

TV news and political change in Brazil: The impact of democratization on TV Globo's journalism

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Abstract:

The article analyzes the changes that since the mid-1990s have transformed journalistic practices in Brazil's most powerful media institution. More especially, the aim is to investigate the transformation of TV Globo's News Division and situate this process in relation to the democratization of Brazilian politics and society. Based on content analysis of *Jornal Nacional*, TV Globo's main newscast, and on in-depth interviews with four senior journalists of the network, the article stresses how the new conditions brought by political and social democratization help explain these changes. In particular, the deepening of democracy in Brazil created new constraints that forced TV Globo to overcome a tradition of more explicit political biases and to minimize the initial trend toward tabloidization with an increase of hard news coverage.

Keywords: Brazilian journalism; commercialization; democratization; journalism models; media opening; political communication; political coverage; tabloidization

The relationship between the news media and the political changes associated with democratic consolidation in transitional societies has not received much attention in journalism studies. This neglect is related to two main blind spots in the field. First, there is normative bias toward stable political environments. Journalism studies have been largely based on stable liberal democracies of post-industrial countries. As a result, the examination of the intersections of politics and journalism is usually filtered through the experiences of more enduring political systems, especially the ones from the USA (Zelizer, 2004: 173). Although post-industrial countries are not static and have been facing similar political transformations in more recent times, including the decline of political parties and the rise of a more fragmented and individualized political system (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 263-67; Swanson, 2004), it is still important to stress that their media systems have developed in quite stable political environments.

The second difficulty in understanding the relation between democratization and the media is the lack of conceptual tools in the literature on Latin American journalism that allow the investigation of media opening, defined as the “process by which mass media become more representative of societal viewpoints and more independent of official control” (Lawson, 2002: 3). Several media institutions in the region have undergone important changes more recently, leading to more plural and independent models of journalism. Nevertheless, because of very good reasons, the general tone of the analyses of

journalism in Latin America is very negative. For example, although the main communication systems in the region have been privately owned and commercially oriented since the beginning, several studies show how Latin American media industries have traditionally operated in a symbiotic relationship with (mostly authoritarian) states, a relation that has been characterized by mutual support and ideological consensus (Fox, 1988, 1997; Lima, 1988; Straubhaar, 1989; Skidmore, 1993; Amaral and Guimaraes, 1994; Sinclair, 1999; Hallin, 2000b; Waisbord, 2000; Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Lawson, 2002; Rockwell and Janus, 2003). Thus, Latin American journalism has been frequently constrained by these alliances between media owners and the state, restricting the spaces for more independent and assertive models of journalism.¹ Pessimistic assessments about Latin American communication systems are therefore well grounded in the reality of the region. Nevertheless, several media institutions have experienced a process of opening and pluralization despite all obstacles.

As a result of these and other blind spots, the investigation of the causes of media opening is still an open field of inquiry. This article aims to contribute to the study of processes of media opening by focusing on an often neglected variable: the impact of political and social democratization on journalistic practices. Without ignoring the importance of other factors, including market competition and journalistic values, I stress the impact of democratic political changes that characterize transitional societies like Brazil, moving from authoritarian rule to a more consolidated democracy.

Based on content analysis and on in-depth interviews with four senior journalists of TV Globo's News Division, this article analyzes the transformation of journalistic practices in Brazil's most powerful media company in the period between 1991 and 2002. The article is organized in the following way. First, I define the concepts of political and social democratization that will be applied to the analysis of TV Globo's journalism. Next, I discuss the links between democratization, media opening, and changes in journalism models. The third section analyzes TV Globo's opening in terms of changes in managerial roles and in terms of shifts in news coverage. The fourth and final section presents the conclusions and considers the possible explanations for the transformation of TV Globo's journalism, focusing on the impact of political and social democratization. The conclusions also discuss the implications of the Brazilian case for research on media opening in other contexts.

DEFINING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIZATION

In the last two decades, students of Latin American politics have turned their attention from processes of democratic transition to the difficult problems that rise in the period of democratic consolidation (Mainwaring et al., 1992; Tulchin, 1995; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999; Hagopian and Mainwaring,

¹ For a more detailed assessment of the barriers that prevent greater media opening in Latin America, see Hughes and Lawson (2005).

2005). These studies tend to define democratization in terms of “institutionalization,” or the strengthening of formal democratic institutions and rules, especially in terms of division of powers, electoral and party systems, and the rule of law. Based on these studies, I define political democratization as the strengthening of democratic institutions and rules that are a prerequisite for a functional and effective democracy. Although it is beyond the scope and purposes of this article to fully demonstrate this claim, I argue that the process of political democratization has advanced significantly in Brazil since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985.²

Besides stressing the importance of political democratization, the theoretical framework of the research presented in this article also considers the role of civil society in the promotion of social democratization. As several authors have argued, one of the main shortcomings of studies on democratic consolidation in Latin America is their focus on elites and the state (Mainwaring, 1992: 302-4; Diamond, 1999: 218; Krischke, 2001: 8; Avritzer, 2002: 27-35). Although the role of elites and the need of strong political institutions should never be underestimated, it is necessary to consider other spheres in the analysis of democratization. In particular, studies on media and democratization should investigate the role of civil society, which can be defined as the realm of social life made up of voluntary, self-organized intermediary groups that are relatively independent of both the state and the market, and which seek to articulate values and advance their interests (see Dryzek, 1996: 481; Linz and Stepan, 1996: 7; Diamond, 1999: 221). As Bennett (1998: 198) puts it, “an often ignored variable in the media and democracy equation is the condition of civil society.”

