



NEWS MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY · HOW DIFFERENT MEDIA AFFECT REGIME SUPPORT IN BRAZIL

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Abstract: The media are a fundamental institution to be considered for the quality of democracy. Different media and messages daily depict the world of politics having the potential to foster or undermine political attitudes toward the democratic regime. This means that the media can be considered important intermediaries between the institutional dimension and citizens' attitudes and beliefs. Media malaise and mobilization theories have contradicting points of view over the role played by the media in democracy. Using data from the national survey "Brazilian Electoral Study" (2002), we explore how media exposure is relevant for Brazilian citizens' orientations towards their political system. We focus our attention on the different impacts of *print media*, *tabloid TV programs* and *attention to political news on the radio* on support for democratic values as well as on valorizing the role of political parties in citizens' representation in the political system. This paper brings partial results of a postdoctoral research conducted in the Political Science Department of the University of São Paulo.

Keywords: Media – Newspaper– Democracy – Political Support – Political Parties

Introduction

Different theoretical perspectives argue that the media are important vehicles that should be taken into consideration for their impact on citizens' political attitudes. Some of these perspectives on the role played by the media in democracy point to a growing cynicism of political journalism in dealing with public issues, leading to the belittlement of politics and politicians in general (Patterson, 1998; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Mervin, 1998). On the other hand, studies based on surveys indicate

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that news media exposure is associated with more democratic attitudes and trust in the regime (Norris, 2000; Newton, 1999).

In Brazil, content analysis research depicts Brazilian political journalism – print and broadcast – as having a strong antipolitical bias. The conclusions from these studies are that this behavior adopted by the media could have disastrous effects on individual attitudes toward the political system, such as a decline in institutional trust, leading to serious obstacles to democratic legitimacy itself (Chaia & Azevedo, 2008; Porto, 2000a; Chaia & Teixeira, 2001). On the opposite direction of these studies, survey based research has demonstrated that newscast exposure is associated with higher levels of institutional confidence (Mesquita, 2010a) and – although more moderately – with democratic principles and valorization of the intermediary role played by political parties (Mesquita, 2010b). These results indicate that, differently from what suggests part of the literature in Brazil, citizens know how to differentiate individual wrongdoings from failures in the functioning of the institutions. This positive association would be based precisely on the fact that the public has a lot of information about their political system, giving individuals conditions to better evaluate regime performance.

In a highly television centered society, newscasts – especially *Jornal Nacional* (National News) of Globo Network – is seen as a privileged source of news for Brazilians.¹ Nevertheless, albeit this importance of TV, it does not constitute the only form of news access. It is then crucial the understanding of the role of other sources, since scope, content and format are distinct in different media. Television is considered as a vehicle that could potentially exert greater influence over people who are less interested in politics, creating a ‘trap’ effect. This happens because of the less selective characteristic of this medium in terms of audience. Print media, although more selective, could have its political coverage reaching more easily those more interested in the subject. In Brazil, radio is a less used source of news, but it still survives as a ‘niche’ in certain segments of the population (Meneguello, 2010). How are these media associated with citizens’ attitudes toward the political system?

Positive impact of quality newscasts on political attitudes - albeit their antipolitical bias - can be explained by this characteristic not being extensive to the

¹ The number of studies that focus on this newscast illustrates this (see, for example, Porto, 2002, 2005; Lins da Silva, 1985, Mesquita, 2008, 2010a; Miguel, 1998, 2002).

treatment of democratic institutions per se. Their portrayal of politics is limited to corruption cases, where politicians - as individuals - are treated in a negative manner. Institutions, as well as the democratic regime, are not treated in a depreciatory way (Mesquita, 2010a). In the case of other news related programs, of a more sensationalist trait - where a “mean world” is portrayed, with an emphasis on violence cases coverage – there could be a different role played in individuals’ political attitudes. What is the impact of “tabloid like” TV programs on public perception of the political world?

The objective of this paper is to investigate the role of secondary media sources on democratic adherence attitudes. Furthermore, we want to know if these sources are relevant to the valorization of the political parties’ role in democracy. The acceptance of parties as a necessary institution of democracy also constitutes an essential aspect of democratic culture. Therefore, it is important to know whether this type of media exposure is beneficial or detrimental to the creation of a political culture that favors and values the role of political parties for citizens’ representation in the political system.

