

Leading Newspapers in Brazil as Political Actors (1994-present)

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Abstract

Brazil's three leading newspapers, *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, act as political actors whose ideological positions tend to mirror those of the dominant elites in a heterogeneous fashion. This thesis is discussed here in the light of two intertwining theories: the organizational and ideological levels of analysis proposed by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese's hierarchical model of influences on media content (1996), and the media's tendency to intervene in political debate, engage in advocacy, or influence political events, as suggested by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's model of political parallelism (2012). This essay examines data from over 20 studies, mostly conducted by Brazilian researchers, about the leading newspapers' coverage of the elections and terms of presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003-2010), Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019- present). These studies collectively corroborate the idea that the Brazilian news media offer content that seeks to further their own interests and reinforces the power of elite groups, if less effectively so since 2018. The findings from these studies are embedded in a historical narrative about the aforementioned presidential elections.

Keywords: newspapers; Brazil; elites; ideology; political actors

Resumo

Os três maiores jornais brasileiros, *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo* e *O Estado de S. Paulo* agem como atores políticos, e suas posturas ideológicas refletem as posturas das elites dominantes de forma heterogênea. Essa tese é discutida aqui à luz de duas teorias que se entrelaçam: de um lado os níveis de análise organizacional e ideológica propostos por Pamela Shoemaker e Stephen Reese em seu modelo hierárquico de influências no conteúdo da

mídia (1996) e, de outro, a tendência da mídia de intervir no debate político e engajar-se na defesa ou no processo de influência política, como sugeriram Daniel Hallin e Paolo Mancini em seu modelo de paralelismo político (2012). Esse artigo examina dados de mais de 20 estudos conduzidos principalmente por pesquisadores brasileiros sobre a cobertura dos três grandes jornais nas eleições e administrações de Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva (2003-2010), Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) e Jair Bolsonaro (2019-presente). Esses estudos corroboram a ideia de que a mídia brasileira oferece um conteúdo que serve aos seus próprios interesses e reforça o poder de grupos de elite, mesmo que menos efetivamente a partir de 2018. Os resultados apresentados aqui são incorporados à narrativa histórica das eleições presidenciais.

Palavras chave: jornais; Brasil; elites; ideologia; atores políticos

Introduction

The intricate relations between the state and mainstream print news media in Brazil have mirrored the country’s mercurial path to full democracy. Once Brazil recovered from a lengthy military rule that imposed heavy censorship on the news media between 1964 and 1985, leading newspapers began, in a more professional style, not only to set the political agenda but also to fashion themselves as political actors by helping to elect presidential candidates—Fernando Collor de Mello in 1989, Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994 and 1998—or defeat them, as befell Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva in three elections. Additionally, leading newspapers have played central roles in covering major corruption scandals, such as the *Mensalão* (in which Congress members received monthly bribes from the ruling Workers’ Party in exchange for favorable votes) and the *Lava Jato* (in which executives from Petrobras, Brazil’s state-controlled oil company, accepted bribes from construction companies while members of the Workers’ Party and other parties were involved in money laundering schemes) scandals. However, the media were generally able to adopt these roles due to leaks of information from inside sources rather than as a result of in-depth journalistic investigation.

Over a 25-year period, as the presidency has shifted from the center to the left and recently to the right, politicians and the news media have fought to control the narrative about national politics. More often than not, both sides have lost credibility. Corruption investigations have sent numerous politicians and businesspeople to prison, and caused the impeachment of a president in 2016 and the sentencing to a prison term of a former president in 2018. In recent years, many print publications—including *Jornal do Brasil*, traditionally Brazil’s fourth-largest daily paper, which recently returned online and to print after an

8-year hiatus¹—have folded, shrunk, or migrated online, losing credibility and the ability to produce investigative journalism. Meanwhile, political polarization has intensified in social media, considered a main source of information, given that 130 million Brazilians (60 percent of the population) were active on Facebook by 2019.² Brazil's print media, highly influential in political circles for decades, now face an uncertain future, not least because the current president, Jair Bolsonaro, preferred to engage through social media during his 2018 campaign and has made disparaging remarks about the press since taking office.

Yet the country's leading newspapers still carry great prestige and continue to help set the political agenda, which makes their analysis crucial to comprehend Brazil's political sphere. Furthermore, analyzing the role of mainstream print media in Brazilian politics sheds light on the path to democracy of Latin America's most populous country. As media scholar Silvio Waisbord has pointed out, the consolidation of a democratic press requires a stable and functional state.³ If the state fails to meet its essential obligations, which include provisions to make journalism possible, the press will also fail to produce a democratic journalism. Moreover, the study of interactions between news media and the state in Brazil contributes to evaluating democratic standards in Latin America, and can potentially improve the global status of this region's nations.

This analysis explores whether news organizations have consistently positioned themselves as political actors during the period examined, as opposed to serving as independent vehicles for public expression and political accountability in a transitional democracy. It also discusses the fluctuation and the ambivalence of news media toward political parties and leaders. Two theories inform this analysis: Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese's hierarchical model of influences on media content, and Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's model of "political parallelism." In surveying more than 20 studies of newspapers' coverage of electoral campaigns and presidential terms, this article finds that Brazil's news media have continued to offer content that serves chiefly to further their own interests and reinforce the power of specific political groups, if less effectively so since the 2018 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework: The Hierarchy Model and Political Parallelism Modified

The hierarchical model of influences in journalism, which is at the core of the field of media sociology, has produced a substantial amount of research worldwide. This model, defined by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese, states that news content is shaped by 1. individual journalists, including their

professional, personal, and political stances; 2. newsroom routines; 3. organizational influences (in this case media ownership); 4. other social institutions along with economic, political, and cultural forces, including government; and 5. predominant ideology (the social system that attempts to maintain the *status quo* supporting the interests of those in power).⁴ My interpretive analysis is more concerned with the third and the fifth levels of influence on news content, as they connect media ownership and ideology.

