

***Framing the 2000 US Presidential Election:
The Coverage by the Brazilian Media***

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The 2000 presidential election in the United States and the events that took place in the weeks following election day were subjects of intense media coverage all over the world, and Brazil was no exception. News producers from different countries focused their attention on these events for many reasons. The position as the main superpower in world geopolitics gives to the U.S. a status of “newsworthiness” that few countries enjoy.¹ The interest with which U.S. presidential elections are observed on the international level is thus perfectly understandable. The 2000 election and the impasse that followed it generated a unique set of events, which in turn raised a number of complex questions and new challenges to journalists and media organizations. How to cover and frame the presidential race? How to define the main features of the political and electoral systems of the U.S.? How to make sense of the impasse that followed the election? Were these events a sign of the strength of American democracy? Or were they definitive evidence of its obsolescence and failure?

These events and the questions raised by them offer an exceptionally rich opportunity to investigate the features of the journalistic culture of each country and how this culture interacts with the realm of politics. The way the different national media responded to these questions in their coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election reveals a great deal about the news values that orient the work of journalists. A basic assumption of this study is that the frames used by journalists to interpret the election and its aftermath offer important clues about the main features of Brazilian journalists’ professional culture.

This paper is aimed at identifying the general patterns of news coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election provided by two of the most important mass media in Brazil. A content analysis of the newspaper with the broadest readership, *Folha de São*

¹ The way Brazilian journalists framed the 2000 presidential election reveals this privileged position of the United States in world politics. In the last days of the campaign, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* started to print the news stories about the election under the heading “The Empire Votes.” The anchor of the newscast *Jornal Nacional* began the report aired on election day by calling the U.S. presidency “the most important post in the world.”

Paulo, and of the newscast with the largest audience, TV Globo's *Jornal Nacional*, is developed to identify these patterns. The analysis includes both the campaign period and the impasse that followed election day. The paper is divided into three sections. The first outlines the theoretical framework of the study, particularly the concept of framing. The second section presents the results of a content analysis of coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election provided by the two news media during the campaign period. The third section presents the results of a content analysis of the news stories that appeared during the impasse that emerged after election day. Finally, the conclusions stress the significance of the findings for the debates about Brazilian journalism and its political role.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FRAMING ANALYSIS

To investigate how the Brazilian media covered the 2000 U.S. election I draw from a growing body of literature on framing analysis.² The concept of frame has been used to define the “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation” used by journalists to organize the world and report it. In this definition, frames are understood as persistent patterns of interpretation by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse (Gitlin, 1980, pp. 6-7). In the coverage of public affairs, frames allow journalists, and to some extent audiences, to organize and interpret political events and issues in particular ways. While producing the news, journalists draw from public discourse but also contribute with their own frames, shaping the “interpretive packages” that are available in any culture (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Ordinary people frequently use media frames as resources in their conversations and discussions of public matters (Gamson, 1995) and these frames have an important effect on viewers’ attribution of causal responsibility on major political and social problems (Iyengar, 1991).

In this paper, I propose to identify the frames applied by Brazilian journalists in the coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election. In the content analysis of the campaign period, I identify four main frames:

1. *Thematic frame*. The term thematic frame refers to interpretive patterns that focus on candidates’ issue positions and proposals. The emphasis of news stories

² See Entman (1994) and Scheufele (1999) for more systematic reviews of the studies in this tradition.

adopting this framework is on the platforms and programs represented by the different candidates. In non-electoral contexts, the thematic frame has been defined in terms of a type of reporting that places public issues in some more general or abstract context, usually requiring more in-depth, interpretive analysis (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14).

2. *Horse-race frame*. This frame focuses on the evolution of the campaign as a race among candidates. The emphasis is on who is advancing and who is falling behind and therefore on polling numbers and on the campaign strategies of the candidates. Studies about the coverage of presidential elections in the U.S. have stressed how journalists rely heavily on the horse race frame to report campaigns (Patterson, 1980, 1993; Robinson and Sheehan, 1983; Hallin, 1994, pp. 133-152). Other researchers have used the terms “strategic” or “game frame” to describe the tendency of the media to report politics primarily in strategic terms (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Lawrence, 2000). In this paper, I use the term horse race frame to describe the interpretive framework applied by journalists to cover the U.S. 2000 election which emphasizes candidates’ performance in the polls, as well as their strategies.

3. *Personality-centered frame*. The tendency of the media to give preference to individual actors and to adopt human-interest angles in events, while downplaying institutional and political considerations, has been identified by some studies (Gitlin, 1980; Bennett, 1988). Scholars have used the terms “human impact frame” (Neuman, Just and Criegler, 1992) or “human-interest” frame (Neely, 1999) to describe such a focus of the news coverage on individuals. I use the term personality-centered frame to describe news stories that focus on the personal characteristics of the candidates and other major actors, including descriptions of their abilities and qualities and voters’ response to them as persons.

4. *Episodic frame*. The final category I apply to the Brazilian media’s coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election is the episodic frame. In this type of coverage, journalists basically report current campaign events and the beliefs of actors, usually limiting themselves to quoting their statements. Patterson (1993) found a strong predominance of “descriptive” news stories in the U.S. press, although this type of reporting declined with the growth of a more interpretive journalism (see also Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997). Some scholars define the episodic frame as a type of event-oriented

reporting that elicits individualistic rather than social-oriented responses to different topics on the part of audiences (Iyengar, 1991). In this study, I use the term episodic frame to refer to event-centered news stories that reported “facts” or actors’ statements, adopting a more descriptive mode of coverage.

These four categories of frames will be used to analyze the coverage of the campaign period of the 2000 U.S. presidential election by two of the most important news media in Brazil. The next section presents the results of the content analysis that was developed on the basis of this classificatory scheme.

THE NEWS COVERAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD

In this section I develop a content analysis of the campaign coverage that was provided by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* and by TV Globo’s newscast *Jornal Nacional*. In the case of *Folha*, the period of analysis goes from the Republican National Convention (July 31, 2000) to the day after the election (November 8, 2000), a total of 101 days. In the case of the newscast *Jornal Nacional (JN)*, the period of analysis was much smaller due to lack of funding and the resulting difficulties in recording its editions.³ The newscast was analyzed in a period of three weeks, between October 16 and the day following the election (November 8), with the exception of two days.⁴

While selecting the sample of news stories to be analyzed, an effort was made to include all news stories about the 2000 U.S. presidential election that were printed or broadcast, with some exceptions. In the case of the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, only the reports printed in the first page and in the international section, which appears under the heading *Mundo* (World), were analyzed. Other items, such as interviews, photographs, illustrations, tables, and maps, were excluded, as well as one-paragraph notes that sometimes appeared in the section *Panorâmica* (Panoramic). In the case of the newscast *Jornal Nacional*, all reports aired about the presidential election were analyzed. For both print and broadcast news, the focus was on the verbal or textual contents of the news stories, not on their visual aspects. Finally, only the stories about the presidential

³ In Brazil there are no public archives from where scholars can obtain episodes of newscasts or other TV programs. I am thankful to Luciana Porto and Marcio Faerman for their assistance in recording the newscast.

