

# MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ON THE FRONT PAGES OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS:

A comparison between newspaper journalism in two cities with different political configurations and its effect on mass democracy

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## ABSTRACT

The paper discusses front-page headlines concerning the 2008 municipal electoral disputes in Brazilian daily newspapers. The front pages of two newspapers were analyzed: *Gazeta do Povo* and *Jornal da Manhã*. The first is distributed regionally and is published in Curitiba, the capital of Paraná state. The second has local circulation and is restricted to the interior of Paraná state. For comparative purposes, the type of visibility given to the municipal elections in each newspaper was evaluated, with the goal of identifying the importance of electoral campaigning in the news. The discussion centers on the role of the media in the dissemination of politically relevant information, taking into consideration the electoral context. While in Curitiba the incumbent mayor was re-elected in the first round with almost 80% of the votes, indicating a lack of a real electoral dispute, in Ponta Grossa the candidate for re-election won in the runoff election with a less than 4% advantage over the runner-up. The analysis questions the need to consider the social context to explain journalistic production.

**Key-words:** political journalism, elections, first page, media democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary democratic societies are commonly identified by their “public democracy” (Manin, 1995) or “opinion government” (Vallespin, 1998), in great part because the authors that create such terminology assume that mass communication has a fundamental role in the socialization and diffusion of information about politics, and consequently, in the transmission of information about representatives and represented. The general argument is based on the principle that government officials are more sensitive to the demands of the citizens

because there is a close interaction between both groups through content transmitted universally by mass communication. This would create what one could call a “government of opinion”, or a democracy shaped by the actions of politicians influenced directly by information disseminated by mass communication and its effect on public opinion. This specific form of democratic practice mediated by the press is defined here as “mediatic democracy”.

However, for public opinion to have the capability to produce a coherent and efficient political judgment that can sustain its political position, it needs a fundamental resource: the diffusion of information by mass media. Without that, there would be no way to consolidate democracy. Usually, this means asserting that there is a public space where citizens have the right to freedom of expression and that everyone can hear what others have to say, as well as make themselves heard. Furthermore, this public space needs to be ample, since it is the place where issues of general interest are discussed.

Despite all the limitations for commercial mass communication to perform the role of diffusing political information, it is still considered crucial in universal mass democracies. The difference between public and private is still present, but in public space the interests can be generalized, which is not the case with private space. Another usual characteristic of this definition is rationality, since it considers that freedom of interaction in the public sphere leads to debate, which will allow the prevalence of the best alternative (BLANCO, 1999). For that to happen, it is necessary that political issues circulate in this sphere. Finally, mediatic democracy requires acceptance of all participants, since differences between those expressing their opinion in the public sphere are expected. According to this normative model, the diffusion of divergent opinions places the media as intermediaries in the public debate.

The challenge for the application of mediatic democracy's prescriptive concept in contemporary democracies is visible when the premises presented above are not established, causing the basic premise of this type of democracy – the free circulation of information about politics in the public sphere – to disappear. Authors such as Dader (1992) consider the existence of at least three threats to the proper functioning of mediatic democracy. The first is the asymmetry generated by the predominance of contents produced by international agencies and published by media all over the planet. The transmission of the same images and political facts to everyone causes stratification, thus reducing the debate's plurality and resulting in excessive concentration of decision-making power as

to what circulates or not in the public sphere through the media. The second threat is the predominance of a private discussion in the public space, that is, the dissemination of issues with interests that cannot be generalized. The increasing presence of private life scandals in the public space, expressed as a form of mediatic voyeurism, is an example of this threat. Finally, as a consequence of the constant need of the political elite to respond to the demands of the media, mediatic democracy can bring about the negative effect of diminishing political discourse, mixing what should be a resource for rational debate with the distraction of humorous information. This reduction of the political theme creates a barrier to rationality, transforming the consumption of media into the mere satisfaction of curiosity.

This paper aims at discussing a fourth possible limitation to mediatic democracy that precedes the three cited above, which is whether the media give visibility to political themes or not. The argument is based on the consideration that it is wrong to define mediatic democracy only as a function of the potential availability of the media to diffuse political information. Before discussing whether there is asymmetry in the definition of contents, whether the debate is primarily of a private nature and whether it reduces the political discourse, it is necessary to know whether political themes obtain spaces affording visibility in the media. If the media pay little attention to political themes and if these spaces are of lesser visibility, then the media's role as facilitator of a debate concerning politics in the public space is undermined, as is the idea of a mediatic democracy based on the discussion of themes of public interest that circulate freely within the public space.

