

DOSSIER

JANUARY 8, 2023:

democracy and resistance in live news coverage



EDUARDA FORMIGA

Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil

ORCID: 0009-0007-5576-5392

CYNTHIA MARA MIRANDA

Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil

ORCID: 0000-0002-9399-7975

EDER AHMAD CHARAF EDDINE

Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil

ORCID: 0000-0003-1882-8503

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ABSTRACT – The text analyzes TV Globo/Globonews coverage on January 8, 2023, when the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches were invaded by followers of Jair Bolsonaro, during the failed coup attempt, to identify the role of journalism in defending the Rule of Law. The analysis showed that the demonstrations echoed the instability, polarization and political insecurity that Brazil had experienced in recent years. It is concluded that TV Globo and Globonews delivered information that provided Brazilian citizens with elements to understand the fact, marking a position of resistance to the attempt at institutional rupture in the country.

Key words: News coverage. Coup d'état. Defense of democracy.

1 Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil. E-mail: eeformiga@gmail.com

2 Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil. E-mail: cynthiamara@uft.edu.br

3 Universidade Federal do Tocantins – Brazil. E-mail: ederahmad@uft.edu.br

8 DE JANEIRO DE 2023: democracia e resistência na cobertura jornalística ao vivo

RESUMO – O texto analisa a cobertura da TV Globo/Globonews no dia 8 de janeiro de 2023, quando os poderes Executivo, Legislativo e Judiciário foram invadidos por seguidores de Jair Bolsonaro, durante a fracassada tentativa de golpe, para identificar o papel de utilidade pública do jornalismo na defesa do Estado Democrático. A análise apontou que as manifestações ecoavam a instabilidade, a polarização e a insegurança política que o Brasil havia experimentado nos últimos anos. Concluiu-se que a TV Globo e a Globonews entregaram informações que forneceram aos cidadãos brasileiros elementos para a compreensão do fato, marcando uma posição de resistência à tentativa de ruptura institucional no país.

Palavras-chave: Cobertura jornalística. Golpe de Estado. Defesa da democracia.

8 DE ENERO DE 2023: democracia y resistencia en la cobertura informativa en directo

RESUMEN – El texto analiza la cobertura de TV Globo/Globonews el 8 de enero de 2023, cuando los poderes Ejecutivo, Legislativo y Judicial fueron invadidos por seguidores de Jair Bolsonaro, durante el fallido intento de golpe de Estado, para identificar el papel del periodismo en la defensa del Estado Democrático. Análisis de Contenido mostró que las manifestaciones reflejaban la inestabilidad, la polarización y la inseguridad política que Brasil había experimentado en los últimos años. Se concluye que TV Globo y Globonews entregaron informaciones que brindaron a los ciudadanos brasileños elementos para comprender el hecho, marcando una posición de resistencia ante el intento de ruptura.

Palabras clave: Cobertura periodística. Golpe de Estado. Defensa de la democracia.

1 Introduction

Widely reported by private, public, national, and international media outlets, January 8, 2023 was the date on which the Brazilian National Congress, the Planalto Palace, and the Federal Supreme Court (STF) were vandalized by supporters of former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro. These supporters did not accept Bolsonaro's defeat and sought to remove President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was democratically elected via electronic ballot boxes.

The scenario of political and informational insecurity, the economic crisis, and the inflation that left 33 million Brazilians unable to feed themselves (Olhe para a Fome, 2022), the disastrous mismanagement of the pandemic that resulted in more than 714 thousand deaths (Ministry of Health, November 9, 2024) were all

fundamental facts that led to Bolsonaro's failure to be re-elected in 2022. The nationalist far-right was split at the polls, and once the votes had been counted, Brazil became more divided than ever and the former president was outmatched, becoming the first president not to be re-elected after the re-democratization. Lula won the 2022 presidential elections with 50.90% (60.3 million votes), while Bolsonaro obtained 49.10% (58.2 million votes), a slight difference in the number of votes. Despite the defeat, the far-right continued to hold power in the legislature. In total, the Liberal Party (PL) – Bolsonaro's party – elected 112 members of parliament to the National Congress. Of these, 99 were federal deputies (23 more than in the previous election) and eight were senators (totaling 13 members of parliament in the House).

Wearing green and yellow shirts, the colors of the Brazilian national soccer team that also appear in the national flag, Bolsonaro supporters claimed they were patriots and began holding demonstrations in front of military barracks and on highways while organizing a fundraising campaign called “vaquinhas”. Those individuals who were unable to participate in the demonstrations could donate money or supplies to support the protests and keep them going. Demonstrators also set up roadblocks in certain areas during the first week after the elections.

