

# THE ROLE OF TELEVISION JOURNALISM IN THE PRODUCTION OF POLITICAL NARRATIVES:

a comparative study Brazil/Colombia



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**ABSTRACT** – Based on the study of open TV news that covered the trials of former presidents of Colombia (Uribe) and Brazil (Lula), the article explores some of the editorial choices made by the two main news broadcasts in these countries (Jornal Nacional, from Brazilian Globo and Noticias Caracol, from Colombian Caracol) and analyzes the impact of these choices in the construction of narratives aimed at producing effects on public opinion. Despite the growing role of digital media in the societies analyzed, we argue that the amount of time devoted to the subject by these newscasts and the rhetorical resources used in the presentation of the news reveals the intentionality to thematize the public debate, even dominating the repercussion in other media and forcing a homogenized narrative of these facts, contributing to the political polarization and the spread of hate speech in the different spheres of the social system.

**Key words:** Narrative. Polarization. Television. Politics. Journalism.

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## O PAPEL DO TELEJORNALISMO NA PRODUÇÃO DE NARRATIVAS POLÍTICAS: um estudo comparado Brasil/Colômbia

**RESUMO** – A partir do estudo de noticiários de TV aberta que cobriram os julgamentos dos ex-presidentes da Colômbia (Uribe) e do Brasil (Lula), o artigo explora algumas das escolhas editoriais feitas pelos dois principais telejornais desses países (Jornal Nacional, da brasileira Globo; e Notícias Caracol, da colombiana Caracol) e analisa o impacto dessas escolhas na construção de narrativas voltadas a produzir efeitos na opinião pública. Apesar do crescente protagonismo das mídias digitais nas sociedades analisadas, arguimos que a quantidade de tempo dedicado ao assunto por esses telejornais e os recursos retóricos usados na apresentação das notícias revelam a intencionalidade de tematizar o debate público, dominando, inclusive, a repercussão nas demais mídias e forçando uma narrativa homogeneizada desses fatos, contribuindo para a polarização política e a propagação do discurso de ódio nas diversas esferas do sistema social.

**Palavras-chave:** Narrativa. Polarização. Televisão. Política. Jornalismo.

## EL PAPEL DE LOS MEDIOS TELEVISIVOS EN LA PRODUCCIÓN DE NARRATIVAS POLÍTICAS: un estudio comparativo entre Brasil y Colombia

**RESUMEN** – A partir del estudio de noticias de TV abierta que cubrió los juicios de los expresidentes de Colombia (Uribe) y Brasil (Lula), el artículo explora algunas de las decisiones editoriales de los dos principales noticieros de estos países (Jornal Nacional, de la brasileña Globo y Noticias Caracol, de la colombiana Caracol) y analiza el impacto de estas elecciones en la construcción de narrativas orientadas a producir efectos en la opinión pública. A pesar del creciente papel de los medios digitales en las sociedades analizadas, sostenemos que el tiempo dedicado al tema por estos noticieros y los recursos retóricos utilizados en la presentación de la noticia revelan la intencionalidad de tematizar el debate público, dominando incluso la repercusión. en otros medios y forzando una narrativa homogeneizada de estos hechos, contribuyendo a la polarización política y la difusión del discurso de odio en los diferentes ámbitos del sistema social.

**Palabras clave:** Narrativa. Polarización. Televisión. Política. Periodismo.

### 1 Introduction

The contemporary debate on the relationship between communication and politics has privileged the digital environment, especially the role of large platforms and their social networks as essential players in the construction of socio-political narratives. Although this is an unquestionable fact (further confirmed by the advent of the use of Big Data and artificial intelligence to influence the outcome of several electoral campaigns since 2016, including Donald Trump's presidential election) agents of news production and political narratives not anchored in digital platforms still play

an important role in the massification of discourses, especially in the thematization of issues aimed at influencing the process of public opinion formation (McLaughlin & Vélez, 2019; Traquina, 2020).

The study of the fundamental role that public broadcasting occupies in mass communication has been nurtured for almost four decades (Ianni, 1998; Weaver, 1972; Wolton, 1996). One of the most widely explored research lines –that of the effects on viewers –“focuses on the prospection and evaluation of the consequences of certain typical features of TV news in the coverage and display of politics” (Gomes, 2009). Even though there is a consensus about the growing role that digital “new media” play in the production of meaning on contemporary political narratives (Coleman, 1999; Sampaio, 2010; Hösl, 2019), it is undeniable that a “digital barrier” or “digital exclusion” (Martino, 2014) affects the base of the social pyramid of Latin American countries. This barrier still somewhat persists in Brazil and Colombia and continues to make open TV news, especially prime time news, the source of dominant mass political orientation.

In order to contribute with research about the dynamics that organize interpretations of the phenomena on the agenda from broadcast TV news programs, we propose to realize a content analysis of two Latin American news programs and their coverage of political events of great political and social impact. The news programs are *Jornal Nacional*, from Brazil, broadcasted by Rede Globo, and *Noticias Caracol*, a Colombian news program broadcast by TV Caracol. Both primetime programs are the most-watched in their respective countries (Kantar Ibope Media, 2018) and are therefore the ideal media outlets for building and elaborating narratives on the reported facts.