For the purposes of this article, I define social democratization as the progressive inclusion of various groups in political life that takes place in the realm of civil society.³ The analysis that follows is based on the assumption that social democratization has advanced in Brazil in the last two decades. Several developments demonstrate this process: first, the increase in the number of associations created in the major Brazilian cities; second, the increasing levels of civil society density, with a growing number of Brazilians reporting membership of associations; and, finally, the decisive impact that the growth of civil society has had on Brazilian politics, especially by opposing corruption and clientelism and by promoting accountability (Hochstetler, 2000; Power and Roberts, 2000; Krischke, 2001; Avritzer, 2002; Hagopian, 2003; Lavallo et al., 2005).

Based on these assumptions, I define the “deepening of democracy,” or advances in the direction of consolidation, as a dynamic process in which both political and social democratization take place. We need therefore to overcome

² For more complete assessments about the quality of Brazilian democracy, see Kingstone and Power (2000), Kinzo and Dunkerley (2003), and Hagopian (2003).

³ This definition is based on Dryzek (1996) and Garreton (2003).

traditional dichotomous approaches to democratization that define it either as a result of political institutions, or as an outcome of civil society mobilization. Several authors have advanced in this direction by pointing to the complementarities of political and social democratization (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 8-10; Garretón, 2003).⁴

MEDIA OPENING AND MODELS OF JOURNALISM

This article analyzes the causes of “media opening,” defined as the process by which mass media become more representative of societal viewpoints and more independent of official control (Lawson, 2002: 3). Thus, media opening refers to the strengthening of more plural and autonomous models of journalism, which in turn lead to a relative decline of media instrumentalization and explicit news biases. The process usually begins when authoritarian regimes go through processes of political liberalization or when dictatorships are replaced by democratic regimes. But what explains the fact that some Latin American media systems have opened, while others have maintained the old pattern of subordination to the state? To begin answering this question, this article stresses the process by which political and social democratization create new constraints to the media, which in turn are conducive for more assertive and independent models of journalism.⁵ I argue that the deepening of democracy tends to promote media opening in at least two important ways.

First, democratization imposes stronger obstacles to biased news coverage. Several authors argue that the need of the media to maintain their credibility in the eyes of the audience limits their ability to manipulate the political process in more explicit ways, since their credibility can be undermined by such manipulations (Hallin, 1994: 32; Schudson, 1995: 5-6; Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 408-9). Nevertheless, these determinants do not operate in the same way in all places and conditions. Studies conducted in the relatively stable political systems of post-industrial countries tend to take the relationship between credibility and media bias for granted. In contrast, this article argues that the potential of explicit media bias to undermine the credibility and the market position of media companies becomes stronger when democracies become more consolidated.

⁴ An interesting study about civil society participation in the Brazilian city of São Paulo demonstrates that successful civic organizations are frequently the ones with ties to political institutions, and not the “independent” ones (Lavalle et al., 2005).

⁵ I do not argue that democratization determines media opening in a direct and mechanical way. I use the concept of “constraint” to designate a process that both restricts and enables outcomes. As Williams (1990) and Hall (1996) suggest, we need to overcome the traditional understanding of determination as the direct imposition of outcomes, and understand it instead as a process in which material and social conditions both set limits and exert pressures to cultural practices. It is in this broader sense that I use the concept of constraint.

Democratization affects the role of the media in a second important way. As a general rule, there is little political uncertainty in authoritarian political systems or during processes of democratic transition that are characterized by high levels of continuity in relation to the previous regime. As Brazil's transition to democracy in the 1980s demonstrates, the initial democratic period might be tightly controlled by a political elite with high levels of continuity in relation to the previous authoritarian past (Hagopian, 1992). In this context, media companies face little political risk by aligning themselves with factions of the political elite. Nevertheless, the more democracy advances, the more institutionalized the uncertainty of electoral and political outcomes becomes (Przeworski, 1991). In a context of growing democratization, the media are forced to minimize political risk by avoiding identification with particular politicians who may become unpopular, and by avoiding hostile relations with politicians who might come to power and possibly harm the company's interests.⁶

Because of these and other types of constraints, democratization frequently leads to changes in journalistic practices and values. But which type of journalism model is adopted when authoritarian media systems open? Studies on Latin American media systems suggest some possible outcomes. In the case of media opening in Televisa, Mexico's dominant network, the authoritarian model and its pro-government bias were replaced by a market-driven approach, with more tabloid programs and soft news coverage in its main newscasts (Hallin, 2000a; Lawson, 2002; Hughes, 2006). In a context of greater commercialization, will Latin American television networks follow a similar path, replacing the old authoritarian model with tabloid news?