In November 2022, after his defeat, Bolsonaro claimed he would not step down (*Bolsonaro says he won't hand over the presidential sash...*, 2021). This was similar to Donald Trump's attempt to annul Joseph Biden's victory, which resulted in an unexpected and unique attack on American democracy in 2020 (Jacobson, 2021). In Brazil, an alert state was created after the election as even though “Bolsonaro radicalism is defeated, it was not “broken up” at the polls, and actually showed a great capacity for mobilization, enticement, and persuasion” (Silva & Schurster, 2023, p. 53). Bolsonaro supporters openly displayed their prejudice and nationalist pride (akin to the idea of superiority seen in other fascist discourses) and turned democracy into a scapegoat to be sacrificed “to appease their intrinsic thirst for violence” (Miorando, 2023, p. 9).

The invasion of the Praça dos Três Poderes (in English, the Three Powers Plaza) was not random or unprecedented. In 2021, while celebrating Independence Day in Rio de Janeiro and the city of São Paulo, Bolsonaro encouraged attacks on the STF, saying that

“this president will no longer follow any decision by Alexandre de Moraes. The patience of our people has already run out” (*See the full text of Bolsonaro’s speech...*, 2021). In this context of Brazilian political polarization, Bello (2023) claims that this adherence to either the Workers’ Party or anti-Workers’ Party groups opened up space for the extreme right movement in Brazil to occur on January 8th. Even with Bolsonaro’s defeat in the presidential elections, the extreme right gained prominence in the National Congress and state governments.

This article analyzes live coverage from TV Globo and GloboNews on January 8 (a total of 3 hours, 7 minutes, and 33 seconds of live broadcast time) as we believe this media event is relevant toward understanding the historical context that made what Bello (2023) refers to as the rise of political polarization rooted in the division between Workers’ Party and anti-Workers’ Party groups.

TV Globo and GloboNews are two of the major open TV channels in Brazil with the largest number of viewers. Our analysis of news coverage was conducted to understand Rede Globo’s position and assess the principles of live broadcasting, in which live television journalism reports on the facts and events concomitantly in order to build effects of reality and enhance identification. It is clear from the events of January 8th that the journalists were ill-equipped to cover the invasion of the three powers, resorting to providing hurried, “firsthand” accounts (Emerim & Cavenaghi, 2012b).

The increased use of digital media has meant television journalism has had to adapt to a new way in which the public consumes its news. TV Globo’s coverage of the events on January 8th is an example of this. It used different strategies, such as more simulcast live transmissions, to respond to the new values of immediacy and continuous information flow (Emerim & Cavenaghi, 2012b), as well as the different formats of participatory and collaborative content (Temer & Santos, 2023).

The first part of this article highlights the methodological assumptions of the study, the second part presents the theoretical foundation, which is based on Bolsonarism in Brazil, the weakening of democracy, and the resistance of journalism, subjects that authors such as Bello (2020, 2023), Maitino (2030), Ribeiro (2022), Boito (2020), Silva and Schurster (2023), Miguel (2019), Silva and Marques (2021), and others have researched. The third part of this article reconstructs the narrative and timeline of the media event on

January 8th before analyzing the live television news coverage of TV Globo/GloboNews.

2 Methodological procedures

Our research involved two methodological procedures: the first was a bibliographic and documentary analysis (Richardson, 2017) and the second examined the qualitative aspects and discursive analyses of Audiovisual Research (Becker, 2012; Temer & Santos, 2023). According to Richardson (2017), documentary analysis is the study and analysis of documents such as newspapers and magazines to discover the social and economic circumstances and their relationships with the sociocultural timeline of a recorded social event.

The organized content (television news scripts) helped us to reconstruct the incidents and perform a critical analysis of the social events on January 8th. The excerpts we selected for this article include timestamps from the TV Globo newscast, taken from YouTube (Cortes Canal de Chamadas, 2023).

Becker (2012) suggests that understanding audiovisual journalistic narratives critically requires combining and analyzing images, sounds, gestures, graphics, and other visual elements. This combination helps to build meaning around the news coverage. The analysis involved directly observing images, sounds, and transcribed conversations, which were then categorized (Franco, 2003).

Our research was conducted in the following manner: 1) the audiovisual material was organized according to direct observation, description, and discourse transcription; 2) the transcribed material was then read and categories were built; and 3) the data was analyzed and interpreted based on the interrelationship between the audiovisual material and the transcribed text. The categories were then organized according to the recurrent discursive patterns in the material. The categories were: “Nature of the crimes committed”, “Providing a space for authorities to respond”, “Presenting any flaws in the projection of events” and “Demand for punishment”. This article took a more in-depth look into the “Nature of crimes committed” category and collected several journalistic narratives on antidemocratic criminal acts. This encompasses newsworthy events centered on attacks against public buildings that represent Brazilian democracy, and events that professional journalism must report

on (Karam, 2009). Qualitative analysis from a social and historical perspective revealed the journalists' social role as news-makers guided by ethical principles and a commitment to a democratic society (Caldas, 2023).