The paper initially discusses the issue of democratic adherence as an aspect of the quality of the regime, reviewing the literature on the debate about the role played by the media in this matter. Next, from the singularities of the Brazilian case, we present the hypotheses that orient the research. Then, we analyze the case of print media – followed by news radio exposure – for democratic adherence and valorization of political parties. We also present analysis of the impact of a specific TV news program of a more sensationalist characteristic on the political attitudes in question. The final considerations try to reflect on the role played by news media in the quality of democracy. Empirical evidence is derived from the ESEB (Brazilian Electoral Study) survey (2002).²

Media and the Quality of Democracy

Attitudes of democratic support are essential for the quality of the regime. Studies on democratic quality intensified after the Third Wave of democratization, and also after signs of a growing discontent with actual regime performance of older

² CESOP (Public Opinion Studies Center of the University of Campinas). National representative sample. N = 2514.

democracies. Therefore, a greater academic effort was made to investigate *how* regimes really work, instead of questions of *why* the transitions occurred. Diamond and Morlino (2004) defined the rule of law, competition, participation, accountability, freedom, equality and responsiveness as crucial dimensions for democratic quality. These authors suggest that the quality of the regime varies as much as these dimensions interact between themselves.

We call attention here to the responsiveness dimension. Since it has to do with consonance between policies adopted by elected officials and aspirations of electors-citizens, it is related to the level of satisfaction with regime performance and the legitimacy that participants of the polity ascribe to it. Hence, under this perspective, the study of political support is crucial to the understanding of the quality of democracy. The question of political support comprehends different dimensions. Easton's (1965) original idea on diffuse support – i.e. attitudes toward the system as a whole – and specific support – i.e. concerning citizens' satisfaction with government and political leadership performances – has been further elaborated in some theoretical approaches.

Some authors have worked with five levels of this type of attitude: support for the *political community* (related to bonds between citizens and the nation-state, usually measured by feelings of national pride); for the *democratic regime per se* (related to democratic adherence as an ideal, connected with values such as freedom, rule of law, participation and tolerance); for the actual performance of democratic system, measured by *satisfaction with the regime*; for democratic institutions (measured by level of trust in them) and for political leaders (related to the evaluation of politicians and political leaders) (Norris, 1999; Moisés & Carneiro, 2010).

The dimension of interest in this paper – democratic adherence per se – should be thought of by two sorts of orientation (Meneguello, 2010). On the one hand, democracy can be thought of as an ideal way of structuring a political system. Therefore, it is taken into account the adherence to certain regime principles, like the rule of law. On the other hand, democratic adherence can also be seen as a more pragmatic measure; a lesser evil compared to the alternatives, which is generally referred to as the “Churchill hypothesis”. In Brazil, about 70% of citizens adhere to democracy as an ideal (democracy always better than any form of government). If we

consider a more pragmatic point of view, 77% agree a lot, or a little, that democracy might have its problems, but it is better than any form of government (ESEB, 2002).

Associated to the question of adherence to regime principles is the intermediary role played by political parties. Understood as a requirement for the democratic ideal, their valorization constitutes one of the essential elements of this adherence. In a similar way, this valorization can be seen as composed by a more normative and a more pragmatic orientation. The first one refers to the axiological role that political parties should represent for democracy. Differently, there is also a perception of the real role performed by parties, as well as proximity between citizens and them. In general, Brazilians display better normative perceptions of parties, while the perception of the actual role they play is more critical. For example, almost 70% believe that parties should represent the population as a whole, while the proportion of Brazilians who have this perception about the real role parties play is just 9%. Meanwhile, 57% believe they represent only the politicians themselves and 34% that they represent the electors or groups that support such parties (ESEB 2002).

Different perspectives try to explain what determines this adherence. Studies of political culture, for example, emphasize aspects like political values or normative orientations of citizens (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart, 2002). Institutional theories of democracy, nevertheless, not considering these factors, believe in the actual performance of governments and its institutions as elements that explain phenomena like trust or regime support (Coleman, 1990; North, 1990). These perspectives should not necessarily mean rival hypotheses. Political culture as well as institutional evaluation can affect in different ways individuals' experiences and influence their political orientations. In the Brazilian case, for instance, Moisés (2010) sustains that axiological and pragmatic orientations do not represent conflicting perspectives for the explanation of individuals' attitudes and intersubjective perceptions concerning the political regime. On the contrary, both approaches are relevant for the relationship between citizens and the democratic regime.

The importance of the media to explain adherence, likewise, should not be seen as a challenging hypothesis. Given the importance of the media in contemporary societies, in their role of informing citizens over public issues, we argue that they influence public perception of institutions and democracy. From this point of view, the influence of the media should not be seen dissociated from the culturalist or

institutionalist approaches. The reason is that, on the one hand, they are responsible for disseminating practical information about institutions. This information, together with actual experience that citizens have with them, provide a base for individuals to form their attitudes towards the system. On the other hand, the media is also responsible for transmitting values, which could influence more normative perceptions that citizens form of their political system.

During the 1990's, media criticisms became common, reflecting a climate of "(...) angst about the vitality of democracy at a time of widespread cynicism about political leaders and government institutions (...)" (Norris, 2000, p. 6). Patterson (1998) states that political parties and representative institutions have weakened in the post-industrial era. It was expected that the media would fill this void. For the author, however, the media were not made to play this role. The duty to inform the public has always been balanced by economic needs of the media that have as its main objective to attract and maintain a great number of advertisers.

