

INTRODUCTION

# JOURNALISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES



SILVIO WAISBORD  
*George Washington University - United States*  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0026-7111

LIZIANE GUAZINA  
*University of Brasilia - Brazil*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4765-6918

The challenges faced by contemporary liberal democracies have put pressure on traditional institutions (which include the media) to be agents that effectively represent society and respond to the demands of different social groups in a fair manner. In a scenario marked by decentralized, fractured and weakened democracies (Trejo Delarbre, 2022), political actors who do not abide to the notion of democracy can systematically create anti-political and anti-establishment discourse around any topic on the public agenda in order to gain visibility (Palau-Sampio et al., 2022).

Using populist communication strategies like the “us versus them” line of thinking is a way one can capitalize on social dissatisfaction and the increasing levels of political polarization. The radicalization of political discourse has led, in many cases, to

a delegitimization of traditional government powers (mainstream media included) and to the emergence of radical groups, especially right-wing ideological groups, that use social media as a place for organizing political violence by promoting and encouraging attacks against the rule of law and stretching the legal limits of freedom of expression (Caetano & Mayorga, 2020).

These issues are particularly relevant in Latin America due to long-lasting democratic deficits and prominent authoritarian trends. The outlook for journalism in this scenario is a challenging one as governments intensely scrutinize and persecute critical news organizations, the recent events in El Salvador and Nicaragua are two cases in point. While digital platforms do act as spaces to express differences of opinion and criticism, reporting and critical expression are not given equal treatment as powerful actors constantly try to control them using both subtle and overt methods.

These trends are part of what Bennett and Pfetsch (2018, p. 245) refer to as disruptions in contemporary democracies, which are increasingly dependent on the algorithmic logic of private platforms for constructing public opinion, and on the many variables that impact current political communication.

In this edition, we encourage debate about journalism and its place in building public spaces of democratic resistance amid the accelerated reshaping of political communication. In other words, we are looking for detailed academic reflection on how professional journalism can challenge new authoritarian populisms, the growing precariousness of rights, and the use of political violence (also performed by governments) to curb freedom of expression.

The ten articles included in this edition address these issues. They present a broad overview of different journalistic practices involved in present-day political communication, drawing attention to the limits and possibilities of exercising democratic commitment in journalism in different countries, particularly in Latin America. These articles clearly demonstrate the wide range of themes that are important toward understanding the current change in political communication, threats to democratic life, and the hybrid nature of the information ecology between old and new technologies, industries and practices.

In the article *FROM COMPLICIT JOURNALISM TO MILITANT JOURNALISM: politicians as media critics and strategic news users*

*in contested political scenarios*, authors Ximena Orchard and Mario Fernani analyze how Chilean political actors criticized the media and journalists on X (formerly Twitter) while strategically using news content to construct their political positions on the Chilean social uprising in 2019. By conducting a qualitative analysis of posts, these authors identified four main functions of news for political actors: informing followers, defining positions, self-promotion, and criticism of political opponents.

On the other hand, in *THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARACTER 'ANDRÉ VENTURA' IN THE PORTUGUESE PRESS: the politician's profile in Revista E*, author Catarina Magalhães, from a narrative analysis perspective, discusses the leader of Chega, a Portuguese far-right political party, by outlining the discursively constitutive elements behind the construction of this individual and its effects on Portuguese politics.

The next article, entitled *JANUARY 8, 2023: democracy and resistance in live news coverage*, authors Eduarda Formiga and Cynthia Mara Miranda, in collaboration with author Eder Ahmad Charaf Eddine, perform a qualitative analysis of live news coverage from Rede Globo of the attempted coup d'état that occurred on January 8, 2023 in Brasilia, looking at it from a historical and social perspective.

In the article *THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC AGENDA APPLIED TO A STUDY OF THE FEDERAL SUPREME COURT OF BRAZIL*, author Grazielle Albuquerque analyzes the role of Brazil's Supreme Federal Court during the country's recent political crisis and the strategies deployed by institutional communication to gain visibility among the other government powers and public opinion.