To do this, we took as objects of research the broadcasts that covered the most relevant events on the dates proposed for the study. Once separated, we provide a brief contextualization of each of the broadcasts. Afterward, we analyzed the internal structure of the news as well as the audiovisual tools used, the length of time both interviewees and journalists spoke for, and the highlighted words. We then performed a comparative analysis of the results to look for similarities and differences in how the facts were reported and which resources were used to report on these important political events in each country. Lastly, we will conclude with the final considerations.

The news coverage we chose for Brazil was the arrest warrant issued by former judge Sérgio Moro for former president Lula and his subsequent surrender to the Federal Police. For Colombia,

we focused on the news coverage of the supreme court's order to detain former President Álvaro Uribe and the subsequent referral of the case to Fiscalía (General Prosecutor Office of the Nation). Both former presidents were the most popular politicians in recent years in their respective countries. They governed for approximately the same period of time and both stood out as political and ideological references, although at opposite ends of the spectrum.

## 2 Research methodology

For this comparative journalism study, we conducted a content analysis (Bardin, 2011) of two similar political events and their news coverage by important Brazilian and Colombian television news programs. We organized the results using a hybrid technique of quantitative/qualitative analysis (Bauer, 2002), adopting as temporal cut-off the key dates in the two processes in question: in the case of former president Lula, his conviction and imprisonment, and in the case of former president Uribe, his detention, change of jurisdiction and subsequent release. We analyzed the collected material with an open model (Silva, 2005) from which we defined the elements for quantitative analysis: speaking times, audiovisual features, active voice, and keywords.

After building the database (see tables 1 to 4) we made a qualitative analysis of the construction of meaning proposed by each news program, their respective editorial choices, and how these choices suggest intent about the events studied. We conclude that the ideological character is present in both news coverages (although more distinct in one of them). The result of the study is relevant when considering the political role these news programs play in the dissemination of news and the construction of public opinion.

It is not the purpose of this article to explain the cases in detail, but rather to focus on the media representation of specific moments. We will briefly outline the context in which each episode took place.

Lula: the case of former president Lula begins with the Car Wash scandal in 2014, which started with rumors of the former president's possible involvement in the corruption scandals under investigation. After years of rumors and accusations by the press, in 2016 Lula is accused by the Public Ministry of receiving kickbacks

and concealment of assets. After months of questionable proceedings and accusations (Proner, 2017), former judge Sergio Moro sentenced Lula to nine years and six months in prison for passive corruption and money laundering. After negotiations, Lula turned himself in to the Federal Police in São Paulo in April 2018.

Uribe: The case against Uribe began in 2016, based on a complaint filed by the former president against the opposition senator Ivan Cepeda. Uribe accused Cepeda of bribing witnesses to implicate him in acts of corruption. In 2018, the Supreme Court, responsible for prosecuting politicians with parliamentary immunity, decided to close the case against Cepeda and based on the evidence, accuse Uribe of the same crimes previously charged to Cepeda, thus opening a new procedure. After two years, the Supreme Court ordered the detainment of the former president for corruption and procedural fraud (Gomez, 2020). The former president went public and published the decision on his Twitter account, and then confirmed it after giving an official statement. The decision became the most talked about topic in the Colombian political scene for weeks afterward.

The news programs were selected according to their audience reach; they are the highest-rated prime time news programs in their respective countries (Rating Colombia, 2020; Kantar Ibope Media, 2018). They also share resources and connections with a large communication network, with both *Jornal Nacional* and *Noticias Caracol* belonging to family-owned hegemonic media groups which are strongly linked to traditional economic structures. The *Jornal Nacional* on Rede Globo is part of the Grupo Globo, which is owned by the Marinho family, the largest media conglomerate in Latin America. The *Caracol* Channel, which produces *Noticias Caracol*, is owned by the business conglomerate Valorem, headed by the Santo Domingo family. It is one of the five largest business groups in Colombia and top of the list of conglomerate companies responsible for media products (Forbes, 2020).

The two news programs we studied run their operations in a similar fashion in their respective countries. *Noticias Caracol* is broadcast daily at 7 pm in Colombia. *Jornal Nacional* airs at 8:30 pm from Friday to Saturday throughout Brazil. According to websites specialized in measuring ratings (or points relative to the size of the audience per program and channel), this interval between 7:00 pm and 9:00 pm corresponds to the time when more people are watching television both in Brazil (Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 2016) and

Colombia (Kantar Ibope Media, 2018) and is, therefore, a coveted time slot for the construction of readings, especially when concealed by the façade of news objectivity.

Some consolidated features in research on television news in the last decades have maintained focus on electoral events to highlight shorter speaking times for politicians in contrast to the increasing interpretative presence of journalists (Hallin, 1992). However, this article is congruent with the research of professor and researcher Wilson Gomes who says:

[...] given the dominant grammar of TV news, and admitted its importance for the public visibility of the agents of the political field, [...] it is here to investigate the distribution of visibility in TV news through sound and other verbal and visual forms of presentation of politics. (Gomes, 2009, p. 6).