To advance in the search for answers to these questions, this study presents two main hypotheses: first, that TV Globo's process of opening will lead to a decline of the authoritarian model, but it will not result in "tabloidization," or a linear growth of a market-driven journalism; and, second, that the causes of TV Globo's opening have to be found in the processes of political and social democratization that have shaped Brazilian society in the last two decades.

There is one important caveat about the second hypothesis. This article is a case study about the changes in TV Globo's model of journalism, which focuses on the impact of social and political democratization. Since the analysis of the causes of media opening is in a preliminary stage, and since the test of the second hypothesis would require a broad range of data, the article does not aim to test the second hypothesis; instead, it seeks to contribute to the development of theoretical perspectives that can account for changes in television journalism practices in transitional societies. Therefore, in the case of the second hypothesis, the article aims at theory building, not theory testing.⁷

⁶ I thank Daniel Hallin for calling my attention to this aspect.

⁷ As George and McKeown (1985: 51-2) put it, "case studies will be particularly useful at an early stage of theory development, when considerations of theory development greatly outweigh those of testing."

THE OPENING OF TV GLOBO

Brazilian television is dominated by TV Globo, the network that controls an absolute majority of the national audience ratings, especially during prime time. The audience ratings of its prime time newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, are very high: an estimated 42 percent of the households with television sets watch the newscast everyday, with an audience share (percentage of the households with TV sets on) of 67 percent.⁸ The network started when the owner of the newspaper *O Globo*, Roberto Marinho, received his first television license in 1962. With financial and technical support from the American group Time Life, Marinho launched his first TV station in 1965, in the city of Rio de Janeiro.⁹ During the two-decades-long military dictatorship that was established by a coup in 1964, the media owned by the family Marinho, especially TV Globo, developed a close alliance with the military, supporting its project of national and economic integration. TV Globo emerged as virtual monopoly in the 1970s, becoming the dominant network and playing an active political role. After the return of democracy in 1985, TV Globo maintained its tradition of political intervention. Studies have shown how it tended to align itself with the government of the day during key moments of Brazil's new democracy, including presidential elections and the impeachment of president Collor in 1992 (Porto, 2003).

While TV Globo's long tradition of political manipulation and news biases is well known (Lima, 1988, 2001; Straubhaar, 1989; Amaral and Guimarães, 1994; Miguel, 2000), not sufficient attention has been given to the recent transformation of its journalism model. The aim of this section is to identify and analyze the main aspects of the opening of Brazil's most powerful media group. I begin with changes in the composition of TV Globo's News Division (*Central Globo de Jornalismo*).

Changes in managerial roles

A new phase in TV Globo's journalism started in 1995 when Evandro Carlos de Andrade replaced Alberico de Sousa Cruz as General-Director of the network's News Division. When he was in charge of the network's journalism department (1990-5), Cruz consolidated *Jornal Nacional's* "pro-government bias." He was directly involved in some of the most important cases of political intervention by the newscast (Lima, 2001; Porto, 2002, 2003). To replace him, TV Globo chose Evandro Carlos de Andrade, then the editor-in-chief of the company's

⁸ Data from TV Globo's web site, URL (accessed on 28 June 2005): http://comercial.redeglobo.com.br/programacaojornalismo/jn_ap.php

⁹ TV Globo's first channel appeared in a wake of scandal which was the object of an investigation by Congress, since the agreement with Time Life was a flagrant violation of the Brazilian legislation (Herz, 1987; Lima, 1988: 117-18).

main newspaper (*O Globo*). Andrade enjoyed a good reputation in the journalism community and, contrary to Cruz, was a more reserved individual who did not have personal ties to members of the political elite.

Andrade introduced several important changes in *Jornal Nacional*. One of the most significant was the decision in April 1996 to remove Cid Moreira, the newsreader who had presented the newscast since its inauguration in 1969. Despite his popularity, Moreira was a symbol of the more passive style of reporting that characterized the old official model. To replace him, Andrade invited two journalists, William Bonner and Lilian Witte Fibe. The hiring of Bonner and Fibe as presenters of *Jornal Nacional* was important because, among other reasons, it replaced professionals who limited themselves to reading the news with journalists who also performed as news editors. Content analysis data reveal that the change of newsreaders had important effects on the content of news coverage, leading to a more active and interpretive role on the part of the new anchors and to a more plural news coverage, with less dependence on official sources (Porto, 2002).

