicians, nursing assistants, physicians, dentists and pharmacists for the positions of councilor, deputy mayor and mayor in all Brazilian municipalities were analyzed.

Initially, the clipping chosen involved the elections for the positions of councilor, mayor and deputy mayor throughout the period of the direct elections, between 1989 and 2020; however, due to data incompleteness and absence, it was only possible to analyze the period between 2004 and 2020. The data on the elections for these positions were made available in the repository from 1996; however, for this year's election there is only information from 21 states, making it also incomplete and, consequently, not included in the analysis. In turn, in the 2000 elections, the Nursing and Nutritionist professions

were classified in the same item, precluding accurately quantifying the number of candidate nurses and nutritionists, making it impossible to include the data of this election in the study. The midwife category was not described in the SEC database and the nursing technicians and nursing assistants categories make up the same item in the database, entitled Nursing technician and the like.

The study encompassed all the records of candidacies included in the repository during the period analyzed, even including those that were unsuitable to compete in the elections. Those coded in the database as Elected, Elected by the Mean and Elected by Partisan Quotient were considered elected candidates.

The data referring to the municipal elections for Councilor, Mayor and Deputy Mayor were chosen for comprising the electoral process with the highest volume of information and capillarity.

Collection took place between November 2020 and January 2021. The variables considered were gender, Federation state, professional category and success in the electoral dispute. Data treatment was performed based on calculation of electoral success absolute frequency, proportion and rate. The absolute frequency of the number of Nursing professionals was compared, with previous calculation of the percentage variation in each election, allowing

to compare the time evolution of the candidacies. The electoral success rate was also calculated, as the result of dividing the number of elected candidates by the total number of candidates multiplied by 100.

The electoral success rate was calculated considering the number of candidates registered, also including candidates with null candidacies, as data density in the database hindered this detailing of the information.

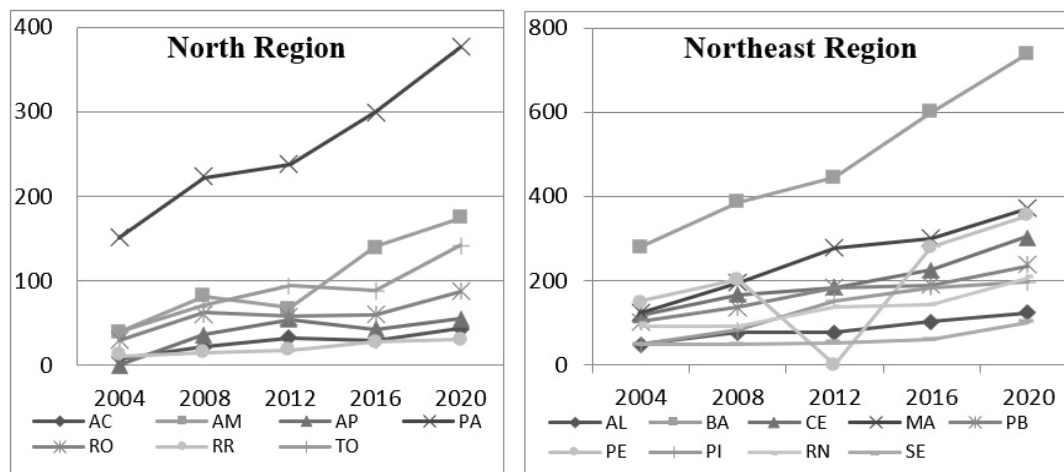
The data extracted from the repository were tabulated in Excel, version 2016, and treated by means of descriptive statistics, being presented in graphs and tables. As the research resorted to public open access information without identifying people, it did not need to be submitted to the analysis of any Research Ethics Committee.