The corpus for the analysis is constituted by two (2) complete editions of *Jornal Nacional*: the first on July 12, 2017, the date on which the former Brazilian president was convicted by former judge Sérgio Moro; and the second on April 4, 2018, the date on which Lula turned himself in to the Federal Police in Curitiba, the capital of Paraná (state in the southern region of Brazil). After two hours of editing (one hour each day), we identified 77 minutes of material that focused on the process against Lula.

The *Caracol Notícias* news program does not make its previous editions completely available, it instead divides the edition into clips and publishes them on its website and its YouTube channel. We looked over all the videos published on the dates of our research and analyzed a total of approximately eighty (80) videos broadcast on these dates: 1) the detention order; 2) the change of jurisdiction; and 3) the freedom order. We selected 15 videos from this total which add to a total of about 60 minutes of video on the subjects under analysis.

### 3 The *Jornal Nacional* and Lula's case

Quantitatively, the analyzed broadcasts of *Jornal Nacional* devote special attention to Lula's case. Research on *Jornal Nacional* indicates that the time dedicated to politics in each edition does not usually exceed 20% of the total time (Gomes, 2009; Porto, 2002). However, in the analyzed programs, the time dedicated to politics was significantly higher, considering that the subject Lula

is eminently political. On the day Lula was sentenced by former judge Moro, the news program dedicated 31 minutes to the subject, equivalent to more than 58% of the program's gross time. On the day Lula turned himself in to police authorities, the time dedicated to the coverage of this fact and its repercussion was 46 minutes, equivalent to 70% of the news program's air time, a longer edition than usual, with 67 minutes of raw edition against the conventional 53 minutes (see Table 1).

These numbers indicate not only the topicality but mainly the relevance of the case for the public debate at that moment. Considering that the self-proclaimed image of prime time news (and particularly TV Globo's *Jornal Nacional*) is that of objectivity and neutrality focused on hard news (recent and important facts), the airtime of a subject strongly impacts its visibility in the public sphere (Gomes, 2009), producing the thematization and scheduling of the public debate.

In this sense, we can think that the hierarchy theorized by Shoemaker and Reese in 1996, and later updated in 2013, can still be applied in institutional environments of news content production. They are based on the gatekeeper theory popularized since the 1950s and analyze the levels of influence that "shape the production of news content: [these levels are] individual, media routines, organizational, extramedia, and ideological" (Schwalbe, 2015, p. 3).

In the editions of *Jornal Nacional*, we observe that a dominant aspect in the most complex reports is the almost uninterrupted narration of a reporter that describes and explains the images, linking them in a flow of apparent causality that proposes a coherent narrative from the fragments, even privileging some characters in the main body of the report and leaving for the final minutes the opposite version. Moreover, from the viewer's perspective, Globo's news is aired between two soap operas, in a moment of idleness and relaxation before the end of the day's activities, which puts the viewer in a particularly receptive state to editorial influences.

The following is a description of the timetable within the edition. By the predominance of voice, the division of these is marked by the voice that is being heard, either in the scene, i.e., with the image of the person who is speaking, or in an off-scene as narrator voice-over supporting images.

**Table 1***Division of time in the Jornal Nacional editions*

Editions/Internal division of content in minutes	Total editing time (no commercial breaks)	Time dedicated to the case of Lula	Time for Lula supporters	Time for opponents and others
July 12, 2017	53 minutes 100%	31 minutes 58%	3 minutes and 3 seconds 5.75%	1 minute and 1 second 2%
April 4, 2018	67 minutes 100%	46 minutes 70%	2 minutes and 33 seconds 3.8%	3 minutes 51 seconds 5.7%

We can see that although the time dedicated to Lula's case is much longer than what is normally dedicated to articles on politics, the capacity for narrative construction (or the discourse built from the facts contained in the story) is more dominated by the journalists' voice or point of view. Table 1 shows that the time not allocated to supporters or others is given to the voice of journalists who are constantly describing some fact.

The first element that fits in this polarized and polemic context is the trial of former president Lula and its developments. Jornal Nacional, with its large audience base and appearance of impartiality (Bucci, 1996), is responsible for translating a situation into something less chaotic with unbiased political positions; the news program just presents the facts and recaps the events as they occur, or at least this is the image it defends. In addition, we included an analysis sheet with the categories observed in the formal aspects of the news construction.