The central question is: do the media insert the political theme in spaces of greatest visibility? To discuss this, two Brazilian daily newspapers with different geographical circulation were researched during a moment of intense political debate: electoral campaigning. The specific object of attention is their front page, considered the space with the most visibility and consequently of greatest importance for news producers. The goal is to verify, during the 2008 municipal elections, when and how the themes "electoral campaign" and "general politics" appear on the front pages of these newspapers. It is not, however, an exhaustive analysis of all media tools or the effects that the contents have on the public. It aims only at pointing out how politics and elections appear in spaces of greater visibility of two newspapers with distinct areas of circulation. *Jornal da Manhã* is a local newspaper with six editions per week that circulates mainly in the city of Ponta Grossa (in the interior of the state of Paraná,

with a population of approximately 350,000). *Gazeta do Povo* is a bigger periodical, with state-wide circulation and its head office in Curitiba, Paraná's capital. The analysis focuses on the first pages of all editions of both newspapers between August 1st and October 31st, when the campaigns for the first and second rounds of mayoralty and city council elections in all Brazilian cities occurred.

The presence of headlines concerning the electoral dispute on the first page will be considered an indication that the media perform their role as disseminators of information about political themes of public interest and represent a source for rational debate. The empirical analysis uses two variables to identify the characteristics of headlines on the front pages of the newspapers. The first is the theme of the headline. The themes "electoral campaign" and "institutional politics" are analyzed in relation to their incidence by types of headlines, for there is a difference of visibility between them. Another variable is the text's format. The formats identified, in decreasing order of visibility, are: main headline with or without photo, headline with or without photo, photo with captions, and teasers. The position of the text on the page – on the top or bottom half of the page, or first- or second-fold headlines – was another variable used to identify the level of visibility given to the theme on the front pages of newspapers. Finally, the scope of the headlines concerning elections is analyzed, whether they focus on the dispute closer to the newspaper's target audience or on more distant electoral contexts, which can generate an asymmetry between journalistic coverage and the public debate.

The text is divided in three parts: the first involves the academic debate concerning the role of front pages of print media and their importance for the visibility of public themes. The second touches on the main characteristics of the two newspapers analyzed, as well as the electoral contexts specific to each city where the newspapers are headquartered. Lastly, the results of the empirical research are presented with an analysis of the main variables related to the newspapers' front pages. This work was possible thanks to the inter-institutional participation of the research groups Media, Politics and Social Actors from the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG) and Political Communication from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), that used the same methodology during the 2008 elections.

### **Visibility of politics on the front pages**

The role of modern media in democracies goes beyond the diffusion

of information during electoral periods, since it is through the media that elected representatives and government can publicly account for their activities, which, in effect, causes the media to substitute for traditional institutions that mediate between representatives and the represented, such as political parties (Manin, 1995). In this sense, according to Marcus Figueiredo, “nowadays, politicians are dependent on the media because the networks of social communication have captured public preference as their main source of information for political decision-making” (Figueiredo, 2000 p. 41).

The natural space for political decision-making in representative democracies is the electoral period, when voters/consumers of information receive informational resources from mass communication for future political decisions. Understanding the criteria used by journalists to select social facts and to shape the edition of daily newspapers is important to order to identify their role in the public space.

Contrary to what is usually thought of the participation of mass communication in the public debate of modern democracies, the selection and ranking process of social facts that compose journalistic media is not simple. It is part of a complex system of exchanges and negotiations that involve symbolic values intrinsic to the media, as well as external to them due to “commercial” needs inherent in the “business” of mass communication. As a result of this process, it is considered that communication media decisively contribute to the development of political reality through an agenda of themes (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), especially in spaces of greater visibility.

To discuss spaces with high visibility in print media, it is necessary to look at the front pages of newspapers, which function as a window for the content presented inside. In the face of the complexity of such phenomena, it is insufficient to think of the news only as a result of a selection process based on elements of social themes defined by journalists according to their own criteria of newsworthiness. It must be argued that the selection and classification of news in newspapers are related to at least two complementary dimensions that coexist in the production of messages. There is an informational dimension, related to the technical aspects socialized among those that produce and diffuse information through the media, and a narrative dimension, which is the moment in which the information gains aspects of stories told to the public as a way to help comprehend reality.

According to Afonso Albuquerque, while the informative dimension tries to portray reality as faithfully as possible, the narrative dimension

recreates a story, with the objective of making it more approachable for consumers. In his words, “the narrative dimension tends to be identified as a betrayal of the principle of journalistic objectivity, despite making the social fact better understood” (Albuquerque, 2000 p.74). There are themes more appropriate for a communication in which the narrative dimension predominates, generally characterized by great humanistic appeal, while for other issues the informative dimension is more evident at the end of the production process and diffusion of news. These two dimensions, when transported to the front pages of newspapers, have great importance for the identification of premises for the proper functioning of media democracy. Themes with a humanistic appeal treated with a more subjective narrative tend to cover aspects of private life and reduce political discourse, which, as discussed earlier, restricts the possibility of a free and rational debate about politics in the public sphere.