According to the author, the media are increasingly expected to compensate the defects of political institutions. They are not required just to inform citizens about current affairs or to watch for wrongdoings. It is also expected that they take a preeminent role in setting the public agenda, organizing public discussions and instructing citizens on relevant values in policy problems and issues. The media, however, are not suited for the role of organizing public opinion and debate because of the restricted amount of time they have. Patterson (2000) also points to tendencies in American journalism to treat politics not as an issue, but as a game in which politicians, as individuals, struggle for power. The media concentrate, hence, on few political actors, and not on the broader interests that they represent. The other tendency that the author sees is American media's adversarial stance. The proportion of negative news has significantly risen in the last years and is already in greater number than "positive" news. The consequence would be the disenchantment of citizens with their leaders and political institutions.

Mervin (1998) indicates television as the main focus of the problem. Television's main role is to entertain, and not instruct viewers. The way it deals with information is simplistic, without substance or context, that is, in the form of entertainment. Political coverage is brief and superficial. There is no space for the debate of complex issues that, theoretically, exists in newspapers. This process would

contribute to a degradation of the public deliberation processes, and to the weakening of political parties as electoral mechanisms, since it turned the process of nomination of candidates a trivial spectacle of entertainment.

Capella & Jamieson (1997) argue that the structure of political news has direct effects on public cynicism towards politics, the government, political debates and campaigns. This happens as a result of the predominance in the media of what they call strategy coverage, which emphasizes the winning and losing, the language of war, games and competition; the emphasis on the performance in opinion polls and candidate styles, and the great influence of opinion polls in the evaluation of candidates. This type of journalistic coverage would promote sensationalism and the simplification of complex issues, creating a “spiral of cynicism” in the public, fomenting disengagement both from the political process and from the press.

Nevertheless, this negative perception of the influence of the media on public issues is not unanimous. Mobilization theory argues, in general, that a combination of growing educational levels with greater access to political information has helped mobilize citizens in behavioral terms, as well as increasing their knowledge. Mobilization theory does not state that the media only have positive effects, but that different media, messages, audiences should be taken into consideration.

Newton (1999) found that reading a broadsheet newspaper, as well as newscasts, are strongly connected to mobilization. Newscasts may have a more pervasive effect because of the great proportion of people who watch them regularly. Even though many people ‘fall into’ the news, rather than ‘jumping into’ it, the effects seem to be more positive than negative. Newton’s conclusion, as the author himself puts it, needs to be taken cautiously. Although he found these associations, it is not possible to establish cause and effect associations. That is, it is not possible to know if newscasts and broadsheet newspapers make people more informed or if more informed people turn to this type of media. Nevertheless, Newton indicates the importance of these associations, which refute media malaise theory.

Norris (2000) argues that, despite the profound changes in the news industry structure (like the proliferation of media outlets seeking mass-market audience with low-cost, low-quality programming) and in the process of political campaigning since the post-war period (with the appearance of political marketing and its persuasion and selling techniques), it is not clear that they have eroded the patterns of political

coverage, or contributed to negative effects in politics. On the contrary, the author suggests that in Europe and in the United States, because of a “virtuous circle”, the attention given to news media gradually reinforces civic engagement, the same way civic engagement raises attention to the news. People usually turn to newspapers, newscasts or even the Internet, because of their previous interests in learning about politics as they are already engaged in the political process and because of long-standing news habits. But at the same time, says Norris, over the long term, repeated exposure to news seems to increase our understanding about public issues and our capacity and motivation to engage in the political process. This virtuous circle would represent an iterative process that gradually possesses a positive effect over democracy.

In Brazil, there is a gap in studies on the relationship between media and public support for democracy. There is a greater interest in the role of the media in electoral processes (Straubhaar, Olsen & Nunes, 1993; Lins da Silva, 1993; Porto, 1996 and 2007; Miguel, 1999, 2003 and 2004). There is also an interest in content analysis, which have a common and unanimous treatment, describing an antipolitical bias in Brazilian media. Journalistic coverage of politics – especially of the legislative power – is frequently described as being negative, focusing on themes like corruption and other irregularities. Even if necessary in a democracy, this investigative journalism and its antipolitical stance would have the potential to disseminate distrust and aversion to politics, creating serious obstacles to the legitimacy of the democratic regime (Chaia & Azevedo, 2008; Porto, 2000a; Chaia & Teixeira, 2001). Notwithstanding, there is the standpoint that this antipolitical bias, although negative in relation to politicians as individuals, does not question the system per se, having an acquiescent character towards the political system and its main institutions (Miguel & Coutinho, 2007).