3 Bolsonaroism: weakening of democracy and resistance of journalism

In 2019, the Brazilian far-right came into power with the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro. His victory at the polls was preceded by a period of political instability, which began in 2016 with the impeachment (Löwy, 2016; Almeida & Amaral, 2020) of President Dilma Rousseff from the Workers' Party (PT). Former vice-president Michel Temer, from the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), stepped in as acting president for the rest of Rousseff's term. According to Albuquerque (2019), the mainstream media supported, encouraged, and favored this move.

Bolsonarism – an ideology based on the political views of Bolsonaro – grew during the political instability that took hold of the country following the impeachment, and gained even more support during the 2018 presidential elections by stirring up a nostalgia for the military dictatorship, claiming it was a time when society had discipline and order thanks to the exercise of censorship and physical violence over the spheres of culture and behavior (Ribeiro, 2022).

In search of political notoriety, the Bolsonaro party appealed to the holy trinity for radicals – the State, the Church, and the Family – and proceeded to label the Workers' Party as the common enemy; the bastion of a great communist threat. To protect and maintain this *modus vivendi*, self-proclaimed conservatives began to resent this so-called threat and thus were susceptible to populist and reactionary figures (Maitino, 2020). These characters come to represent the feelings and interests of the extreme right, something which Bolsonaro mimics from other world leaders, such as Donald Trump (Republicans) in the United States of America (USA).

This “straightforward, active and propositive far-right, with its sizable public activism and frequent incursions in the streets, exploits the shortcomings and deficiencies of democratic regimes”

(Reis, 2020, p. 3). They used social media to spread disinformation in order to benefit their own political agenda.

As Simon (2021) points out, the far right in the United States gained momentum through Trump's narratives of contempt for the rules. He was able to evoke mass hypnosis among his voters with the notion that a new world could not emerge without destroying existing norms. As highlighted by Bello (2020), Brazil was divided between Bolsonaro supporters in opposition to the Workers' Party and Lula. It was easy to convince supporters of how corrupt the Workers' Party was by pointing to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, international and national economic crises, the fluctuating inflation and unemployment rates (Bello, 2023), major scandals such as Mensalão (*Mensalão: a timeline of the events*, 2021), and Operation Car Wash (*Understand the events*, n.d.), all of which were major headlines in the media. Coalitional presidentialism¹, where governments negotiate political deals to secure diverse interests across different branches of government, was blamed for the economic and social problems. By opening a space for neoliberalism (to achieve the goals of the extreme right, and thus please Brazilian voters who are suspicious of the political class) Bolsonarism was able to speak to those who felt threatened "by a corrupt system and an omnipresent left that tries to destroy their values and enrich themselves at their expense" (Maitino, 2020, p. 16).

Populist rhetoric, "particularly the us versus them mindset, which places the people, represented by their leader, against a common enemy" (Baptista et al., 2022, p. 115), established a dichotomy in the country. Ribeiro (2022, p. 75) conceptualizes Bolsonarism as "a phenomenon that exceeds the sphere of politics, thus allowing a broad reading of the *modus operandi* of the extreme right in Brazil today". Boito (2020) states that Bolsonarism emerged during the campaign to remove Dilma and was a distinctly neo-fascist reactionary movement that wanted to rule by law. Silva and Schurster (2023, p. 120) use the term Bolsonarist fascism in reference to "its denialist and regressive policies" that brought its "leader" to power and led Brazil to "the hardest and deepest crisis of the Republic since 1964". Ribeiro (2022, p. 95) concludes that: "on the streets and online, the extreme right, which did not go away after the civil-military dictatorship, was reborn and is no longer ashamed of being who it is".

Following its inauguration in 2019, the Bolsonaro administration engaged in direct attacks on institutions, mirroring the denialist narratives common in anti-Workers' Party discourse. One year later, the covid-19 pandemic began, challenging scientists and overcrowding hospitals in Brazil and around the world. At times, the former president questioned the seriousness of the Coronavirus, claiming it was just a "mild flu" (Silva, 2020). He immortalized phrases such as "I am not a gravedigger" (Gomes, 2020) when answering questions about the covid-related deaths. He was an advocate of early treatments, the so-called "Covid kit", which included unproven and untested medication which was widely distributed and prescribed by doctors in Brazil.

Since Jair Bolsonaro took office as president, the political participation of the working classes has been limited due to the authoritarian laws and measures that made it impossible for civil society to participate in certain councils. The assault on the media and civil society, marked by intensified polarization, the denigration of opponents, and the discrediting of elections, became a standard operating procedure. For Witt Bendlin and Witt (2024):

One can conclude that democracy in the country was severely threatened between 2019 and 2022. Its democratic institutions were seriously weakened, the Superior Courts being one example, and there was the constant threat that a military government would be installed, a subject that continues to be investigated throughout 2023. (Witt Bendlin & Witt, 2024, p. 242).