Research concerning newsworthiness and professional values used in the definition of themes that occupy the first pages of newspapers is not recent. The debate regarding this amounts to over four decades of international literature. One of the first works concerning this theme was *Galtung and Ruge* (1965), which analyzed the newsworthiness criteria of Norwegian newspapers with respect to international crises. From a taxonomy that identified the criteria for news selection, the authors concluded that social facts farther from the newspaper’s routine are less covered (*Galtung and Ruge*, 1965). Their results were confirmed by later studies, including the application of the criteria for selecting themes that received first-page coverage. In 1981, while analyzing international coverage in British newspapers, *Peterson* concluded that issues which become news present drama, simplicity, surprise and some negative or conflictive element. Generally, these authors analyzed the full content of the newspapers to reach their conclusions. Here, the aim is to identify whether the municipal electoral campaign theme appears or not on the front pages of newspapers, being an issue of relevance to the public debate of a democratic society and lying within the circulation area of the researched newspapers. As such, the next section will identify the main characteristics of the newspapers (organizational aspects) and the political situation in the two cities analyzed (social aspects) which, due to their capability of generating more or less public interest, can be given privileged spaces in news editions.

### **Political context and newspaper**

*Gazeta do Povo*, a newspaper that circulates predominantly within Paraná State, began publishing on February 3, 1919, in Curitiba. In 2008 it was the newspaper with the highest circulation in Paraná according to the Circulation Verification Institute (IVC), with an average of approximately 70,000 copies daily. Despite its origin in the beginning of the 20th century, since its conception *Gazeta* has fit into a commercial journalism framework, aimed at reaching a large number of potential readers. As such, it presents itself as an independent newspaper that defends the interests of the state.

After a recent reformulation which started in 2007, the newspaper changed its editorial structure. Since then, the section Public Life (*Vida Pública*) is responsible for political coverage, mostly edited in three pages dedicated to issues related to the theme. In these pages there are two political columns. The editorial team, composed of all reporters and under the section editor's responsibility, signs one of them. Journalist Celso Nascimento, the newspaper's main political columnist, signs the other. Besides his column, the newspaper also publishes columns by journalists from other cities, mostly through news agencies. In this way, the interpretative space dedicated to local political coverage is shared with authors that discuss themes related to national and international politics. Nevertheless, the newspaper's differential in the 2008 elections was publishing a weekly column written by a political scientist, a professor from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), about themes related to public governance. Regarding the presence of the political dispute on the front page, as will be shown in the next section, during the electoral campaign the newspaper published an average of 1.2 headlines on the front page per edition concerning the mayoralty election between August and October 2008.

The other newspaper analyzed is *Jornal da Manhã*, with a circulation limited to its hometown, Ponta Grossa, and neighboring cities. According to information from the publication, it circulates in 22 cities, with six editions per week, published from Tuesday through Sunday. It was founded in 1954 and in 2007 underwent a change in its ownership control which caused a drastic reformulation of its editorial style. Within its section division, politics occupies – normally – one page in the first section, whereas during the 2008 electoral period a two-page editorial was frequent in the political section. This coverage, besides informative material, is composed of a signed column that exclusively covers political issues, the "*Informe JM*", for which the editorial team is responsible. As in the case of *Gazeta do Povo*, *Jornal da Manhã* published few signed

editorials or articles about the electoral campaign, without any regularity in dealing with such issues in these formats.

During the period analyzed, *JM* published more headlines on its front page about the electoral campaign per edition than *Gazeta do Povo*. The local circulation daily presented an average of 1.6 headlines about the theme per edition between August and October 2008. This difference in theme visibility between the two newspapers can be explained by the particular characteristics of the disputes in their respective cities in 2008. What especially stands out is the fact that the mayoralty election in Curitiba was very predictable, with a first-round victory for the candidate running for re-election, who was at the forefront in voters' declared intentions during the whole period. On the contrary, in Ponta Grossa the candidate running for re-election began the dispute in second place in voters' intentions and the opposition candidate who had a larger preference in the beginning of the dispute did not make it to the runoff election. To better understand the political situation in the two cities, Figure 1 presents their election results.

