

# THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVERSITY IN JOURNALISM

*Jornal Nacional* and political  
deliberation in Brazil

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**ABSTRACT** This article discusses a journalistic value that has important consequences for political deliberation: diversity. After identifying the key dimensions of the principle of media diversity, the text presents a case study about *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the 2002 presidential election. The study suggests that, although the campaign coverage was balanced and fair, it did not include a diversity of voices in the controversies about the main theme of the electoral process: the economy. Such lack of diversity restricted the range of interpretations to which voters were exposed. In 2002, the process of political deliberation was characterized by a media environment with low levels of diversity in terms of access of voices and interpretive frames. Based on the notion of public interest, the article concludes by proposing measures to promote media diversity, including the fields of content regulation, journalistic norms and the role of civil society.

**KEY-WORDS** Journalistic norms, diversity, *Jornal Nacional*, political deliberation, elections

Discussions about media values have been fading away in the age of technological revolution, deregulation and great increase in the number of communication channels and consumer choices. Nowadays, to speak about criteria for judging media performance according to values – as well as to consider public policies that could be designed to promote such values – frequently means to “swim against the tide”, to raise issues that some consider to be obsolete. Yet, we face new paradoxes in the era of globalization. The discussion of media values has never been more necessary than in the age of “information abundance”. Recent developments in communication services and industries around the world have demonstrated that diversity of channels and consumer choices do not necessarily lead to more diversity in the symbolic world that is built, mediated and circulated by the mass media. Indeed, the

explosive growth of information has been frequently accompanied by a problematic decrease in the availability of interpretive frameworks that could help audiences make sense of the fast flow of information that reaches them.

These developments are even more significant when we consider the relationship between the mass media and political deliberation. In this article, I argue that the role of interpretive frameworks in the process by which citizens' preferences are formed and sustained has been largely neglected. To a great extent, this is due to the tendency to conceive of mass media as "sources of information" and of political deliberation as an information-processing activity or rational argumentation. It is not surprising then to find few frameworks in academic and public discourses that could help us analyze and propose improvements to media's contribution to processes of political deliberation<sup>1</sup>. And since the media became key institutions in contemporary democratic systems, the values, norms and routines that organize their activities are central for the performance of such systems.

This article discusses a journalistic value that has important consequences for political deliberation: diversity. After a brief discussion about this value and related ideas, particularly that of *public interest*, I will develop an argument about media diversity based on a case study about *Jornal Nacional's* role in the 2002 presidential election.

## **MEDIA, POLITICAL DELIBERATION AND DIVERSITY**

### **Media and the 'public interest'**

The regulation of communication industries around the world has been deeply marked by the assumption that broadcasting and telecommunications services have to fulfill obligations related to some notion of the *public interest*. The policies designed to regulate radio and television services, for example, have been largely based on the idea that such services should protect and promote the "common good" or the general welfare of society, instead of narrow interests of social forces or institutions, such as the state or the market. Since the creation of the first regulatory frameworks, the electromagnetic spectrum has been defined as a scarce public good, characterized by a limited availability of frequencies. In this context, media policy became a natural course of action and the political regulation of broadcasting gained legitimacy (Siune, 1998, p. 19). As a result, even in those countries where broadcasting services were left

in the hands of private companies, such as the United States, TV and radio stations were placed in the position of public *trustees*. According to this trusteeship model, the licenses to operate broadcasting services imposed upon their operators the duty to serve the public interest (McQuail, 1992, p. 50). In Europe, where broadcasting has evolved within the dominant model of *public service broadcasting*, public stations like the BBC were established to provide entertainment, information and education with high standards in the public interest, with a relative autonomy from the state and from commercial ownership and interests (Golding, 1998, p. 12). Thus, the notion of public interest has been central in the development of media regulations in different broadcasting systems.

Yet, the notion of public interest has never resulted in a completely clear concept. It developed within complex ideological struggles, in which different parties attempted to impose their own definitions (Golding, 1998, p. 9). But even though the notion remained a general principle, whose interpretation varied according to political and social changes, it has offered a rather solid ground for media regulations aimed at opposing the colonization of the communication sphere by the state or market forces. If it is true that the public interest can never be definitely pinned down, it should always be pursued, since it offers a somewhat elevated plane of discourse that can work as an authoritative basis for media regulation (Blumler, 1998, pp. 54-55).