According to Shoemaker and Reese, media ownership may distort journalists' attempts to describe the world objectively. Such a predicament is common in Latin America's young democracies, where private media and government officials are still closely connected and practice reciprocity. Waisbord calls attention to Latin American media patrimonialism, which "refers to the discretionary use of public resources by political officials to strengthen personal or partisan power and favor allied news organizations."⁵ This type of use includes offers of advertising, broadcasting licenses, tax breaks, and subsidies to news organizations in exchange for "supportive coverage and silence on sensitive matters affecting governments."⁶ Furthermore, Waisbord asserts that media companies are connected to industrial corporations as well as political parties: "There is no strict separation between political and market media powers" in an environment where "polarized politics inevitably engulf newsrooms as they are deliberately mobilized behind personal, partisan, and business goals."⁷ In this sense, leading publishers and media owners are political figures, although they are not a monolithic group, as they reflect personal positions and internal battles within the elite, nor do they work unchangingly as mouthpieces for political parties. Waisbord sustains that "alliances between news media and politicians are temporary and contingent on personal calculations and specific arrangements."⁸

Issues arising from media ownership are directly connected to a more general level of analysis that Shoemaker and Reese classify as ideological influences on media content. Social scientists hardly agree on a particular definition of ideology, tending to use a theoretical definition rather than an empirical one. For the purposes of this article, I would define ideology as set of political and economic beliefs and social values representing group interests. In Brazil, elite values are centered around a dependent capitalism articulated by the state that acts as a central authority that mostly restricts what citizens can do. Another salient feature of how ideology operates in Brazil is the disjunction between legal norms and the daily lives of Brazilians (breaking the law is easier than following it) as well as the prevalence of personal networks (family, friends, godparents, clans) to cope with the social system and injustice. However, there is no single rubric that represents ideology in Brazil. As an unequal society based on privilege, modern Brazil bears the scars of its colonial past, slavery, and classism.

Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian religions, and more recently Protestant evangelical groups comfort those in distress, while political and community leaders work on raising the awareness of citizens with lower levels of education who demand little from the government and economic elites.⁹

In an attempt to connect the two levels of influence on media content, one could project that in a developing democracy such as Brazil, media ownership and the ideology that supports the *status quo* (a dependent capitalism and a strong state) form the most powerful associated forces responsible for setting and enforcing policy at news organizations and, thus, for shaping media content. Media owners are members of heterogeneous elite groups that occupy strategic positions and have access to economic, political, or symbolic power.¹⁰ These groups include large-scale landowners, business owners, politicians, and bureaucrats, among others. Their shared ideology usually lacks awareness of their responsibility for seeking solutions to social problems such as education, health, and welfare. One typical example is the shared belief among these groups that the state should be responsible for solving poverty, which excludes them from the equation. Nonetheless, they defend the privatization of state companies and the reduction of the role of the state in people's lives.¹¹

Under the conditions related to media ownership and ideology described above, Brazilian journalists have a low level of autonomy. In the most recent survey of how they perceived their roles, professionals indicated that their work has been substantively constrained by lack of access to information (65 percent) and by editorial policies (55 percent).¹² That journalists are constrained by editorial policies is a solid indication of the top-down structure of the organization of Brazilian newspapers. "The owner has the last word" states the enduring adage that circulates in newsrooms across the country. Most news organizations do not communicate their political allegiances or ruptures to newsrooms in an open or direct style. Rather, journalists learn about them in subtle ways. Frequently, newspapers' support of political parties or individual politicians is negotiated behind closed doors and then becomes clear in the process of selecting news and in the framing of political issues, most frequently carried out by editors, in keeping with the organization's internal logic.

Another theoretical framework that allow us to characterize the influence of media ownership and ideology on news content focuses on the media's tendency to intervene in the political debate, to engage in advocacy, or to influence political events, particularly in the case of organizations that have no formal ties to political parties. It represents a facet of the multidimensional conceptual framework through which Hallin and Mancini focus on political parallelism, seeking to understand links between the media and political tendencies that are not necessarily related to political parties.¹³ This broader sense of political

parallelism usually develops in countries that have faced a late democratic development and present contrasting patterns of relations between politics and the media, as opposed to old Western European democracies, where the media and political parties have had a historical, direct link that has prevailed. Afonso de Albuquerque, for example, believes that leading media organizations in Brazil have adopted a market-driven, catch-all attitude and increased their internal pluralism, although “this does not mean they have adopted a more passive attitude towards politics.”¹⁴ The perception that news organizations have distanced themselves from particular political groups is also shared by other Brazilian researchers.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Albuquerque endorses the perception that Brazilian news media play an active role by taking sides in the name of national interest, a justification that is frequently invoked through editorials and opinion pieces. To account for this, Albuquerque proposes a new model that characterizes how the media acts as a political agent. He argues that the Brazilian news media take explicit political positions, but specifies that their agenda and positions are not reducible to the agendas of the political parties.¹⁶ Their “catch-all” attitude is adapted to their mutually beneficial relationships with individual politicians and public servants rather than to their alliance with collective forces or party politics.

Albuquerque’s recent views were somewhat anticipated by former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. In a 1998 interview with journalist Roberto Pompeu de Toledo, Cardoso claimed that the media’s role was a political one and that politics and journalism were inseparable, even if political parties were not present in this formula. “The news media are more democratic. Competition ended the newspapers’ political agenda with the exception of *O Estado de S. Paulo*. The newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* defined its agenda as the lack of an agenda and more newspapers followed this path ... This gave more power to editors who state that they are accountable to their readers ... However, the editors’ freedom is limited by the news media’s business interests.”¹⁷

The dynamic of political alliances in Brazil has been shaped by pragmatic interests as much as ideological ones.¹⁸ With a few exceptions, political parties are ideologically inconsistent and frequently produce incoherent coalitions with elected officials that switch parties without any accountability to the electorate.¹⁹ To some extent, the heterogeneous structure found in politics extends to the media. The media’s alignment with political views has varied throughout modern history, due to political interests, government subsidies and advertising, direct pressures, and even censorship. And more often than not, signs of political parallelism appear when the few families that own media outlets develop personal connections instead of formal organizational ties, as Duncan McCargo has observed in Asian countries.²⁰ This set of trends reflect the political gray zone

in Brazil, a country that is “no longer autocratic but yet not fully democratic” as Katrin Voltmer describes in her account of hybrid media systems.²¹

Newspapers and Political Parties

Political parties in Brazil are considered to be unstable institutions motivated by self-interest. As of early 2019, about 35 political parties were officially registered at the Higher Electoral Court, with another 40 in the process of being registered.²² This high number of parties is perceived as a major downside of Brazilian democracy, in the opinion of political scientists, and its roots are perverse. During the dictatorship, the military allowed the existence of two parties, ARENA (the government party) and the MDB (the opposition). The government put an end to the two-party system in 1979 and the opposition splintered into many groups – a strategy devised by the military to divide the opposition. Since then, loyalty of individual politicians to political parties has been elusive.²³

In truth, the country’s political party structure is weak, fluid, and frequently guided by personalities rather than principles.²⁴ Brazil’s current president, Jair Bolsonaro, for example, was a member of eight different political parties during his political career until he settled for a ninth party in 2018.²⁵ More recently, Bolsonaro left the PSL he joined in 2018, and announced his intention of creating a new party, the Alliance for Brazil (APB), supported by Evangelical groups and controlled by his family.²⁶