Jornal Nacional's process of change has nevertheless been slow, irregular and controversial. A few months after allowing the new presenters to act as editors, Andrade reduced their power by inviting Mario Marona, another journalist from the newspaper *O Globo*, to be the new editor-in-chief of the newscast. On March 1998, Lilian Witte Fibe left *Jornal Nacional* to be the anchor of the late evening newscast, *Jornal da Globo*. Journalist Fatima Bernardes, William Bonner's wife, replaced Fibe as one of the anchors of *Jornal Nacional*. According to Fibe, one of the main reasons for her decision to quit was her dissatisfaction with the newscast's new emphasis on soft news and entertainment. As she complained in a newspaper interview a few weeks after leaving the newscast, *Jornal Nacional* tended to follow a "cake recipe" model, which gives to viewers what they "want," not what they "need" (Lima, 2001: 271). Thus, Fibe identified the rise of a market-driven journalism at TV Globo, which was trivializing the news coverage.

Finally, there were two other important changes in TV Globo's News Division. First, on 9 September 1999, Evandro Carlos de Andrade replaced Mario Marona with William Bonner as *Jornal Nacional's* editor-in-chief. Thus, besides acting as presenter, Bonner obtained full editorial control over the newscast. Second, when Evandro Carlos de Andrade died in 2001 he was replaced by Carlos Henrique Schroder, then Planning-Director of the News Division. Schroder was a member of Andrada's team and he continued the editorial project established by his predecessor.

These changes in the News Division are a clear indication of TV Globo's opening. The analysis that follows is based on interviews conducted by the author with four senior news editors at TV Globo: Evandro Carlos de Andrade,

William Bonner, Mario Marana, and Carlos Schroder.¹⁰

Changes of managerial roles in TV Globo's News Division clearly suggest the emergence of a new editorial policy. But to demonstrate processes of media opening it is necessary to go beyond shifts in personnel and verify to what extent news coverage reflects the rise of a new journalism model. Next, I use content analysis to verify the main trends in *Jornal Nacional's* patterns of news coverage.

Changes in news coverage (1991-2000)

The first hypothesis of this study states that TV Globo's process of opening will lead to a decline of the authoritarian model, but it will not result in "tabloidization," or a linear growth of a market-driven journalism. This section tests this hypothesis with content analysis of *Jornal Nacional* in the period between 1991 and 2000.

The content analysis is based on specific operationalizations of the concepts of "authoritarian model" and "tabloidization." In the case of the authoritarian model, I take the weight of official sources in political coverage as a key indicator of a more passive approach to news gathering. In the case of tabloidization, I use two of the indicators proposed by Esser (1999) for testing the concept empirically:

1. Changes over time. Tabloidization is a process and its analysis requires a long-term perspective. To take this aspect into account, the content analysis of *Jornal Nacional* will cover a nine-year period (1991-2000);
2. Changes in topics and sources. Tabloidization means a change in the range of subjects (more entertainment) and a change in the mode of address (more street talk). To consider these factors, I analyze the growth of soft news coverage (sports, crime, violence, entertainment, miscellaneous) and of soundbites with ordinary citizens as indicators of a market-driven journalism.

To test the first hypothesis, I conducted a content analysis of 30 complete broadcasts of *Jornal Nacional* in three key moments: 1991, 1996, and 2000. The first 10 broadcasts, aired in November/December 1991, represent the period before media opening, when TV Globo's journalism was still characterized by the passive and biased patterns of the authoritarian model. The next 10 broadcasts, aired in November/December 1996, represent the initial period of media opening, after Evandro Carlos de Andrade became the General-Director of the

¹⁰ The interviews lasted about one hour. They were tape recorded and then transcribed. Three of the journalists were interviewed once: Evandro Carlos de Andrade, Rio de Janeiro, 8 November 1999; Mario Marana, Brasilia, 22 November 1999; Carlos Schroder, Rio de Janeiro, 11 March 2003. William Bonner was interviewed in two occasions, both in Rio de Janeiro: 8 November 1999, and 11 March 2003. All quotes from TV Globo journalists were translated by the author.

News Division and Mario Marona became the editor-in-chief of *Jornal Nacional*. Finally, the last 10 broadcasts, aired in November/December 2000, represent the more mature phase of media opening, after anchorman William Bonner became editor-in-chief of the newscast.¹¹

When designing the sample, I also tried to choose similar periods in Brazil's political history, to increase the comparability of the sub-samples. All three periods represent the end of the second year of presidential terms and therefore include similar political contexts.¹² The sample was also constrained by the availability of video archives with broadcasts from *Jornal Nacional*.¹³

I begin the analysis by looking at *Jornal Nacional's* agenda. What are the main trends between 1991 and 2000? Table 1 presents the thematic composition of *Jornal Nacional* news coverage, according to the proportion of airtime taken by each topic. The results confirm the first hypothesis. As the data show, coverage of traditional hard news topics, including politics and social problems, declined in 1996, but increased in 2000. If we consider only domestic news, and therefore exclude international items, we find that politics, the economy, and social problems took 50 percent of domestic news airtime in 1991, 38 percent in 1996, and 50 percent again in 2000. Thus, there is no linear increase of soft news coverage between 1991 and 2000.