Although these studies might suggest interesting hypotheses, we presume that the media cannot be studied solely on the basis of content analysis, since the public does not interpret messages homogeneously. Individuals are capable of critically interpreting what they consume by the media (Lins da Silva, 1985). The relevance that they have, as well as other sources of information, is given in a wider context, where other interpersonal sources – such as friends, family and organizations like the

church and unions - play an equally important part. (Straubhaar, Olsen & Nunes, 1993).

Therefore, even if the antipolitical stance of Brazilian media is taken as a given, it is questionable that they represent an obstacle to democracy, through the depiction of corruption and other irregularities cases that could lead to distrust in politicians and institutions as a whole. First, we need to further analyze the content of the media itself. There is a certain consensus over the fact that the media's negative stance is restricted to a critical appraisal of public officials. The media is not accused of being cynical of the system or of institutions. What exists, is an assumption that this negative individual characterization represents, by extension, also a negative view of the system (Porto, 2000a; Chaia & Azevedo, 2008). In a different perspective, it could also be argued that the emphasis on conflict and negative news coverage is a democratic function of the media, which should also act as a *watchdog*, holding governments accountable for their actions (Schmitt-Beck & Voltmer, 2007). Far from disturbing trust in institutions, for instance, it would be the perception that the media watches power, one of the guaranties of the general climate of trust.

Contrary to what these content analysis suggest, studies based on survey statistical analysis point to more modest and positive effects of the media over perceptions of the political system. Meneguello (2010) found a modest association between information consumption in the media – especially broadcast – and critical evaluations of the functioning of democracy, as well as institutional distrust. On the other hand, despite a period of very negative news concerning corruption scandals, Brazil's main Newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, appeared positively associated with trust and evaluation of institutions, as well as with satisfaction with Brazilian democracy (Mesquita, 2008b, 2010). Even if we consider the uncertainty of the direction of causality, these results defy the assumption that an antipolitical stance of the media can undermine confidence that citizens have in their institutions.

Differently from what part of Brazilian literature on the subject states, therefore, citizens seem to differentiate individual misconducts from failures in the working of the institutions. Publicizing irregularities and, at the same time, the institutional stances responsible for investigating them, confront citizens with control and accountability mechanisms present in the democratic system. The public has, therefore, conditions to evaluate positively democratic instances. News media,

furthermore, is associated with other measures of democratic quality, such as political participation (Rennó, 2003), as well as adherence to political parties as an essential element of democracy (Schlegel, 2006).

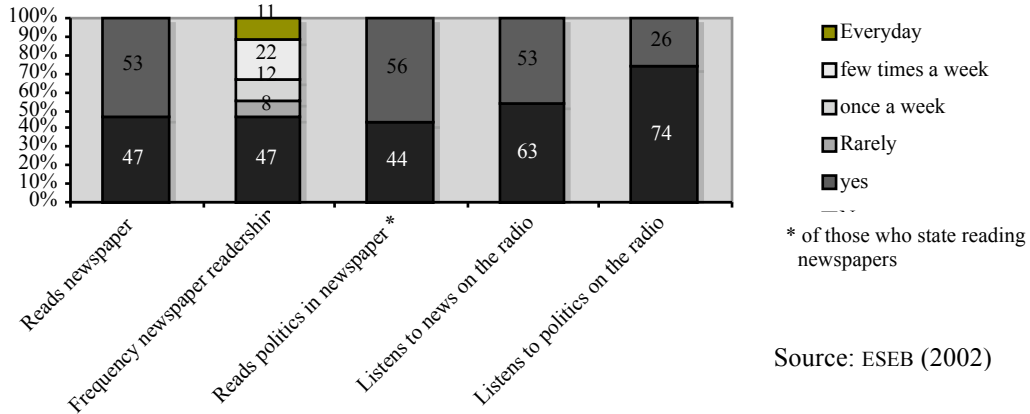
In Brazil, broadcast media use is widespread, while there are both low educational levels and significant illiteracy rates. For example, 93% of Brazilian homes have at least one TV set (PNAD, 2006). At the same time, the circulation of the main newspapers reached only 45,3 for every 1000 inhabitants (WAN, 2005). Data from the survey “Citizens’ Distrust in Democratic Institutions” (2006)³ (A Desconfiança dos Cidadãos nas Instituições Democráticas) indicate that the source of political information most used by citizens is television, with 65,4%. Brazilian TV’s evaluation is also high: 78,1% of the interviewed rated it as excellent or good. One of the most watched newscasts is *Jornal Nacional* (*National News*), from Globo Network. Only 10,6% claimed never watching it, while 67,7% watch it at least three times a week. The percentage of people who claimed watching it everyday is 34,3%.