On the other hand, in the era of the “information society”, which is characterized by a technological revolution and a great increase in the number of communication channels and consumer choices, the notion of public interest has been under assault. It has been argued that the emergence of new technologies, such as cable and satellite television or computer mediated communication, has ended one of the central bases of public interest regulation: the scarcity argument. According to this point of view, technological changes dramatically broaden the availability of communication channels and the diversity of contents available for consumers, making any public interest-based regulation unnecessary. Nevertheless, several consistent arguments have been developed to demonstrate the central importance of public interest policies for a digital age characterized by information abundance, even though the notion of public interest needs to be redefined to account for new realities (McQuail, 1992; Blumler, 1998; Golding, 1998; Siune, 1998; Weiser, 2000). I strongly endorse such a view and propose to demonstrate, based on the Brazilian case, the centrality for political deliberation of one key value that has been historically linked to the notion of public interest:

diversity. But before advancing in the analysis, we need to clarify the meanings of media diversity and demonstrate its importance for political deliberation.

### **Media diversity**

One of the central aims of public interest regulation has been to guarantee a diversity of perspectives and points of view in the public sphere. In the case of the United States, for example, among the public interest obligations imposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) upon radio and television operators was the *Fairness Doctrine*, aimed at promoting free and open debate (see Aufderheide, 1990; Weiser, 2000). The Doctrine “provided that broadcasters were required to cover public issues and both (sic) sides when so doing” (Weiser, 2000, p. 12). Thus, the media operators who received licenses to operate radio or TV services were expected to cover public affairs and to present a diversity of perspectives on them. Broadcasters strongly opposed the Doctrine, arguing that such impositions would lead to a “chilling effect”, in which media companies would react by censoring materials that may be considered controversial. According to them, the Doctrine would result in less, not more, coverage of public affairs and controversial issues.

During the deregulation wave that was promoted by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, the FCC announced in 1987 that it would no longer enforce the Fairness Doctrine. Patricia Aufderheide (1990) demonstrates that this decision had important consequences for the operation of broadcasting stations. Following FCC’s announcement, there were substantial budget cuts for public affairs programs, especially in news departments. The access of groups concerned with one side of a controversial issue diminished, especially for those groups without funds to buy airtime. As a result, the absence of the Doctrine contributed to diminish the diversity of points of view in the coverage of elections and public affairs. Aufderheide concludes that there is little evidence supporting broadcasters’ claim that the Doctrine had a “chilling effect” when it was being enforced.

The Fairness Doctrine is a concrete example of a media policy aimed at promoting diversity. But how to define this important media value? What are its main dimensions? In the search for answers to these questions, Denis McQuail’s (1992) path-breaking book on media performance remains an influential framework (see also Brants, Hermes and Zoonen, 1998). McQuail identifies three principles or dimensions of diversity<sup>2</sup>:

*Diversity as reflection* – Refers to the expectation that the media should represent or reflect the prevailing differences of culture, opinion and social conditions of the population as a whole. The assumption here is that the content or the structure of media systems should reflect differences in politics, religion, culture and social conditions in society in more or less proportional way;

*Diversity as access* – Refers to the expectation that the media should make available channels through which groups and interests which make up society can speak to the wider society. It is often by way of this type of access that critical or oppositional voices, which are essential for political deliberation, can be heard;

*Diversity as more channels and choice for audience* – Refers to the assumption that a greater variety of communication services, formats and choices make more information and opinions available. The focus here is on the range of products available for consumers.