The electoral context and results in the two newspapers' hometowns were distinct in many aspects. In *Gazeta do Povo's* hometown, Curitiba, Paraná's capital, there was a strong public preference for the candidate seeking re-election, Beto Richa (PSDB Party), during the entire first round. This resulted in an absolute majority of votes (77.27% of total valid votes) for Richa, eliminating any runoff election in this city. On the other hand, in Ponta Grossa the candidate seeking re-election, Pedro Wosgrau (PSDB Party), did not have the majority of voter preferences during the first round, at many times remaining in second place. That caused the dispute between the two most voted candidates, Wosgrau and Sandro Alex, to go into a runoff election, with a small margin (52.26% of all valid votes versus 47.74%) in favor of Pedro Wosgrau.

**Figure 1 – Results of Mayoralty elections in Curitiba and Ponta Grossa (2008)**

CURITIBA – 1 <sup>st</sup> Round			
Candidate (Party)	Votes	% valid	Situation
Beto Richa (PSDB)	778,514	77.27	Elected
Gleisi Hoffmann (PT)	183,027	18.17	Defeated
Carlos Moreira (PMDB)	19,157	1.90	Defeated
Maurício Furta do (PV)	8,906	0.88	Defeated
Ricardo Gomyde (PC do B)	7,187	0.71	Defeated



Fábio Camargo (PTB)	5,366	0.53	Defeated
Bruno Meirinho (Psol)	4,464	0.44	Defeated
Lauro Rodrigues (PTdoB)	888	0.09	Defeated
<b>PONTA GROSSA – 1<sup>st</sup> Round</b>			
Pedro Wosgrau (PSDB)	67,791	39.44	Runoff
Sandro Alex (PPS)	48,982	28.50	Runoff
Jocelito Canto (PTB)	48,384	28.15	Defeated
Gerveson Silveira (PT)	4,973	2.89	Defeated
Lauro Padilha (PV)	1,080	0.63	Defeated
João Luiz Stefaniak (Psol)	683	0.40	Defeated
<b>PONTA GROSSA – Runoff</b>			
Pedro Wosgrau (PSDB)	89,538	52.26	Elected
Sandro Alex (PPS)	81,782	47.74	Defeated

Source: Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE)

In Curitiba, Mayor Beto Richa ran for re-election after having been the winner in the runoff election in 2004. Now, re-elected in the first round with 77.2% of the total number of valid votes, he presented one of the highest voting results among Brazilian state capitals in 2008. Earlier, in 2000, he had been elected vice-mayor of the city. Richa ran as the candidate of the PSDB Party, supported by a coalition of right-wing parties such as PP and DEM, and center-left parties like PDT and PPS, as well as six other small parties. He had as his main opponents the PT Party, which had already taken the 2000 and the 2004 mayoralty races to runoff elections; and the PMDB, the party of the state governor, Roberto Requião, also a declared opponent of Richa. Both the PMDB and the PT in Curitiba opted for new candidates and for politicians with little experience in elected positions. As its candidate for mayor, the PT chose its state president, Gleisi Hoffman, who had in her curriculum a significant run for the federal senate in 2006, when she was runner-up. The PMDB announced as its candidate the former chancellor of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), Carlos Moreira. This was Moreira's first electoral dispute as a candidate of a political party. Both the PT and PMDB had much worse electoral results than expected. Gleisi Hoffman, who was said to have the best chances of going into the runoff election, got 18.17% of the total number of valid votes for mayor – less than half the percentage she had obtained in the 2006 senate dispute in the state capital. The PMDB candidate, former chancellor Moreira, presented an

even more negative result. Even with the declared support of the state governor, he only got 1.9% of all valid votes. The other five candidates received less than 1% of all valid votes, with practically no relevance from the electoral perspective.

In Ponta Grossa the electoral dispute was different. The candidate for re-election, Pedro Wosgrau (PSDB) did not present a well-regarded administration. As such, at the beginning of the first round campaigning, the majority of the electoral preference was for the main opposition candidate, state deputy and former mayor Jocelito Canto (PTB). A third political influence, radio host Sandro Alex (PPS), disputed the first round with a constant growth in voters' intentions. During the electoral campaign, Canto presented a decline in preference, while Wosgrau managed to react in the last phase of the first round. With that, the candidate seeking re-election got 39.4% of the total number of valid votes, insuring his continuation in the dispute. In second place, with only 0.35% more votes than the candidate in third place, was Sandro Alex. Canto lost his chance to dispute the runoff election and was defeated for the second time in a Ponta Grossa mayoralty election, with a difference of less than 600 votes in a universe of more than 180,000 valid votes. As for the other three candidates, the PT candidate Gerveson Silveira got less than 3% of all valid votes, while two other contestants had less than 1% in the first round. The runoff election was still close, with opposition candidate Sandro Alex starting with an advantage over the candidate for re-election. Only in the last week there was a turnaround in voters' intentions and Wosgrau was elected with 52.2% of the total number of valid votes, against 47.7% for Sandro Alex, a difference of less than five percent.