**Table 2**

*Categories of analysis in the Jornal Nacional editions*

	Audiovisual tools	Narration / Text / Voice	Keyword
12/07/17 Conviction of Lula by former judge Moro	File images to support the text	Textual reading of the former judge's sentence, read by journalists	
	Unclear photos. Taken from hidden cameras	Journalists' speeches as a synthesis of reactions	Common crime, Judge Moro, Conviction
	Animation: highlight fragments of the sentence	Testimonials from the reactions	"no one is above the law"
	3D animation, rusty pipeline, 100 reais notes, and photo of Lula with conviction. In the background, you can read the word "convicted"		"documentary, expert and testimonial evidence"
	Animation of the following stages of the proceedings with photos of those involved (e.g., judges)		"Law is for everyone"
	Testimonials of the reactions		"Partiality"
	Testimony of the defense of the former president		
07/04/18 Lula's arrest day	Helicopter	A narration of the day's events by journalists	"globocop"
	A live correspondent on location (airports, detention facility in Curitiba)	Fragments of speeches outside the union	"tension"
	Teleobjective	Summary of Lula's speech by the anchorwoman	"supporters"
	Digital zoom/emphasis on fragments of the frame	A narration of the next steps in the judicial process	"live"
	Repetitive editing	Moro speaks in English without translation or subtitles	
	Narrative and montage of tension (images of confrontation between supporters and detractors, the gate being torn down)		
	Journalist in the studio, standing off to the side of the screen with live pictures		
	Interview image of former judge Moro		

We see some elements that allow us to question the objectivity of the editions under analysis. Let's start with the July 5, 2017 edition, the date that former Judge Moro convicted Lula. The news program begins by announcing that Lula was the first president in the history of Brazil to be convicted of common crimes, something they would continue to repeat and focus on throughout the broadcast.

After 20 minutes of covering cases of corruption with Temer's government, the anchorman for the newscast presents the case seriously, mentioning for a second time that the conviction was upheld only after the judge "analyzed documentary, expert and testimonial evidence" (sic). After presenting the case, the anchorman invited viewers to continue watching after the commercial break. The closing image as the *Jornal Nacional* went to break showed a picture of Lula's face on a newsroom montage with the words "passive corruption and money laundering" next to it, as shown in Figure 1.

It is evident from the narrative construction of this episode that the facts were read according to what the judge had said. This is apparent in the program's decision to dedicate 15 minutes, or 50%, of the total analysis to reading and explaining the sentence. The program has the news anchors and off-air voices of other journalists explaining the facts, accompanied by images of the actors mentioned in their discussion. These images were primarily of Lula, of the Guarujá triplex case<sup>1</sup>, and of a 3D montage of a dark and dirty space, including animation stills of what looks to be a rusted pipeline with notes of R\$ 100 scattered around it, alluding to the idea of hidden money, in a caricature of the corruption present in the sentence (See figure 2).

### Figure 1

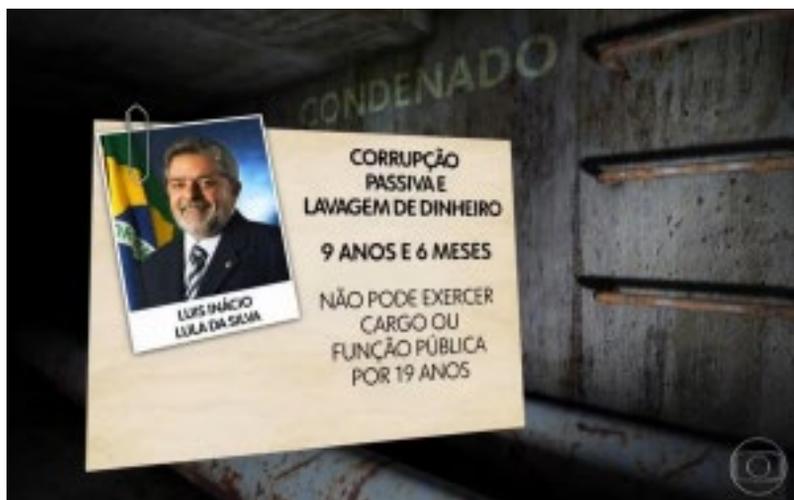
*Image of Jornal Nacional broadcast*



Source: *Jornal Nacional* (12/07/2017)<sup>4</sup>

## Figure 2

*Image of Jornal Nacional broadcast*



Source: Jornal Nacional (12/07/2017)<sup>5</sup>

In this edition, the news program seeks to explain each of the evidential elements used in the ruling as well as demonstrate how the former president was not able to give clear explanations to the accusations of his guilt.

The part dedicated to the judge's ruling dominates, yet it is journalists who narrate the words of the judge, whose power as an institutional figure is given a prominent place in the news. The images of the former judge are always taken from his official speeches where he is seen smiling and looking pleasant.

After 20 minutes of describing the ruling and the direction the process should take after the trial, the news program got reactions from public figures, mainly in the Senate. This is a short segment, less than a minute in length, which shows three PT<sup>1</sup> senators talking about the ruling. The senators are always talked about as being “under investigation” or “accused in the Car Wash scandal”<sup>2</sup> before anyone even hears their arguments and how they criticize the ruling handed down by the former judge.

Here, the editorial line becomes a little less descriptive, which we understand as a discursive strategy for reading this event. For example, at the 44'27” mark, journalist Camila Bonfim, who presented the segment and introduced the senators who support the former

president, speaks to the camera and says: “members of the Workers Party expected this ruling and already have a strategy lined up: disqualify the decision of Judge Sergio Moro”. The statement presented in the same tone and the same formal hierarchy as other analyses was noticeable when we saw 20 minutes of arguments that defend the evidence and that organize the reading of the facts from the ruling itself.