⁴ The editions from November 4 and 5 were not recorded due to technical problems.

race were included and therefore news stories about congressional elections were not analyzed.

After defining the sample, the main methodological procedure was the classification of the news stories according to a common coding scheme, having the news story as the unit of analysis. Each report was then classified according to its dominant frame and according to other variables.

The Newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*.

Folha de São Paulo is the largest Brazilian newspaper, with an average daily circulation of 472,000 copies.⁵ The paper was founded in 1921 and in 1962 it was bought by its current owners, the family Frias. Although Brazil has one of the lowest newspaper circulation levels in the world, with 42 copies sold for each 1,000 inhabitants, *Folha* plays an important political role. Since the leading Brazilian newspapers are intensely consumed by the national elite and are closely monitored by other media, they have an important agenda-setting function (Kucinski, 1998, pp. 24-26). *Folha* is a central source of foreign and domestic news for the national elite in Brazil.

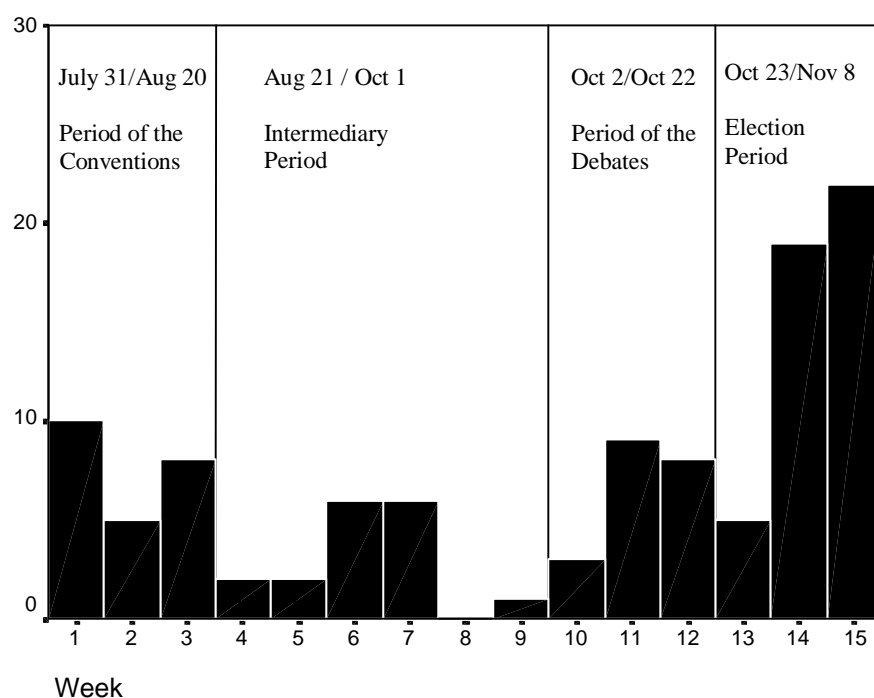
a) How much coverage did *Folha* offer in the electoral period?

We can start with a preliminary question: how much coverage did the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* provide about the U.S. presidential election? In the period of 101 days between the Republican Convention (July 31) and the day following the election (November 8), *Folha* published 106 news stories about the electoral contest, thus a little bit more than one per day. Nevertheless, as one would expect, the news stories were not evenly distributed across time. Figure 1 presents the frequency distribution of news items across the fifteen weeks of the electoral period. The data suggests that the coverage was concentrated around major campaign events. The first period (weeks 1 through 3) was dominated by the coverage of the National Conventions of the Republican and Democratic parties. This period was followed by an intermediary phase (weeks 4 through 9) that attracted less coverage, since no major campaign events took place. Coverage

⁵ *Folha* is followed by the newspapers *O Estado de São Paulo* (367,000) and *O Globo* (335,000) in circulation numbers (World Association of Newspapers, *World Press Trends*, Paris, 2000). These are very low numbers for a country with more than 170 million inhabitants.

increased again in the third period (weeks 10 through 12) due mainly to the three debates that were organized with the two leading candidates, George W. Bush and Al Gore. As election day approached, coverage increased substantially, with the election period (weeks 13 through 15) attracting the largest coverage. Despite the fact that the last “week” included only three days (November 6-8) it contained the greatest number of news stories. Thus *Folha* provided its readers with a good amount of news coverage of the election, with some exceptions, such as week 8 (September 18-24), when no news stories were printed.

Figure 1 – Frequency of news stories about the 2000 U.S. presidential election published by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* (July 31 – November 8, 2000). *



* Total number of news stories = 106. All weeks include a seven day period, from Monday through Sunday, with the exception of week 15, which includes only three days (November 6-8).

b) What kinds of journalists constructed the news stories of *Folha*?

Another issue investigated was the source of the news stories. During the entire electoral period, *Folha* maintained a special correspondent in the United States to cover

the election and its local reporters in the city of São Paulo also contributed with their own news stories. Besides its own reporters, the newspaper translated and reprinted articles from other media, particularly from American newspapers. It is therefore important to distinguish between the news stories written by *Folha*'s staff and those produced by other media and news services. Table 1 presents the classification of the news stories according to their source (or byline). *Folha*'s journalists wrote almost half of the news stories (47 %) and its correspondents in the U.S produced the great majority of them. On the other hand, more than half of the items were written by foreign journalists, mainly from the U.S., or were based on international news agencies. If we consider the 56 news stories that were not written by the staff of *Folha de São Paulo*, we find *The New York Times* as the single most important foreign news source: 24 news stories (43% of the foreign items) appearing in *Folha* were reprinted from the *Times*. The second most important international source was the foreign news agencies, followed by other foreign media.

Table 1 – Classification of the news stories published by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* during the campaign period according to their source (July 31 – November 8, 2000).

Source			Total
<i>Folha</i> 's Staff	Correspondent in the U.S	40.6 %	47.2 % (n=50)
	Local reporters	6.6 %	
Foreign Sources	<i>The New York Times</i>	22.6 %	52.8 % (n=56)
	Other U.S. newspapers	3.8 %	
	International news agencies	14.2 %	
	Other foreign sources	12.2 %	

Thus, when analyzing how *Folha* covered the U.S. election, it is important to distinguish between the content produced by its own staff and the content extracted from or based on foreign sources. In this article, I identify two main categories. First, I use the term “articles from *Folha*'s staff” to refer to reports written by *Folha*'s correspondents

and local reporters. Second, I use the term “articles from foreign sources” to refer to items written by or based on foreign media and international news agencies. It is important to note that the first group was dominated by *Folha*’s correspondents in the U.S., while the second was dominated by *The New York Times* and the international news agencies.

c) How did *Folha* frame the 2000 U.S. presidential contest?