As McQuail (1992, p. 145) stresses, these three principles (reflection, access and choice) are obviously inter-related. It is important to stress, nevertheless, that one principle does not necessarily imply the other and that definitions of diversity depend on historical changes and struggles over the normative frameworks that orient media regulation. The dominant discourse in the era of cable television and the Internet asserts that we no longer need to design policies aimed at promoting reflective or access diversity, since we now have a broad range of options of channels and sources of information. According to this position, the diversity of channels that results from a deregulated market is the best way of establishing diversity. But diversity of consumer choices does not necessarily mean diversity in content, since we might have “more of the same”, especially in a historical period of increasing concentration of ownership by communication industries (Cuilenburg, 1998; Golding, 1998; Siune, 1998).

Several studies demonstrate that a multiplicity of channels is not synonymous with content diversity. Els de Bens’ (1999) research about Flemish television is very illustrative in this regard. Belgium has the highest cable penetration of the world (93 per cent of television households), with increasing competition between public and private television channels. Nevertheless, the commercialization of the country’s television system led to a convergence of contents and not to more diversity. Public and commercial stations grew closer, especially because of the increase in entertainment on public television and similar offerings in the case of information programs.

We have no reason to abandon concern with the value of diversity because of the increase in the number of channels and sources of information. The ability of such channels to present a diverse political content remains a key issue, since increasing commercialization and concentration of ownership tend to cause contents to be homogenized. As a result, several countries maintain media policies designed to promote diversity in the media environment, despite the dominant deregulatory trend. For example, in countries like Sweden or the Netherlands, public funds are allocated to subsidize newspapers and magazines that sponsor alternative views, but who would otherwise face difficulties to survive in the market competition (Gustafsson, 1980; Cuilenburg, 1998; Weibull, 2003). Policies such as these, aimed at promoting reflective and access diversity, remain important, since the presence of more channels of communication does not necessary result in a more plural media environment in terms of access of relevant ideas, opinions or interpretive frameworks.

### **Media diversity and political deliberation**

Having defined the value of diversity and its main dimensions, I now turn to the relationship between journalistic diversity and political deliberation. The links between the news media and the process of public opinion formation have been acknowledged since their emergence in modern societies. As a result, the mass media have always been considered vital for the health of democracy and processes of political deliberation. Among the classic arguments about the liberty of the press was the liberal view that truth could be attained only through unrestricted discussion among citizens, in which a free press would be a key condition to create an abundant supply of facts and arguments about the facts (Keane, 1991, pp. 17-20). There was therefore an early acknowledgement of the links between diversity of media content and the quality of political deliberation.

The importance of journalistic diversity for the process of preferences formation can be understood in terms of basic rights in contemporary democratic societies. Graham Murdock develops a framework about cultural citizenship, which identifies four basic sets of *cultural rights*: to information, to experience, to knowledge and to participation (1999, pp. 11-12). For the purposes of this article, I would like to stress the importance of the “right to knowledge”, as Murdock calls it. According to the author, “Connecting the particular to the general, the micro to

the macro, requires access to frameworks of interpretation that point to links, patterns and processes, and suggest explanations. They translate information and experience into knowledge” (p. 12). As a result, public communicative activity “must balance the promotion of diversity of information and experience against citizens’ rights of access to frameworks of knowledge, and to the principles that allow them to be evaluated and challenged” (p. 16).

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Porto, 2001; 2003), democratic theories usually emphasize the right to information, but have largely ignored questions related to the “right to knowledge”. The role of the media is not limited to providing information to audiences. They are key sources of interpretive frameworks that allow audiences to make sense of the information that reaches them. Studies based on the concept of *framing*<sup>3</sup> have shown that the media play an important political role not only as sources of information, but also of interpretive frames that present specific “explanations” of the relevant political issues and events.

The empirical research that I conducted with television audiences in Brazil offers consistent evidence about the interdependence between media diversity and the outcomes of political deliberation processes (Porto, 2001). Based on content analysis and audience research (controlled experiments and focus groups), the research shows that when Brazil’s most popular programs present more than one interpretive frame about a certain controversy, adopting therefore a *plural* format, citizens have access to a broader set of explanations and develop more varied understandings of the issue or event in question. Conversely, when media content is characterized by a *restricted* format, with a single frame, more subjects interpret the theme or event according to its dominant interpretation.