The same speaking time was given to the senators who defended the ruling as the senators who criticized it, with a minor difference of 10 seconds more given to the senators who supported the ruling. The edition then shows the defense’s official statement, given in a hotel in São Paulo. The program dedicates three minutes and 38 seconds to this part, a substantial amount considering how the program is laid out. During this segment, the defense organizes the arguments and mentions the strategies they will use, stressing that the ruling was for a crime that had not been proven to occur.

This is the last segment with external images in this edition before the program returns to the news anchors. The closing theme begins, and the news anchors show a list of open processes against the former president. This allows us to conclude that there is a large number of cases against the former president in addition to what was mentioned in the program. Words like “defendant”, “inquiry”, “criminal organization”, “Petrobras defraud”, and “hidden bribe” end the segment on the former president. Viewers are then told to stay tuned for the football game right after the soap opera.

When studying the place of news on television, Bucci states that “television news knew how to add to the general rule of spectacularization, a melodramatic course, almost as if it were a piece of fiction” (2000, p. 27). Thus, the news, inserted in the logic of spectacularization, competes for viewers by showing images and texts to build a coherent narrative.

We see that *Jornal Nacional* seems to have internalized the resources to maintain its struggle to be a protagonist in the entertainment field. The beginning of the coverage of former president Lula’s surrender seems to represent this. The second edition we analyzed was from April 6, 2018, the day ex-president Lula turned himself in to the Federal Police. This newscast began with unclear images, which viewers are used to seeing in a sensationalist television show like this one which pursues criminals or cars which are on the run.

Analyzing the characteristics of telejournalism, Canavilhas comments on the effect of

## live broadcasting:

[The] maximization of emotion is transmitted via information in real-time. If the live broadcast is associated with the unforeseen, then the information-show reaches its highest point [...] the broadcast does not allow points of view: the images are taken in raw, leaving only freedom for commentaries. The lack of background leads to the uniformization of the commentary and redundancy since the event is only the moment. (Canavilhas, 2001, p. 9).

The use of the long-range camera and digital zoom to facilitate what is being narrated (sometimes the image was paused to highlight a particular element within this disorganized scene) is understandable because, after all, it is a crime that is being recorded, and the poor aesthetics almost highlight the marginal character of the situation.

The images at the beginning of the April 7, 2018 edition are shot similarly but the subject the cameras are following is former president Lula, in the moments leading up to his surrender. Once the edition begins, the news anchors briefly highlight the events of the day and quickly move on to live images of the plane taking off. Live images are one of the most distinctive features of television and news.

The image is simple: just a small plane taking off. The image is poorly lit and follows the movement of the plane on the runway and according to the video edition, we think that the plane may have taken off a little earlier as now a helicopter is following the plane. The journalist repeats several times: “we have just seen the plane take off here at Congonhas airport, in the south zone of São Paulo”, “you are with us live at this moment, you can see...”. There are almost three minutes of coverage dedicated to the plane without any other idea being developed other than the reiterating of the two phrases mentioned above.

The presentation of facts is the editorial logic of all editions and is mostly guided by the speech of journalists who manage the information to build meaning. The speeches of external agents comprise only 9.5% of the entire program. From this total, 3.8% are voices in support of the former president (see Table 1).

The narrative in this edition summarizes the day's events and centers on the figure of the former president who was speaking to the “steelworks union in the ABC Region (metropolitan area of São Paulo)”. The speeches describe large segments of time using supporting images, mainly of the helicopter and some showing a

close-up of the former president and his supporters in the car where the speeches were held. These journalists' narrations are accompanied by fragments of speeches, Dilma Rousseff saying a prayer, which is given a representative time (29 seconds), and three fragments of Lula speaking, about 30 seconds in length for each.

Lula spoke for more than 10 minutes, so it was interesting to see how the segments summarized his speech. There were three segments in total: the first has Lula criticizing Moro; in the second he talks about the MST (the Movement of Landless Rural Workers) and the organized protests and tire burning; in the third, he talks about his reasons for why he decided to turn himself in. This amounts to a total of one minute and thirty seconds of edited speech.

After commenting on the rest of Lula's speech and on the reactions of those who opposed it, the edition continued to describe the day's events, using mainly long-range images, digital zooms, and a constant tension in which supporters of the former president were described as creating problems for the authorities, blocking the flow of traffic, and not allowing journalists to get close to them, forcing them to record from a distance.

The news program also has a large block that is edited and narrated by several journalists who comment on the process of the former president, going through each accusation and how the defense's arguments were invalidated in the process. It also shows the place in Curitiba where the former president was to be detained and how this was included in his sentencing. At this time, they added a segment, only a few seconds in length, of an interview with Moro in which he is speaking English, but it was not translated or subtitled into Portuguese.

After giving details of the process and showing segments where judges used technical terms to describe the illustrated events, the segment on Lula concluded with images of the Federal Justice building in Rio being vandalized. This segment lasts for more than three minutes which included separate interviews condemning the vandalism and the attack on the building.

Other statements were also given in a closed individual interview by opponents and critics of the former president condemning his speech, reinforcing the narrative that the "powerful must also answer to justice". The only reaction opposed to Lula's imprisonment in this program came from a PC do B (Brazil's Communist Party) deputy. His segment lasted a total of 13 seconds.