After clarifying how much coverage *Folha de São Paulo* provided and what kinds of journalists were in charge of writing the news stories, I now turn to the frames used by journalists in the campaign coverage. The news stories were classified according to the four main frames: thematic, horse race, personality-centered and episodic. All news stories of the electoral period were coded according to its dominant frame. Table 2 presents the results of this classification and also divides the news stories according to their source (*Folha*’s staff or foreign sources). The data show that the most frequent frame, dominant in 35% of all news stories, was the horse race. The emphasis on polls, “winners-and-losers,” and on candidates’ electoral strategies was dominant both in the news stories written by *Folha*’s staff and in those by foreign sources, with a stronger emphasis on these aspects in the second group. The second most frequent frame was episodic, with stories basically describing events without contextualizing them in terms of the other frames. As in the case of the horse-race frame, emphasis on events and description was stronger in the content produced by foreign sources. The third most frequent frame was thematic, with items focusing on candidates’ issue positions and proposals. In this case, the emphasis was stronger among items from *Folha*’s journalists, who produced almost twice as many thematic reports as did foreign sources. The fourth most frequent frame was personality-centered, emphasizing candidates’ attributes and qualities, as well as voters’ responses to them as persons. These aspects were more frequent in the news items produced by or based on foreign sources. Finally, no dominant frame was identified in 10 of the 106 news stories (9.4%). This category includes news stories that presented more than one frame, with none of them appearing to be dominant, as well as items that presented other interpretive frameworks.

Table 2 – Classification of *Folha de São Paulo*'s news stories according to their dominant frame and according to their source (July 31 – November 8, 2000).

Frame:	All News Stories:	Articles from <i>Folha</i> 's staff:	Articles from Foreign Sources:
Horse-Race	34.9 %	32.0 %	37.5 %
Episodic	28.3 %	24.0 %	32.1 %
Thematic	15.1 %	20.0 %	10.7 %
Personality-Centered	12.3 %	10.0 %	14.3 %
Mixed/Other	9.4 %	14.0 %	5.4 %
Total	100% (n=106)	100 % (n=50)	100 % (n=56)

Pearson Chi-Square = 4.844 (p<.304).

Therefore, most of the reporting provided by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* focused on the horse-race aspects of the campaign or limited itself to describe events (63% of all news stories), while candidates' positions and proposals were the main focus of only 15% of the news stories. The news stories based on or produced by foreign sources presented more emphasis on horse race, episodic and personality-centered frames and less on policy issues. Nevertheless, the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant. Thus, *Folha*'s coverage as a whole followed a very similar pattern, independent of the source of the news stories. After identifying the main framing patterns of the electoral period coverage, I will now describe in more detail how journalists applied each frame to report the campaign.

The horse-race frame

A significant part of the horse race coverage was made up of reports that presented poll results, focusing on who was ahead, rising or falling. Journalists also focused on the importance of polls for voters and party activists and consequently for the general climate of the campaign. No item illustrates this approach better than an article reprinted from *The New York Times* ("Al Gore tries to bring the dispute to the field of ideas," August 19). Focusing on how the Democratic Convention was trying to change

Gore's image among voters as a "boring and stiff" candidate, the article quotes a delegate from the state of Ohio: "The polls have a psychological effect. It is like when you go to the jockey club, look at the list of horses that will race and see that your horse is not well positioned in the predictions." It is difficult to imagine a more explicit interpretation of the campaign as a horse race.

Even when journalists dealt with candidates' issue positions they frequently framed them in terms of electoral strategies and rhetorical manipulations aimed at attracting voters. In a report by *Folha's* correspondent with the title "Bush rejects economic merit of Clinton" (August 2), the focus is not so much on Bush's economic policy, but on how Republicans were facing the problem of campaigning against the Democrats in a period of economic expansion. According to the journalist, polls showed that voters were giving the credit for the good performance in the economy to President Clinton, but that he did not manage to transfer this credit to his candidate, Al Gore. The Republican platform, approved two days earlier in the party's National Convention, is interpreted by the journalist in terms of a strategy aimed at preventing this transfer from happening. In his view, Republicans were trying to accomplish that by attributing the causes of the economic expansion to the Republican governments that preceded Clinton in the White House. The same theme is repeated three months later in an article reprinted from *The New York Times* ("Prosperity does not guarantee Gore's victory," November 2). The focus here is not on Bush, but on Gore's difficulties in associating his image with the economic prosperity of the Clinton years. The attention is directed again to the strategies of the candidates.

Another report by the correspondent frames the Republican Convention in terms of a conscious effort to change the image of candidate Bush ("Party tries to improve Bush's image," August 3). According to the report, the American public started to see Bush as unprepared in foreign policy after he could not name four important international leaders in a television interview. The presence of politicians and military leaders in the Convention, such as general Norman Schwarzkopf and senators Robert Dole and John McCain, is interpreted as a maneuver to show voters that Bush is well prepared to command foreign affairs, particularly in relation to national defense.

The Democratic National Convention was also framed in terms of the horse race framework. In the report “Al Gore wants to take off with old symbols” (August 14), the correspondent argues that Los Angeles was chosen as the site of the Convention to improve the candidate’s position in the polls. The aim of the Democratic Party would be to symbolically link Al Gore to John Kennedy, who had his candidacy launched in 1960 in the same city. According to the correspondent, Los Angeles was chosen not only because of “symbolic” factors, but also for two other reasons. First, California is the state with the biggest number of delegates (54) in the electoral college. Second, the state is the cradle of two industries that are heavy donors to the Democratic Party, Hollywood and the new technologies sector. Thus, the choice of the site of the Convention is seen as part of a general strategy aimed at improving Gore’s performance in the polls, guaranteeing votes in the electoral college, and attracting financial contributions to the campaign.

The debates between the two main candidates, Bush and Gore, were also reported in terms of the horse race frame. Stories about the debates frequently focused on their impact on the polls or on the results of surveys that were aimed at evaluating who “won” the debate. There wasn’t much focus on what the candidates said. Horse race stories also stressed how campaign events were organized and scheduled according to electoral strategies. Thus, in the weeks that preceded the election, candidates’ decisions on which states to visit were seen as determined by the features of the electoral system. A report based on international news agencies argued that candidates’ schedules were a result of their strategy of winning the “decisive states” in the electoral college (“Populous states might favor Democrats,” November 2). On other occasions, events are judged in terms of their possible impact on the polls. The exposé about Bush’s 1976 citation for driving under the influence of alcohol was discussed by a report reprinted from the British newspaper *The Independent* in these terms (“Revelation shakes a monotonous campaign,” November 4).