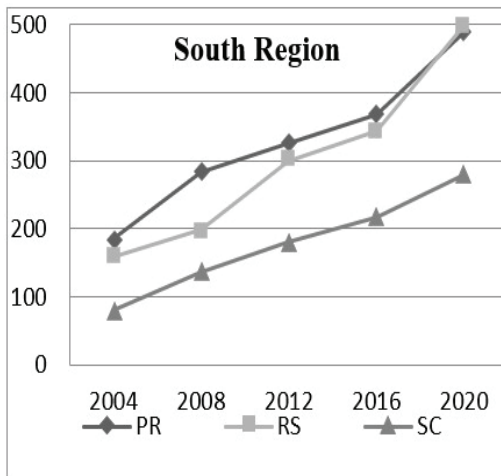
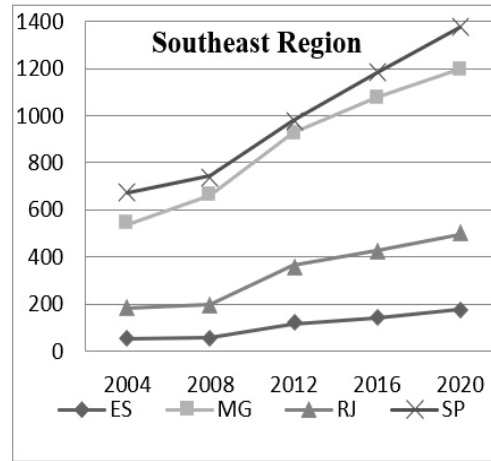
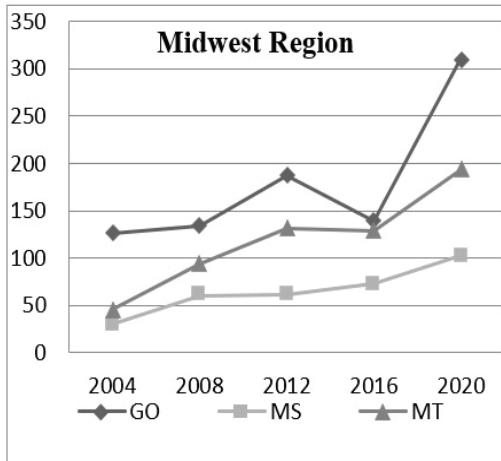
## Results

The search resulted in the registration of 2,311,979 candidacies for the positions of councilor, mayor and deputy mayor in the period under analysis and, among these, 29,024 were Nursing professionals, which represented 1.2% of the candidacies.

Nursing professionals presented a progressive increase in the number of candidacies in practically all the time clippings (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** – Distribution of the evolution in the number of candidacies among Nursing professionals by states and regions, between 2004 and 2020. Brazil, 2021.





Source: Supreme Electoral Court (2020).

The data reveal that, in 2004, the percentage of candidates corresponding to Nursing professionals was 0.8%, while in 2020 this value was 1.5%, assuming growth in the inclusion of Nursing professionals in party politics. In general, there was an increase in candidacies for these positions also among the general population since, in 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 there was a -4.9%, +20.4%, +6.7% and +11.8% growth, respectively. However, the percentage growth among Nursing professionals was +32.9%, +26.1%, +23.6% and 23.6%, respectively,

which shows that, in fact, there was a relative increase in the number of candidacies among these professionals.

Analyzing the Brazilian mean, it is noticed that, although there has been an increase in the proportion of women seeking positions as mayor, deputy mayor and councilor, there is still significant disparity, with prevalence of male candidates. This fact does not reflect Nursing professionals' reality, as the mean is inverse among them, resulting in a mean of 68.9% of female candidates, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1** - Number of candidacies among Nursing professionals and candidacies in general in Brazil. Distribution by gender. Brazil, 2004-2020. (N=2,311,979) (continued)

YEAR	BRAZIL		NURSING PROFESSIONALS	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
2004	316,377 (77.5)	85,387 (22.5)	1,002 (29.8)	2,355 (70.2)
2008	302,646 (78.2)	84,863 (21.8)	1,535 (34.4)	2,929 (65.6)