Throughout his term, Bolsonaro questioned the legitimacy of journalism and any trust placed in it. Not engaging in any kind of meaningful dialogue with competing ideas, the "leader" mimicked the Trumpist strategy in Brazil, reinforcing the asymmetric polarization that results in the "reduction of the possibility of debate between competing political groups" (Miguel, 2019, p. 47).

Jair used the public machine to mock and disregard the press, the "press enclosure" set up in front of the Alvorada Palace is one example of the disrespect he exhibited towards Brazilian journalism. Media professionals were often the targets of direct attacks, especially women (National Federation of Journalists [FENAJ], 2022). When asked about claims of his meddling with the Federal Police in Rio de Janeiro in May 2020, Bolsonaro told the reporter to "shut up" (*Bolsonaro tells reporter to shut up...*, 2020). He threatened a journalist in Brasilia when asked about checks

deposited by Fernando Queiroz into Mrs. Bolsonaro's account, saying "I want to punch you in the face" (Bolsonaro threatens journalist...,2020). The attacks on media professionals are seen as a strategy to delegitimize democracy and particularly to gain accolades from loyal followers.

This stance by the former president to discredit the work of journalism professionals generated consequences throughout his term. The Report on Violence Against Journalists and Freedom of the Press in Brazil (2022), released by the National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ), showed that political violence has seriously affected journalists and communicators in the country. In 2022, the number of attacks on journalists and media outlets was 376. Jair Bolsonaro was the main aggressor and/or person responsible for these attacks, accounting for 104 cases (27.66% of the total).

The institution of journalism became a target during the Bolsonaro government, which also represented a weakening of Brazilian democracy if it limited the freedoms of opinion and expression as they pertain to the "exercise of citizenship that shall be extended to all citizens and their representative organizations" (Peruzzo, 2006, p. 8). Miranda et al. (2024) highlight that the recent persecution and delegitimization of the press at the hands of the extreme right in Brazil has left a legacy of hatred and distrust that is directed toward professional journalism. For a fair and plural society, everyone must have equal opportunities and access to these resources, and the right to participate in public debate through the media.

The Final Report from the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry Commission of January 8, 2023 states that – as a right consolidated by the Magna Carta (Art. 220) – the defense of freedom of the press depends on incentives for free communication "capable of – in a productive tension with democracy – fostering public opinion, based on criticism guided by respectful and rational debate" (National Congress, 2023, p. 147). Bolsonaro's administration shifted from supporting open communication to consistently undermining journalists' credibility.

The Brazilian Journalist Code of Ethics (Fenaj, 2007) reinforces the right to inform and be informed. Article 6 lays out a journalist's obligations by stating that "a journalist must constantly fight for the defense of freedom of thought and expression, as well

as for the free exercise of the profession”, which was prevented under the extreme right government in the country.

Silva and Marques (2021) highlight that South American countries have contested news coverage in ways that range from trying to make the press out to be an enemy of citizenship to calling for physical violence. These authors also highlight that the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro as president in January 2019 increased tensions with press professionals, which had already been going on since his time serving as a federal deputy. In essence, journalism’s role as an institution to strengthen democracy was what the former president was calling into question.

Despite being under attack during Bolsonaro’s administration, Brazilian journalism continued to work at providing and protecting accurate, contextualized, and quality information in the name of guaranteeing fundamental rights and defending democracy. This means that the journalist acts as a fundamental agent who monitors and investigates suspicious activities, abuse of power, corruption, or unethical and unusual behavior that is of public interest, finding out who the perpetrators are through transparency and “accountability”. This central and strategic reference point for journalism contributes to the formation of the meaning and the social construction of reality (Lima da Rocha & Marroquim, 2011). It becomes a public asset that serves the community (Peruzzo, 2006) without removing itself from its social responsibility (Pereira, 2004) to search for objectivity and uphold the social contract that establishes truth and trust on the part of the public in the press.

Following the January 8th events, the media collaborated to determine the crimes committed, using nationally televised images as evidence against the perpetrators. Veteran Reuters photojournalist Adriano Machado, a twenty-year chronicler of Brazilian politics, faced threats to delete his photos (Agência Senado, 2023), highlighting the insidious power of the accusatory press. Those photographs subsequently aided in the identification of some of those responsible for the attempted coup on Sunday.

3 TV Globo News coverage on January 8th

Key factors in judging news importance include originality, novelty, relevance, prominence, and evidence of wrongdoing

(Traquina, 2005). A possible coup d'état, an unprecedented event in recent Brazilian political history, interrupted regular television programming that Sunday afternoon. TV Globo, the media outlet we chose for our analysis, began reporting live at the scene as the events were unfolding, producing and broadcasting aerial images while also showing videos that had already been circulating on the internet. Before analyzing the TV Globo/GloboNews coverage, we believe it is important to reconstruct the narrative of the event.