A common theme in the horse race stories is the strategy used by candidates to attract voters. In these stories, candidates’ positions and programs are never related to ideological differences or to their commitments to specific constituencies, but are presented as conscious rhetorical acts aimed at winning the election. A journalist from the news agency *Reuters* argued that since the election was a close one, its final outcome

would depend on candidates' ability to convince their electoral bases to cast their votes on election day ("Turn out might decide the election in the USA," October 26). According to the journalist, it is for this reason that Gore was dealing with the problems of women, African-Americans and the elderly, while Bush was focusing his attention on conservative Christians and rural voters. Weeks later, on election day, a report by *Folha's* correspondent argued that the strategies of the two main candidates were characterized by "electoral centrism," a process by which candidates produce "ideological metamorphoses" to attract independent voters and to broaden their electoral basis ("Candidates use Clinton's 'centrism'," November 7). According to several experts quoted in the report, Clinton inaugurated the strategy in the 1992 and 1996 campaigns. Polls results are cited by the journalist to justify the conclusion that Bush's centrist strategy has been more successful, since he has attracted a higher number of independent voters.

The Episodic frame

As we have seen, the second most frequent frame in *Folha's* news coverage, dominant in 28% of all stories, was episodic. In these news stories, journalists focused on some basic tasks. First, they frequently limited themselves to reporting current facts, mainly by describing campaign events, such as conventions, debates, and rallies. On other occasions, journalists reported beliefs or attitudes of actors, usually limiting themselves to quoting their statements. Finally, several news stories conveyed information to the readers without the context of the three other interpretive frameworks (thematic, horse race or personality-centered). For example, *Folha's* correspondent informed readers that senator Joseph Lieberman, who had recently been chosen as Gore's running mate, had been in Brazil in 1998 as an envoy of Congress ("Nominee acted in Brazil during Real's crisis," August 8). The report focused on Lieberman's mission and who he met, and transcribes several quotes from the vice-presidential candidate. The dominant tone of this report, as in all episodic news stories, was descriptive.

The thematic frame

Despite the clear predominance of horse race and episodic reports in *Folha's* coverage of the election, candidates' issue positions received some attention. In these reports, the emphasis was not on candidates' strategies or on poll results, but on their programs and proposals. One of the main subjects of the thematic reports was the candidates' foreign policy position in general, and their possible impact on the relations with Brazil in particular. In a report based on an interview with Robert Zoellick, Bush's foreign policy advisor, *Folha's* correspondent discussed the Republican candidate's proposed policy for Latin America, suggesting that an eventual Republican presidency would improve relations with the region ("Bush prioritizes relation with Latin America," August 1). The foreign advisor is quoted saying that Bush would accept a request made by emerging countries, mainly Brazil and China, to exclude environmental and labor issues from the negotiations of the World Trade Organization. Nevertheless, the correspondent stresses that the platform approved by the Republican Convention is "less kind" with developing countries than the advisor suggested. The correspondent stresses in particular the platform's positions on the World Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In another report in the following day, the correspondent discussed how the platform approved by the Republican Convention failed to include homosexual issues ("Party avoids debate about homosexuals").

Evaluating the platform approved by the Democratic Convention, *Folha's* correspondent argued that it contained proposals "strongly contrary" to the positions of the Brazilian government and of other emerging countries ("Gore's platform contradicts Brazil's positions," August 16). The journalist points to the fact that the platform proposes to establish environmental, social and human rights conditions to loans made by the World Monetary Fund and by the World Bank, as well as to trade agreements established within the World Trade Organization. The report says that Brazil and China are some of the countries which fear that such conditions might be used by the United States as an excuse to increase protectionist policies and as an instrument to win trade disputes with emerging countries. Another report by a local journalist from *Folha* argued that the Brazilian foreign ministry saw too much protectionism in Gore's platform and

was hoping for a Republican presidency (“Itamaraty sees protectionism in Gore and hopes for Bush’s victory,” November 6).

Journalists also focused on candidates’ positions on domestic issues. A news story reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times* discussed Gore’s proposals to eliminate the national deficit and improve the income of working families (“Gore promises to eliminate internal debt and to elevate income in the US,” September 7). A report by *Folha*’s correspondent discussed the results of a study about executions in the state of Texas when Bush was governor, raising the issue of the death penalty (“Study condemns executions in the Bush era,” October 18). A story reprinted from *The New York Times* discussed Bush’s policy on abortion (“Pro-abortion groups of the US criticize Bush,” October 30) and one report reprinted from the Spanish newspaper *El País* stressed how both the Republican and the Democratic parties were ignoring the interests of the poor, since they tended not to participate in politics (“Campaigns ignore the poor,” November 8).

News stories frequently compared candidates’ positions in a single area or issue. One report by *Folha*’s correspondent discussed the differences in the proposals of the two main candidates in the area of foreign policy (“Bush fears ‘Vietnam’ in Colombia; Gore sees exaggeration,” August 17). An insightful story by a journalist from the Spanish newspaper *El País* dealt with the same issue two months later (“Candidates disagree on foreign policy,” October 17). One story by *Folha*’s correspondent compared how the platforms of the Republican and Democratic candidates would affect Brazil and the projects of regional integration in the continent (“Republican platform prioritizes Brazil; Democratic, does not,” November 6). A short story reprinted from *The New York Times* compared the stands of the two main candidates on the issue of abortion (“Elections decide the future of abortion,” October 12). *Folha*’s correspondent compared the economic policies of the candidates, including their proposals on taxes and on how to use the surplus (“Elections defines the course of US economy,” November 5). One of *Folha*’s correspondents in the US stressed how the election would affect the composition of the Supreme Court (“Electoral dispute also decides the ideological profile of the Supreme Court,” November 5).

The personality-centered frame

Another interpretive framework used by journalists to report the election centered on candidates' personalities. When Bush was formally launched by the Republican Convention as a candidate, *Folha's* correspondent presented his personal history ("Republicans make Bush's candidacy official," August 4). The journalist argued that Bush's adolescence was centered around parties and alcohol and that he failed as businessmen, becoming a politician under the shadow of his father. The reporter also commented on how the candidate frequently makes gaffes due to his difficulties in verbalizing some words and because of the tendency to mix up the names of countries. According to the report, these gaffes then become raw materials for comedians. A news story reprinted from *The New York Times* discussed voters' responses to the personal qualities of the candidates, mainly Bush's weak knowledge of foreign affairs ("Bush shows weakness in foreign policy," October 11). Gore is presented as an intelligent person, but also as someone who has an irritating tendency to tell small lies and to say things just to please the audience. Bush, on the other hand, is presented as someone who does not know much about foreign affairs and as having difficulties in verbalizing simple words.

The debates between the two main candidates were frequently reported in terms of their success in changing voters' perceptions about the negative aspects of the candidates' personalities. Two short items published on October 13 evaluated the candidates' performance in the second debate on these terms. The first report, from *The New York Times*, argued that Bush was successful in appearing more intelligent and Gore in appearing less aggressive and formal ("Undecided votes will decide election"). The second report, from *The Washington Post*, stated that the main reason why Gore was not leading the polls was "the fact that the public still has doubts about Al Gore as a person, mainly in relation to the truthfulness of what he says" ("Voters still have doubts about Gore"). *Folha's* correspondent argued weeks later that both candidates have the tendency to tell "small lies" ("Candidates keep the tradition of telling 'small lies'," November 5).