**Table 1** - Number of candidacies among Nursing professionals and candidacies in general in Brazil. Distribution by gender. Brazil, 2004-2020. (N=2,311,979) (conclusion)

YEAR	BRAZIL		NURSING PROFESSIONALS	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
2012	320,460 (68.6)	146,266 (31.4)	1,676 (29.7)	3,957 (70.3)
2016	341,451 (68.5)	156,890 (31.5)	2,226 (31.9)	4,737 (68.1)
2020	370,554 (66.4)	187,085 (33.6)	2,524 (29.4)	6,083 (70.6)
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,651,488 (71.5)	660,491 (28.5)	8,963 (30.8)	20,061 (69.2)

Source: Supreme Electoral Court (2020).

In the 2020 elections, nursing technicians and assistants were the professionals with the highest absolute number of candidacies, followed by nurses and physicians. Considering the number of professional categories under analysis and the number of candidacies, it is possible to infer that nurses were the professionals who, proportionally, put themselves forward the most (0.6%), followed by physicians (0.5%).

Nurses lead in terms of elected professionals in 2020, followed by physicians, nursing technicians and assistants, dentists and pharmacists. However, when the electoral success rate is calculated, physicians manage to proportionally elect more candidates and Nursing professionals present the lowest electoral success rate among the professions analyzed.

**Table 2** - Electoral success rate across health professions. Brazil, 2020.

PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY	2020			
	NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS IN BRAZIL	CANDIDATES	ELECTED	SUCCESS RATE (%)
Nurse	582,212	3,919	685	17.47
Nursing Technician and Assistant	1,800,298	4,688	376	8.02
Physician	547,344	2,745	673	24.51
Pharmacist	229,018	926	217	23.43
Dentist	344,399	1,365	328	24.02

Source: COFEN (2020), CFM (2020), CFF (2020), CFO (2020), SEC (2020).

## Discussion

The findings revealed that there was a proportional increase in Nursing workers' participation in the competition for positions in municipal elections when compared to the other health categories, with a sustained increasing trend in the number of candidates for these positions, so that in the last elections, in 2020, they appear as the professionals with the highest number of candidacies and the highest number of elected candidates among the health professionals with the highest representation.

An analysis of Nursing professionals' political insertion through data from the Supreme

Electoral Court considered their participation in the electoral disputes as reduced<sup>(13)</sup>. However, the study conclusion was based on the total number of candidates in relation to the Nursing professionals enrolled in the Federal Nursing Council and did not consider how this participation occurred in relation to the other health professions.

The relative expressiveness of nursing professionals' engagement in party politics at the municipal level can also be related to the discourse of some leaders from Nursing class entities that reinforce the importance of the professionals' inclusion in party politics, in order to collaborate to remedy some historical

demands of the category, such as establishment of a salary floor and regulation of the 30-hour weekly hour load<sup>(7-8)</sup>.

Another possibility for the stimulus to evolve in this process lies in the existence of precarious working conditions, remunerations not compatible with their activities and responsibilities and weak employment bonds, as well as discreet social visibility<sup>(2)</sup>, a context that shelters them to seek solutions, with the possibility of making them glimpse a way to overcome this reality in political inclusion.

Both in Brazil and in the world, there is scarcity of studies that analyze the insertion of these professionals in party politics; however, the available evidence portrays this participation as insufficient and urgent. A research study that involved 17 leaderships of class entities revealed that these leaders perceive the category as weakly incorporated into politics<sup>(14)</sup>.

Although Nursing stands out by the number of candidacies and of elected candidates, these professionals represented those with the lowest electoral success. In this regard, multiple factors can be related to this outcome, such as the fact that it is a predominantly female profession, with only 14.4% of male professionals<sup>(15)</sup>, as male candidates have more chances of electoral success, which is due to a negative trait of Brazilian society: the belief that there are limitations for women to hold leadership positions, with greater difficulty for them to have access to the political field, as they face social impositions that hinder their entry into parties or other public organizations<sup>(16-17)</sup>.