During the Independence Day celebrations on September 7, 2021, Bolsonaro made his intentions regarding the following year's election clear, and once again deliberately questioned the legitimacy of the Brazilian electoral system. For the former president, the election would only be legal if he won. "Even after the explanations from the Federal Court were examined and accepted by the political parties and universities, Bolsonaro continued to claim the electoral process was rigged" (Silva & Schurster, 2023, p. 61). His accusations were directed at the ministers of the STF and also at Congress.

The day before the attacks on January 8, 2023, one hundred buses arrived at the Federal Capital with more than four thousand protesters (Correia, 2023). That same night, the former Minister of Justice, Flávio Dino, authorized the National Force (Portela, 2023) to act on any possible disturbances. On Sunday, January 8, the Military Police in the Federal District escorted the protest as it began in front of the Army Headquarters and continued towards the Esplanada dos Ministérios at 1 pm (*See the timeline of the events that led to the invasions*, 2023). Public security fenced off three lanes of the Eixo Monumental highway so that Bolsonaro supporters could protest without being disrupted. About two hours later, around 3 pm, the crowd of Bolsonaro supporters pushed the fences down and broke through the blockade that was preventing access to the buildings that symbolize Brazilian democracy. The police officers at the scene tried to react but underestimated the destructive nature of the masses and were unable to control the situation.

The attacks were not limited to buildings, blows and punches were directed at a police officer who was trying to quell the violence. The mounted policeman was pulled down off his horse and assaulted while lying on the ground (*VIDEO: MP cavalry officer attacked by Bolsonaro terrorists...*, 2023). The protestors proceeded to make their way up the ramp to the National Congress and invade the building. At 3:10 pm, they smashed the glass windows of the building and were

now desecrating public property. They entered through the Black Hall (the main entrance, referred to as the “entrance of honor”) and headed to the Green Hall where several works by renowned international artists are on display. They destroyed everything in their path, and despite appearing to have a certain level of organization (funding and mass communication), there was no hierarchy or command and their disorganization was evident.

They eventually arrived at the Blue Hall, which is used to access the Senate Plenary and the office of the President of the Senate. The rioters proceeded to invade the Senate Plenary and began throwing furniture around, even upturning a bench and using it as a slide as they “played around” in the House of the People and disrupted democracy.

While this was going on, other self-proclaimed patriots entered the Planalto Palace, the official workplace of the president of Brazil, at 3:50 pm. On that particular Sunday, the newly sworn-in president Lula was in Araraquara (SP). As they did not encounter any type of police resistance, the rioters invaded the building, destroying furniture and objects in their path. Valued at R\$8 million, “As Mulatas” – a very important painting by Di Cavalcanti that hangs in the Planalto Palace – was torn countless times. Lethal and non-lethal weapons were stolen from the Institutional Security Office (GSI), and what is also interesting here is that they already knew where to find the weapons. Similarly, at 3:55 pm, another group of rioters invaded the STF: they smashed the windows in the Great Hall, trampled and destroyed the chairs, tore up documents and books in the plenary, and vandalized personal objects of the Supreme Court ministers. The National Force arrived at 4:25 p.m. but was too late to prevent the damage.

About two hours after the invasions began, at 5:10 pm, the governor of the Federal District, Ibaneis Rocha (MDB), announced that the head of Public Security for the DF, Anderson Torres, had been removed from his position and asked for federal support. Torres was in Florida (USA) at the time. He was head of the Ministry of Justice until the end of Bolsonaro’s term, who coincidentally was also in the United States.

President Lula responded at 5:55 pm by decreeing intervention in the Federal District and appointed the executive secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Ricardo Capelli, as interventor. Lula also stated that the DF Public Security was incompetent and that the extremists would not go unpunished. At 6:10 pm, Ibaneis

Rocha called on all police officers in the Federal District to contain the extremists. The first of many arrests was confirmed ten minutes later, at 6:20 p.m. The governor apologized, stating that the riots were unacceptable.

Six hours after the invasions began, Bolsonaro referred to his supporters who destroyed public property as people who “break the rules” (Vinhai, 2023), thus removing himself from any responsibility. At that time, there was an idea circulating on social media that the destruction had been caused by “infiltrated leftists” (Pacheco & Prata, 2024).

The Federal Police and Capelli established a crisis cabinet around 9 pm. Simultaneously, President Lula was evaluating the rioters’ destruction.

The relevance of this event is unquestionable: institutions that represent society and Brazilian democracy were invaded and vandalized. It is important to note here that the major media outlets have branches or subsidiaries in the Federal Capital. This infrastructure (permanent staff, equipment, links, helicopter) means Brasilia is geographically close, allowing TV Globo to provide instant coverage.