The presence or absence of a diversity of interpretive frameworks in media content has, therefore, important consequences for the process by which citizens’ preferences are formed, sustained or changed. If citizens do not have access to frameworks of interpretation that suggest explanations of relevant information, issues or events, then the main dilemmas of contemporary democracies cannot be solved. As a result, democracy is seriously constrained when there is no diversity of interpretive frames in the media that could work as shortcuts for citizens when they form their preferences (see Porto, 2001, 2003).

Thus, there are two dimensions of media diversity that are central elements in political deliberation. By modifying McQuail and Murdock's frameworks, it is possible to argue that the quality of political deliberation depends on: a) *reflective diversity*, or the ability of the media to represent or reflect the prevailing differences of culture, opinion and social conditions of the population as a whole; and b) *access diversity*, especially in relation to the ability of the media to publicize the interpretive frameworks that are sponsored by relevant social groups or organizations. In the next pages I will apply these assumptions to the field of journalism and analyze the contribution of television news to political deliberation processes in Brazil.

### **DIVERSITY IN TV NEWS: JORNAL NACIONAL'S COVERAGE OF THE 2002 ELECTION**

In the remaining sections of this article, I will consider the performance of Brazilian television journalism in terms of content diversity, especially in what concerns the representation of social groups and the access of interpretive frameworks to the symbolic world that is presented by TV news.

The newscast *Jornal Nacional* (JN) is the most important source of information for Brazilians. It is watched by approximately 42 per cent of all households with TV sets, with an estimated daily audience of 40 million viewers (see Porto, 2001, p. 169). The newscast is aired by TV Globo (*Rede Globo*), which is the dominant network in Brazil, since it concentrates about half of the total national audience and advertising expenditures on television. *Jornal Nacional* has been historically linked to the government of the day, including the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), gaining a reputation of a biased and pro-government newscast. Nevertheless, JN has been undergoing important changes more recently, which lead to a more active and plural news coverage (see Porto, 2002).

How diverse is *Jornal Nacional's* news coverage in terms of access of a variety of voices and interpretive frameworks? To answer this question, the following pages will discuss some results of a content analysis of the newscast's coverage of the 2002 Brazilian presidential election.<sup>4</sup>The analysis includes all news stories about the presidential campaign that were aired between June 1 and the first round of the elections (October 6). A total of 602 news stories about the presidential elections were aired in this period, with an average of approximately 6 news stories



per day.<sup>5</sup> Two key issues were investigated: the level of diversity in terms of interpretive frameworks and the level of diversity in terms of voices heard.

### Diversity in news stories

Following the *interpretive controversies* research model, which I have outlined elsewhere (Porto, 2001, 2003), the “form” of the news stories was identified. The concept of form refers to the level of diversity of “interpretive frames” in each report. Interpretive frames can be defined as *arguments promoted by a sponsor that offer a specific interpretation of a political event or issue*. The interpretation that is promoted by this type of frame usually involves one or more of the following areas: (1) Problem definition; (2) attributions of responsibility and causes; (3) assessments of the significance of political events or issues; (4) arguments about consequences; (5) treatment recommendations. Interpretive frames are made up of arguments such as: “Government inefficiency has led to the crisis of the health care system” (responsibility attribution); or “The health care reform approved by Congress reflects the interests of business, not of citizens” (assessment of significance); or “The health care reform approved by Congress will increase the deficit and lead to inflation and therefore harm citizens” (argument about consequences).

When a news story presents a single interpretive frame about a political fact of theme, its format is coded as *restricted*. On the other hand, when reports present more than one frame or interpretation, its form is coded as plural. Finally, for news stories that do not present interpretative frames or controversies, adopting a more descriptive tone and focusing on “events” or statements, their form is classified as episodic. Based on controlled experiments with *Jornal Nacional's* viewers, I have shown that when the newscast presents a single interpretive frame about political events or issues, adopting therefore a restricted form, more members of the audience interpret such events or issues in terms of the interpretation promoted by this frame (Porto, 2001).

