BRAZIL: A PORTRAIT OF DISPARITIES[1]

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ABSTRACT

Transparencia Brasil (an NGO dedicated to fighting corruption in the country) involves systematically gathering stories about corruption and associated themes published in the daily press. Titled "Deu no Jornal" (It Made the News), the initiative has been collecting news stories published in 59 dailies and four weeklies since January 2004. The publications covered by the project comprise all the main newspapers from all 26 states, plus the Federal District. No significant newspaper from any state is absent. News is taken from the newspapers' web editions and introduced into a data base. Each story is filed under a specific "case"[2] and cases are categorized according to several descriptive criteria. At the time of this writing, Deu no Jornal included about 142,500 stories distributed among 3,586 different cases, corresponding to an aggregate of about 326 million characters. On the average, about 3.5 new cases of corruption are reported by the Brazilian press somewhere every day. Deu no Jornal is the most comprehensive database of news stories on corruption in existence, not only in Brazil but worldwide.

KEY-WORDS Market, news stories, corruption

As any observer is bound to remark, Brazil is a very unequal country. As well as suffering from one of the more iniquitous income distributions in the world[3], the country's regional imbalances are notorious. The Southern and Southeastern regions, comprising 7 of the 26 Brazilian states, concentrate the bulk of the country's economic production, being responsible for generating 73% of Brazil's Gross Domestic Product. As a result, all things that come with the economy are much more present in the richer states than in the poorer – including a functioning press

It is easy to see why. A healthy press in a liberal-economic environment such as Brazil's must find sources of income to finance its operations and make a profit. Subscriptions and newsstand sales of copies are never enough to actually finance newspapers, so at least in principle they must rely on advertising to earn their way.

However, where economic production is weak, not only do firms not make enough money to pay for advertising but the newspapers' potential market/readership is small. On the average, the middle and working classes (those who have jobs, and not too many do) do not earn enough to spend on newspapers. Their inability to access information is also compounded by low literacy rates[4].

The net result is that in most Brazilian states, the printed press relies on extra-market measures to survive.

Since the persistence of a non-viable newspaper cannot be justified for direct economic reasons (it would be a contradiction in terms), the motivation to keep it alive is political. In the poorer Brazilian states, the same groups that dominate the economy also directly or indirectly dominate politics. This leads to two complementary mechanisms by which a non-viable newspaper keeps on existing in an environment whose market cannot support it.

If the controllers' political adversaries are in power, they finance the newspaper operations with money coming from other firms belonging to the same economic group. When they are in power, or support those in power, they get state-sponsored advertising.

Since the motivation for the very existence of such newspapers is not providing information but leveraging political interests, their journalistic standards tend to suffer. Staff salaries are low, staffs are under-manned and editorial policies are reduced to the controllers' whims. The practice of journalists simultaneously holding jobs as press advisors for the local governments and as reporters or columnists in newsrooms is common in some states. The direct consequence is below-standard journalism, resulting in a low-quality service furnished to the public.

In contrast, in the richer regions, first-line newspapers belong to economic groups that produce information as a business. São Paulo is the home of two powerful groups, *Folha* and *Estado*. In Rio de Janeiro there is the giant *Globo* and the relatively new Tanure (CBM) group (controller of *Jornal do Brasil* and *Gazeta Mercantil*)[5]. The Southern region is the field where two main groups compete, RBS (owner of *Zero Hora*, the most prestigious newspaper in the State of Rio Grande do Sul) and Paulo Pimentel (based in the State of Paraná). Another national group is Diários Associados, controller of the Brasília newspaper *Correio Braziliense* and Minas Gerais' *O Estado de Minas* (as well as papers in other states).

The immediate political interests of these groups might appear with varying frequency in the news they publish, but it cannot be said that this is what characterizes them. The strongest groups in particular (*Globo*, *Folha*, *Estado*) are in permanent competition in the markets they occupy. Blatant political alignments are bound to alienate segments of their readers, and that is something they cannot afford in the long run.