The last news value deals with the infraction which “refers specifically to the violation, the transgression of the rules” (Traquina, 2005). The scenes of the attempted coup clearly show there was no shortage of infringements that Sunday afternoon. TV Globo’s narrative of the event renounced the protests, claiming they were an attack against all Brazilians. It is also worth mentioning the systematization proposed by Gislene Silva (2005), which adds tragedy/drama as a newsworthiness criterion, and in this case, mirrors the violence of the acts committed.

On the Sunday of “Selma’s Party” (Pinheiro & Carone, 2023), the code used by the criminals, TV Globo resisted interrupting programming to report on the riots. During *Fantástico* at 5:16 pm, host Poliana A Britta summarized the unfolding coup attempt in Brasília. Television coverage was then provided by journalist Erick Bang, from GloboNews, and was simulcast on open and paid television – something which was unprecedented before then (Cortes Canal de Chamadas, 2023).

There was no specific lead (using the traditional “who, what, where, when, why” questions) as discussions were held about the events as they unfolded. The broadcast, in a way, was reminiscent of the live coverage from American broadcasters of the terrorist attacks

on September 11, 2001, when the reporters and hosts were reporting on the events as they unfolded, without specifying exactly what was happening (Emerim & Cavenaghi, 2012a).

Temer and Santos (2023) conducted an audiovisual analysis of the event and the social media images (Poliana Abritta, 22s) that the editors used of the protestors rioting at the Three Powers. The coverage (which lasted 3 hours, 7 minutes, and 33 seconds) was provided by journalists and commentators Marcelo Lins, Julia Duailibi, Merval Pereira, Fernando Gabeira, Eliane Cantanhêde, Camila Bonfim, Valdo Cruz and Gerson Camarotti, and included mixed formats with participatory and collaborative content. The first aerial images that were released were of the police in the area trying to contain the rioters.

According to commentator Marcelo Lins, Bolsonaro was complicit in the invasions, and he advocated for the prosecution of all those who planned, supported, or financed the coup. This search for civil and criminal responsibility was a recurrent theme throughout the broadcast. “The parallel is uncanny” (5min42), said Lins about the similarity between the invasion of the American parliament and the Brazilian parliament; and a similarity between the Brazilian and American far-right, as pointed out by Silva and Schurster (2023). It is important to note that Bolsonarism is not an exclusive, unique, or temporary movement. Anti-democratic practices have already been recorded in other countries, such as the U.S. Capitol riot in Washington on January 6, 2021. There are also similarities regarding Bolsonaro’s discourse before the invasion of Brasilia, such as rejecting democratic rules, disputing the results of the polls, and disregarding the legitimacy of his opponents (Diep & Nguyen, 2023).

Based on the newsworthiness values, class, and political and economic bias of each media outlet, professional journalism is governed by “technical rules and standards of conduct that guarantee reliable reporting of relevant facts” (Andrade et al., 2022, p. 22), and must comply with the obligation of public utility. A series of crimes were committed during the broadcast, as we observed in *Plantão Globo* (Cortes Canal de Chamadas, 2023):

Because it’s a monument, when you break the windows, you’re not just breaking the building, you know, that’s what was going on, it’s a criminal act of great magnitude by the people, symbolically, that says a lot, right. (Poliana Abritta, 32m37s).

150 people are already in prison because they were caught red-handed defacing public property. (Valdo Cruz, 1h41min56s).

As the statements demonstrate, the attacks were not only against the physical structures of the National Congress, the Planalto Palace, and the Supreme Court but also against the institutions that the buildings in the Three Powers represent. Journalism sees this as a crime based on the chosen framework.

But what we saw earlier was ridiculous, horrible scenes of people committing crimes not only against the State but against all Brazilians as well; our representations were vandalized and destroyed this Sunday afternoon, January 8, 2023, in Brasilia. (Erick Bang, 3h6min41s).

Nine months later, the Supreme Court convicted the first offenders of the attempted coup and blatant disregard for the Democratic State of Law. Aécio Lúcio Costa, 51 years old, received a 17-year sentence (15 years and 6 months in prison, and 1 year and 6 months in a detention center), and was ordered to pay collective damages in the amount of R\$ 30 million and a 100-day fine (STF convicts 1st defendant for January 8 coup acts..., 2023). To clarify, despite a conviction months later, contemporaneous reporting failed to anticipate the full scope of the offenses, including the misapplication of anti-terrorism legislation.

As laid out in the CPMI final report (National Congress, 2023), the extreme right often misuses national symbols. The criminals were dressed in green and yellow and used the Brazilian national football team uniform as an emblem, a uniform. The televised scenes showed a distorted sense of sport and self-proclaimed patriotism. The symbolism surrounding January 8 remains strong in the democratic order.