How plural was *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the 2002 presidential election? Did it include a diversity of interpretive frames in the reports about the campaign? To answer these questions, all 602 news stories were coded according to their form. Table 1 presents the results. They show that most news stories adopted an *episodic* form, avoiding controversies with a descriptive tone. On the other hand, when the newscast presented some type of controversy, most news stories adopted a *restricted* form. These results suggest that, when JN presents interpretations about

political events or issues, it tends to adopt a *restricted* form (see also Porto, 2001).

**Table 1: The form of *Jornal Nacional's* news stories about the 2002 Presidential election, according to their form (June 1 – October 6)**

Form	Frequency
Restricted	40.5%
Plural	6.7%
Episodic	52.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (N=602)</b>

Source: Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos, 2004.

The tendency to present a *restricted* news coverage becomes even more clear if we consider *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the main theme of the campaign: the economy.<sup>6</sup> In the months before the first round of the presidential election (October 6), Brazil's economy experienced a period of turbulence. The country's currency, the *Real*, was devaluated and consulting firms of foreign banks ranked Brazil as one of the most risky countries for investments in the world. The government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso attempted to frame these difficulties as a result of uncertainties about the future, since the main candidate of the opposition, the leftist Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, had a strong lead in the polls. According to this interpretive frame, the difficulties in the economy were related to the fear of foreign investors that Lula would win the elections and change the economic policy. On the other hand, the interpretive frame promoted by Lula and other candidates from the opposition attributed responsibility for the problems in the economy to the policies of President Cardoso, especially in relation to his inability to control the huge deficit in the budget of the federal government and his failure to cut interest rates.

Table 2 presents the classification of the form of all 165 news stories that had the economy as their subject. The results show a strong dominance of *restricted* news stories (74,5%). Thus, TV Globo's journalists tended to present a single line of interpretation or point of view when making news about the elections, especially when dealing with the economy, the main controversial topic of the coverage.

**Table 2: Classification of Jornal Nacional's reports on the economy, according to their form (June 1 – October 6, 2002)**

Form	Frequency
Restricted	74.5%
Plural	8.4%
Episodic	17.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (N=165)</b>

Source: Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos, 2004.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the classification of the form of news stories refers to the internal organization of each single report. It does not necessarily mean that there is no diversity of points of view in the media, although it is an important measure of such diversity. The key question then becomes: which voices or perspectives dominated the restricted news stories? Did *Jornal Nacional* systematically privilege the interpretations promoted by a particular actor? The next section offers some answers to these questions by analyzing the soundbites<sup>7</sup> that appeared in the *restricted* news stories about the economy.

### Diversity of voices

Another key issue investigated was the access of different voices to the news coverage. Who journalists granted the right to speak during the coverage of the main campaign theme, the economy? Which kind of actors had their points of view aired in the *restricted* news stories? To answer this question, all soundbites aired in restricted news stories about the economy were coded according to the actor who appeared speaking on the screen. Table 3 below presents the results. They show that Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (or simply Lula), the leftist candidate who won the election, had an important access to the news stories that presented a single interpretive frame about the economy. The other two main oppositional candidates (Ciro Gomes and Anthony Garotinho) also had an important participation in the controversies about the economy. Thus, the coverage of the economy was characterized by some level of diversity, since the candidates of the opposition accounted for 29% of the soundbites that appeared in *restricted* news stories about the economy.

**Table 3 Actors appearing in restricted reports about the economy**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Lula and his representatives	16.9%
José Serra and his representatives	12.7%
Other candidates and their representatives	11.8%
Official sources*	28.2%
Businessmen	10.3%
Specialists and scholars	9.4%
Ordinary citizens	7.5%
Other	3.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (N=213)</b>
* President, Minister of State or other high ranking official of the federal government.	

Source: Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos, 2004.

Nevertheless, Table 3 also shows the predominance of official sources of the federal government and its candidate, José Serra. The main sources of the reports on the economy were high ranking officials of the executive power (28,2%), especially President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and the members of his administration who were in charge of the economic policy. If we add to this category the soundbites of candidate Serra, as well as those of experts, scholars and businessmen<sup>8</sup>, we will see that the great majority of the soundbites (60,6%) tended to sustain the interpretive frames promoted by the federal government in the controversies about the economy.