On the other hand, it is difficult to establish the real number of daily newspapers currently published in the country. Hurt by publishing costs and the rise of Internet penetration, a high number of publications have folded, shrunk, or moved to an online format only.²⁷ What is left of a vibrant press, still controlled by a few families and several politicians, is mostly accessible through paywalls. The three largest and most prestigious Brazilian newspapers with print circulation in major capitals and the highest online readership—*O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo*—in 2018 had less than 200,000 individual digital subscriptions on average. In the same year, the average paid circulations of these newspapers in print format were 315,000 for *O Globo*, 310,677 for *Folha*, and 239,436 for *O Estado*.²⁸

Despite the fact that television and social media are the main sources of information among Brazilians, national newspapers and magazines remain the main agenda-setters in their coverage of politics, as TV news offers only short, fragmented perspectives and social media (Twitter, especially) provide minimal information, referring readers back to links to contents prepared by newspapers and magazines. The major daily newspapers and a few newsweekly magazines

are mostly read either in print format or online by the upper- and middle-classes,²⁹ while television and radio are the main sources of information for the working class. In a circular movement, members of the upper- and middle-class are at the same time the sources, the protagonists, and the readers of news in elite newspapers, excluding major social segments.³⁰

The main papers have a long history of manifesting their political opinion. Traditionally, *O Globo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* have been clearly conservative while *Folha de S. Paulo* has positioned itself on the liberal side of the spectrum. For many years, *Folha* has claimed to be the only major daily newspaper to adopt a genuine watchdog position regarding every government in power since the country's redemocratization in the mid-1980s, as it states in its online marketing. In its 2019 subscription drive, *Folha* announced that it had 120 columnists and produced daily more than 180 news stories that “scrutinize public power, offsetting the social media intolerance and tracing a clear line between truth and lie.”³¹ While the other two papers do not make such a claim, the owner of *O Globo*, Grupo Globo, states in its website's “About” section that the company “creates, produces, and distributes quality content to inform, entertain, and educate.”³² And *O Estado* asserts that its mission is “to communicate and defend democratic principles, private enterprise, press freedom, justice, and the ‘search for the truth’.”³³

Print media are concentrated in the hands of a few groups and four television networks share 70 percent of the national audience.³⁴ Furthermore, there are no regulations against cross-ownership, which bolsters media concentration. National and regional conglomerates are associated with prominent families, whose main business is the media, except for the Protestant evangelical groups that entered the radio and television market in the 1990s and also own churches and banks. Additionally, these evangelical groups have a strong presence in Congress, having elected 84 members of Congress and seven senators in 2018, all of whom fully support Jair Bolsonaro.³⁵

The roots of the tradition of family ownership lie in constitutions such as that of 1946, which prevented legal entities and joint stock companies with foreign capital from owning news organizations.³⁶ The NGO Reporters Without Borders detected in 2017 that “transparency about ownership of media companies remains low as there is no legal obligation for companies to disclose their shareholder structure.”³⁷ That is the case of the three newspapers discussed in this analysis. *O Globo*, created in 1925, belongs to Grupo Globo, owned by the Marinho family, which is the largest media conglomerate in Brazil and includes top-rated broadcast network TV Globo. *Folha de S. Paulo*, also created in 1925, belongs to Grupo Folha, Brazil's second-largest media conglomerate (which includes leading internet portal UOL), owned by the Frias family with other sharehold-

ers.³⁸ The newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, founded in 1875, belongs to Grupo Estado (which includes a news agency), owned by the Mesquita family with other shareholders.³⁹ Since all three parent companies are privately held, the identities of minority shareholders (some of whom might be politicians) are not known.

Coupled with concentrated newspaper ownership, low readership is another major barrier to pluralism; this owes much to Brazil's large number of functional illiterates, whose capacity to understand and reflect on the news is limited. The Brazilian Index of Functional Literacy, published by the Instituto Montenegro/IBOPE, shows that in 2018 close to 30 percent of the population aged between 15 and 64 years old were functionally illiterate.⁴⁰ It is no surprise that television is by far the most popular medium in Brazil, nor is the consistent growth of social media.⁴¹ In fact, Brazil is home to a major news desert, according to a 2018 study of urban citizens by the Brazilian Press Association: 70 million people (33 percent of the country's total population) have no access to news in print or online.⁴² Unsurprisingly, several media outlets are owned by politicians such as former president and current senator Fernando Collor de Mello, who in northeastern Brazil owns *Gazeta Alagoas* TV (affiliated with the Globo network), the *Gazeta de Alagoas* newspaper, and *Gazeta 94* FM radio.

In 2018, international polling company Latinobarómetro found that Brazilians' dissatisfaction with most social institutions extended to the press. Its survey showed that while 47 percent of Brazilians had "a lot of confidence" in the church, only 27 percent felt similarly about the armed forces, 17 percent about the police, and just 15 percent about the media; lowest ranked of all were the government, Congress, and political parties, which, together, polled at 2 percent.⁴³ Low confidence in the press, which may derive in part from its publishing of politicized leaks during the corruption scandals of recent years, in turn likely helps explain (along with the rise of news portals and social media) the sharp decline in newspaper circulation. Yet there is no solid data about this. Between 2015 and 2018, the combined sales of Brazil's 11 most popular paid-for daily papers fell by 41 percent.⁴⁴

Media, Elections, and the Economy, 1994-2002

Brazil exists perpetually between two macroeconomic world views, defined by neoliberal policies and neostructuralist ones. In short, as of the 1980s, center-right and center-oriented politicians, along with some of the leading news media, pushed for free trade, deregulation of financial markets, and minimal state intervention, while center-left and left-wing politicians, supported by other leading news media, have defended a larger role for the state, with the adop-

tion of programs to reduce social inequalities. Governments have sided with one trend or the other, pulling Brazil's development in different directions. The newspapers *O Globo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* have identified with neoliberal policies, while *Folha de S. Paulo* has alternated its views, frequently exposing the positive and negative features of both economic platforms.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) was elected for the first time in 1994 with 54 percent of valid votes, ahead of the Workers' Party (PT) candidate, Lula da Silva, who won 21 percent of valid votes. A total of nine candidates ran for president that year and Cardoso won without the traditional runoff election, due to the support of a coalition comprised of the center-left Social Democratic Party and two right-wing parties, the Liberal Front Party and the Brazilian Labor Party. Cardoso, a renowned sociologist, had helped draft the Constitution of 1988 and served as minister of finance in the previous government, where he launched a new currency, the *real*, and spearheaded a successful plan to reduce inflation.⁴⁵ Along with the new currency, his ministry implemented the "deindexation" of the economy, prohibiting the automatic adjustment of salaries in line with inflation and establishing the right for employees to bargain with their employers for salary adjustments. For the first time in a long period, Brazilians escaped economic and political instability and were able to enjoy new consumer habits.⁴⁶