#### 4 Noticias Caracol and the Uribe case

The material gathered from the newscast in Colombia consisted of videos that were uploaded on the relevant dates for our research, as listed in the table below:

**Table 3**

*Number and time of videos on Noticias Caracol*

Date of issue	Number of videos	Total length of videos
August 4	7	33 minutes and 12 seconds
August 31	4	10 minutes and 47 seconds
October 10	3	15 minutes and 44 seconds

The Caracol news channel only uploads clips of its broadcast material on its YouTube channel, thus making a complete analysis of the broadcast impossible. As a result, we selected the clips that referred to the case under analysis in this paper and which were posted on the same dates we analyzed them. On the first day, August 4, 2020, we divided the videos into lengths ranging from one to eight minutes.

Of the seven videos we studied, we easily identified three as having been published after the event itself had occurred, in other words, they were reaction videos and organized with last-minute information. The other four videos were published at the end of the day and had a more elaborate tone with more time spent on editing.

In the afternoon videos, we found a significant amount of time, around eight minutes, dedicated to a video interview held with two senators who oppose the government and the former president, Uribe. In the evening videos, priority was given to the narrative construction from the journalist's perspective, a chronological recap of the events lasted for about 30 seconds (in a four-minute and twenty-one-second video) reading statements from the former president himself. Another 50 seconds were dedicated to the journalists reading tweets that the former president had published during the process.

**Table 4***Categories of analysis in the Noticias Caracol editions*

	Audiovisual tools	Narration / Text / Voice	Keywords (in Spanish)
04/08/2020 Arrest order against former president Uribe.	Split-screen with journalists who specialize in different aspects of the case.	Journalist narrations presenting the videos and testimonials.	Supreme Court; detención domiciliaria; reacciones; efectos políticos; respeto a la justicia; nadie está por encima de la ley; análisis; fraude processual; manipulación de testigos; grabaciones; JEP (Justicia especial para la paz).
	File images of Uribe walking in public buildings.	Uribe's tweet was narrated by a journalist.	
	Archive footage of Uribe's interviews.	Audios of telephone wiretaps on the former president.	
	Images illustrating the text.	Interview with the victim (senator Cepeda).	
	Featured Uribe's Tweet.		
	Video of Uribe making journalists and guests laugh.		
	Graphics to illustrate the phone wiretaps.		
31/08/2020	Live interview with the victim of the lawsuit.		Fiscalia; process; expertise; jurisdiction.
	Interview with opposition senator.		
	Archive images of the characters mentioned.	Introduction and explanation of journalists.	
	Expert Testimonials (video conferences).	"Authority" explanation from experts.	
10/10/2020	Depositions from the case.	Opinions from the parties (counsel for the defendant and victim).	Libertad, juez de garantías, indagatoria, imputación, "gracias a dios".
	Journalist in the studio with images of the next steps of the process on the side of the screen.	Opinions of opponents and supporters of the defendant.	
	Journalists on set.	Journalists' narration summarizing the facts.	
10/10/2020	Trial session in the video.	A segment of the judge's speech granting the defendant's freedom.	
	A journalist reporting live from home.		
	Supporters of the former president in interviews and speeches.		

The news is presented in a serious tone and does not contain many visual elements, the videos refer to the subjects that are being mentioned and even take images and segments from the afternoon broadcast and repeat them in the evening broadcast. The content maintains an inquisitive nature about the development of the events, together with a perception of uncertainty constantly repeated by the news anchor when he says that the detainment of the former president may lead congress to “a polarized and enraged environment” between “supporters and opponents of the president”, a statement that highlights the value the newscast gives to the former president.

The second day of the Uribe case we analyzed was August 31, 2020, the same date on which the case was moved to another jurisdiction. This was a significant change in the case, and it is quite surprising that there are only four news clips published about it on this day. Only one of these clips lays out the steps behind the decision to move jurisdiction, another one speculates on the future of the case, and two others talk about the victim in the case, Senator Ivan Cepeda.

The four videos have a total running time of 10 minutes, about four minutes of which contain interviews with, and statements made by, subjects relevant to the case: the victim and the defendant’s lawyer; experts; a Supreme Court minister; and former attorney general of the republic. We observed that the Caracol newscast objectively represented the parties in the case, which provided for a less monopolized elaboration of the narrative construction of the events.

The third day analyzed was October 10, 2020, the date when the ruling judge in the Uribe case declared that the defendant was to be set free. The decision was made based on a change that had occurred to the law which affected the rules of the case as they applied to the defendant. The coverage of this event was brief, almost reserved, in comparison to the coverage on the case from the other days.