Another important finding in Table 1 is the increase of *Jornal Nacional's* airtime. In the 1990s, each broadcast included about 28 minutes of news coverage (commercial breaks excluded). In 2000, the average length of each broadcast was more than 34 minutes, which represents a 23 percent increase of airtime.

Content analysis data reveal that there is no linear trend toward tabloidization in TV Globo during the period under consideration. Interviews with TV Globo's news editors also suggest that the initial trend toward soft news was later reverted. For example, William Bonner (1999) affirmed that after the initial decline of political coverage in 1996, TV Globo decided to increase hard news coverage later.

¹¹ The sample includes 30 complete broadcasts of *Jornal Nacional*: 28, 29, 30 November and 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 December 1991; 24, 29, 30 November and 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 14 December 1996; 27, 28, 29, 30 November and 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 12 December 2000. The initial plan was to include the same dates in the three periods, but not all broadcasts were available in the archives used.

¹² The 1991 broadcasts were aired in the end of the second year of President Fernando Collor de Mello's term of office, before the scandal that led to his impeachment in 1992. The 1996 broadcasts were aired in the end of the second year of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first presidential term. Finally, the 2000 broadcasts were aired in the end of the second year of Cardoso's second term in office (he was re-elected in 1998).

¹³ There is no public video archive in Brazil that includes broadcasts from *Jornal Nacional* in all of the period analyzed in this article. The sample was therefore constrained by the availability of taped broadcasts in existing archives. The main video archive used for this research belongs to University of Brasilia's Research Center on Media and Politics (NEMP). The broadcasts aired in 1996 and 2000 were provided by NEMP. The 1990 broadcasts were provided by TV Globo.

Table 1 – Distribution of airtime in *Jornal Nacional*, according to the subject of news stories

Subject:	1991	1996	2000
Political items*	28	18	23
Economy	2	6	5
Social problems**	13	7	13
International items	14	17	17
Violence/Crime	9	11	10
Miscellaneous	24	27	17
Sports	11	14	14
Total airtime in seconds:	100% (n=16,486)	100% (n=16,844)	100% (20,715)
Average length of broadcast:	27.5 minutes	28.1 minutes	34.5 minutes

* Includes news coverage of governments, legislatures, judiciary, corruption, political scandals, protests, and social movements.

** Includes news coverage of education, health, social security, environmental issues, and consumer rights.

These results contrast with other studies which suggest that changes in *Jornal Nacional* have led to greater emphasis on soft news (Miguel, 2000; Lima, 2001: 269-339). This apparent contradiction is solved when we understand the different phases of the new editorial project. The main trend toward tabloidization took place during Mario Marona's term as editor-in-chief (1996-9), but was reversed later. The book launched by TV Globo to commemorate the 35th anniversary of *Jornal Nacional* admits that Marona's period was characterized by a move toward soft news (MemóriaGlobo, 2004: 289). According to the book, when some episodes revealed a certain "exaggeration" in terms of soft news, Evandro Carlos de Andrade ordered the staff to reduce this type of coverage. The content analysis results support the conclusion that the initial trend toward a market-driven model was later reversed.

The first hypothesis also stated that media opening would lead to a decline of the authoritarian model in *Jornal Nacional*, especially in terms of reliance on official sources. To test this part of the hypothesis, I analyzed all soundbites that appeared in the newscast's political coverage. I classified all soundbites according to their source and measured their length in seconds. Figures 1 and 2 present the results of this analysis. The data confirm the hypothesis. As Figure 1

shows, the number of soundbites with official sources (President, Ministers, high-ranking officials) declined progressively, from 28 percent in 1991, to 17 percent in 1996, and 8 percent in 2000. If we consider the total airtime taken by soundbites, the decline of official sources is even more remarkable. As Figure 2 shows, official sources took 50 percent of soundbites' airtime in 1991, 21 percent in 1996, and only 11 percent in 2000. Thus, the hypothesis that media opening would lead to a decline of official sources in the news coverage is confirmed.

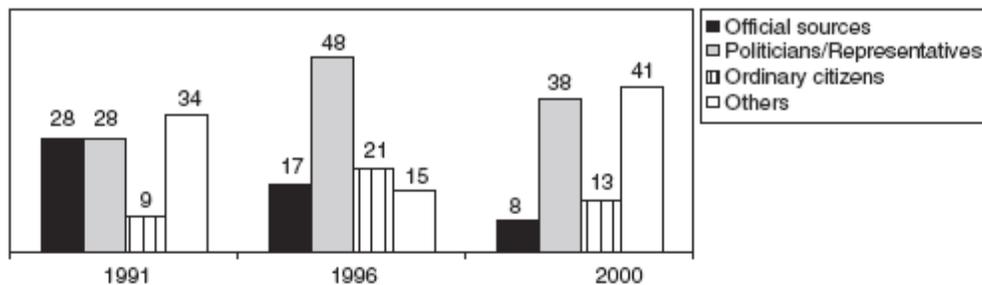


Figure 1 Frequency distribution of soundbites in *Jornal Nacional's* political coverage, according to their source (percentages)