It is interesting to note that journalists used candidates' qualities as persons to answer one of the key questions of the campaign: why wasn't economic prosperity helping the Democratic candidate in the polls? *Folha's* correspondent gave a personality-

centered explanation: voters think that Bush is a more authentic person (“Economy is well, but does not help Gore,” November 5). Experts are quoted saying that because of some of Gore’s statements, such as when he said he had invented the Internet, his image started to be associated by voters with someone who tries to be something he is not.

On election day, two news stories reprinted from the French newspaper *Le Monde* summarized the biographies of the candidates, both stressing their qualities as persons. The report on Bush raised the question of whether he would be able or not to distance himself from the shadow of his father, presenting him as outgoing, charming and as having good political skills (“Republican candidate struggles to run away from father’s shadow”). The report on Gore presents him as someone with good performance in debates, with good knowledge of policy issues, but as someone without charisma (“Democrat was programmed to occupy the presidency”).

Journalists sometimes focused on the personal qualities and role of key members of the families of the candidates. A report by *Folha*’s correspondent introduced Bush’s nephew, George P. Bush, as a weapon available to the Republicans to attract Latino voters (“Candidate’s nephew is a Latino weapon,” August 1). The emphasis of the report is on George P.’s personal qualities, including his physical similarity to the Spanish singer Enrique Iglesias and his role as a celebrity among Hispanic women. Another report by a local reporter focused on the different personal styles of the wives of the candidates (“Gore’s wife is active and Bush’s discrete like her mother-in-law,” November 5).

Other frames

Some of the frames used by journalists did not fit the four main categories. The most important of them was the interpretive framework that emphasized the monarchy-like features of the U.S. political system. A report by *Folha*’s correspondent about the Republican National Convention interprets American politics in terms of a monarchical system dominated by the Bush dynasty (“Convention acclaims Bush dynasty,” August 3). A few days later, a story reprinted from *The New York Times* adopts the same interpretive framework (“For the Bush clan, event is a family reunion,” August 6). The frame reappears three months later, in the day before the election, in a report written by a local journalist (“Election keeps U.S. dynastic tradition,” November 6).

One of *Folha*'s correspondents compares the rules of the debates in the U.S. and in Brazil. The reporter frames the Brazilian system, which allows the participation of a greater number of candidates in the debates, as a "circus" ("Debate rules in the U.S. are better than the Brazilian ones," October 12). A report from another correspondent frames the U.S. presidency as the most powerful post in the world, although corporations and Congress limit the power of the president ("U.S. president will have record revenues," November 5).

d) How did *Folha* evaluate the style of U.S. elections?

Another topic investigated refers to the evaluations presented by the news stories about the style of the U.S. electoral campaigns, particularly to how campaign strategies and methods were interpreted by journalists. Such evaluations were found in only 14 of the 106 news stories, the great majority of which (11) were written by *Folha*'s own journalists. Most of the evaluations centered around the role of the media or on how the political system was tailored to the needs of the electronic media. The National Conventions, in particular, were particularly criticized on these grounds. A report about the Republican National Convention by *Folha*'s correspondent presented a very critical evaluation of the Conventions: "Presidential conventions in the U.S. are theatrical plays planned in their minimal details to gain space in the media and to nationally launch candidates that have been chosen months before, during the parties' primaries in the states" ("Party makes Bush's candidature official under the shadow of McCain," July 31). The exact same statement was repeated by the correspondent in a story printed a few days later ("Republicans make Bush's candidature official," August 4).

A long report reprinted from *The New York Times* criticized the U.S. media for changing their news coverage of the campaign according to variations in the results of the polls ("Electoral polls influence the media coverage," October 1). According to the journalist, "At every oscillation in the pendulum of the polls the media change their coverage and start to attack the candidate that is ahead." The article criticizes the tendency of the media to take poll results as precise reflections of reality, ignoring how survey questions pressure undecided voters to "choose" a candidate when they haven't decided yet who they are going to vote for. Because the media want a clear answer to the

question of “who is ahead,” polling institutions count the preferences of these voters as definitive ones, when their preferences are in fact very volatile.

The debates were also criticized. An article written by one of *Folha*'s local reporters argued that the dominant format of the debates is the “quiz show,” with specific questions and very little time for the answers (“Marketing advisors dominate the first meeting” October 11). The journalist argues that the debates started to be dominated by marketing specialists, turning them in “little more than a pile of ready phrases, created by teams of writers and tested by qualitative research [with voters].” In the following day, one of *Folha*'s correspondents presented a more positive evaluation of the debates. Comparing the television debates of the U.S. and Brazil, the journalist criticizes the “democratism” of the Brazilian system, which grants access of a great number of candidates to these events (“Debate rules in the U.S. are better than the Brazilian ones”).

One of the correspondents discussed the dominant position of some clans, including the Bush family, in the American political process and proposed an explanation to it (“Election keeps U.S.’s dynastic tradition,” November 6). According to the journalist, the phenomenon was a result of two factors. First, the “celebrity cult,” developed in the last four decades by the media. Second, the capacity of these celebrities to raise money for the electoral campaigns.

A report reprinted from the British newspaper *The Independent* criticizes the negative tone of candidates’ political advertising on television and the monotony of the campaign (“Revelation shakes a monotonous campaign,” November 4). In a similar way, the correspondent notes that the U.S. election took place in a rather cold climate, without the agitation in the streets and the enthusiasm of supporters that characterize the elections in Brazil (“In Chicago, Blacks prefer Gore,” November 8). Another report from the correspondent points to a peculiarity of the US political process, the fact that newspapers openly support candidates in their editorials, while trying to keep the news coverage objective (“Press diminishes support for candidates,” November 7).

Another aspect of the U.S. elections that was criticized was their high costs. The correspondent presents the results of a study which shows that the 2000 presidential election was the most expensive in U.S. history (“Undecided prefer Gore in the final debate,” October 19). On election day, *Folha*'s correspondent also stressed the high costs

of the election, comparing it to the last presidential election in Brazil (“Campaigns cost US\$ 3 billion and were the most expensive,” November 7). According to the journalist, Bush’s campaign collected US\$ 187 million dollars, while Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s 1998 campaign collected approximately US\$ 40 million.

TV Globo’s newscast *Jornal Nacional* (JN)

TV Globo’s *Jornal Nacional* is the newscast with the highest audience ratings in Brazil. As several studies have already shown, TV Globo (*Rede Globo*) has consolidated a dominant position in the Brazilian television market, becoming a key player in the political process (Lima, 1988; Amaral and Guimarães, 1994). Besides dominating the television market, Globo Organizations are characterized by vertical and horizontal integration, with business activities in several areas, including newspapers, radio stations, a publishing house, a recording company, cable and satellite television, telecommunications and Internet, among many other sectors (Amaral and Guimarães, 1994; Lima, 1998; Brittos, 2000). The network’s main newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, is by far the most popular news media in Brazil. It is broadcast in prime time, around 8:00 p.m., and is watched by an average of 40% of the dwellings with television sets.⁶

a) How much coverage did *JN* offer and by what kinds of journalists?