The situation is totally different in most of the poorer states, where market competition is either absent or weak. To mention just a few examples, and without being exhaustive, many of the owners of the Brazilian regional media (not only newspapers, but also radio and TV) are front-line players in the political arena[6]:

Table 1: Brazilian political groups by region

Alagoas – The Collor family headed by the former Governor, former President (impeached in 1992 for corruption) and now Senator Fernando Collor de Mello.
Bahia – Former Governor and current Senator Antonio Carlos Magalhães.
Maranhão – The Sarney family, headed by former President and current Senator José Sarney.
Pará – Former Governor, former Senator and now Federal Deputy Jáder Barbalho.
Rio Grande do Norte – Divided between the competing Maia and Alves families, comprising several politicians active in both the state and the federal spheres.
Tocantins – Former Federal District Governor and curent Senator Joaquim Roriz.

In many poor states, the printed media is not an industry, but an ancillary part of oligarchic political-economic complexes. The objective of such newspapers is not providing information to the public, but perpetuating the hold their controlling groups exercise over entire states[7]. Midway between the traditional media conglomerates and the politically-motivated groups, there are a number of medium-sized communications groups actually trying to do business in various markets.

Statistical evidence

These statements about the average Brazilian press are substantiated by actual observation and measurement of its performance. An initiative that has been maintained since 2004 by Transparencia Brasil (an NGO dedicated to fighting corruption in the country) involves systematically gathering stories about corruption and associated themes published in the daily press.

Titled "Deu no Jornal" (It Made the News)[8], the initiative has been collecting news stories published in 59 dailies and four weeklies since January 2004.

The publications covered by the project comprise all the main newspapers from all 26 states, plus the Federal District[9]. No significant newspaper from any state is absent. Thus, Deu no Jornal coverage corresponds to practically all news published in state-wide newspapers. Although there are about 400 daily newspapers in Brazil[10], most of them are either targeted publications issued in big cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte or very small local newspapers with minuscule readership.

News is taken from the newspapers' web editions and introduced into a data base. Each story is filed under a specific "case"[11] and cases are categorized according to several descriptive criteria. At the time of this writing, Deu no Jornal included about 142,500 stories distributed among 3,586 different cases, corresponding to an aggregate of about 326 million characters. On the average, about 3.5 new cases of corruption are reported by the Brazilian press somewhere every day. Deu no Jornal is the most comprehensive database of news stories on corruption in existence, not only in Brazil but worldwide[12].

The statistics generated by the database provide a telling portrait of the Brazilian disparities in the media field. The disparities range from penetration to the type of coverage produced. Let us start with penetration. A penetration index for the newspapers of a given state can be built by taking into account the population of the papers' presumable target audience; the papers' circulation; the volume of published information[13], measured by the number of characters.

Since all Brazilian newspapers mainly sell copies in their hometowns, it is natural to use the State Capital's metropolitan population as a baseline. Circulation figures are not easy to come by, because in few publications the circulation is independently audited and, therefore, stated figures usually are not trustworthy. Nevertheless, the advertising industry must adequately inform their clients about the media circulation, and circulation estimates can be obtained from these sources.

The state penetration index used in Deu no Jornal is calculated as follows. The circulation of each newspaper is multiplied by its published volume in characters. The resulting figures for all newspapers belonging to each state are added and the sum is divided by the State Capital's metropolitan population. Finally, the figures are normalized (divided by) the state with the least such result. This produces a scale from 1 to the highest figure.