No doubt Brazilian TV and its newscasts are a privileged source of political information. Even so, they are not the only ones used by citizens. Although less Brazilians use the radio, this medium still survives as a “niche” for obtaining news. Of those who use it for this purpose, 71,5% are from Brazilian’s smaller countryside cities and 62% are older than 35 (Meneguello, 2010). Brazilian journalism’s antipolitical stance also reflects on the radio. However, differently from quality newscasts (Mesquita, 2010), there is evidence that its criticisms go beyond the simple individual sphere, translating into negative appraisals of the system itself (Chaia, 2004), what could bring about a “depolitization” of its listeners (Nunes, 1993).

Newspapers, for their part, are characterized by low readership, cumulativeness and overlapping. Of those who read newspapers at least once a week, 83% also state they watch *Jornal Nacional* at least once a week, while the opposite is not true. Only 45% of those who state watching JN at least once a week, read newspapers the same frequency (Meneguello, 2010). Despite its low circulation, the press performs an active role in denouncing corruption scandals and in setting the agenda for other media, like TV, in addition to being a “niche” for more instructed citizens and opinion formers.

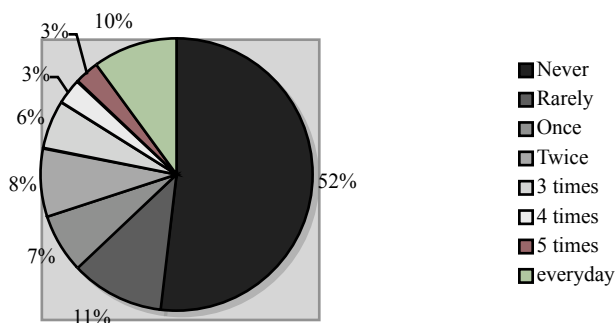
³ Coordinated by professors Dr. José Álvaro Moisés (USP) and Dr. Rachel Meneguello (UNICAMP). See appendix for frequency tables.

News consumption - Newspaper and Radio



Besides quality newscasts, in television, there are also other news programs with a smaller audience and with more specific characteristics (more popular themes, closer to citizens), with great emphasis on violence and crime cases, treated with a sensationalist perspective. Although with a smaller audience, there is a segment of the public who watch them. One of these “low quality” newscasts is *Cidade Alerta* (“Alert City”), of Record Network.⁴

"Cidade Alerta" Viewership



With the objective of further investigating the role of news media for aspects of democratic quality, we examine here two dimensions of political support:

⁴ At the time the survey was conducted. Currently, the host - José Luiz Datena – is on another network (Bandeirantes). The name of the program is *Brasil Urgente* (Urgent Brazil).

democratic adherence per se and valorization of the *representation role of political parties*. These are the dependent variables of our study. The independent variables are, apart from newspaper readership, news consumption on the radio and *Cidade Alerta* viewership.⁵

In consonance with the positive role played by quality newscasts for democratic adherence and valorization of political parties (Mesquita, 2010b), we propose the following hypotheses:

*H₁: Reading newspapers is **positively** associated with greater democratic adherence and greater valorization of the representation role of political parties.*

On the other hand, given their more popular characteristics and greater emphasis on news that, at times, are more critical of institutional aspects:

*H₂: Exposure to news on the radio and to Cidade Alerta are **negatively** associated with democratic adherence and valorization of political parties.*

In order to test these hypotheses, statistical analyses were used using Brazilian Electoral Study Database (2002). Although the language of causality is used, at times, in this text, it is implicit that what we talk about is correlations, since it is not possible to attribute cause and effect relationships with this type of data.

Impact of the Press

For models with print media, we used three variables that are included in the ESEB (2002) survey. One (dichotomous) where the respondent states whether he reads the newspaper or not; another (ordinal) is composed of frequency of readership and a third (dichotomous) with answers if the respondent reads the political section of the newspaper. The first results show the impact that they have in each of the listed variables. Since dependent variables are ordinal, we opted for performing a procedure called categorical regression.⁶ With respect to the valorization of the political parties

⁵ This paper is part of an ongoing post-doctoral research conducted in the Political Science Department of USP, and is funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP – process n. 08/57470-0).

⁶ (*Optimal Scalling* in SPSS). Categorical Regression quantifies categorical data ascribing numerical values to categories. This results in a linear optimal linear equation for the transformed variables. All variables in the study were recoded for a positive coefficient (Beta) to always represent greater support to democracy. Therefore, for dependent variables such as “prefers democracy than any other form of government”, a positive Beta would represent greater **agreement** with the phrase. For phrases like “Parties only serve to divide people”, a positive coefficient represents greater **disagreement**. Therefore, all positive coefficients of the study refer to a positive impact for the dimension in question. Details in formulation and variables treatment can be obtained on request from the author.

role, as expected, those who most read the political section, agree less that they only serve to divide people. However, contrary to the proposed hypothesis, frequency of readership is negatively associated with the opinion of democracy as the best form of government.