The period of analysis of the newscast *Jornal Nacional* (*JN*) was much shorter than the one used in the case of the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. The sample includes all editions aired between October 16 and the day following the election (November 8), with the exception of November 3 and 4. In the 19 editions analyzed in the period, *JN* broadcast reports about the election in only 6 of them (32%), totaling 15 minutes of news coverage.

Two of the six reports were made up of shorter items (30-47 seconds) in which only the anchor of the newscast spoke. In both cases the anchor basically announced the results of the most recent polls about the presidential race. The remaining four news stories started with an introduction by the anchor followed by a report from *JN*’s

⁶ IBOPE, Relatório AIP Nacional, September 1999.

correspondent in the U.S., reporter Zileide Silva.⁷ These news stories were longer (between 1 minute and 13 seconds and 6 minutes and 30 seconds) and obviously more detailed. Thus, the main newscast in Brazil did not provide much coverage in the three weeks of the campaign period and TV Globo's correspondent in the United States produced the great majority of the news stories.

b) How did *Jornal Nacional* frame the 2000 U.S. presidential election?

Of the six news stories aired, four adopted a horse race frame and two an episodic format. Therefore, *JN's* coverage focused only on polls or on describing recent events. The first report, aired on October 18, dealt with the last presidential debate between the two main candidates, George W. Bush and Al Gore. In her wrap-up of the report, the correspondent focused on the possible impact of the debate on poll results. In the second and third reports (October 23 and November 2) the anchor announced the most recent poll results. In the fourth report (November 6), the journalist presented a didactic explanation of the U.S. electoral system, mainly of the electoral college, but focused on the campaign activities of the candidates and their strategies to make sure their supporters would cast their votes on election day. These four stories were coded as adopting a horse race frame.

The remaining two news stories limited themselves to reporting the most recent events, adopting an episodic frame. The fifth report, aired on election day (November 7), basically described the lines in the voting locations and reported the last rallies of the two main candidates. The item includes a live report from the correspondent, as well as brief quotes from the two main candidates and from voters who had just cast their ballots. The news story aired the day after the election (November 8) also included live participation by the correspondent, who summarized the events that followed election day, mainly in relation to the deadlock in Florida. It also included participation from TV Globo's correspondent in London. He told the audience about the gaffe of several world leaders who hurried to be the first to congratulate Bush and were embarrassed by the fact that his victory had not been officially confirmed.

⁷ It is important to note that Zileide is a female black journalist, a rare case in Brazil's not diverse media landscape.

In sum, the coverage of the campaign provided by *Jornal Nacional* was entirely devoted to reporting the most recent events and to emphasizing horse race aspects, mainly poll results. Although there were more reports adopting a horse race frame, the two reports adopting an episodic frame were much longer and took two thirds of the coverage time. On the other hand, there were no reports focusing on candidates' issue positions or on their personalities in the period of analysis. Thus, TV Globo's prime time newscast not only offered relatively little coverage of the U.S. presidential election, but also adopted a descriptive style or focused on horse race aspects.

d) How did *JN* evaluate the style of U.S. elections?

There were two brief comments about the style of the election in two of the six news stories aired by *JN*. In the report broadcast on October 18, the correspondent calls attention to the more flexible or talk-show like features of the last debate between the two main candidates. The reporter stressed, for example, the fact that candidates could walk around the stage. In the report broadcast on November 6, the correspondent emphasized that the 2000 election was the most expensive in U.S. history, although details were not provided.

THE COVERAGE OF THE POST-ELECTION PERIOD

Besides investigating how the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* and the newscast *Jornal Nacional* framed the election period, I also developed a content analysis of the coverage of the conflicts that followed election day. The period of analysis of *Folha's* news coverage of the post-election impasse ranged from the day in which the impasse was announced (November 9) to the day following Al Gore's concession speech (December 14), including therefore 35 days. *Jornal Nacional's* period of analysis was again shorter, for the same reasons previously explained. All editions of the newscast that were broadcast between November 27 and December 14 were analyzed. The sample with news stories from the newscast includes therefore 16 days.

The content analysis of the news coverage of the post-election period focused on a basic question: how did the Brazilian media interpret the disputes over the counting of votes in the state of Florida? How did journalists frame the events that postponed the

final decision about the outcome of the election? Thus, in this section I focus on a more specific level of framing. The aim is to investigate how the media interpreted the events and disputes that took place during the post-election period.

The newspaper Folha de São Paulo

a) How much coverage did *Folha* offer and by what kinds of journalists?

The confusion in the counting of the votes in Florida and the conflicts over the final outcome of the presidential election attracted a lot of coverage on the part of the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. In the 35 days of the post-election period, *Folha* published 151 news stories about those events, an average of 4 reports per day. The coverage offered by *Folha* in the post-election period was four times larger than the coverage offered in the campaign period.

The sources of these news stories are presented in Table 3. The pattern is very similar to that of the campaign period, with some differences. The most important of them is the fact that in the post-electoral period *Folha's* staff wrote the majority of the news stories (56%), compared to less than half of the reports (47%) in the campaign period. Otherwise, both periods have similar patterns. Correspondents wrote the great majority of the news stories from *Folha's* journalists. In the stories written by or based on foreign sources, there is a predominance of *The New York Times*, followed by the international news agencies.

Table 3 – Classification of the news stories published by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* during the post-electoral period according to their source (November 9 – December 14, 2000).

Source		Total
<i>Folha's</i> Staff	Correspondent in the U.S	48.3 %
	Local reporters	7.9 %
Foreign Sources	<i>The New York Times</i>	16.9 %
	Other U.S. newspapers	5.6 %
	International News agencies	12.6 %
	Other foreign sources	8.6 %
		56.2 % (n=85)
		43.7 % (n=66)

b) How did *Folha* interpret the events of the post-election period?

In the post-election period, the analysis focused on the interpretations presented by news coverage of the conflicts that followed election day. All news stories containing references to the causes or significance of these events were coded. Such references were found in only 30 of the 151 news stories. The low number of stories providing some type of interpretation (20%) indicates that journalists refrained from making or presenting more explicit evaluations about the events. Therefore, it is important to note that the analysis that follows is not representative of the whole post-election news coverage. It refers to this smaller set of news stories that offered some interpretive background on the basis of which the significance of the events could be assessed.

The 30 news stories were classified according to four main types of interpretation. Table 4 presents the results of this classification. The causes for the confusion and the impasse that followed the election were attributed mainly to features of the electoral system. This interpretation was present in almost half of the 30 news stories. This framing was followed by those evaluations that emphasized the role of political institutions and of the mass media. Finally, the fourth most frequent interpretation was the one which argued that the defeat in the popular vote would undermine the legitimacy

of an eventual Bush administration. Other types of interpretation accounted for 15% of the total.

