**The pitfalls of bottom-up accountability: evidence from Brazil**

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**Abstract**

What is the effect of a technology designed to incentivize citizen-politician bottom-up accountability on public service delivery? In this paper, we study the effect of a cell phone application designed to facilitate the citizens’ pressure on politicians regarding delayed municipal public school constructions in Brazil. The application helped citizens to find delayed school constructions and provided a platform to anonymously message politicians, requesting information about the construction delay, and asking for a revised expected completion time. We find that the app had a null impact on the completion times subsequently reported by the municipalities. Additionally, few politicians reacted to the citizens’ requests. These findings suggest that it is difficult to motivate bottom-up accountability, especially when politicians are unresponsive to non-electoral pressures. This paper has implications for the design of bottom-up accountability mechanisms.

**Keywords:** accountability; bottom-up accountability; technology; experiment; state capacity; responsiveness; Brazil

**Introduction**

One of the key determinants for public service provision is a robust accountability system (XXXX CITE XXXX). Accountability ensures that politicians act on behalf of voters, increasing effort, monitoring, controlling malfeasance, and holding politicians accountable for their positive (XXXX), as well as their negative behavior while holding public office (XXXX).

However, there are several designs and XXXX of accountability systems and structures that XXXX. One XXXX is bottom-up accountability, that XXXX. [TALK ABOUT BOTTOM UP ACCOUNTABILITY]

In this paper we address this problem by proposing a technology driven solution to considerably lower costs of pressuring, and provide a direct channel between citizens and politicians. [EXPLAIN TA DE PE]

Contrary to our expectations, the technology application XXXX. [DISCUSS TREATMENT AND RESULTS]

This paper contributes to three strands of the literature. First, XXXX. Second, XXXX. Third, XXXX.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section XXXX discusses the theoretical XXXX of accountability and how this design can contribute to the bottom-up accountability XXXX. Section XXXX presents the Tá de Pé App, the application build by XXXX in a partnership with Google, to provide an easy and effective way for the population to monitor political XXXX. Section XXXX explains the research design we build to access the Tá de Pé impact, and discusses the areas where the software achieved the XXXX. Finally, the last section concludes the paper, discussing the limits of bottom-up accountability and future venues of research.

**Accountability: from XXXX to XXXX**

[GENERAL PAR on ACCOUNTABILITY]

[HOWEVER, OTHER FORMS ACCOUNTABILITY]

[BOTTOM-UP ACCOUNTABILITY + TECH]

[BOTTOM-UP ACCOUNTABILITY SO FAR]

[TECH DRIVEN BOTTOM-UP: FUTURE? NEED TO SEE IF IT WORKS]

**The Brazilian context**

[BRAZIL IN EDUCATION]

[BRAZIL IN EFFICIENCY]

[BRAZIL: problem of constructions that are not finished – put picture here]

[TECH DRIVEN PRESSURE: remember politicians of their promises?!]

**Technological bottom-up tool: the *Tá de Pé* initiative**

In 2016 the Brazilian Transparency proposed a project of an app that would help people to find and denounce cases of stopped or delayed school constructions in Brazil. The project got more than 200 thousand votes and was awarded a Google Social Impact Initiative grant. The prize was used to build the *Tá de Pé App* (or in a rough translation: Is it done App).[[1]](#footnote-1)

The App consists in a dataset of all the municipal school constructions, which were funded by the Brazilian federal government, sorted by the proximity to the user. The user can select one of the schools, and then the app displays descriptive information, together with the expected finishing time. If the construction is delayed, then the user has the opportunity to take a picture of the construction site. This picture is then send to the Brazilian branch of the Engineers without borders that do a basic assessment of the extent of the delay. The app then sends a notification to the mayor’s office that has 15 days to answer. If they fail answer by the deadline, a notification goes to the federal government, making it harder to the municipality to access federal funds again.

The app was built in the first semester of 2017 and it was tested on the May of that year. After finished, it was finally deployed the first final Android version on Google Play by August 14, 2017. At the same time, a massive Facebook campaign started in order to publicize the App. Facebook is one of the most used social media networks in Brazil with around 90 million users in 2016.[[2]](#footnote-2) The campaigns were concentrated in October 2017, investing around BRL 14.333,74 (US$ 4.479,29), and attracting 2028 new users in October 2017 only.

[FIGURE HERE: TDP SCREENSHOTS]

In January 2018, the Brazilian Transparency finished the iOS version of the App, and currently, many other features are being added, such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook integration, inclusion of State level constructions, plus additional information about what is wrong with a given construction. We limit our analysis for the period spanning from August 14, 2017 to March 1, 2018, in order to consider the impact of the technology invented, avoiding its minor improvements.

**Bottom-up technology pressure: accessing the impact**

[TA DE PÉ: RANDOMIZATION]

[ASSESSMENT: towns where was downloaded]

[MANIPULATION CHECKS]

[REPORTS]

[STATS ON REPORTS: post treatment]

[ATE: Time to finish reported]

[DISCUSSION: Null effect despite the good manipulation…]

**Conclusion**

[Accountability idea x reality]

[Bottom up accountability: more of a concept than a reality]

[Representative democracy: delegation culture]

[VENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH]

**Appendix (for online publication only)**

Tá de Pé Initiative

Randomization Procedure

Datasets

Analytics

Robustness checks

1. A literal translation would be *On its Feet App*. More information about the project can be found at the project’s webpage: <https://www.transparencia.org.br/projetos/tadepe> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The banners used in the campaign are in the Appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)