Table 1 Press, Democratic Adherence and Political Parties

Regression coefficients (beta), controlled by socioeconomic variables		
	disagrees “Parties only serve to divide people”	Democracy better than any other form of government
Reads Newspaper	Ns	ns
R²		
N		
Newspaper readership frequency	ns	-0,065**
R²		0,072
N		1091
Reads political section of newspaper	0,15***	ns
R²	0,096	
N	1100	

Significance: *p < 0,10, **p < 0,05, ***<0,01. N= number of cases. Source: ESEB (2002).

For dichotomous independent variables, logistic regression models were used. As the previous models, newspaper readership frequency is negatively associated with preference for democracy. As for regime principles, the same viewership, as well as reading the political section of the paper, favors the rule of law principle.

Table 2 Logistic Regression – Press and Democratic Adherence

Value Rule of Law						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency	.154	.092	2.826	1	.093	1.167
Constant	21.332	22769.4	.000	1	.999	2E+009
N= 1078. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.199. Overall percentage: 80,5%.						
Reads political section of newspaper	.503	.163	9.549	1	.002	1.653
Constant	20.724	22686.7	.000	1	.999	1E+009
N= 1073. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.212. Overall percentage: 80,4%.						
Preference for Democracy						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency	-.262	.097	7.265	1	.007	.770
Constant	22.143	22579.1	.000	1	.999	4E+009
N= 1050. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.239. Overall percentage: 80,9%.						
Reads political section of newspaper					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. Source: ESEB (2002).

In a normative perspective, the press is not relevant for respondents' view of what parties should represent. Nevertheless, reading the political section of the newspaper is associated with valorization of political parties, in the sense that it favors the opinion that it is important for a President to be identified with one of them (table 3). On the other hand, in a more pragmatic perspective, both general and politics section readership disfavors proximity of citizens to parties. In addition, it is associated with a negative view of this institution. Those who state reading politics in the paper have a greater belief that political parties represent more electors and groups that support them to the detriment of the population as a whole, as table 4 shows.

Therefore, similarly to quality newscasts (Mesquita, 2010), the press also seems to play a part in the valorization of certain normative aspects of political parties. Conversely, in a more pragmatic stance, it estranges readers from them, what might be related to the opinion, favored by this exposure to the press, that parties are more representative of electors and groups that support them than of the population as a whole.

Table 3 Logistic Regression – Press and Normative View of Parties

Parties SHOULD represent Population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper					ns	
Parties SHOULD represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper					ns	
Better a President identified with a Political Party						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper	.262	.142	3.406	1	.065	1.300
Constant	.307	1.422	.047	1	.829	1.360
N= 1047. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.225. Overall percentage: 66,9%.						

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

Table 4 Logistic Regression – Press and Pragmatic View of Parties

Parties represent population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper					ns	
Parties represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper					ns	
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper	.430	.147	8.497	1	.004	1.537
Constant	-.933	1.677	.310	1	.578	.393
N= 1043. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.249. Overall percentage: 70,3%.						
Any party represents your point of view						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Reads Newspaper	-.487	.115	18.030	1	.000	.615
Constant	1.251	.451	7.702	1	.006	3.494
N= 2071. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.197. Overall percentage: 65,5%.						
Newspaper readership frequency					ns	
Reads political section of newspaper	-.531	.143	13.798	1	.000	.588
Constant	-19.612	22323.4	.000	1	.999	.000
N= 1044. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.264. Overall percentage: 65,9%.						

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

On the other hand, the association with democratic adherence per se presented more paradoxical results. As expected, exposure to newspaper is associated to a greater valorization of the rule of law. Contrarily to expectations and international literature, however, the association with preference for democracy is the opposite, echoing, in a certain sense, worries that the antipolitical stance of Brazilian journalism might undermine legitimacy of the regime.

The disparities found may be due to a methodological issue. Surveys on other countries often make a difference between reading tabloids and broadsheet newspapers. The positive results reported in the literature are always concerning the latter. In Brazil, as tabloid-style newspaper reading is not as significant as in other countries, the press readership variable does not specify any specific type of newspaper. In this sense these surveys in Brazil measure something somewhat different from other countries, as broadsheet, tabloid and local newspapers are taken into account as a group, which could account for the results.

On the other hand, the answer may lie in the question of the direction of causality. Although the language of causality is often used here, it is implied that what we are talking about is associations, since it is not possible to establish relations of cause and effect with this type of data. That being said, different media might represent distinct patterns of causality. Television, for example, being a less selective medium, could correspond to a causality that runs from messages to individuals. Although citizens might watch news programs because they already have their TV sets on while watching their favorite entertainment shows, newscasts enable an increment in information about politics, which leads to a better understanding of the functioning of the political system.