Performing the calculations for the news published between January 26, 2004 and March 2, 2007 leads to the following scale:

Table 2: Regional amount of information about corruption

Home state	Penetration	Region
Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	158	SE
Brasília (DF)	155	CW
São Paulo (SP)	151	SE
Rio Grande do Sul (RS)	72	S
Mato Grosso (MT)	63	CW
Pará (PA)	52	N
Amazonas (AM)	47	N
Espírito Santo (ES)	39	SE
Minas Gerais (MG)	36	SE
Santa Catarina (SC)	31	S
Goiás (GO)	27	CW
Ceará (CE)	26	NE
Amapá (AP)	22	N
Paraná (PR)	21	S
Paraíba (PB)	21	NE
Bahia (BA)	19	NE
Mato Grosso do Sul (MS)	15	CW
Alagoas (AL)	14	NE
Pernambuco (PE)	13	NE
Tocantins (TO)	12	N
Rio Grande do Norte (RN)	10	NE
Acre (AC)	9	N
Piauí (PI)	9	NE
Rondônia(RO)	8	N
Maranhão (MA)	6	NE
Roraima (RR)	6	N
Sergipe (SE)	1	NE

The table indicates that the average inhabitant of the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro receives 158 times more information about corruption from local newspapers than the average metropolitan inhabitant of Aracaju (the Capital of the State of Sergipe). That is, for each paragraph about corruption that potentially reaches the public in Rio de Janeiro, Sergipe provides one single letter, Roraima and Maranhão provide about one word and so forth[14].

The states' positioning conspicuously shows that there are no Northeastern states above the 12th position (Ceará), and that all the bottom 13 positions are occupied by Northeastern, Northern and one Central-Western state. On the other hand, with one single exception (Paraná, in 14th place), states from the South and the South-East are concentrated in the top 9 positions.

Even then, the two newspapers published in Fortaleza, the Capital of Ceará, the highest-ranking Northeastern state, have a combined penetration that is about seven times less than those from Rio de Janeiro (two newspapers), Brasília (two) or São Paulo (two). Anyway, it is worth pointing out that in Ceará the two newspapers covered by the Deu no Jornal project are managed as businesses competing for the local market. These inequalities follow the different levels of regional economic development[15].

Similar disparities become apparent when directly comparing the newspapers' variety and published volumes. The following table depicts the number of stories, characters and different cases published by the newspapers from all states (in the descending order of the number of characters) in the period:

Table 3: Number of stories and cases by region

Home state (region)	Stories	Characters (thousand)	Cases
SP (SE)	20098	50182.7	946
RJ (SE)	11547	30380.7	763
MG (SE)	10640	27376.0	622
DF (CW	9785	26008.1	680
MT (CW)	9413	19871.3	611
PA (N)	6491	17174.3	573
PR (S)	6634	13886.1	581
BA (NE)	4839	12984.4	457
PB (NE)	5653	12916.5	515
GO (CW)	5300	11240.3	439
CE (NE)	5062	10874.9	442
SC (S)	6264	10237.9	475
ES (SE)	4653	8751.2	415
RS (S)	5996	8676.1	445
MA (NE)	3334	8181.4	401
AM (N)	3873	8046.3	430
PE (NE)	3244	6995.6	391
RN (NE)	2402	6382.8	323
AL (NE)	4016	6168.0	383
PI (NE)	2827	4971.6	338
AP (N)	1692	4011.0	262
RO (N)	1929	3839.5	287
AC (N)	1293	3456.9	211
TO (N)	1795	3335.1	311
MS (CW)	1886	3136.3	292
RR (N)	558	1334.7	118
SE (NE)	424	1097.9	105

Again, with few exceptions, states from the Northeastern and Northern regions occupy the lower places, while the newspapers from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais (all from the South-East) and Brasília, the country's Capital, are those with the most extended coverage. In the Center-West, a notable exception, already appearing in the analysis of penetration, concerns the state of Mato Grosso (three competing newspapers).

In fact, the regional concentration of the Brazilian printed media is such that just three newspapers (*Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, from the namesake state, and *O Globo*, from Rio de Janeiro) publish about 23% of all the volume on corruption collected by the Deu no Jornal project. Taken together, newspapers from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília and Minas Gerais are responsible for no less than 42% of all the volume about corruption recorded by the project.