Cardoso's successful struggle against inflation, which by 1993 had reached 2,709 percent, helped identify his candidacy with economic stability. He became known as "the man of the *real*," massively supported by voters and by the news media.⁴⁷ Cardoso's focus on economic issues led the news media to emphasize economic reporting, while political reporting focused on the traditional tug-of-war between candidates in a direct reflection of Brazil's interest in personalism. Carolina Matos has noted that an elite consensus, which included the news media, formed around Cardoso, perceived by then as the establishment's natural candidate. Although the Left called Cardoso a neoliberal candidate and accused him of putting forward a dependent role for Brazil in the global economy, he rejected both claims and portrayed himself as the negotiator between "social democratic policies and economic liberalism."⁴⁸

The print media covered Cardoso's government intensively but in a responsible manner. In her content analysis of the newspapers *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* during the 1994 presidential campaign, Matos found a predominance of neutral news (53 percent and 49 percent respectively) about the political campaign. Journalists interviewed by Matos confirmed the media's sympathy for Cardoso due to the proposed anti-inflation plan and "the identification of media management and ownership with Cardoso's political and academic persona" while Lula da Silva faced an evident media bias, notable in *O Globo*

and *O Estado*, for his lack of formal education and working-class background but, above all, for his party's aggressive discourse.⁴⁹

Brazilian scholars have considered the coverage of the 1994 presidential campaign to be more professional and less ideological in comparison with the coverage of the election and the impeachment of president Collor de Mello in 1992.⁵⁰ The coverage reflected the alignment of Cardoso's values with those of the leading newspapers, which wanted a path to development without political risks.

Fernando Farias de Azevedo claims that Brazil's leading newspapers have functioned as political actors aligned with center-right political groups. He defines the role of *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* as that of setting the political agenda during the 25-year period from 1989 to 2014, which encompassed seven presidential elections. With the exception of *Folha*, which has maintained a higher level of internal diversity among its columnists, the other two papers have shown limited internal diversity over a period of decades.⁵¹

The news media's full support of Cardoso extended to the 1998 presidential elections. In his 2016 memoirs, *Diaries of the Presidency*, the former president wrote that media support was decisive for his reelection in the first round in 1998 when he won 53 percent of the votes. Lula da Silva representing the left-wing coalition won 32 percent, an 11-point improvement upon his showing in 1994.⁵²

Cardoso fared poorly during his second term (Jan. 1999-Dec. 2002) as, due to an economic slowdown, national consensus about his economic program melted away and he was portrayed negatively by the news media. The news media, by then invested in their political actor role, expressed their distaste with the economic crisis. As Eli Diniz explains, "the privatization, liberalization, and structural reforms of the 1990s had effectively dismantled the old order but failed to establish a new developmental path."⁵³ The social and economic gains from Cardoso's first term were rocked by a national crisis involving fiscal deficits, currency devaluation, unemployment, and opposition from Congress to government plans to continue with the reforms. In a global context, the country was deeply affected by the dark economic wave that engulfed Asia in 1997 and Russia in 1998, undermining Brazil's dreams of leaving the semi-peripheral circle of developing nations.

In his analysis of the editorials of *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* between 1995 and 2002, Rodrigo Carvalho noticed that both newspapers demanded more coherence, austerity, and responsibility from the government and political parties. While *O Globo* supported Cardoso and offered moderate criticism of his policies, *Folha* published more editorials emphasizing its critique of government policies and of old-style politics in the poorest regions of Brazil, still dominated by traditional oligarchies. Nonetheless, both newspapers defended the plan for economic modernization and the insertion of Brazil in the global economy

prescribed by Cardoso, which included neoliberal policies that were criticized by left-wing leaders. The two newspapers also offered a strong critique against the Workers' Party's socialist proposals and encouraged the party to become less radical and to avoid "utopic or defeated ideologies." In a nutshell, Carvalho states that *Folha* and *O Globo* took a clear ideological position favoring free enterprise and a market economy with a less dominant role reserved for the state.⁵⁴

The combination of organizational and ideological factors proposed by Shoemaker and Reese in their hierarchical model of influences was visible in the media coverage of Cardoso's election and his two terms of office, whenever his policies were compatible with the expectations of the Brazilian elite regarding economic stability and development within neoliberal parameters, in conjunction with neostructuralist measures represented by state-funded social programs. The latter, however, were perceived as a bonus, as long as the economic model remained sustainable. When the economy faced a downturn due to a combination of national and international factors, news media's support of Cardoso dwindled while attacks against his cabinet and suspicions of corruption multiplied.

The Turn to the Left: The 2002 Election

In 2002, Brazilians elected Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) as their new president. After three unsuccessful candidacies as a leftist, the former steel worker and union leader took power as a moderate, making peace with some of his old enemies and showing willingness to enter in an agreement with other political parties to solve the national economic crisis.⁵⁵

Lula da Silva obtained 61 percent of the votes in the runoff with the help of a coalition of conservative parties, the support of two small communist parties, and two other presidential candidates, Ciro Gomes of the Popular Socialist Party (PPS) and Anthony Garotinho of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). Furthermore, the Workers' Party developed a massive marketing campaign to counter the rejection previously faced by the candidate. Ciro Coutinho describes how Lula's campaign portrayed him as a politician interested in national conciliation, open to maintaining existing economic strategies and honoring contracts with foreign investors.⁵⁶ This time, Lula da Silva would show less rage and more political command. Furthermore, Lula's ability to appeal to emotions became an electoral strategy in contrast to Cardoso's intellectual composure. Like Cardoso on his first campaign, Lula hired a spin doctor to design his campaign. Party cash was used to buy political support from conservative politicians in the hope of forming future government alliances.⁵⁷ His party also published a *Carta aos*

brasileiros (Letter to Brazilians), which reassured the financial markets and the business community by affirming Lula's commitment to maintaining the economic policies implemented by the Cardoso administration but, at the same time, emphasized the need for social policies to reduce poverty and inequality.⁵⁸

Although the news media were traditionally supportive of elite candidates, they gave Lula a chance because he sounded less radical during the campaign, while the candidate from Cardoso's PDSB was faring poorly in the polls. Lula's charisma conquered voters, including journalists in key positions in most newsrooms. Lula had already risen to prominence in the news media when he led strikes between 1978 and 1980. At the time, journalists were impressed with his leadership skills among steel workers and soon hundreds of reporters registered as party members, signing the forms that quietly circulated in newsrooms.⁵⁹ One of the founders of the Workers' Party in 1980, along with Catholic activists, left-wing intellectuals, factory workers, and members of left-wing political groups, Lula won a seat in Congress in 1986 but did not run again in 1990, as he had his eyes on the presidency.