As can be seen, the electoral contexts in Curitiba and Ponta Grossa were distinct in 2008, which can help to explain possible differences in election coverage patterns by newspapers in each city. This is because commercial dailies tend to give more attention and visibility to competitive political disputes, as is the case of Ponta Grossa. Campaigns that do not present many alterations and become predictable may possibly stimulate the newspapers to give spaces with more visibility to other themes with more commercial appeal. Attempting to test this hypothesis, the next section presents the main findings of the front-page monitoring of the two newspapers during the 2008 municipal elections period.

### **Politics on the front pages**

Between August 1 and October 31, 2008, *Gazeta do Povo* had 92

editions and *Jornal da Manhã* had 80 editions. The smaller number of *JM* is because the newspaper does not publish on Mondays but is characterized as a daily, with six publications per week. In the 80 editions of *JM* during the electoral campaign, 175 headlines about the dispute were published on the first page, totaling 20,500 cm<sup>2</sup>. This represents an average of 117.4 cm<sup>2</sup> per headline involving politics. In the same period, *Gazeta do Povo* published 311 headlines about politics on its front pages, which at first could represent a larger presence of the theme in the newspaper's most visible space, namely, the cover. However, when considering the cm<sup>2</sup>, it is clear that this first impression is not correct. With 311 headlines, *Gazeta do Povo* occupied 17,500 cm<sup>2</sup> of its covers in 92 editions, resulting in an average of 56.3 cm<sup>2</sup> per headline concerning politics. This information shows that despite fewer publications in the period studied, the local circulation newspaper *JM* dedicated more space on its covers to the political theme, which combines electoral campaign and institutional politics, than did *Gazeta do Povo*. Furthermore, the average size of headlines concerning politics in *JM* was larger than that of *GP*, while the higher number of headlines involving politics in *Gazeta do Povo* than in *Jornal da Manhã* indicates that the headlines were smaller in the former and therefore less visible.

Since the work encompasses primarily the treatment given to the political campaign theme, table one below shows the percentages of themes that appeared on the front pages of the newspapers analyzed during the electoral campaign. In both newspapers, electoral campaign and institutional politics were not the most frequent themes. In *Gazeta do Povo* the theme Economy was predominant, with 16.8% of the headlines. Institutional Politics and Varieties/Culture were tied in second place with 12.8%. It is interesting that during the municipal electoral campaign period, more headlines involving institutional politics appeared in *Gazeta do Povo* than those concerning Electoral Campaigns which had 7.7% in sixth place. In *Jornal da Manhã*, on the other hand, a greater presence of Electoral Campaign is seen on the front page, but it also did not predominate. In this newspaper, the most frequent theme during the analysis was Sports, with 24%. Electoral Campaign came second, with 14.1%, followed by Economy, with 12.1%.

Table 1 – Theme Distribution on the front pages during the Electoral Campaign

Headline Theme	<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>		<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Electoral Campaign	117	7.7	133	14.1
Institutional Politics	194	12.8	42	4.5
Economy	253	16.8	114	12.1
Health	59	3.9	34	3.6
Education	62	4.1	48	5.1
The Poor and Minorities	18	1.2	10	1.1
Urban Infrastructure	87	5.8	39	4.1
Environment	54	3.6	11	1.2
Violence and Security	140	9.3	95	10.1
Ethics	97	6.4	15	1.6
International	35	2.3	1	0.1
Varieties/Culture	194	12.8	100	10.6
Sports	126	8.3	226	24.0
Other	74	4.9	73	7.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1510</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Sources: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

This first variable shows that the local newspaper *Jornal da Manhã* gave more visibility to the electoral dispute on its first pages than did *Gazeta do Povo* – which circulates regionally – both in absolute and comparative terms. While *JM* presented 133 headlines concerning the electoral campaign, *GP* had 117 entries with this theme.

Here, two main details can be observed. The first is that the electoral campaign was not the theme with the greatest presence on the first pages of either periodical. The second is that the newspaper with local circulation, *JM*, presented a larger number of front page headlines than the state-wide daily. However, just this information is not enough to uphold the affirmation of greater visibility in the former newspaper. Comparisons between headlines concerning politics and other themes are needed, which would allow for a more precise identification of the level of importance of the themes for each newspaper. Table 2 compares the average sizes in cm<sup>2</sup> of the headlines concerning politics with the average sizes of the other themes. It can be observed that in *Jornal da Manhã*, out of the total headlines published in the period studied (941), 18.7% (175) concerned the electoral campaign or institutional politics, identified in the table as “politics”. In *Gazeta do Povo*, the theme represented 20.5% (311) out of a total of 1510 headlines published in the same period. As discussed above, in terms of politics, there was a predominance of the political-institutional theme in this newspaper,

instead of the electoral campaign theme.

