

Improving Anti-Corruption Efforts in Local Governance: Prosecutorial Presence in Brazil

Challenging Corruption

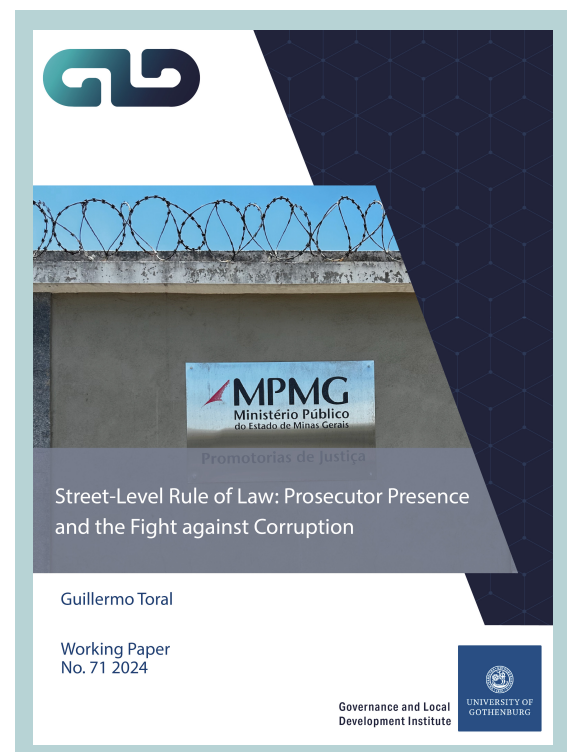
Brazil's system of governance faces significant challenges at the municipal level, where the misuse of public resources and corruption often hinder the effective delivery of essential services. Prosecutors have emerged as key actors in promoting accountability and combating the use of public employment as "political currency." Drawing on recent empirical evidence, Guillermo Toral's recent [GLD Working Paper](#) illustrates the impact of prosecutor presence in Brazilian municipalities, highlighting their essential role in battling corruption in local governance. Toral's paper demonstrates that a prosecutor's arrival in a municipality is linked to a significant increase in anti-corruption actions targeted at the local government, including investigations, recommendations, and extrajudicial agreements.

Why Prosecutors?

Unlike in other countries, Brazilian prosecutors occupy a privileged position within the country's institutional framework, setting them apart from other accountability actors, such as judges and auditors. Their effectiveness in combating corruption stems from their significant authority, flexibility, and other institutional features that guard them from possible political interference. Not only are they selected on merit, but they are also appointed for a lifetime, protecting them from forced removals. They are equally empowered by a robust constitutional mandate and operate with institutional autonomy. Their offices are organized into local districts, ensuring a decentralized and strong presence across the country. This local integration enables them to address corruption at grassroots levels. They have access to a diverse array of judicial and extrajudicial tools, enhancing their ability to respond to reported cases and preemptively deter malfeasance.

The Impact on Corruption

Guillermo Toral's research provides compelling empirical evidence on the impact of prosecutorial presence in Brazilian municipalities. The study examined three main categories of dependent variables: anti-corruption actions, municipal employment practices, and detectable corrupt acts. The findings are striking and demonstrate the significant effects of prosecutorial presence on both anti-corruption efforts and local governance practices. They also indicate a strong possibility between the presence of a prosecutor and reduced corruption. In municipalities with a prosecutor present, there was a marked increase in various anti-corruption activities, including preparatory proceedings, formal investigations, recommendations to local officials, and binding agreements.



Toral's findings also provide compelling evidence that the physical presence of prosecutors in municipalities can have a substantial impact on good governance practices, particularly in the critical area of public employment. The presence of a prosecutor was associated with a significant increase in the number of civil service bureaucrats hired and a rise in the share of new employees hired with civil service contracts. Importantly, no significant increase was observed in temporary hires, suggesting a reduction in politically motivated hires. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the presence of a prosecutor in a municipality has an impact on detectable local corruption levels. When federal auditors reviewed records in municipalities with prosecutors, they reported low corruption levels.

These results have several important implications:

- **Deterrent Effect:** deters potentially corrupt practices, even without direct legal action.
- **Improved Hiring Practices:** a reduction in the use of public employment as "political currency."
- **Physical Presence Matters:** integration into local municipalities aids effective oversight.
- **Decentralization of anti-corruption institutions matters:** when people have access to anti-corruption institutions, they are more likely to report corrupt acts and are deterred from committing corrupt acts.

Recommendations:

Policymakers can employ several strategies to tackle corruption, such as:

- **Expand Prosecutorial Coverage:** Develop strategies to ensure prosecutor presence in more municipalities. This could include programs like the "Traveling Prosecutor's Office" initiative in Minas Gerais.
- **Leverage Public Trust to Expand Local Prosecutorial Presence:** Capitalize on the current positive public perception of prosecutors to advocate for increased public budget allocation for hiring.
- **Strengthen Institutional Support:** Allocate additional resources to prosecutors' offices to maximize their impact on local governance. This may include increased funding, improved training programs, and enhanced technological support.
- **Promote Inter-agency Collaboration:** Facilitate cooperation between prosecutors and other accountability institutions to create a more comprehensive anti-corruption framework.

Source:

Toral, Guillermo (2024). "Street-Level Rule of Law: Prosecutor Presence and the Fight against Corruption" *Governance and Local Development Institute*, University of Gothenburg, Working Paper no. 71, 2024.

How to Cite:

Castaman, Kiara. (2024). "Improving Anti-Corruption Efforts in Local Governance: Prosecutorial Presence in Brazil." Lust, Ellen; Namusanya, Dave; and Shaber-Twedt, Rose. *Governance and Local Development Institute*, University of Gothenburg, Policy Brief no. 25, 2024.

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