Notes: 1 Total number of soundbites: 175 (32 in 1991, 48 in 1996, and 95 in 2000)

2 Official sources: President, Minister of State, high-ranking official in the federal level

3 Politicians/Representatives includes Congress members and politicians that are not government officials at the federal level

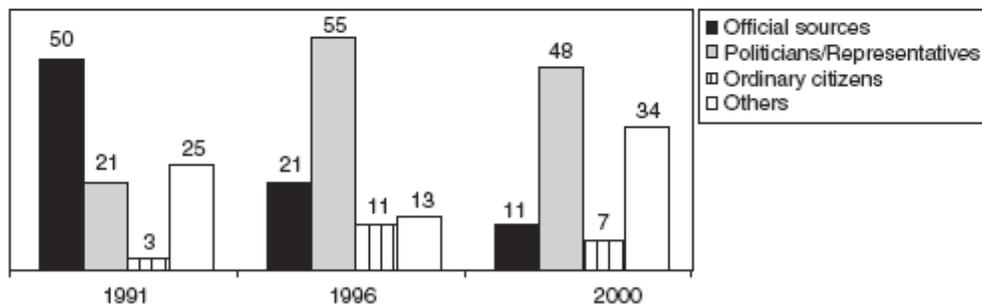


Figure 2 Airtime distribution of soundbites in *Jornal Nacional's* political coverage, according to their source (percentages)

Notes: 1 Total number of seconds of soundbites: 1611 (373 in 1991, 418 in 1996, and 820 in 2000)

2 Official sources: President, Minister of State, high-ranking official in the federal level

3 Politicians/Representatives includes Congress members and politicians that are not government officials at the federal level

Figures 1 and 2 provide further evidence that *Jornal Nacional's* trajectory cannot be interpreted as a simple process of tabloidization. As we can see in Figure 1, there is no linear growth of soundbites with ordinary citizens in the political coverage. The proportion of soundbites with common Brazilians increased from 9 percent to 21 percent between 1991 and 1996, but declined to 13 percent in 2000. A similar pattern is found in terms of proportion of airtime taken by ordinary citizens (Figure 2).

We can therefore conclude that TV Globo's opening has led to a decline of the authoritarian model, but not to a linear process of tabloidization. In the period between 1991 and 2000, the weight of official sources in *Jornal Nacional's* political coverage declined substantially, but not the amount of hard news coverage. Next, I turn to *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the 2002 election, since it provides further evidence of TV Globo's process of opening.

THE 2002 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The process of media opening in Brazil achieved a new level with *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the 2002 presidential election. The coverage was characterized by several important changes. First, there was a huge increase in the volume of news coverage traditionally devoted to campaigns. While in the previous presidential election (1998) *Jornal Nacional* devoted 5 percent of its total airtime to election coverage, in 2002 the topic took 31 percent of the newscast airtime (Miguel, 2004). This finding confirms the hypothesis that the opening of TV Globo would not result in a linear growth of a market-driven journalism.

When asked about this significant increase in campaign coverage, William Bonner, the anchor of *Jornal Nacional*, explained the change in the following terms: "I think the main reason is maturity. I think maturity is the key word and I speak of maturity not only about our work, journalists' work, the press maturity; I am also speaking about the maturity of Brazilian democracy" (Bonner, 2003). It is very revealing the way that Bonner links the change of media coverage to the deepening of democracy in Brazil.

Besides the increase of the airtime traditionally devoted to presidential elections, there were other important changes in 2002. Content analysis data show a remarkable level of impartiality in *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the four main candidates (Porto et al., 2004). The unprecedented high levels of balance in terms of the distribution of airtime resulted from a deliberate policy. According to Bonner (2003), one journalist received the task of verifying with a chronometer whether the four main candidates were taking the same number of seconds of airtime. He was also in charge of making sure candidates would have the same number of soundbites. The General-Director of the News Division confirmed the existence of the policy (Schroder, 2003). Bonner (2003) added that they followed the popular saying: "It is not enough to be honest, you

have to look honest.” In this way the journalist emphasized the concern with protecting the reputation of the network from accusations of biased news coverage.¹⁴

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: JOURNALISM IN TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

When TV Globo replaced Alberico de Sousa Cruz by Evandro Carlos de Andrade as General-Director of its News Division in 1995, a new journalistic model started to emerge. According to some of the leading members of the team, Andrade’s appointment marked the beginning of a “small revolution” (Bonner, 1999) and a “democratization” (Schroder, 2003) of journalistic practices and values at TV Globo. How to explain these changes? Why did TV Globo decide to open? In this section, I develop a specific framework that focuses on the impact of political and social democratization. One of the main purposes is to advance the investigation of the second hypothesis, which states that the causes of the changes in TV Globo have to be found in processes of democratization that have shaped Brazilian society in the last two decades. But first I consider possible alternative explanations for TV Globo’s opening.