Polls conducted during the campaign indicated that unemployment was the number-one issue among voters. In contrast to the Cardoso government and its technocratic focus on state reform, fiscal austerity, and protection of the currency, the Workers' Party proposed an inversion of priorities by centering on increasing state investment in education, health care, and agrarian reform. The Workers' Party also benefited from its "clean" reputation, free from corruption and clientelism while demonstrating sustained membership growth over 20 years.⁶⁰

These factors alone do not explain why leading newspapers suddenly began to cover Lula in a fair way during the campaign, but a clear picture emerged: a past government in crisis; the lethargic, sometimes academic tone of the continuity candidate, the PDSB's José Serra, that divided the party and failed to mobilize public opinion; and the openness of the economic elite to the new Lula da Silva. In her content analysis of leading newspapers and magazines during the 2002 elections, Matos noted that coverage was more open to the Workers' Party than it had been in previous presidential campaigns. Farias de Azevedo noticed a similar trend, and Alessandra Aldé pointed out that leading newspapers paid more attention than ever before to all elements of the candidates' campaigns, from their rallies across the country to their websites and interviews with their campaign strategists; this type of coverage favored the Workers' Party, which was better organized this time and produced more ready-made content for news organizations, including videos, than other political parties.⁶¹

Felipe Borba found that the more positively the three leading newspapers treated a candidate, the more his chances of impacting public opinion and winning voters were increased. Peoples' voting intentions improved in Lula's

favor as the newspapers published more positive news.⁶² On the other hand, the candidacy of Ciro Gomes, of the left-wing PPS was quickly ruined when, in the same campaign, most of the news media described him “impulsive, ill-tempered” and compared him to the impeached president Collor de Melo.

Overall, Lula appeared in the news as a legitimate candidate. This time he was not merely dismissed as left-wing, much less as a socialist, while his main opponent, José Serra, was subjected to wider criticism. Lula was mostly framed as a new social democrat, a condition that would make him more palatable to the country’s elites. In editorials, *O Estado de S. Paulo* supported Serra and published numerous negative opinion columns about Lula’s candidacy, but *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* maintained their neutrality and a sense of expectation, although at times *Folha* exercised its historic watchdog role by describing the ambiguities of the Workers’ Party. Among them, in one particular editorial *Folha* commented on how “Lula courted the banks and big business behind closed doors while on the road criticized the same economic elite using heavy jargon.”⁶³ Borba found that in its coverage *Folha* criticized Lula throughout the campaign, only to change its tone towards the end for reasons that were unclear. Coinciding with other studies, his findings indicate that *O Globo* offered “benevolent” coverage of Lula and *O Estado* offered mostly negative coverage.

The different stances of the three newspapers reflect variations in their readers’ social class and political perceptions and in the personal profiles and trajectories of the families that own them.⁶⁴ Although it is hard to pinpoint details about readership, historically *O Estado* has voiced the concerns of rural landowners, financiers, and a privileged urban upper class associated with old money, while *Folha* appeals to a more diverse readership composed of liberal professionals, public servants, and intellectuals, among others. These two papers offer divergent standpoints—conservative vs. liberal—stemming from São Paulo, Brazil’s largest and richest metropolis inhabited by 12 million people. *O Globo* offers the news from the viewpoint of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil’s cultural and entertainment center) to a diverse urban readership, politically less conservative than the readers of *O Estado* but not as liberal as the readers of *Folha*.

Overall, modern Brazilian elites are diverse and fragmented; they do not hold absolute power as they did in the past. They are also scrutinized by a growing civil society, with old and new actors “disorganizing and reorganizing” themselves around their interests.⁶⁵ As economist and former minister Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira has put it: “Like the market, civil society is not entirely rational, does not follow a course, nor obeys a specific logic. It is made up of agents who rationally seek to identify their own interests with those of the collectives, but whose success in this attempt is always fleeting.”⁶⁶

Pereira's assertion casts light on Brazil's political ambiguities and may be extended to the news media's representation of politics. While it is easier to label the political perspectives of *O Estado* and *O Globo*, interpretation of *Folha's* critique of the *status quo* remains a challenge for researchers, political leaders, and the newspaper's own readers. Its watchdog-style coverage has been designed to challenge public figures and sustain its role as a political actor, following Hallin and Mancini's alternative reading of media advocacy in light of political parallelism. However, *Folha's* claim to independence is undermined by its lack of transparency regarding its minority shareholders.

Progressivism Interrupted by Corruption: 2003-16

By the time Lula da Silva was elected president, the Workers' Party had implemented three major changes: the leadership reduced the importance of the party's articulation with social movements; it redefined its policies on political alliances, and moved to the center of the party spectrum; also, it began basing its campaign decisions on electoral research and political marketing.⁶⁷ These decisions divided the party. In political terms, Lula da Silva's first term as president was marked by "tension between continuity and change."⁶⁸ On the one hand, he intensified Cardoso's macroeconomic policies to win the trust of international financial markets and institutions. On the other hand, he amplified Cardoso's social programs to include a complex and high-profile Zero Hunger program (*Fome Zero*), which included the Family Stipend (*Bolsa Familia*), providing for low-income families. By assuming that hunger was the central problem facing the poor, Zero Hunger put into action a series of interventions involving the distribution of staples, purchase of food from family farms, drilling of artesian wells, and the construction of housing.⁶⁹

While these measures made Lula the most popular president of Brazil among the working class, the elites were unimpressed by the socially oriented measures to reduce poverty but tolerated them because the improvement of the economy was helping them to multiply their gains. Meanwhile, the news media kept scrutinizing the accusations of corruption that emerged in the third year of Lula's first term. When revelations broke about what was happening behind doors, a government coalition that at one point involved 10 political parties soon evaporated into thin air.