About 1 hour and 26 minutes into the broadcast, journalist Valdo Cruz announced that around 150 people had already been arrested and detained for crimes against public property. In addition to reporting what was happening in real-time, the journalists pointed out that the crimes would have consequences and that those involved would be punished.

Journalist Flávia Oliveira began her coverage by stating: “This attempt to abolish the democratic rule of law or a coup d’état failed” (1h41min56). This ended up reinforcing democracy itself, which had been attacked and rebuilt; in other words, it was a demonstration that institutions would become stronger after the crimes and that the law would prevail.

The nature of the crimes being committed was a constant focal point, and Erick Bang joined the simulcast to, once again, renounce the event, claiming that the attack was an attack on all Brazilians: “our representations were vandalized, they were destroyed on this Sunday afternoon on January 8, 2023, in Brasilia” (3h6min41 s).

At this point, the journalists who were covering the event managed to fulfill their social duty of defending democratic institutions by drawing attention to the crimes being committed by the rioters. The journalists' goal was to help clarify and explain the crimes, and demand punishment for the perpetrators (this includes the protesters and the individuals who organized and funded them). The argument was not only directed toward the obvious destruction of public property but also to the refusal to accept the results of the electronic voting machines, which were constantly being delegitimized during Jair Bolsonaro's administration. Since the classical values of journalism are the “basis of democratic health” (Karam, 2009, p. 26). The final CPMI report from October 2023 found out that the “investigative, critical, and free press, while under attack, still managed to document, reflect, and renounce the attacks” (National Congress, 2023, p. 15).

The protesters were calling for a coup d'état, and the news coverage of January 8th was declaring “the country is experiencing an attempted coup d'état”. After the perpetrators had been arrested, the coup d'état narrative was further reinforced in journalism.

Globo TV professionals emphasized the gravity of the coup in their assessment of its predictability, asserting that a strategically organized populace could have prevented it. January 8th also proved that intelligence and state security had been compromised.

On the other hand, Temer and Santos (2023) point out that television journalism also underestimated the magnitude of the event in terms of its criminal potential by minimizing the potential for violence in the demonstrations and choosing not to speak of the close to one hundred buses full of protesters that arrived in Brasilia. The organized demonstration on the Eixo Monumental highway was also mostly ignored, thus limiting the public's perception of what January 8th would become.

Journalist Natuza Nery, while watching the protesters being removed from the invaded buildings, said that the way forward should be to arrest these protesters. “It is not enough

to just remove the protestors from the buildings, we have to arrest them, we have to detain these people” (26m). The call for accountability in this context stems from the need to set a clear legal standard and discourage any future attempts to overthrow the government. Holding the perpetrators responsible and raising awareness among those who witnessed the events sends a message that such actions are unacceptable and should not be repeated. This serves as a deterrent and helps establish a precedent for maintaining stability and upholding the rule of law. According to the journalists:

[...] It is essential to ensure the rule of law and the full accountability of those who are violating the law, including those who have committed acts of vandalism and acts of terrorism and that will go uninvestigated. (Camila Bonfim, 1h14).

It is essential to punish those responsible, to investigate and punish those who committed the crime, who funded it, who ordered it. (Flávia Oliveira, 1h44min32s).

The period of governmental instability stemmed from the presidential transition, during which governing bodies remained under the previous administration’s influence. This did not mean journalism did not demand responsibility from the new president (Valdo Cruz, 8min52s).

Initially, the criminals were labeled “terrorists” and journalists followed on the heels of hasty statements from authorities such as President Lula, Justice Minister Flávio Dino, and Minister Alexandre de Moraes (STF) during their live coverage who, when ordering the removal of the governor of the Federal District Ibaneis Rocha, referred to the event as a terrorist act. Once the Supreme Court convicted the first perpetrators in the second half of 2023, it became clear that this was not a case of terrorism, but an attempted coup d’état.

This lack of knowledge about the classification of the crime seems understandable, given the “heat of the moment”, but it demonstrates how unprepared the media were in terms of their live coverage of January 8, data also found by Temer and Santos (2023). Another factor that stands out is the lack of specialized journalism coverage to carry out the appropriate constitutional interpretation. A critical reading of the corpus (journalistic narrative) shows how the media outlet’s position changed before and after the narrated event. It is also clear that the event itself influenced the journalistic

narrative's version of reality while the events were unfolding. While the event was being reported on, there was also an attempt by the media outlets to capture the audience's attention and, given the destructive manner in which public property was vandalized, it was unavoidable that condemning the acts of destruction and defending democracy would garner different viewpoints than the ones the journalists had.