On the other hand, since newspapers are more selective in terms of consumers, it would make more sense to interpret an opposite direction of causality. Individuals with certain previous political points of view turn to content that best reflects these perspectives. Together with the fact that it is not possible to know exactly what kind of newspaper - and therefore what content - people are reading, this could explain the differing orientations represented by newscasts and newspapers.

Impact of News on the Radio

The next set of results concerns the role that news consumption on the radio – as well as programs that debate political themes in this medium – represent for the same dimensions presented in the former analyses. The data of regression models described in the table below are not significant for the tested variables.

Table 5 Radio, Democratic Adherence and Political Parties

Regression coefficients (beta), controlled by socioeconomic variables		
	disagrees “Parties only serve to divide people”	Democracy better than any other form of government
Listens to news on the radio	ns	ns
R ²		
N		
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio	ns	ns
R ²		
N		

Significance: *p < 0,10, **p < 0,05, ***<0,01. N= number of cases. Source: ESEB (2002)

In the logistic regression models, analogously, news on the radio is not relevant to explain democratic adherence and the valorization of the rule of law principle, as shown in the table 6. In a more normative perspective, radio is also not relevant to

explain the opinion that a president should be identified with a political party. Nevertheless, listening to programs that debate political themes on the radio favors the idea that parties shouldn't represent the population as a whole, but rather electors and groups that support them, as expected (table 7).

Table 6 Logistic Regression – Radio and Democratic Adherence

Preference for Democracy						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio					ns	
Value Rule of Law						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

Table 7 Logistic Regression – Radio and Normative View of Parties

Parties SHOULD represent Population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio	-.281	.128	4.810	1	.028	.755
Constant	1.269	.549	5.339	1	.021	3.558
N= 1911. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.215 Overall percentage: 75,8%.						
Parties SHOULD represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio	.320	.133	5.806	1	.016	1.376
Constant	-2.086	.623	11.197	1	.001	.124
N= 1911. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.193. Overall percentage: 78,7%.						
Better a President identified with a Political Party						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

In a more pragmatic way, listening to news on the radio, as well as listening to political programs, estrange listeners from parties. This political programs audience is associated with a view that parties represent more electors and groups that support them, instead as the population as whole (table 8).

Table 8 Logistic Regression – Radio and Pragmatic View of Parties

Parties represent Population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio					ns	
Parties represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio					ns	
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio	.364	.119	9.279	1	.002	1.439
Constant	-.693	.503	1.900	1	.168	.500
N= 1901. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.204. Overall percentage: 68,0%.						
Any party represents your point of view						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Listens to news on the radio	-.212	.103	4.193	1	.041	.809
Constant	1.030	.496	4.308	1	.038	2.802
N= 1948. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.195. Overall percentage: 64,6%.						
Listens to programs that debate politics on the radio	-.323	.116	7.783	1	.005	.724
Constant	1.222	.497	6.046	1	.014	3.393
N= 1943. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.198. Overall percentage: 64,5%.						

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

Although there is no impact on democratic adherence, the data presented here support the hypothesis that radio news consumption plays a role in the “depolitization” of citizens. In addition to being associated to negative normative and pragmatic perspectives of the function played by parties, radio audience– and maybe because of this fact – also estranges people from them.

The case of *Cidade Alerta*

The last series of results are related to a specific television program - *Cidade Alerta* - with a more popular and sensationalist depiction of public affairs. Regression models display below - as expected - that this type of programming has a negative

impact on democratic adherence. Those who most watch *Cidade Alerta*, believe less that democracy is the best type of government. Similarly, in respect to parties, this audience favors the idea that they only serve to divide people.

Table 9 Cidade alerta, Democratic Adherence and Political Parties

Regression coefficients (beta), controlled by socioeconomic variables		
	Democracy better than any other form of government"	disagrees "Parties only serve to divide people
"Cidade Alerta" Audience	-0,068**	-0,053*
R ²	0,051	0,067
N	943	978

Significance: *p < 0,10, **p < 0,05, ***<0,01. N= number of cases. Source: ESEB (2002)

Logistic regression models point to the same direction. Although preference for democracy and valorization of the rule of law are not associated to this program (table 10), on the other hand, watching *Cidade Alerta* favors the normative view that parties should represent electors and groups who support them, in the detriment of the population as a whole (table 11). The models with other variables were not statistically significant, as table 12 shows.

Table 10 Logistic Regression – Cidade Alerta and Democratic Adherence

Preference for Democracy						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
"Cidade Alerta" Audience					ns	
Value Rule of Law						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
"Cidade Alerta" Audience					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. Source: ESEB (2002).