The news report presents the news based mainly on images taken from the virtual hearing, in which the judge, using legal language, concludes the trial by issuing the immediate release of the defendant. The journalistic analysis focuses on the rigor of the law applied in the case, that is, a reading of the technical aspects of the events and avoiding any political

assessments or positions. This is reinforced by the guests, experts, and former judicial officials who state that, to quote the words of one of the guests, “here you cannot evaluate things from an emotional or political point of view, only a legal one” (Alfonso Iguarán, Interview for Noticias Caracol, October 10, 2020)<sup>6</sup> It also draws attention to the lack of room space for any alternative readings of the event; the journalists, specialists, and other guests all agree with the notion of independence and objectivity of justice. However, the off-screen journalists do allude slightly to the possibility of further polarization due to the judge’s ruling, which may also suggest an editorial decision to avoid positions that openly support polarization.

### **5 Elements for the construction of the analysis**

When talking about the development of the importance of media and news as articulators in public debate, Habermas states (Barbero, 1991) that the function of journalism is to constitute itself as a space of open deliberation between the public and private fields, thus highlighting its relationship with politics and the defense of democracy. Thus, the Habermasian view “emphasizes the potential for a strong democracy through public deliberation in the media sphere”, as researcher and professor John Nerone (2013, p. 448) claims. However, this contrasts with a tragic loss of this quality today, as “wasted on the capture of media, first by the market and then by industrial capitalism, as the 19th century gave way to the 20th century” (p. 448).

In contrast to the view of the media being controlled by politics, there is also a historical analysis of its role as the driving force behind creating the media and the press, including the development of a media culture that emphasizes political neutrality and even a certain kind of “objectivity” (Schudson, 1978). These two aspects – the market and the political control – have followed the press since the nineteenth century; these elements are still present in discussions about journalism, although adapted to the major technological revolutions and crises that have occurred over the years in journalism.

In the Brazilian case, we need to consider other elements when evaluating this objectivity. The following

hypothesis proposed by researcher Afonso Albuquerque (2000) is relevant:

[...] the Brazilian press defines itself, like the American one, as a “fourth power”, but it conceives its political role in much more active terms than the latter. More than merely contributing to the balance between the constituted powers, the Brazilian press has claimed authority to, in cases of disputes between them, intervene in favor of one power against the other, in order to preserve public order. Behind the “American” discourse on the ‘fourth power’, and not necessarily consciously, hides an entirely different model about its purpose, the characteristically Brazilian model of the “moderating power”. (Albuquerque, 2000, p. 43).

This hypothesis does not declare a consensus regarding this moderating power, nor a legitimation of it, but rather an elaborate stance concerning the socio-political context in which a journalist’s work takes place, and that it is essential to analyze the strategies adopted as well.

In relation to another aspect mentioned by Nerone, about how the market is a decisive element in the capture of the media, some authors associate TV news in Latin America as competition for other media products, such as soap operas or reality shows (Pizarro, 2011; Pellegrini, 2010). Thus, their products have more of a sensationalist element to them and maintain a short-term attention span of viewers. With these elements in mind, we look at the analysis of the data collected from our observation of the news programs.

## **6 Comparative analysis of the results**

The two news programs on the dates selected for analysis are facing an event that reflects the ethical and formal challenges of the approach to central polarizing facts. The challenge when thinking about ethics in journalistic work is not a search for objectivity, but the understanding that, in the words of Dennis de Oliveira:

[...] journalism is a process of selection or choices, from the agenda to the edition, journalism ethics should focus on the criteria that guide these selections. What are the criteria that select the subjects that deserve to be reported, those that guide the selection of sources, the angulation, and the hierarchy of the stories? In other words, the reconstruction of reality made in journalism is driven by

values – and that is where journalistic ethics comes in (Oliveira, 2008, p. 8).

We understand, with Oliveira, that it is on these criteria that organize the information and distribute the loads, the aesthetic choices, the presence of actors, the hierarchy of the lines, that we should guide our analysis. All these elements contribute to the transmission of events, in the reconstruction and formation of a narrative, a logical reading of chained facts that allows the viewer to construct meaning.

In polarized contexts, in which the public space is saturated with opposite and emotionally charged readings, the serious reading of a newscast is positioned as a space to build meaning for much of the public, and until more recent studies, it has remained the privileged source of access to news both in Colombia and Brazil (Kantar Ibope Media, 2020; IBGE, 2020).

In its privileged place of access to the viewer's home, the TV news is positioned as an integrator of events, because as commented by researcher Claudia Lago,

Cultural psychologists claim that our tendency to organize experience in narrative form is a human impulse that predates the acquisition of language: we have a primitive and innate predisposition to the narrative organization of reality. (Lago, 2007, p. 145).

Jornal Nacional dedicates an extraordinary part of its edition to the coverage of the events concerning former president Lula. In it we see a deep tendency to the television spectacle (Sartori, 2014; Nunomura, 2012), encouraged by live images, follow up from the helicopter, and a latent tension in the presentation of the events, especially the day of the surrender to the authorities.

At the same time, in the edition in which the newscaster analyzes the ruling we see that he tries to build a narrative by trying to align events and isolated facts to build an internal meaning.

The fragmented news of every day naturally conforms diffuse integralities, significant unitary events. The news of each day can prolong the conformation of the plot and delay the denouement of the event, as it happens in short stories and novels. But the reader's search is always for unitary meanings, for comprehensive connections. (Motta, 2004, p. 19).