Brazilians are accustomed to corruption at all levels; it is part of their daily lives. Whether in the media or academia, discussions about corruption are a tortuous exercise, intensively polarized and capable of creating great resentment among journalists and scholars. One common claim is that corruption is

inherent to Brazilian politics and has happened in every government under any political leadership. In an interview broadcast by TV Globo in July 17, 2005, in Paris, Lula da Silva lamented that corruption scandals surfaced at a moment when Brazil enjoyed great international prestige, adding that “The PT only did what other Brazilian parties have done all along.”⁷⁰ The fact is that corruption scandals spiraled during the 13.5 years of Workers’ Party rule. They began in June 2005, when federal deputy Roberto Jefferson of the PTB, who was being investigated for involvement in a national postal service scandal, retaliated by exposing a cash-for-votes scheme, where congressmen were paid monthly sums (about 28.800 reais equivalent to US\$12,000 at the time) in exchange for votes supporting Lula’s policies. Jefferson revealed the scheme in an exclusive interview with *Folha de S. Paulo*.⁷¹ The case became known as the *Mensalão* (large monthly stipend) scandal, the first of 13 major corruption scandals involving the Workers’ Party. Later on, *Folha*, along with newsweekly magazines such as *Veja*, would expose other corruption scandals involving the PT.

When those involved in the *Mensalão* scandal were brought to trial, the Supreme Court indicted 40 people accused of illegal campaign finance activity, receiving kickbacks at government-owned businesses, and taking cash payments for voting with the government in Congress. Among those indicted was José Dirceu, a popular former member of an armed Marxist group in the 1960s, later president of the Workers’ Party, coordinator of Lula da Silva’s presidential campaign, and his chief of staff during his first term. Lula da Silva himself though was shielded by his party and went on to be reelected for a second term in 2006. From that campaign on, the leading newspapers and the news media in general dedicated most of their electoral and presidential coverage to corruption scandals, which kept making headlines.

During the 2006 campaign, with polls favoring Lula despite the corruption scandals, a major Brazilian newspaper manifested for the first time its open political support of a candidate in its editorial section. *O Estado de S. Paulo* announced its backing of Geraldo Alckmin of the PSDB, the party of Cardoso. *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* did not openly support any candidate. Pedro Mundim has noted that the three newspapers offered heterogeneous coverage with a negative tone toward the Workers’ Party due to the *Mensalao* scandal. However, *O Globo* “showed benevolence toward the candidate in power” while *Folha* retained its critical, independent tone.⁷² Lucio Renno had previously observed that the media coverage of the campaign was “boring” and that Lula was expected to win the majority of the votes in the first round, which seemed to be the case until before the election, when the police arrested two members of the Workers’ Party campaign committee in Sao Paulo with US\$1 million in unaccounted money, intended to buy incriminating information about the

leading candidate for the governor of the state of Sao Paulo, José Serra of the PSDB. The dossier scandal, as it was known, added to the tally of corruption that prevented Lula from winning in the first ballot. However, the Brazilian economy was stable, which reassured voters and investors, helping Lula win in the second round, with 60 percent of the votes.⁷³

During Lula's second term, his government consolidated several social programs, which, it claimed, had raised the living standards of millions; international institutions upheld the Brazilian economy as a model while banks operating in the country registered the highest rates of profit. He left the government with the highest popular approval rate ever registered (80 percent) and with enough political influence to help elect his candidate in the 2010 and 2014 presidential elections: Dilma Rousseff, the first woman to hold the presidency. Rousseff was frequently portrayed in newspapers' editorials as a "Lula's creature" and as lacking political autonomy.⁷⁴ Rousseff was a member of a Marxist armed group in the 1960s and had been captured, tortured, and incarcerated by the military dictatorship. Released in the 1970s, she engaged in politics but did not run for public office before the presidency. She was an active member of the Workers' Party, having been minister of energy and chief of staff to Lula.

Rousseff's campaign in 2010 coincided with Lula's worst conflict with the news media. Dissatisfied with the investigative reports about money laundering and manipulation of government contracts by members of his administration, including the chief of staff who replaced Rousseff, the president attacked the news media at a rally, stating that he "would defeat newspapers and magazines that behaved as political parties," and promising also to "destroy the news organizations that denounced the recent corruption scandals."⁷⁵ At that pivotal moment, the news media focused on the threat that Lula had voiced against freedom of the press, a strategy frequently deployed throughout Rousseff's campaign. A content analysis of the online news produced by the leading newspapers and magazines during the campaign revealed that the Workers' Party was the main target of the negative coverage, which focused not only on the corruption in which the government was involved but also on Rousseff's candidacy, which was characterized as "artificial."

A larger issue was at stake. Media alerts to readers about threats to freedom of the press coincided with a Workers' Party project, in alliance with several organizations such as the National Federation of Journalists, to regulate the media in Brazil by breaking up media conglomerates and establishing smaller communications groups, not only to increase diversity of opinion but also—according to opponents of the plan—to silence criticisms of the state. By then, other left-wing governments in Latin America, as in Venezuela and Argentina, were taken similar measures. The owners of news media outlets and other sec-

tors of Brazilian society opposed the plan on the grounds that it would open the door to government control and censorship of the news media.⁷⁶ The plan was abandoned after Rousseff's election, partly because of the media's protests but mostly because Rousseff, an unpopular candidate with the leading news media, wasn't willing to enter a fight she would surely lose.

The two major candidates disputing the 2010 presidential election were Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party and José Serra of the PSDB. Rousseff won the second round with 56 percent of the votes while Serra received 44 percent. The dispute for power between these two parties continued in 2014. Rousseff retained the presidency in the second round of the election, with 52 percent of votes while the PSDB's Aécio Neves received 48 percent. In both elections, Lula was considered the biggest winner, but voters signaled their division. Increasingly, as of 2010, Brazilians split into two groups that argued daily on social media: those in favor of *petismo* (the Workers' Party agenda) and those against it. At the same time, the sequence of corruption scandals involving the Workers' Party ended the informal truce established in 2002 between the news media and Lula da Silva. Both the media and the middle class would develop a "visceral anti-*petismo*,"⁷⁷ which brewed in street protests in 2013 and reached full force through new street protests in 2015 and 2016, as growing numbers called for Rousseff's impeachment.