In their article *MEDIA THAT NO LONGER MEDIATE: the blurred enunciation in contemporary journalistic practices*, authors Leticia Gambetta and Agustina Huertas propose an analysis of the implications of using journalists' personal accounts to publish information of public interest about a case censored by the Uruguayan newspaper O Observador. In this case, journalists used the digital media platform to circumvent the news company's decision to publish a news story.

In a comparative study entitled *COMPARATIVE POLITICAL JOURNALISM IN SOUTH AMERICA: professional configurations and disputes over truth in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay*, authors Ivan Schuliaquer and Camila Moreira Cezar offer an in-depth analysis

of the complex notion of truth in political journalism in the three aforementioned countries. Toward this objective, they propose a research model based on identifying the types of journalism, the presence of journalists as celebrities, and the types of journalistic professionalization in order to characterize the activities and the professional context in the region.

Continuing with the theme of political journalistic coverage, Renan Araujo and Celia Belim's article *JOURNALISTIC COVERAGE OF A POLITICAL SCANDAL IN DEMOCRACY: Vaza Jato in Folha de S.Paulo*, presents a narrative analysis of the events behind the Folha de S.Paulo newspaper's decision to publish its article on Vaza Jato, an investigation that exposed connections between the public prosecutor and the justice system in the Car Wash Scandal. By using mixed methods research (an analysis of the narrative, the discourse, and the interviews), these authors seek to identify the newspaper's reasons for publishing leaked information and how these leaks were argumentatively structured in its coverage.

In their article *RISK AND FORMS OF VIOLENCE IN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM WITHIN DIGITAL NATIVE MEDIA: a study of Quinto Elemento and Periodismo de Barrio*, authors Daniel Olivera Pérez and José Refugio Arellano Sanchez provide a comparative observation of the perceptions and experiences of journalists from Mexican and Cuban media outlets. Based on interviews, these authors seek to identify the sources, risks and threats to producing quality digital investigative journalism in their respective countries.

The last two articles in this edition center on fact-checking. The first article, *TRANSPARENCY AGAINST MISINFORMATION? An analysis of how the Lupa and Aos Fatos agencies use public transparency mechanisms to verify questionable digital content*, written by Thatiany Nascimento, Diógenes Lycarião and Suzete Nocrato, presents a content analysis of reports from the two aforementioned Brazilian fact-checking agencies in order to identify how public transparency tools are used and the onus on public administration to fact-check in the country as these tools are created and maintained by the Brazilian public administration itself.

The final article in this edition, *BEYOND THE FACTS: Political fact-checking and the risks of "us against them" journalism: A France-Brazil comparison*, written by Alexandre Joux and Gisela Cardoso Teixeira, offers an analysis of the fact-

checking that was performed of the debates in the second round of the 2022 elections between candidates Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron in France, and between Jair Messias Bolsonaro and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil. For this purpose, these authors compared the fact-checking agencies' assessments of the candidates' statements in order to identify specific and contextual characteristics of the work.

This collection of works corroborates not only the multiple shifts in political communication and journalism, but also the variety and dynamism of research agendas. Needless to say, changes in communicative infrastructure require an inquisitive and open academic willingness to constantly monitor and understand fluid situations. We hope that the picture of this situation and the in-depth analyses presented in this edition will be useful in continued reflections on current fundamental issues.

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**Silvio Waisbord** is a professor at the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, United States. He is the president of the International Communication Association and editor of the International Journal of Communication. He has authored and edited twenty books on journalism and politics, communication studies, media policy, and communication for social change. His latest book is *Introduction to Journalism (Polity)*. Email: [waisbord@gwu.edu](mailto:waisbord@gwu.edu)

**Liziane Guazina** is a professor at the School of Communication at the University of Brasília, Brazil, leading the research groups “Culture, Media, and Politics” and “Observatory of 21st Century Populism.” She is a researcher at the National Institute of Science and Technology in Information Disputes and Sovereignty - INCT-DSI. Email: [lguazina@unb.br](mailto:lguazina@unb.br)