Table 11 Logistic Regression – Cidade Alerta and Normative View of Parties

Parties SHOULD represent Population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
"Cidade Alerta" Audience	-.112	.046	6.083	1	.014	.894
Constant	2.176	.745	8.524	1	.004	8.815
N= 1017. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.246. Overall percentage: 77,0%.						
Parties SHOULD represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
"Cidade Alerta" Audience	.107	.047	5.115	1	.024	1.113
Constant	-3.074	.837	13.473	1	.000	.046
N= 1017. Nagelkerke R ² : 0.243. Overall percentage: 79,1%.						
Better a President identified with a Political Party						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
"Cidade Alerta" Audience					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. Source: ESEB (2002).

Table 12 Logistic Regression – *Cidade Alerta* and Pragmatic View of Parties

Parties represent Population as a whole						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
“Cidade Alerta” Audience					ns	
Parties represent electors and groups that support them						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
“Cidade Alerta” Audience					ns	
Any party represents your point of view						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
“Cidade Alerta” Audience					ns	

Controlled by: gender, age, instruction, income. **Source:** ESEB (2002).

Brief Final Considerations

The media are a relevant factor to be considered for the understanding of public affairs. The information they contain might help to engage citizens in democracy, or estrange them from democratic principles. To understand the role represented by the media for public support for democracy, we need to consider different impacts of varying sources of news that citizens are exposed to.

The results presented here confirm this plural role played by news, depending on the medium in question. On the one hand, the press is positively associated to the valorization of normative aspects of political parties, as the hypothesis proposed. Nevertheless, this view is followed by a critical evaluation over the role they actually represent. This might explain the fact the viewership is associated with an estrangement from parties. Put differently, biggest consumers of newspapers expect parties to represent the population as a whole, think they actually represent more the electors and groups that support them and, hence, don't feel close to them. As expected, the press also favors certain democratic principles, such as the rule of law.

The most intriguing fact however, is that it disfavors democratic adherence per se. A methodological difference in measuring newspaper readership could explain this fact. International literature studies – which show the positive role of the press – measure broadsheet newspapers as opposed to the consumption of tabloids. Questionnaires in Brazil do not differentiate these two kinds of newspapers. What we could be measuring, then, are broadsheet, tabloid and local news consumption combined. Furthermore, newspapers being more selective in terms of consumers, it

would be possible to affirm that people with certain prior political views read newspapers that express these previous perspectives, rather than a possible causality of messages influencing readers.

News consumption on the radio, on its turn, isn't relevant for democratic adherence. As expected, however, it disfavors individuals' expectations of the role parties should have, as well as appraisal of their actual role. This empirical evidence is consistent with theoretical points of view that suggest a depolitization played by news on the radio (Nunes, 1993). If this type of audience foments the view that parties shouldn't – and, in fact, don't – represent the population, why should citizens feel close to any political party?

Cidade Alerta audience follows in the same direction. Although significant in a smaller number of models, this show disfavors democratic adherence, as well as valorization of political parties. Both radio and more sensationalist programs, therefore, show that the way negative news about politics is treated might make a difference. Quality newscasts cover corruption scandals in an individual, not an institutional, perspective. The view that the media watches power, in its watchdog function, might be related to the fact that this type of audience stimulates democratic values and regime support attitudes. Conversely, if criticisms by the media cross the line from this individual approach, to a more institutional one, the effect seems to be the opposite. More studies that offer greater details on content of these types of programs could help the understanding of the results found here.

This being said, do news media constitute a concern with the quality of democracy? As stated before, the results presented here refer to secondary sources of news. Quality newscasts' (Brazilians' main source of news) audience frequently appear associated with attitudes of political support (Mesquita, 2010a and 2010b). Negative associations presented by radio news and "tabloid like" TV shows consumption should be indicative that the type of message matters for the results shown: not all media are alike. Nevertheless, they still represent a secondary source of information for a restricted segment of the population, what shouldn't, in principle, mean greater concerns over Brazilian democratic quality.

Another consideration should be made in regards to directionality of associations. As said before, from this type of data, it is not possible to say whether media impacts political attitudes, or if citizens with certain political attitudes turn to

the type of media that display the world view they already have. In this sense, it seems that different media in question might offer diverse suggestions for this relationship.

Television newscasts, as *Jornal Nacional* for example, have a more diversified audience. Many people watch it because they have their TV sets on between favorite entertainment shows⁷. In this case, it could be suggested of an actual positive role of the newscast that has the potential to reach an audience previously not interested in public affairs. Conversely, the secondary sources of news analyzed here could suggest a different causal relationship. Since they are more selective in terms of consumers, it does seem plausible that they are read, listened to or watched by a public that has the same points of view these media convey. Nevertheless, a better way to understand these effects could be as a two-way flow. Although people turn to these media because they reflect certain points of view they already have, they reinforce these previous attitudes, which could be of support of democratic values, or estrangement from politics in general.

⁷ In Brazil, this newscast is strategically aired at 8:15 pm, between Brazilians favorite entertainment programs, soap operas.

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