However, the average size of headlines involving politics in the newspapers is what stands out. In *Jornal da Manhã*, while headlines concerning politics presented an average size of 117.41 cm<sup>2</sup>, the average of headlines involving all other themes was 84.55 cm<sup>2</sup>. Conversely, in *Gazeta do Povo*, besides the slighter difference, the average size of headlines concerning politics was smaller than that of other themes. Politics averaged 56.28 cm<sup>2</sup>, compared to 66.10 cm<sup>2</sup> for the other themes.

**Table 2 – Size of headlines**

Newspaper	Variable	Theme	N	Average	Standard Deviation
<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>	Size in cm <sup>2</sup>	Others	766	84.55	100.78
		Politics	175	117.41	143.58
<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>	Size in cm <sup>2</sup>	Others	1199	66.10	106.31
		Politics	311	56.29	96.30

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

Table 3 summarizes the main information from a Student's T-Test to verify if these differences are statistically significant or not.

**Table 3 – T-Test for the size of headlines involving politics and other themes**

Newspaper	Variable	T-test for equivalence of averages						
		t	Variance	Sig.	Mean difference	Standard difference error	Confidence interval of 95%	
							Superior	Inferior
<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>	Size in cm <sup>2</sup>	-3.565	939	0.000	-32.8604	9.2168	-50.9483	-14.7725
<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>	Size in cm <sup>2</sup>	1.476	1508	0.140	9.8025	6.6393	-3.2207	22.8258

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

The results reinforce the inferences from table 2, since only *Jornal da Manhã* shows statistical significance, with the T value -3.565 and significance level of 0.000. On the other hand, for *Gazeta do Povo* the significance level is above the critical limit, at 0.140, and the T statistic of 1.476 does not permit the affirmation that there are significant differences between the sizes of headlines involving politics and those involving other themes. Therefore, the statistical test reinforces the affirmation, with more certainty, that headlines involving politics on the front pages of *Jornal da Manhã* occupied spaces significantly larger than the other themes during the electoral period, while for *Gazeta do Povo* it is not possible to reach such a conclusion.

To continue the verification of differences in the treatment given the

political theme in each newspaper, the position on the page in which the theme predominantly appears was analyzed. For this purpose, the cover of the newspapers was divided vertically into two parts, the first and second fold. What separates them is the central line on the page. These halves indicate the importance editors of newspapers give to the themes, for it is known that the first fold (upper part of the page) is more visible than the second fold. Table 4 shows the results for the two newspapers, and once again, *Jornal da Manhã* proportionally devotes more spaces of greater visibility to the political theme than does *Gazeta do Povo*.

**Table 4 – Position of headlines involving Politics on the covers of the newspapers**

Position	Theme	<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>		<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
First fold	Other	302	76.3	308	81.5
	Politics	94	23.7	70	18.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Second fold	Other	464	85.1	891	78.7
	Politics	81	14.9	241	21.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1132</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

In *Jornal da Manhã*, 23.7% of the total headlines published in the first fold involved politics, while in *Gazeta do Povo* this percentage falls to 18.5%. In the second fold, headlines concerning politics in *Gazeta do Povo* reach 21.3%, compared to 14.9% in *Jornal da Manhã*. Until now the information points to the fact that *Jornal da Manhã* not only gave more quantitative space to the political theme on its first page during the electoral period than did *Gazeta do Povo*, but it also devoted more qualitatively superior space on the cover (first fold) to this theme than the other newspaper.

To continue the qualitative analysis regarding politics, table 5 shows the distribution of headlines involving politics in each newspaper with relation to the text formats on the front page. They were divided into six formats: Main headline with photo and main headline without photo are the most important formats of each edition. In this research the existence of only one headline per edition is considered. Besides the main headline, the covers can also present other headlines with or without photos, while the titles are supplemented with texts explaining the subject. There are also captioned photos – when the image is more important than the text – and teasers, restricted to a single phrase that summarizes the issue to be covered on the inside of the edition.