In editorials, the leading newspapers dropped their ideological and programmatic discussions of the Workers' Party agenda and focused on the issue at hand: government corruption. Content for daily news stories came mostly from the largest anti-corruption investigation in the country's history, Operation Car Wash (*Lava Jato*), helmed by the federal police and a group of young judges led by Sergio Moro in Southern Brazil. Rousseff and her mentor Lula were under intense public scrutiny, accused of masterminding a new corruption scheme involving state oil company Petrobras. In 2016, during the six-month period leading to Rousseff's impeachment, other members of the Workers' Party's coalition, such as the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) and the Progressive Party, which were also investigated in the *Lava Jato* case, received less media attention. The newspapers' action in this regard reflected how, during infostorms, journalists are prone to group thinking and often reproduce hegemonic interpretations of national politics based on what their sources offer them. This strategy may reflect how the vested interests of elites take precedence over watchdog journalism.⁷⁸

Mads Damgaard's examination of newspapers *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Globo*, and *Folha de S. Paulo* during the six months leading up to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff noted that "more than a hundred different political corruption cases were the topic of news items, but only a select few received

sustained coverage.”⁷⁹ In what Damgaard calls “information cascades,” various media outlets repeated the same message over and over, forming a hegemonic perception that reinforced the media’s agenda-setting role. This observation reflects Waisbord’s claim that coverage of scandals in fact express the vested interests of elites rather than the ideals of watchdog journalism.⁸⁰ Damgaard concluded that the leading newspapers granted excessive coverage to some corruption cases linked to the Workers’ Party and simultaneously disregarded corruption cases in which other political parties were involved, producing what he calls an “intra-elite strategy,” which amplified the cascade of information, with the aim of impeaching the president rather than holding all of the political spectrum accountable.⁸¹

The leading newspapers supported the impeachment in editorials that varied in tone. *O Globo* defended the impeachment arguing that “the typical checks and balances of a representative democracy are working satisfactorily”; *Folha de S. Paulo* wrote, “If the president does not correct her economic policies, society will force her to abandon her presidential responsibilities and, eventually, the office she occupies”; and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, taking a more radical position wrote, “Workers’ Party’s Dilma Rousseff can no longer remain in the Presidency of the Republic for the simple reason that she has adopted irresponsibility as a government method.”⁸² Overall, the news media coverage adopted a critical tone in describing Rousseff’s disagreements with the industrial elites and also her inability to negotiate with the Congress. In the emphasis on the scandals involving the Workers’ Party, then in power, some Brazilian researchers perceive a bias against the left-wing government, as other scandals involving the PSDB, the opponent party, received less attention.⁸³

Rousseff was formally impeached by the Senate on August 31, 2016, with 61 votes in favor and 20 against, on charges of manipulating the federal budget to conceal the country’s economic problems. The impeachment was also a verdict on her poor administration and lack of skills at negotiating and communicating. It put an end to nearly 14 years of Workers’ Party leadership in Brazil. Her vice-president, Michel Temer of the PMDB, would serve as acting president until December 2018.

Media bias against Rousseff seemed to be present since the very beginning of her second term, as one study of *Folha de S. Paulo* coverage observed. Out of the 518 editions of *Folha* between October 2014, shortly after the presidential elections, and April 2016, after the impeachment vote in the Chamber of Deputies, 171 cover pages were dedicated to Dilma Rousseff’s possible removal from the presidency.⁸⁴ An analysis of 507 editorials of *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Folha* in 2015 and 2016 showed that the former often called for the impeachment while the latter proposed the resignation of the president and her vice-president

as “Dilma’s impeachment alone would not solve the crisis.”⁸⁵ Both newspapers appeared to attempt to “pressure or persuade parliamentarians to revoke Dilma Rousseff’s term,” therefore clearly positioning themselves as political actors.⁸⁶ A third study, on the impeachment narrative in *Folha* and *O Globo* in 2015 and 2016, found that most of the news had a neutral if pessimistic tone, without significant differences between the two newspapers.⁸⁷

Taken together, these studies’ findings indicate a convergence between the interests of media owners and national elites to end the era of *petismo*. Evidence of this appeared more frequently in editorials than in news sections, and it can be tied to the following aims: to halt the corruption practiced by the Workers’ Party in the central government, although corruption was also detected among members of other political parties, and to stop the spiraling economic crisis from breaking the pact between the state, economic elites, and the unions that consisted in preserving economic neoliberal measures in conjunction with social programs such as *Bolsa Família*. The news media clearly took a side by refusing to give the Workers’ Party a chance to redeem itself.

The Turn to the Right: 2018 to Present

Brazilians elected former military officer and Congressman Jair Bolsonaro of the PSL (Social Liberal Party) as their 38th president in the runoff election held on October 28, 2018, with 55 percent of the votes, against Fernando Haddad of the Workers’ Party. During his campaign, run mostly through social media, Bolsonaro made vague promises to fight political corruption, the economic crisis, and urban violence. His supporters did not seem to mind his coarse style which offended minorities and women, nor his difficulty at expressing his thoughts in complete sentences. Closer to the election, polls published by the leading newspapers pointed to Bolsonaro as the winner. From the beginning of the presidential campaign, newspapers seemed frustrated with the top two candidates and the candidates complained that the media were biased against them. None of the three major newspapers supported any of the candidates, at least officially.

Haddad, a former Workers’ Party minister of education and former mayor of Sao Paulo (who ended his term in 2017 with a 14 percent approval rating), was frequently described by the news media as “Lula’s ghost.” Although imprisoned at that time, Lula planned to run for a third term and, as a result of this, his party waited until the very deadline to confirm Haddad as its candidate. The leading newspapers criticized Haddad on several of his positions, especially his unwillingness to condemn the Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and his statements that he would revive the plans to regulate the Brazilian media and implement

an agrarian reform to benefit landless peasants. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, offered a vague agenda aligned with the Far Right and did not communicate well with the news media due to his volatile and aggressive personal style. During the campaign, in an interview with TV Globo, Bolsonaro accused *Folha de S. Paulo* of publishing false news and threatened to cut government advertising to the paper if it ran information that he deemed inaccurate.⁸⁸ Once he was elected, he continued to manifest his antagonism toward the news media in general.

At the end of the campaign, amid fighting in the streets between *petistas* and *bolsonaristas* and a huge disinformation campaign through fake news from both parties, but especially the PSL, dominating social media, *Folha de S. Paulo*, the most liberal of the major newspapers, published on September 29, 2018 a front-page editorial with pictures of the two candidates with the headline “*A hora do compromisso*” (Time to commit).⁸⁹ The editorial urged the candidates to respect the Constitution and play according to the rules of democracy, avoiding authoritarian views. It asked Bolsonaro to stop defending torture and the military dictatorship, and change his offensive language toward women and minorities. It asked Haddad to stop discrediting decisions made by the Judiciary and Congress about his party and previous PT administrations, and to stop ignoring evidence of corruption in Lula’s government. *Folha* also suggested that the two candidates intended to intimidate the press, curb the power of Congress, and “alter by oblique modes the functioning of the Supreme Court.”⁹⁰

In several editorials, *O Estado de S. Paulo* criticized both Haddad and Bolsonaro during the campaign, and Bolsonaro again once he took power. *O Estado* feared Haddad’s radicalization toward the left and Bolsonaro’s radicalization toward the Right. Likewise, *O Globo*, on October 10, 2018, published an editorial stating: “The dispute between Bolsonaro and Haddad symbolizes the radicalization in the clash between Right and Left that will continue. Nothing that can be frightening if all political forces submit to the rules of the democratic rule of law.”⁹¹ In the same editorial, the newspaper criticized both candidates and asked them to detail their plans. This time around, even TV Globo, which in many past elections committed major journalistic sins by directly interfering in the political process and manipulating the news, refrained from openly supporting any presidential candidate.