Not only the penetration of Southeastern newspapers is much higher than the press from other regions, but they also tend to dominate what the other newspapers publish. Upon analyzing the credited sources of stories published by the newspapers (about 14% of stories are credited to news agencies), it is found that the news agencies associated with two newspapers (*Folha* and *Estado*) are responsible for 90% of all agency-credited news published by the newspapers covered by Deu no Jornal. Adding the Globo agency, the percentage is 95%. This does not count news items that are simply appropriated by a newspaper without credit, a very common phenomenon.

The Brazilian newspapers also differ widely concerning their coverage. A set of characteristics that are systematically recorded in the project concerns the place where the reported cases happened. Of the 3,586 cases filed in the period, 2,975 corresponded to local cases (i.e., they were circumscribed to specific states or municipalities) and 384 to national/federal cases (for the remainder the classification is mixed or not applicable).

A secondary effect of the overwhelming dominance of news organizations from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro is the amount of information pertaining to those states that is published by newspapers from other states ("dispersion").

There are several ways to define dispersion in the present context. Here we chose the following: for a given state, the dispersion of cases is the sum of cases reported by out-of-state newspapers[16] divided by the total state cases (2,975). The resulting set of figures is then normalized (divided) by the minimum.

Performing the calculations, we obtain the following table:

Table 4: Out-of-state cases published by regional newspapers

State	Dispersion
SP	85
RJ	46
PR	23
RO	20
AM	18
DF	16
PA	16
MG	14
RR	14
GO	12
PE	9
ES	8
MT	7
CE	7
MA	7
RS	6
PB	6
AL	6
MS	6
AC	5
BA	5
SC	5
AP	4
TO	4
PI	3
RN	2
CE	1

This means that, irrespective of their importance, cases about corruption happening in São Paulo are 85 times more likely to be known in the rest of Brazil than cases happening in Sergipe, about 42.5 times more than cases in Rio Grande do Norte, etc.

Several subjective factors affect the coverage of out-of-state cases, such as being broadcast via national TV, which tend to influence the next day's editions of the printed press. These, however, tend to affect the index uniformly. The most important factor is the number of state cases published. The more cases are published somewhere about the state, the higher is the state's dispersion. However, the relationship between dispersion and number of state cases radically drops when Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are excluded from the calculation[17]. This constitutes

further evidence that news published/distributed by Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo news organizations strongly influence the behavior of other states' newspapers.

One way to assess a state's newspapers' coverage is to measure how much they cover national/federal and local cases and what they fail to cover. The following table shows in the second column the distribution of the 2,975 local cases across states. The numbers do not necessarily mean that the newspapers from that state published stories about all the cases, but that the cases were reported somewhere. The third column represents the percentage of cases belonging to each state that were not covered by newspapers from that same state.

Table 5: Newspapers' coverage and the omitted cases

State	Cases	Omissions
SP	233	10%
PB	198	1%
MT	184	0%
PR	174	4%
RJ	168	5%
PA	167	1%
MG	136	8%
SC	127	2%
ES	124	2%
GO	113	9%
AM	109	5%
BA	106	4%
RO	105	1%
MA	104	6%
PI	101	3%
CE	89	0%
MS	87	5%
AL	86	3%
RN	83	0%
DF	79	10%
AC	76	1%
PE	73	5%
TO	73	3%
RS	70	10%
AP	55	4%
RR	40	3%
SE	15	7%

A first observation regarding these figures is that, although the absolute amounts of omissions (not shown) are strongly related to the number of reported cases per state (which is to be expected), the rate of omissions does not follow the same pattern[18]. In other words, the tendency of a state's papers not to publish stories arising from that state has no bearing to the intensity with which cases involving that state are reported somewhere in the Brazilian press. If reasonably common working conditions and editorial criteria were present in the Brazilian press, then one should expect a much higher correlation between cases and omissions. The lack of a relationship constitutes evidence that the standards and conditions are unequal throughout the Brazilian press – something that is well known, of course.