Accounting for headlines with and without photos, the political theme occupied this valuable space on the cover of the newspapers in 22 of the 80 editions of *Jornal da Manhã* analyzed during the period, representing 27.5% of the total editions, compared to 26 headlines concerning politics in *Gazeta do Povo*, which represents 28.2% of the 92 editions analyzed. In this sense, both newspapers presented a very close comparative proportion of headlines involving politics during the electoral campaign. Yet when the distribution of only headlines about politics in the different cover formats is analyzed, the greater importance given to the theme by *Jornal da Manhã* than by *Gazeta do Povo* is once again noted. From the total of entries about politics, the predominant format in *Jornal da Manhã* was headline without photo, with 41.1%. It is a format with less visibility than main headlines or headlines with photo. Nevertheless, this was also the predominant format in *Gazeta do Povo*, but with a much higher percentage, 61.7%. As such, in *Gazeta do Povo* there was a higher concentration of texts concerning politics in headlines without photo. On the other hand, the political theme had 18.3% participation in formats with greater visibility (headlines with and without photo) in *Jornal da Manhã*, compared to only 8.3% in *Gazeta do Povo* considering the sum of both types of headlines (see table 6).

**Table 6 – Formats of entries on the front page for the theme Politics**

Format	<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>		<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Main Headline with photo	15	8.6	6	1.9
Main Headline without photo	17	9.7	20	6.4
Headline with photo	30	17.1	12	3.9
Headline without photo	72	41.1	192	61.7
Captioned photo	5	2.9	5	1.6
Teaser	36	20.6	76	24.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

Besides the number of headlines, an additional data item that helps in understanding the dynamics of treatment of the different themes on the covers of the newspapers, namely the spaces devoted to politics in each format of text, in cm<sup>2</sup>, can be discussed. For this purpose, table 7 below presents the number of headlines in average cm<sup>2</sup> and in total cm<sup>2</sup> for the newspapers' covers. It can be noted that in the format of greater visibility, main headline with photo, *Jornal da Manhã* presents a larger number of entries (15) than *Gazeta do Povo* (6). The average size in cm<sup>2</sup> of the headlines with photo involving politics is also larger

in *Jornal da Manhã* (467.2 cm<sup>2</sup>) than in *Gazeta do Povo* (443.8 cm<sup>2</sup>) and, consequently, the total space is also larger in *JM* (7,008.3 cm<sup>2</sup>) than in *GP* (2,663.3 cm<sup>2</sup>). An inverse relation occurs in the format main headline without photo. *Gazeta do Povo* has a higher number of headlines (20) than *JM* (17). The average size is also larger for *GP* (234.6 cm<sup>2</sup>) than for *JM* (175 cm<sup>2</sup>) and the total space occupied comes up to 4,692.5 cm<sup>2</sup> in *Gazeta do Povo*, versus 2,975.8 cm<sup>2</sup> in *JM*.

As for the other formats, in the headlines with photo *JM* presents a smaller average than *GP*, but with higher total occupation. For headlines without photo, *Gazeta do Povo* presents a larger average size and more total space occupied than *Jornal da Manhã*. In the case of captioned photos, *Jornal da Manhã* has a higher average per entry and a total cm<sup>2</sup> higher than *Gazeta do Povo*. A permanent exchange of positions between the two newspapers in terms of the spaces occupied by the formats is observed, but in the spaces with less visibility there is always a predominance of spaces for the political theme in *Gazeta do Povo* when compared to *Jornal da Manhã*. Only the format captioned photo presents a tie in number of entries in both newspapers, but with a predominance of total space and average in cm<sup>2</sup> for *Jornal da Manhã* with relation to *Gazeta do Povo*.

**Table 7 – Space in cm<sup>2</sup> per text format in the front page concerning politics**

Format	Statistics	<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>	<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>
Main Headline with photo	Number of entries	15	6
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	467.2	443.8
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	7008.3	2663.3
Main Headline without photo	Number of entries	17	20
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	175.0	234.6
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	2975.8	4692.5
Headline with photo	Number of entries	30	12
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	194.6	234.4
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	5837.8	2813.3
Headline without photo	Number of entries	72	192
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	36.9	29.3
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	2656.8	5640.0
Captioned photo	Number of entries	5	5
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	318.5	207.1
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	1492.3	1035.5
Teaser	Number of entries	36	76
	Average cm <sup>2</sup>	16.0	8.7
	Total cm <sup>2</sup>	577.5	664.5

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

Until now, the information regarding the first pages of the newspapers analyzed points to the fact that the locally-distributed publication, *Jornal da Manhã*, gave more visibility to the political



theme during the 2008 electoral campaign than did the regionally-distributed daily *Gazeta do Povo* – despite the theme not being the most frequent in either newspaper. It still has not been identified whether the newspapers cover the electoral disputes in their hometowns or whether they present headlines involving politics and elections in other cities when including politics on their front pages. For this purpose, the scope of headlines involving politics and the 2008 elections in each newspaper was verified. The classification criterion is as follows: when the entry covers the electoral dispute of the newspaper’s hometown, the scope is local. If the entry covers the electoral dispute in any other city in Paraná, the scope is regional. When the entry touches on political issues in cities in other states of Brazil, the scope is national. In cases of entries concerning political themes that involve other countries, the scope is international. Table 8 presents the comparative results.