Relations between Bolsonaro and journalists continued to plunge from the day of his inauguration, when security personnel transported accredited newsmen in buses and left them locked in different rooms for several hours without windows or access to restrooms for the duration of the three ceremonies that took place in different buildings in Brasilia.⁹² In the first few months of his government, the new president used Twitter to criticize the news media about every three days. Bolsonaro or his sons referred to the news media as “garbage” and accused

journalists of being left-wingers; his tweets were sometimes signed by him and other times by his sons, who act as his informal advisers. On March 10, 2019, for example, the account @jairbolsonaro accused a female reporter from *O Estado de S. Paulo* of trying to ruin the political career of senator Flavio Bolsonaro, the president's eldest son, who was being investigated for money laundering, and blamed her for suggesting that the president should be impeached. The reporter denied the accusation and received support from the National Association of Newspapers (ANJ) and other media organizations. The Brazilian Bar Association replied that president Bolsonaro tried to use his power to intimidate journalists and news organizations.⁹³ In an editorial from July 31, 2019, *O Estado* stated that Bolsonaro “does not respect norms of civility and democratic coexistence.”⁹⁴

Nonetheless, in a six-month period the president hosted a total of 100 journalists selected by the government for breakfast in the presidential palace and sometimes answered questions.⁹⁵ The current assumption is that leading newspapers may prefer to avoid direct contact with Bolsonaro, and rather conduct their reporting and editorial content with independence, especially due to the president's unpredictable behavior. It may also indicate that negotiations between the president's representatives and the newspapers have resumed, in order to guarantee the continuity of government advertising. Meanwhile, Bolsonaro conserved the support of two national TV networks: SBT, owned by billionaire Silvio Santos; and TV Record and its online portal R7, owned by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a major Protestant denomination that had openly backed Bolsonaro's electoral campaign.

In late 2019, Bolsonaro ramped up his war against the mainstream news media. He temporarily excluded *Folha de S. Paulo* from the Presidency's list of digital subscriptions and recommended that Brazilians stop reading the paper or buying the products it advertised. The paper then published an editorial (“The Emperor's Fantasy”) stating that Bolsonaro “does not understand and will never understand the limits that the Republic imposes on the exercise of the Presidency.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, Bolsonaro threatened to cancel TV Globo's broadcast license after the network and *O Globo* cited his name in the ongoing investigation into the murder of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco in 2018. In a 23-minute video published on Facebook, he scolded Grupo Globo: “You are scumbags! Scoundrels! You are not patriots!... There will be no public money for you!”⁹⁷ By the end of 2019, all three newspapers—*O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*—had intensified their criticism of Bolsonaro's authoritarian and erratic behavior.

Amid the political polarization, frenzied circulation of fake news on social media, and overwhelming lack of trust in politicians and parties, journalists are betting that the country's mainstream newspapers will survive and thrive

as their readership, middle- and upper-income Brazilians, rely on trustworthy information to make their most basic decisions. Media expert Fernando Moraes predicts that Jair Bolsonaro will lose his battle against the mainstream media, and especially his arm-wrestling campaign against TV Globo. The president's threat to cancel the network's license revealed his ignorance of the regulatory system for television as well as the fact that an unwilling Congress would have to vote on such a move (various politicians own TV stations, some of them Globo affiliates). What Bolsonaro can do and has done, as Lula and Rousseff did in a more shrewd style when they hoped to regulate the media and end the rein of Globo network, is redirect federal advertising funds towards friends who are favorable to him.⁹⁸ However, he does not have any regulatory plans and seems to act out of contempt toward the media.

Conclusion

This article asserts that Brazil's three leading newspapers function as political actors and that their ideological positions tend to mirror that of the dominant elites in a somewhat heterogeneous—that is, flexible and opportunistic—fashion. As Hallin and Mancini have argued on a theoretical level, modern Brazilian news media do not align with political parties *per se*, but choose carefully which politicians they will support and for how long. Reporting on politics is more nuanced than it might seem and depends on the evolution of political events.

The ideology of Brazil's big three dailies, *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, which generally favors neoliberal economic policies, found its highest point of political compatibility during the first election and term of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and its lowest during the two elections of Dilma Rousseff and her impeachment trial. When Cardoso faced major economic setbacks in his second term, he lost support from the news media. When in 2002 Lula da Silva ran for president for the fourth time under a more conciliatory position by moving from the left to the center, he received media support even though his opponent belonged to a center-right party favored in previous elections. Lula fell from media grace in his second term, due to numerous corruption scandals and his personal bickering with the press. Further, a major economic crisis, combined with new indications of corruption and the government's attempt to expand the role of the state broadened the abyss between elites and the Workers' Party. The media's doors closed to Rousseff during her one-and-a-half turbulent terms in an "intra-elite" strategy that somewhat dismissed the cannons of investigative journalism and put in action a political war to remove a supposedly incompetent left-wing government that refused to negotiate with the national elites. This is

partly why mainstream media supported Rousseff's impeachment. And maybe it is why a new war seemed to be brewing in 2019, as the media sought to put a check on Jair Bolsonaro's far-right social and cultural policies, despite their support for his economic agenda.⁹⁹

Brazil's news business is still in the hands of the Globo, Folha, and Estado groups, and there are opportunities for these corporations to grow, investing in a more inclusive, pluralist style of reporting. Although it is sometimes hard to pinpoint their underlying intentions when they support or oppose specific politicians, they do not yield their power to set the national agenda and to represent the forces of capital and economic progress as defined by national elites. Their actions support Hallin and Mancini's view of an alternative form of political parallelism, focused mostly on political figures that temporarily represent media owners' interests. When political leaders fail or cease to attend to those interests, newspapers open fire on them and present solutions fermented within elite thinking, the impeachment of Rousseff being one of them. This idea can clearly benefit from further inquiry and better empirical support. Brazil's fluid reality often surprises researchers; what stands out as a concrete trend at one point changes quickly at another point. In the 2020s, should the crisis of credibility among political parties deepen and confidence in politicians further erode, it may be the turn of newspapers to show themselves as the more reliable ones and as independent of institutions.

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