The next table represents the coverage of national/federal cases and of cases from states other than the newspaper's home state.

Table 6: Coverage of national/federal cases related to regional cases

Home	% National	Other	% Other
SP	72%	297	10%
RJ	60%	238	8%
DF	62%	233	8%
MG	55%	160	5%
MT	45%	153	5%
PA	45%	131	4%
PR	46%	130	4%
RS	43%	118	4%
CE	38%	118	4%
GO	37%	110	4%
SC	39%	110	4%
PE	35%	107	4%
BA	41%	105	4%
AM	37%	101	3%
MA	34%	95	3%
PB	37%	90	3%
ES	34%	88	3%
AL	35%	86	3%
TO	27%	72	2%
PI	30%	56	2%
RN	30%	56	2%
AP	26%	48	2%
MS	27%	47	2%
RO	22%	47	2%
AC	19%	22	1%
RR	10%	17	1%
SE	12%	15	1%

The breakdown clearly shows that the coverage by newspapers from the more developed states is much higher than that in the less developed ones, in both categories. Once again, Northern and Northeastern newspapers tend to fare very badly in comparison with papers from the Southeastern region.

Moreover, the correlation between national and other states' coverage is extremely high[19]. Newspapers that tend to cover a broader spectrum of national/federal cases are also those that more frequently cover cases happening in other states.

In poorer states, the reading public not only receives much less information than the public in richer states, but also a sizable amount of the information they receive is generated in São Paulo. On top of that, they receive a disproportionate amount of information about richer states. This not only means that readers from poor states tend to know less about their neighbors than readers of richer states, but also that they tend to know more about the latter states than the readers of richer states know about what is happening in the poorer states.

Besides offering less coverage than newspapers from richer states, papers from the poorer regions inherit and share the formers' inadequacies. One of them is the tendency to forget cases. Thus, no less than 45% of national/federal cases published somewhere in the Brazilian press are covered at most for three days; for cases involving the state sphere the percentage is 63%; and for municipal cases it is 76%. Cases that are covered just once, not to be taken up again, are: federal/national – 20%; state – 38%; municipal – 52%. Thus, the more distant the cases are, the more the Brazilian newspapers tend to follow them, an inversion of what would be expected if the press tried to establish firmer roots in the local communities.

What all this amounts to is that when it comes to information about corruption and related subjects conveyed by newspapers, Brazil gravitates around the South-East, especially São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in much the same way as the country depends on these states for economic welfare. The situation is especially serious in the very poorest states, where both economic activity and the production of information are negligible.

Conclusion

A panorama of inequalities is painted by the figures that have been extracted from the coverage of corruption by Brazilian newspapers. The vista is not likely to change in the short run, because it is directly rooted in the adverse economic conditions prevailing throughout most of Brazil.

The poorer states' economies are not sufficiently productive to create a demand for advertising space in the printed media. The same economic conditions have an unfavorable impact on the potential reading public, which not only is largely illiterate but also suffers from widespread unemployment, lack of proper social services, housing and so forth. Such a population does not constitute a suitable target for general-purpose newspapers, not even in the richer states.

Even in São Paulo, the richest state in Brazil, the circulation leader (*Folha de S. Paulo*) sells only about 300,000 copies per day. Contrast this with the population of the metropolitan area of the state's capital – 17 million inhabitants. So, even in the best of circumstances, Brazilian newspapers talk to a minuscule percentage of the population, and as a result are losing the race for advertising to other media, especially electronic. Indeed, between 2000 and 2005, the share of newspapers in the overall advertising market fell from 22% to 17%[20].

Not only are revenues from advertising declining in relative terms, but readership is also falling for broad-spectrum newspapers. Although the aggregate circulation of newspapers grew about 6.5% in 2006 compared to 2005[21], the growth is due to the appearance of low-priced ultra-popular publications in Brazilian big cities. Traditional newspapers in fact have shrunk. Between 2000 and 2006, the three leaders (*Folha*, *Estado* and *Globo*) lost about 30% of their circulation, a downward trend that has shown signs of abating only in 2006[22].