The role of journalistic values

One possible explanation for the changes at TV Globo is the impact of new journalistic values emerging in newsrooms and affecting news organizations. When analyzing the emergence of independent publications in Mexico, Sallie Hughes (2003, 2006) stressed the importance of new organizational cultures and professional identities. According to the author, a civic orientation was spread among Mexican journalists due to a variety of factors, including their socialization into civic values within the context of the newsrooms. Could the transformation of TV Globo’s journalism be explained in terms of the development of new values and orientations among journalists? The interviews with TV Globo’s news editors suggest that the change came from the top, not from the “inside out” (the newsroom). In his interview, Evandro Carlos de Andrade said that when he presented the principles of the new editorial project to his staff, he could only see ironic smiles. According to him, journalists reacted by saying that his discourse was nice, but that they doubted it would be implemented (Andrade, 1999). The General-Director of TV Globo’s News Division suggested that journalists had accommodated to old norms and routines, and that the new editors had to work hard to change basic attitudes.

¹⁴ *Jornal Nacional*'s balanced coverage does not mean that the newscast did not play an important political role during the 2002 presidential election. The newscast provided a restricted coverage of the main campaign issue, the economy, privileging the interpretive frame that was promoted by the government, its candidate, and financial markets. Survey data show that exposure to *Jornal Nacional* contributed to increased public support for this frame (Porto, 2007). Thus, TV Globo tended to support the perspectives of the government during the campaign, although in more subtle ways, through the framing of the main campaign controversies.

In the case of *Jornal Nacional*, the evidence suggests that its newsroom culture was not autonomous, but changed as a result of broader forces, especially political and social democratization. But before considering the impact of democratization, I discuss the role of market forces.

The pressures of commercial competition

Besides news values, another possible explanation of the changes in *Jornal Nacional* has to do with the pressure of competition and greater commercialization of the national television market. In spite of its monopolistic position in the Brazilian communication system, TV Globo started to face stronger competition by other networks, especially by the Brazilian System of Television (SBT, its Portuguese acronym). Partially due to greater competition, TV Globo in general, and *Jornal Nacional* in particular, started to face declining audience ratings. Between 1989 and 1994, *Jornal Nacional* lost about 1.5 million viewers, with a 25 percent decline of its share of the national audience (Borelli and Priolli, 2000: 67).

Increasing competition helps explain changes in *Jornal Nacional*. Nevertheless, market forces were not the main agents of change. Arguments about the impact of market competition on media opening in Latin America (e.g. Tironi and Sunkel, 2000; Lawson, 2002) are limited because of two basic reasons. First, they ignore the fact that a market-driven journalism can also contribute to erode the credibility of the news media. When Evandro Carlos de Andrade noticed that *Jornal Nacional's* emphasis on soft news was further damaging the reputation of the newscast, he ordered his staff to diminish this type of coverage. Second, market-based explanations do not take fully into account the constraints imposed by political and social democratization.

The impact of political and social democratization

To achieve a better understanding of television news practices and values in transitional societies, we need new theoretical approaches that consider their connections with the broader political context. The present study is aimed at contributing to this theory-building effort by stressing the links between the changes in TV Globo and the deepening of political and social democratization in Brazil. With democracy entering a more mature stage, television networks like TV Globo may lose credibility and audience if they insist on presenting partisan news coverage. As anchor William Bonner (1999) puts it:

Especially in relation to politics, given *Jornal Nacional's* political strength in terms of the public it reaches, we have to take extra care to avoid serving the interests of this or that group, of this or that political cause. If *Jornal Nacional* favors a certain cause, it runs the huge risk of throwing away the confidence that the public has in it and in its professionals.

In the case of TV Globo, its reputation as a pro-government network has contributed to erode its relationship with the national audience. In a 1988 survey, more than half of *Jornal Nadanal's* viewers (53%) affirmed that the information it presents is “not very reliable” or “not reliable” (Squirra, 1993: 14-15). Other surveys conducted in 1995 revealed that most viewers identified TV Globo as the network that most actively supported the federal government, defended economic interests, and distorted more the facts.¹⁵

TV Globo's new journalism was aimed at changing the network's public image and improving its relation with the audience. Evandro Carlos de Andrade introduced several measures to ensure higher levels of credibility, even when these measures contradicted established practices and audience preferences. For example, TV Globo's recent book about *Jornal Nacional* admits that the change of news presenters in 1996 was aimed at bringing more credibility to the news coverage and at making it more dynamic (MemóriaGlobo, 2004: 287-8). The interesting aspect here is that the change took place against the preferences of the audience. Public opinion polls showed that viewers were against the removal of Cid Moreira before the change and that they did not approve the changes after they were implemented (Porto, 2002). Thus, the transformation of TV Globo's journalism cannot be explained solely in terms of commercial imperatives.