Some papers have discussed gender-based inequalities in political ambition, advocating that the most commonly employed political ambition measures can also be based on gender, leading to the belief that the apparent lack of interest in women is, in fact, a rational decision to refuse candidacies, given a structure of political opportunities that favors men<sup>(18)</sup> and, although some public policies have ceased to stimulate participation of the female public, they are permeated by biases such as quotas for women in elections, which reflected in many “orange” candidacies of women<sup>(19)</sup>.

Other factors may be limiting the political inclusion of Nursing, such as insufficient financial resources, high workloads, feeling of helplessness, lack of time to devote to the campaign, poorly planned campaigns or limited knowledge about political party processes, feelings of inability and the perception of an ethical conflict between professional values and political involvement<sup>(20-21)</sup>.

It was found that only a small percentage of Nursing professionals put themselves forward. Thus, considering that political participation concerns the set of attitudes that attempt to influence decisions of power holders in the political system<sup>(6)</sup>, this participation has been listed as an opportunity for the category to advance in its demands for improvements in working conditions and social recognition<sup>(8)</sup>, with the need for these professionals to develop new skills with a view to advancing political representativeness and, thus, occupy decision-making spaces<sup>(22)</sup>.

These professionals can use their influence to actively participate in electoral campaigns and in the process of formulating public policies because, by having their professional knowledge and skills available, they cannot only benefit users and contribute to public health, but also ease the development of Nursing as a science and professional field<sup>(23)</sup>.

However, in general, training opportunities are limited in the field of political participation and in undergraduate courses, and little has been problematized about political inclusion<sup>(24)</sup>, which presents itself as an obstacle, as Nursing professionals, still in training, might develop knowledge about how to participate in the formulation of public policies, as well as in the political-partisan process.

By knowing more about the political inclusion movement of the category, it is believed that professionals can better direct their efforts in this process, as politicization has been pointed out as a powerful means for transforming work contexts and representation before society.

If only considering the candidates eligible to be voted, the electoral success rate could reveal higher success rates among all professionals, but

this detailing was precluded by the availability of information from the SEC database, configuring a study limitation. The impossibility of distinguishing between the candidacies among nursing technicians and assistants limited the analysis to the extent that it makes it impossible to identify the specificities of this inclusion among the categories that make up the Nursing field in Brazil. The descriptive and quantitative nature of the study also has its limitations regarding the possibility of assertively pointing out the determining factors for electoral success.

The following are also pointed out as limitations: the absence of data distribution from the competing position (councilor, mayor and deputy mayor) variable, as well as the absence of a proportional difference between candidacies among men and women within the Nursing professional field, to the extent that both hold potential to strengthen the analysis but had their execution compromised by the difficulty manipulating the SEC database.

## Conclusion

In relation to the other health categories, Nursing professionals had a higher number of candidacies, although given the number of workers, it can still be considered small.

Although Nursing professionals have also proved to be the ones with the highest number of elected members, they were the ones with the lowest electoral success, with the need for other studies explore which factors are involved in the political-partisan inclusion process.

As they comprise the largest number of people elected to executive and legislative positions at the municipal level among health professionals, other studies are necessary to explore how this contingent of professionals has been acting in the chambers of councilors and municipalities in Brazil, clarifying that changes that this inclusion has caused in public policies, especially in health, and how it has reflected, or not, in improvements in the working conditions and social recognition of these categories.

The study also raises the need to know how the inclusion of Nursing professionals in electoral

disputes occurs at other governmental levels, as they configure spaces where performance might have repercussions on the change of legislation and agendas of interest for the categories.

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Received: November 4, 2021

Approved: July 25, 2022

Published: November 21, 2022



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