The unitary sense that seeks to be built in this edition is clearly guided by the words of former judge Moro, and it is the sentence itself read by journalists that configures the role of the narrator of the edition. Under the image of the infallibility of justice and especially the hero image elaborated around the former judge, it seems understandable this editorial decision.

However, when we think about a polarized context as the one existing at the time of the trial and the multiple studies that criticize the objectivity of the sentence (Proner et al., 2017) we can infer a clear positioning by Jornal Nacional when assuming as a meaning-creating reading one of the poles of the context.

Giving voice to both sides of the same story when two sides are facing each other in it is both an ethical and technical requirement of journalism. Seeking the truth of the facts is an ethical imperative – and also the goal of all journalistic techniques. (Bucci, 2000, p. 50).

In the case of the Caracol news channel, we see that the program tries to build the reading of the context based on the sum of elements and a few comments offered by journalists. It chooses aspects it considered fundamental, in this situation, the technical aspects of the case, which, in radical opposition to the treatment given to Lula's case studied in Brazil, allowed the moral and political aspects involved in the process against former president Uribe to take a back seat to the issues of the legal procedures involved.

On the day the order of preventive detention against former President Uribe was issued, for example, we notice a diversity of sources and voices that respond to the ethical and technical requirements mentioned by Professor Bucci (2000). The narrative is focused on the facts and the court ruling, although little is mentioned of it we see a speech from a magistrate of the Supreme Court explaining the decision. We also see in both opponents and supporters of the decision and even hear a conversation collected from the intercepts on the defendant's phone, allowing a more comprehensive perception of the elements involved in the process by the viewer and strengthening a notion of neutral narrative construction.

However, we see a shift in the development of the story since the space for discourse from people other than journalists is

restricted almost entirely to experts and focuses mainly on technical aspects of the judicial process, the narrative of the story ends up becoming a series of legal analyses in which the crimes and the political and ethical elements that were strongly criticized by the victim of the process are presented only as being unrelated or not closely connected.

## 7 Concluding remarks

Our analysis of the editions of *Jornal Nacional* and *Noticias Caracol* revealed that there are some important differences to consider. Both news outlets maintained clear editorial positions regarding the former presidents during their governments: *Jornal Nacional* hardly hid its position of criticism and opposition to the PT government and particularly to Lula (Vasconcellos, 2014), while *Caracol Noticias*, although more moderate than other television newscasts on Colombian television, was more in line with the discourse of the Uribe government in a type of ideological homogenization of the Colombian media at the time (Ayala, 2006).

These contextual elements are not irrelevant when we see former presidents being recalled to the spotlight. *Jornal Nacional*, under the pretense of defending the law and using a moralistic and anti-corruption discourse, finds a way to define one of the discussion poles as a homogenizing reading of the context, in other words, behind the journalists' words there is a tendency to legitimize a polemic position as a unitary sense.

*Noticias Caracol*, however, clearly seeks more of a balance between the parties, although the serious and withdrawn manner with which it treats the former president is notable. It hardly gives details of the crimes or explanations of the ruling, which is odd as it was considered -and criticized- for being a "lengthy" ruling yet only mentioned in passing.

With the Colombian case, we see that the narrative construction of isolated facts keeps the viewer at a distance, especially in the second and third dates of the analysis, which contain an abundance of expressions and technical legal explanations that contribute to a reading of objectivity and infallibility of justice, draining the ethical and political elements relevant to the crimes,

and consequently, their results.

We can also conclude that *Jornal Nacional* has an ideological position in line with that of the hypothesis of Albuquerque (2000), which is that it recognizes itself as a power actor. And not just one that monitors the actions of the three government powers, but explicitly tries to validate a specific stance at a time of intense polarization and polemics. On the other hand, in the case of *Caracol Noticias*, we recognize that this ideological stance is not explicit, but rather tacit when seeking defined objectivity and giving a voice to the parties, one more in line with a resource frequently used in the United States of leaving the public to decide which of the interpretations is most correct (Tuchman, 1993). However, the choice, deliberate or not, to not cover the judicial development of a case of such relevance in greater depth can be interpreted as an editorial position with clear beneficiaries.

The challenge for journalists now lies in the displacement of the monopoly on the construction of narratives, a displacement that we see taking place with the virtualization of relations and the digitalization of information. In this sense, the challenge lies in constant discussions of the ethical and qualitative values of journalism in the context of financial capitalism, as well as the possibility of alternatives for a diverse construction of meanings for a truly democratic exercise.

## NOTES

- 1 The triplex was the supposed evidence alleged by the prosecutors to demonstrate the bribe that former president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva would have received to benefit the Odebrecht construction.
- 2 Historical left party led by former president Lula.
- 3 A famous operation, known for the judicialization of corruption cases and the politicization of justice.
- 4 Retrieved from: [www.globoplay.globo.com/v/6003762/](http://www.globoplay.globo.com/v/6003762/)
- 5 Retrieved from: [www.globoplay.globo.com/v/6003762/](http://www.globoplay.globo.com/v/6003762/)

- 6 (Interview available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sStk8M2Tak&t=205s>)

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