Table 4 – Interpretations about the electoral impasse presented by 30 news stories printed in the post-election period by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* (November 9 – December 14, 2000).

Interpretation:	Frequency:
Responsibility of the electoral system	42.4%
Responsibility of political institutions	15.1%
Responsibility of the media	15.1%
Defeat popular vote undermines legitimacy of Bush	12.1%
Other interpretations	15.1%
Total:	33 (100%) *

* This number is higher than the number of news stories (30) because 3 of them presented more than one interpretation.

The Responsibility of the electoral system

After presenting the main interpretations that were offered by *Folha's* post-election coverage, I will now describe them in more detail. The most frequent interpretation, found in 14 of the 30 news stories, was the one that explained the impasse in terms of the shortcomings of the U.S. electoral system. In some instances, Brazilian journalists presented this frame in explicit ways. A local journalist from *Folha* argued, for example, that the conflicts in the counting of the votes call into question the country's electoral system ("Divisions weaken the winner," November 24). In the last day of the post-election period, the correspondent concluded that "The long post-electoral impasse showed that the country which gives lessons about democracy to the rest of the world needs to change the form by which it chooses its president" ("Bush wins," December 14). More frequently, journalists quoted others to criticize the electoral system of the United States. A report reprinted from *The New York Times* quotes U.S. political leaders to this end. Republican Senator Mitch McConnell argues that "in the dawn of the 21st Century it

is inexcusable that the most advanced democracy of the world still uses voting systems created just after World War II.” Democratic leader Scott Harshbarger is quoted saying that the fiasco of Florida made imperative a revision of voting and counting systems and concluded: “This 19th Century system is completely obsolete and unacceptable.” (Congress wants to change elections,” December 14).

The criticisms about the U.S. electoral laws and institutions were frequently presented in terms of the “Banana Republic” frame. According to this interpretation, the disputes over the final outcome of the election indicate that the United States has the same type of political problems and archaic institutions as those of less advanced countries. In the first day of the post-election period, the correspondent argued that American electoral institutions behaved like those of Peru. In a news story with the title “The rest of the world satirizes U.S. election” (November 10), a journalist of the news agency *Reuters* presents the critical comments made by foreign politicians, experts and media about the confusion in the election. The journalist quotes an unnamed expert who argues that the U.S. electoral system is worse than the one adopted by Azerbaijan. He also quotes an editorial from the Cuban newspaper *Granma* entitled “Banana Republic,” which ridiculed the confusion in the electoral process, and a politician from Russia who calls the U.S. electoral system “stupid.” In a report reprinted from *The New York Times*, one academic refers to a Spanish friend who compared the state of Florida to a Banana Republic and another scholar admits that the state has an obsolete voting system (“Electoral confusion undermines Florida’s reputation,” November 16).

The Brazilian electoral laws and institutions were compared to those of the United States. A local reporter quotes Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who presented the recent municipal elections in Brazil as an example of democratic consolidation. The president argues that the “powerful neighbor” did not manage to count the votes so fast and so accurately as in Brazil, where final results are known in the same day of the election because a fully computerized voting system (“FHC is ironic about delay in the counting,” November 11). A short report reprinted parts of an editorial from *The New York Times*’ which stated that the Brazilian electoral system is more advanced than the American (“Newspaper complements voting system in Brazil,” November 25). The editorial is quoted affirming that Brazil carried out successfully its first entirely

digital election, when more than 100 million people voted with the assistance of computers.

Even when journalists opposed these ironic comments about the U.S. political system they could not avoid criticizing some features of the electoral system, particularly the electoral college. One of *Folha*'s local journalists criticizes the ironic and humorous comments that were circulating in Brazil about the deadlock in the U.S. election. Although the journalist opposes such interpretations, he defines the electoral college as an "anachronistic" institution. He also argues that the possibility of having a president elected without the majority of the popular vote is a clear shortcoming ("The American elections and the gibe of the butler," November 15).

The fact that obsolete voting systems tend to be more frequent in marginalized communities was also stressed. In a report from *The New York Times* candidate Al Gore argues that "old and cheap machines are usually installed in areas with low-income population, minorities or seniors" (Blacks had more chance of having their votes invalidated," November 30). The report also presents the charges put forward by the African-American leadership (Jesse Jackson and the NAACP) according to which Florida authorities systematically blocked the access of blacks to the voting locations or prevented them from registering.

In a news story which asked why the richest country in the world still has precarious voting systems in most of its states, the correspondent argues that the answer lies in the lack of political interest in improving the electoral institutions. This lack of interest on the part of politicians would explain why only a minority of voters use computers and why 25% of them vote with machines that were invented in 1892 ("Only 8% of the cities have electronic voting," November 10). In a similar way, a news story from *The New York Times* argued that the main reason for the existence of obsolete voting machines in a time of technological advancement is the higher cost of computerized systems ("USA have chosen to economize in their electoral system," November 20).

The Responsibility of political institutions

The post-election conflicts were also framed in terms of the deficiencies of the American political institutions. This criticism was sometimes directed to the institutions of the state of Florida. An advisor of candidate Al Gore was quoted saying that the state's attorney general was a puppet of the Bush family and was intentionally manipulating the election to favor them ("Judge order the continuation of the recounting in Florida," November 14). But the institution that was the main target of criticism was the Supreme Court. A reporter of *The New York Times* argued that the Court's decision to suspend the recounting of votes followed ideological lines and that this decision was seen by the American public as a pro-Bush political intervention. As a result, there was a great risk that the legitimacy of the Court would be undermined by its partisan decisions ("Supreme Court risks losing legitimacy," November 12). In a similar way, a journalist from the Spanish newspaper *El País* argued that the partisan character of the judiciary's deliberations reflects the extreme polarization of the country's political scene ("End of the dispute will be political," December 13). In the final day of the post-electoral period, one of *Folha's* local reporters presented several critical evaluations of the Court's final deliberation. An academic expressed concern about the possibility that the Court's Justices might be seen by society as lacking neutrality and Democratic leader Jesse Jackson was quoted saying that the Court's decision was politically motivated and undermined its moral authority. The article also presents similar critical evaluations of the role of the Supreme Court by the newspapers *The New York Times* and *USA Today* ("Supreme Court's decision is criticized," December 14).

The Responsibility of the media

The role of the media in the post-electoral impasse was another major object of critical evaluations. One of *Folha's* local reporters argued that the TV networks deceived the public by hiring the same institute to do exit polls in Florida, in an unparalleled disaster in the history of the press. The journalist interprets the fiasco of election night, when the networks mistakenly announced the victory first of Gore and then of Bush, as a result of the lack of reporters in Florida and the reliance on celebrity journalists to cover

the election (“TV networks caused catastrophe,” November 9). A report from *The New York Times* criticized the way the TV networks covered the final deliberation of the Supreme Court, arguing that reporters failed to present coherent or clear interpretations of the Court’s sentence (“American TV networks get confused once more,” December 14).