**Table 8 – Scope of headlines involving politics**

Scope of the headline	<i>Gazeta do Povo</i>		<i>Jornal da Manhã</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Local	93	29.9	152	86.9
Regional	75	24.1	15	8.6
National	109	35.0	8	4.6
International	34	10.9	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Groups: Media, Politics and Social Actors (UEPG) and Political Communication (UFPR)

Table 8 shows once more that in comparative terms *Jornal da Manhã* gave more visibility to the political dispute in its hometown than did *Gazeta do Povo*. While in *JM* headlines involving politics in the city of Ponta Grossa represented a total of 86.9%, in *GP* headlines that covered the city of Curitiba were limited to 29.9%. In second place in *JM* came the regional scope with 8.6%, followed by the national scope with 4.6%. There were no entries on the cover of *JM* concerning international politics in the period analyzed. The predominance of coverage closer to the area of circulation of the newspaper is expected in newspapers with local distribution. At the same time, the regional scope is expected to predominate in newspapers with state-wide circulation like *Gazeta do Povo*. However, that was not the case with politics. The predominant scope in the period of analysis was “national”, with 35%. The regional scope came in third place with 24.1%. In *GP*, 10.9% of the total entries involving politics were of international scope. This data shows that besides giving less visibility to the political theme than *JM*, *Gazeta do Povo* covered more elections and institutional politics involving cities

in Brazilian states other than its area of circulation.

### Concluding notes

The analysis in this exploratory work allows some interpretations to stimulate curiosity for new and insightful research. In the first place, it is an indicator of the quantity of headlines on the front page involving politics for both newspapers analyzed. Despite the municipal disputes and the newspapers having local or regional circulation, during the campaign the political theme represented at best a little over one in ten headlines in *Jornal da Manhã* (14.1%) and approximately half of that in *Gazeta do Povo* (7.7%). If that is too little or too much, only continuity in this type of research that permits comparisons with other media, societies and in different historical periods can answer this question. The fact is that in both newspapers, during the electoral campaign there were more headlines involving sports than the political dispute, which can be used as a gauge to measure the role of mass media in mediatic democracy – or its absence.

In the comparison between the two newspapers, *Jornal da Manhã* gave more visibility to the electoral campaign theme than *Gazeta do Povo* in all variables analyzed. Proportionally to the number of editions, in *Jornal da Manhã* there was a greater presence of headlines concerning the electoral campaign than in *Gazeta do Povo*. Also, the former's headlines occupied larger spaces in cm<sup>2</sup>, had more visible formats and appeared primarily on the cover's first fold. The same situation did not occur in *Gazeta do Povo*. In addition, the fact is that GP presented almost half of its political headlines on the first page concerning themes in regions outside the scope of its circulation area (45.9% when national and international are added together).

*Jornal da Manhã* gave more visibility to the 2008 municipal political dispute than did *Gazeta do Povo*. An explanation for that can be found in the fact that *JM* does not intend to be distributed statewide, with its scope limited to the cities directly influenced by its hometown, Ponta Grossa. On the other hand, *Gazeta do Povo*, which has a well-known regional circulation and is present in most cities of Paraná, can attempt to give more importance to themes of other cities not connected to its hometown, Curitiba, or even themes of cities in other states. If this affirmation is accepted, the consequence is that newspapers with local circulation tend to be less asymmetric with respect to themes of interest to their immediate public than newspapers with regional or national circulation, as has already been pointed out by Dader (1992).

An alternative conclusion is that the behavior of periodicals has less relation to the area of circulation and more to the dynamics of the dispute *per se*. Since in Curitiba the election did not “mobilize” the public debate because the dominant preference was consolidated early in the dispute, the newspaper may have preferred to occupy its visible spaces with themes other than electoral politics. In Ponta Grossa, since the dispute was more competitive, with alterations of preference for candidates by the majority of voters throughout the election’s two rounds, with a real possibility of a defeat of the incumbent mayor by an opposition candidate, *Jornal da Manhã* may have considered the electoral campaign theme still not resolved in the public debate and thus tried to reserve spaces with greater visibility for it in its editions. In this case, the social impacts that are outside the control of the media become determinant in the definition of the role newspapers perform in mediatic democracy. In any case, to the limitations already pointed out in the literature about political coverage, identified by the asymmetry of contents produced by agencies outside the area of circulation of the newspapers, by the privatization of the debate and the reduction of the political discourse, it is necessary to add the limitation generated by the low visibility of the political theme in the most important spaces of the communication media.

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