If that is the situation in the richest markets, in the states where private firms do not produce enough to justify advertising the picture is much worse. Naturally, the regional distribution of gross revenues from advertising in newspapers replicates the Brazilian imbalances. In 2005, papers from the State of São Paulo alone accounted for 41% of the national total and Rio de Janeiro had 25%. The South and South-East (except Rio and São Paulo) accounted for 17%, the North-East 11% and the Center-West 6%[23].

The newspapers that do exist in the poorer states either exist precariously or are bound to serve other purposes than generating profits for their owners by selling information. Such objectives are invariably political. Changing that situation would require profound economic change in Brazil's poorest states. Few would say that such an endeavor is achievable in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1   The author would like to thank Marcelo Beraba (ombudsman of *Folha de S. Paulo*), Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva (Patri) and John Devitt (Transparency International Ireland) for their criticism and suggestions.

2   "Cases" are not limited to specific corruption cases, also including a number of general themes.

3   The country's Gini index (an indicator that compares the income appropriated by the rich with that of the poor) has been around 60 for the last decades. In 2005 it was 60.7. Among the countries where the index is measured (for many poor countries there are no trustworthy.

4   Only 26% of the Brazilian population is fully literate. Instituto Paulo Montenegro: Indicador Nacional Funcional de Analfabetismo, 2005. www.ipm.org.br/ipmb_pagina.php?mpg=4.02.00.00.00&ver=por).

5   At the time of this writing, CBM was bidding for control of Editora 3, publisher of the weekly *IstoÉ.*

6   For some, the newspapers they control are not necessarily dominant.

7   According to Agency Repórter Social (www.reportersocial.com.br), 80 members of the 2007-2010 Brazilian Congress hold equities in radio and/or TV stations exceeding R$ 100,000. The regional distribution is: Northeast – 44; North – 7; Center-West – 3; Southeast – 18; South – 8.

8   Site www.deunojornal.org.br. The project has been financed with grants from the Ford Foundation.

9   For the sake of simplicity, from here on we will refer to "27 states".

10   Associação Nacional de Jornais (National Association of Newspapers), comprising the controllers of the printed media.

11   "Cases" are not limited to specific corruption cases, also including a number of general themes.

12   The staff of Deu no Jornal produces analyses of selected topics, published in the website's "Studies" area. The project also includes a tool (www. deunojornal.org.br/mapa/mapa.asp) to identify and exhibit connections between persons and cases. The names of up to three persons can be inputted and the tool responds by exhibiting all the cases in which they are mentioned. Conversely, up to three cases can be inputted and the device gives back all the names of the persons that are mentioned in stories referring to these issues.

13 Keeping in mind that the database is limited to news on corruption, State reform, access to information and related topics.

14 There is one broad-spectrum newspaper published in Aracaju, Sergipe's Capital: *Correio de Sergipe*, with a daily circulation of about 3,000-4,000 copies. It is controlled by the family of former Governor João Alves Filho, with interests in communications, agriculture, construction and real estate.

15 Source for the States' GDPs: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2005.

16 Observe that, since the same case might be reported by several newspapers, this figure is higher than the state's total number of cases.

17 The statistical correlation between the two sets of figures is 0.613 when RJ and SP are included, falling to 0.350 when these states are omitted.

18 The statistical correlation between the figures in the second and third columns is only -0.04.

19 The statistical correlation is 0.97.

20 Figures aggregated from data provided by the Intermeios Project (www. projetointermeios.com.br). Internet, Cinemas and Guides not included. Advertising revenues from the Northern region are not included in the project's reports.
21 Associação Nacional de Jornais.

22 Instituto Verificador de Circulação (IVC).

23 Intermeios Project.

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