Ordinary citizens had some access to the controversies about the economy, with 7,5% of the soundbites. Nevertheless, these soundbites usually do not play a significant role in the interpretation of political events and issues, since they are usually included in the news coverage to “illustrate” a line of interpretation that is built by the journalist (Porto, 2001, 2002). The short length of the soundbites with common people is a strong evidence of this fact. While the soundbites with candidates, their representatives and official sources of the federal government lasted, in average, 22 seconds, ordinary citizens spoke, in average, less than 8 seconds.

Another important evidence of the lack of diversity in the coverage of the economy by *Jornal Nacional* is the complete absence of representatives of trade unions and non-governmental organizations. There were no soundbites with these actors in the 123 restricted news stories about the economy. Thus, trade union and NGO leaders were not considered authoritative sources by TV Globo’s journalists. Such editorial decision

has, of course, important implications for the range of interpretations and voices that manage to gain access to the news coverage. The systematic exclusion of civil society in the main controversies of the electoral campaign established important constraints for the process of political deliberation by JN's viewers. The audience of the newscast did not have access to interpretive frameworks that originated outside the realm of elites and of the political establishment.

### **Consequences of the lack of diversity**

In 2002, TV Globo presented its best news coverage of a presidential campaign. In contrast to previous elections, which were characterized by a biased, unbalanced or reduced news coverage on the part of the network, the 2002 elections received a different treatment. TV Globo's main newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, provided extensive coverage of the elections, including live interviews with the four main candidates. There was also an unprecedented level of equal treatment of candidates in terms of time, number of appearances and tone of the reports (negative, positive or neutral), with very few exceptions (see Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos, 2004). Nevertheless, as we have seen, *Jornal Nacional* played a more subtle political role in the way it covered the main topic of the campaign. The level of diversity of interpretive frames in *restricted* news stories about the economy was a reduced one. The voices of official sources and of the candidate of the federal government dominated the news stories dealing with controversies about economic policy. The result was the imposition by the media of an interpretive frame about the economy which considered essential that President Cardoso's economic policy be maintained by the next President. Special emphasis was given to the need to reduce the federal budget's deficit and to maintain the inflation under control. Candidates of the opposition, including the winner, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, were permanently pressured by the media to assure that there would be no substantial changes in the economic policy established by the previous administration. The instability of financial markets during the campaign period, with a growing devaluation of the national currency and negative evaluations on the part of foreign investors about the country's outlook, was extensively used by the media to force compromises on the part of opposition candidates. In this scenario, the difficulties faced by the Brazilian economy were linked to uncertainties about the future policy of the new government. As a result, to maintain public support, calm down market forces and to avoid clashes with the

agenda of the media, candidates of the opposition tended to moderate their discourses and to promise to keep key features of the economic policy of President Cardoso.

Thus, although *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the 2002 presidential election was balanced and fair, it did not include a diversity of voices in the controversies about the economy, especially in *restricted* news stories, which presented a single interpretive frame. Such lack of diversity had an important role in the political process, by restricting the range of interpretations to which voters were exposed. As a result, the public had less cognitive resources available to evaluate the situation of the economy and the candidates' proposals. The process of political deliberation was characterized by a media environment with low levels of diversity in terms of access of voices and interpretive frames.

### **CONCLUSIONS: PROMOTING MEDIA DIVERSITY**

In the final section of this article, I will discuss some basic questions about media values that emerge from the previous analysis. How to improve the performance of the news media in terms of access diversity? Would it be possible to establish democratic regulations of media content aimed at promoting the value of diversity? If so, which kind of legal arrangements and measures could be adopted?

These questions are even more relevant in the case of Brazil's communication system, which is characterized by the existence of a weak and obsolete regulatory apparatus for broadcasting. The executive power concentrates enormous power in defining communication policies, resulting in an authoritarian legal tradition. Moreover, the few existing laws and legal principles are not respected, leading to an environment which is conducive to concentration of ownership and which has no effective tools to promote media accountability (Lima, 2001).