The theoretical implication of the analysis allowed us to look at the narrative and the event and determine to what extent the institution of journalism understands the coup of January 8, 2022. Understanding the role of narratives in socialization processes (Motta, 2013) and events as pragmatic phenomena that break from expectations and disorganize our present (França, 2012), helped to identify the dispute over the apprehension and reconstruction of the event, that is, the "journalistic work" of TV Globo which, during the Bolsonaro government, presented ambiguous coverage, alternating between support and opposition.

The analysis of the corpus shows that the limitations of news coverage cannot be solely attributed to the temporality of the event and the lack of specialized journalism to adequately interpret the crime. Another possible hypothesis that may be of interest for future studies is the influence that the media outlet's editorial line has on building narratives of a particular event.

Thus, we believed that the news coverage was relevant, but not remarkable, given that being in favor of the attacks, for example, was not plausible. Even with flaws and a slight lack of preparation, the television news coverage we analyzed fulfilled its public service insofar as it reported on the invasion of the three branches of government and labeled it an attack on Brazilian democracy.

4 Final considerations

On January 8, 2023, Brazilian democracy was threatened. Supporters of former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro, unhappy with his defeat in the 2022 polls, invaded the Three Powers Plaza in Brasilia. They vandalized the National Congress, the Supreme Federal Court, and the Planalto Palace. This day will be remembered in history. These institutions were disrespected by criminals who wanted to remove the

elected president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), from office. After the failed coup attempt, a Joint Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPMI) was established to investigate the events that occurred between May and October 2023, on what was being called the “Sunday of Shame”. As of May 2024, complaints filed by the Attorney General’s Office have already resulted in 216 perpetrators being convicted by the Supreme Federal Court. Some of the crimes committed according to the Supreme Federal Court were: a violent disregard for the Democratic Rule of Law, a qualified disaster, a coup d’état, destruction of a heritage site, and criminal conspiracy.

Hierarchy, logistics, and communication chain: there was a large anti-democratic sentiment behind all the coup movements. What this means is that the events of January 8th did not happen spontaneously, without organization or leadership. Our research revealed that Bolsonaro supporters, known as the extreme right, are highly organized in terms of funding and hierarchy. Conversely, even though Bolsonaro supporters were not victorious at the polls, they formed a strong presence in the National Congress and state executives.

The aim of this study (which is by no means conclusive) was not to analyze the quality of news coverage as this would require more comprehensive analytical elements. It sought to understand the public role that journalism plays in defending Brazilian democracy by reporting on the invasion of the three powers in the country’s capital. The limitations regarding the live coverage of the event, as highlighted by Temer and Santos (2023), cannot be disregarded. However, we were still able to ascertain that TV Globo’s full coverage, in partnership with GloboNews, of the events as they unfolded on January 8 did provide the public with enough information about the crimes so that they do not happen again. A broadcaster from Rio de Janeiro highlighted the impunity and tried to demand responsibility from the public sphere, which was responsible for the security of the area.

The tone and speech of the journalists during their broadcast were clear; it was as if the attacks were being committed against all Brazilians, including the journalists themselves. The joint coverage by TV Globo and GloboNews provided more in-depth content than usual for open television, and our analysis showed that this coverage fulfilled its obligation as a public utility. GloboNews is a paid television service that broadcasts exchanges

between presenters, reporters, and commentators as a way to delve deeper into the topics being reported on. While performing live coverage, each journalist validated the information they were reporting with their own sources, so there was a wide range of topics being presented and some disorganization as they attempted to report on events as they unfolded. The GloboNews model – in which news is produced jointly – provided a myriad of perspectives, opinions, and varied sources on the event. It was this informational exchange that TV Globo's narrative of January 8th was built on, providing information about the events and placing itself in opposition to the attempt at an institutional breakdown in the country.

NOTES

- 1 Coalitional presidentialism involves governments ensuring the approval of their legislative policies to use them as an electoral strategy, allowing presidents to enact policies that may differ from their public statements (Alemán & Tsebelis, 2011).

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EDUARDA FORMIGA. Journalist and master's student in the Communication and Society Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT). Collaboration on this article: conception, conceptualization, investigation, discussion of results, methodology development, writing, review, and approval of the final version of the work. Email: eeformiga@gmail.com

CYNTHIA MARA MIRANDA. Journalist, associate professor in the Journalism graduate program and in the Communication and Society Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT), and a CNPq Level 2 researcher (Productivity Grant). Collaboration on this article: conception, conceptualization, discussion of results, methodology development, review, and approval of the final version of the work. Email: cynthiamara@uft.edu.br

EDER AHMAD CHARAF EDDINE. Psychologist, associate professor in the Journalism graduate program and in the Communication and Society Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT). Collaboration on this article: conception, conceptualization, discussion of results, methodology development, review, and approval of the final version of the work. Email: ederahmad@uft.edu.br

TRANSLATED BY: LEE SHARP

FINAL REVISION: FRANCISCO DE ASSIS FERNANDES VIEIRA
BISNETO