The Brazilian case shows that democratization is a key factor explaining the new patterns of interaction between political and media systems. The interviews with TV Globo's journalists suggest the importance of democratic political change in explaining the reforms in the network's News Division. This became particularly evident in arguments presented to explain *Jornal Nacional's* new patterns of electoral coverage during the 2002 presidential election. As we have seen, Bonner explained the changes in terms of the maturity of Brazilian democracy. He detailed this argument later in the interview:

Brazilian democracy was entering [in 2002] its adolescence. It was completing thirteen years and going to its fourth direct [presidential] election. The environment was completely different from the first direct election [in 1989]. Thus, I think that the word maturity is the one that explains a more significant boldness in the coverage [of the presidential election] ... With a higher degree with maturity, not only ours, professionally, but also of politicians, of the democratic institutions, the environment was favorable to this type of coverage. (Bonner, 2003)

Bonner links changes in journalistic practices to the maturity of democratic actors and institutions, which in turn creates a new type of environment for the media. These new types of constraints, which become more relevant in transitional societies when processes of political and social democratization advance, have not yet received the attention they deserve.

¹⁵ “A imagem dos telejornais: O povo acusa,” *Imprensa*, 105: 24-8, September 1995. See also Borelli and Priolli (2000: 71).

Lessons from the Brazilian case

Which implications for studies on journalism and media opening in new democracies can we draw from this case study? Based on examples from Latin America and Eastern Europe, two of the most important regions of the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington, 1991), I argue that the findings reported in this article provide at least two important lessons for studies on media and democratization.

First, the opening of TV Globo points to shortcomings of theories that define privatization and the development of a strong and modern communication sector as the most significant preconditions for media opening. Several studies about the media’s role in democratic consolidation in Latin America and Eastern Europe have focused on processes of commercialization, privatization, and modernization when explaining changes in media systems (Millard, 1998; Sukosd, 2000; Tironi and Sunkel, 2000; Gross, 2002; Lawson, 2002). These studies are based on the assumption, rooted in liberal theories of the press, that only by anchoring the media to a free market is it possible to ensure their independence from government control and interference.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the rise or consolidation of a private and highly differentiated media system does not necessarily lead to media opening. As I have already noted, most Latin American media industries are privately owned and commercially operated, but they have historically operated in a symbiotic relationship with the state (Fox, 1988, 1997; Lima, 1988; Straubhaar, 1989; Skidmore, 1993; Amaral and Guimarães, 1994; Sinclair, 1999; Hallin, 2000b; Waisbord, 2000; Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Lawson, 2002; Rockwell and Janus, 2003). The same alignment between business and political interests can be found in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. In this region, processes of deregulation and privatization did not prevent governments from manipulating or imposing control over commercial media outlets or the collusion between media organizations and the state (Splichal, 1994; Jakubowicz, 1995; Hall and O’Neil, 1998; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Sparks, 2000; Milton, 2001; Richter, 2002).

If commercialization and market competition do not fully explain media opening in new democracies, which other variables should be considered? The Brazilian case provides a second lesson that contributes to answer this question. The history of TV Globo demonstrates that social and political democratization play an important role in shaping journalistic practices and values. Thus, the level of institutionalization of political societies, as well as the level of organization and mobilization of civil societies, should all be taken into consideration in the investigation of the causes of media opening.

¹⁶ For a critical review of liberal theories of media and democracy see Curran (1996). Hallin (2000b) and Waisbord (2000) stress the limits of these theories for understanding political communication processes in Latin America.

Political communication research in transitional countries illustrates this point. In Central America, the slow pace or absence of media opening has been explained in terms of oligarchic tendencies in the political system that constrain media organizations. As Rockwell and Janus (2003: 4) point out, “lacking strong historical roots in democracy, media systems tend to support and reflect a country’s oligarchic tendencies.” In a similar vein, research on Eastern Europe has shown that the media systems that emerged after the fall of socialism were affected by the political systems’ lack of democratic traditions, as well as by democratically elected leaders’ authoritarian attempts to control or manipulate the media (Splichal, 1994; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Jakubowicz, 2001; Milton, 2001).

The theoretical framework of this article also suggests that, when analyzing the causes of media opening, we need to go beyond political democratization and consider the relative strength of civil society. In the case of Eastern Europe, some studies show that media reform was delayed or severely constrained by the weak autonomy of civil society in relation to the state (Splichal, 1994: 109; Gross, 2002: 59). Thus, the analysis of media opening in Eastern Europe should not ignore the fact that the political transitions of the region left most citizens with a lasting aversion to public activities, resulting in low levels of participation in voluntary associations (Howard, 2003).

The consolidation of democratic institutions in transitional societies affects journalistic practices, especially when articulated with the expansion of citizenship and participation in the realm of civil society. As the cases of Latin America and Eastern Europe illustrate, the consideration of the impact of political and social democratization can shed new light on processes of media opening that take place in new democracies.

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