Based on the notion of *public interest*, I propose the following possible instruments to promote media diversity:<sup>9</sup>

#### a) Content regulations

New regulations should be established based on an open process of debate between Congress, media owners and professionals, and civil society. One possibility is the introduction of principles of "fairness" or "balance" in the law, creating incentives for media owners and professionals to avoid systematically privileging some positions over others. The fulfillment of these requirements would be taken into account

by an independent regulatory agency when deciding on the renewals of the broadcasting licenses. By establishing norms and parameters to evaluate media performance, these regulations would also create conditions for a variety of organizations to monitor the content of the media. And if systematic patterns of inequality in the treatment of issues or actors were identified and made public, the credibility of the biased media outlet would be undermined. This creates more incentives for the media to avoid presenting a restricted content.

There is also a need to improve the accountability of broadcasting organizations. This can be accomplished by demanding that every newscast should introduce the figure of the ombudsman, which is already a common practice in the newspaper industry. Newscasts would need to devote a few minutes for an ombudsman to present viewers' opinions and criticisms about the news coverage. This would lead to better accountability of the media and to more incentives for presenting a more plural range of points of view.

#### b) Changes in professional norms and routines

Besides regulations, changes can be made in the training of journalists and in their professional routines. Schools of journalism can introduce discussions about notions of fairness and balance in the curriculum, calling attention to the dangers involved in restricting the sources of the news coverage. Journalists themselves can develop more systematic discussions about their professional routines. Scholars can involve journalists in seminars and other activities to promote some exchange of opinions. Journalists should develop more clear criteria about the use of soundbites and develop some norms about the need to include alternative interpretive frames in the news coverage. To do that properly, they should be familiar with congressional politics, social movements, interest groups, and other organizations from which interpretive frames emerge.

#### c) The role of civil society

Citizens' competence can be enhanced not only through regulations or by the initiatives of media professionals. Organizations of civil society can also search for ways of improving the plurality of perspectives available in the public sphere. The recent growth of media watch organizations and non-governmental organizations of viewers in Brazil is already a significant step in this direction. These organizations can develop a systematic monitoring of media content as part of their activities. But they

should also try to create conditions that could improve their access to the news and other programs. For example, leaders and activists should be sensitive to the rules and norms that govern the work of journalists. They could also facilitate journalists' work by providing a systematic list of organizations available in each subject area, with simple descriptions of their work, and individuals available to be contacted.

Since diversity of interpretive frameworks in media content is central to processes of political deliberation, these recommendations have the potential to enhance media accountability and citizen competence. Other instruments and alternatives could be discussed and adopted. Due to relevance of the value of diversity for media performance, the promotion of this value should continue to be a central aim of media regulation around the world.

## NOTES

- 1 There are, of course, important exceptions to this gap (see, for example, Page, 1996, and Chambers and Costain, 2000).
- 2 See McQuail, 1992, pp. 144-145, and Cuilenburg, 1998, pp. 40-42.
- 3 There is growing body of research about the relationship between media and politics based on the notion of framing (see Porto, 2004).
- 4 The content analysis data discussed in this section was presented elsewhere in more detail (Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos (2004). The coding of the news stories was done by Rodrigo Figueiredo de Vasconcelos.
- 5 See Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos (2004) for details. It is important to note that the number of news stories is quite high due to coding decisions. For example, each segment about the agenda of the candidates was coded as a single news story. Thus, although the activities of the candidates were presented as a single report, candidates were followed by different journalists and the segments devoted to a single candidate were considered as separate reports.
- 6 The main topics covered by Jornal Nacional were: campaign activities and events (51,8%), economy (27,4%), corruption and other irregularities (6,1%), social problems (4,5%), political institutions (4,5 %). I consider



- economy as the main topic, since the coverage of campaign activities and events is less relevant and involves less controversy.
- 7 Soundbites are the tape segments of a newscast that show someone speaking (politicians, ordinary citizens, experts, etc.).
  - 8 As Porto, Bastos and Vasconcelos (2004) show, the soundbites of scholars, experts and businessmen tended to sustain the interpretations about the economy promoted by the federal government.
  - 9 I have presented these recommendations elsewhere (Porto, 2001).

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