The defeat in the popular vote as undermining the legitimacy of Bush’s presidency

Journalists also assessed the consequences of the fact Bush could become the first president in the 20th Century to be elected without winning the popular vote. *Folha*’s correspondent presented this interpretation in the first day of the post-election period. Later on, a local reporter argued that the confusion and conflicts that followed the election would undermine the legitimacy of the next president (“Divisions weaken the winner,” November 24). In the last day of the post-election period, the correspondent concludes that “The 2000 elections exposed an outstanding division of the American people and caused a long and stressful post-electoral battle that might stain the four years mandate of Bush and raise serious doubts about the legitimacy of the Republican victory” (“Confused decision of the judiciary guarantees victory,” December 14).

Other interpretations

Besides the four main interpretations provided by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* about the post-electoral events, other types of evaluation were also presented. Two news stories included arguments according to which the credibility of American democracy was shaken by these events. One report from a local reporter of *Folha* presented the opposite evaluation, namely that the events indicate the strength of U.S. democracy, which, in contrast to Brazil, is characterized by solid, stable and long lasting institutions and laws (“The American elections and the gibe of the butler,” November 15). Finally, some references were made about the role of individuals, particularly vice-president Al Gore and Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, in creating or worsening the electoral impasse.

TV Globo's newscast *Jornal Nacional*

In the case of the newscast *Jornal Nacional*, the news coverage also increased dramatically in the post-electoral period. All 16 editions analyzed included news stories about the conflicts in the counting of votes, totaling 24 minutes and 42 seconds of news coverage. The television news coverage of this phase was therefore three times more frequent than that of the campaign period and took 60% more time, even though the post-election period was shorter. As for the journalists in charge of producing the reports, 12 of the 16 news stories included an introduction by the anchor followed by a report of the correspondent in the U.S., journalist Zileide Silva. In the 4 remaining news stories only the anchor appeared reporting the latest developments, with no participation of reporters.

a) How did *Jornal Nacional* interpret the events of the post-election period?

As in the campaign period, *JN's* coverage of the post-electoral impasse was heavily episodic, with news stories basically reporting the latest developments and quoting the two main candidates and their representatives. In only 3 of the 16 news stories were interpretations of the conflicts presented. In the first two days of the period of analysis (November 27 and 28) the reporter presented the evaluation of the impasse by candidate Al Gore. The democratic candidate is quoted saying that the recounting of votes in Florida is necessary to guarantee the integrity of the country's democracy and that to ignore a single vote means to ignore democracy.

In the last day of the post-election period (December 14), *Jornal Nacional* presented the longest of all reports, which lasted for 4 minutes and 41 seconds. It included the participation of one of the anchors, the correspondent in the U.S. and the correspondent in London, Marcos Losekann. The London correspondent presents the reaction of European leaders and media to the confirmation of Bush's victory. The report does not focus on the post-electoral conflicts but instead on assessing what the transition to a Republican presidency would mean for world politics. The London correspondent reports that the British media, mainly the tabloids, criticized with irony the lack of knowledge in foreign affairs of the new president. He also reported on the concern of European leaders that Bush would lead the world to a new arms race or that he would

adopt an isolationist foreign policy. Thus the final outcome of the election tended to be framed in negative terms by the last news story of the post-election period.

CONCLUSIONS

The content analysis of the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* and of the newscast *Jornal Nacional* shows important differences between their news coverage of the 2000 U.S. election. Although *Folha* also focused on horse race aspects of the campaign and on a descriptive style of reporting, it offered its readers a broader range of interpretive frames when compared to *JN*. For example, the newspaper printed reports that discussed the candidates' issue positions and proposals, including their standpoints on Latin America and on the relationship between Brazil and the United States. Without such focus on the differences and/or similarities of candidates' platforms it is very difficult to understand the significance of each alternative and of the electoral process as a whole. In the case of TV news, the policy position of the candidates was never the main focus of the reporting. TV Globo's newscast also did not include news stories that centered on the personality of the candidates. Television news was completely dominated by an episodic news coverage and by a descriptive style of reporting.

Despite the differences between the two media, the results of the content analysis show that Brazilian journalism tended to cover the 2000 U.S. election primarily in terms of horse race and episodic frames. This type of reporting raises two important questions. The first refers to the impact of these frames on audience's views about politics in general and the U.S. election in particular. Previous research in the U.S. has shown that the focus on strategy and game prevents voters from learning more about the electoral process, mainly in what concerns candidates' issue positions (Patterson, 1980). The framing of the political process in terms of candidates' strategies and manipulations also contributes to activate cynicism about politics in the mass public (Capella and Jamieson, 1997). On the other hand, episodic news stories elicit individualistic rather than social-oriented responses to public matters, preventing viewers from seeing the interconnections between social problems and the actions or inactions of political leaders (Iyengar, 1994). In short, the focus on horse race and episodic frames, and the resulting lack of attention to

the substantive aspects of the campaigns, do not contribute to promote a more effective citizen involvement in politics in general and in electoral processes in particular.

The second question raised by the findings of the content analysis of the Brazilian media refers to the features of the country's journalistic culture. What does the analysis of the coverage of the 2000 U.S. election tell us about Brazilian journalism? For some scholars, the American model of objective journalism has had the biggest impact in the development of Brazilian journalism, in spite of other influences (Marques de Melo, 1985; Lins da Silva, 1991). Others suggest that the specific social and political context of the country has led to "reinterpretation" of the independent model of journalism as practiced in the United States (Albuquerque, 2000). In fact, survey research with Brazilian journalists suggests that they tend to embrace interpretive and investigative roles much more than their American counterparts (Herscovitz and Cardoso, 1998). Nevertheless, the results of the content analysis presented in this paper indicate that, at least in the coverage of elections, Brazilian journalists adopt similar framing procedures when compared to their American counterparts, namely by focusing on horse race and by adopting a more descriptive style of reporting. The lack of significant differences between the framing patterns of news stories produced by *Folha de São Paulo's* staff and those written or based on foreign sources further lends support to this interpretation.

When the post-election conflicts erupted, postponing the final results of the U.S. presidential election, the Brazilian media offered intense media coverage. Nevertheless, this coverage, particularly in the case of TV Globo, tended not to contextualize events in terms of interpretive or analytical frameworks that could help the public in assessing the significance of the conflicts. Research with audiences has shown that the presentation of such evaluations by journalists is important, since factual coverage without interpretation makes little sense for audiences (Graber, 1994). In the specific case of TV news, research with viewers of *Jornal Nacional's* suggests that although audiences don't recall much of the factual information presented by news stories, they have a better performance in identifying and applying the interpretive frameworks presented by them (Porto, 2000). In their coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential dispute, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* presented evaluations of the post-election events in 20% of its news stories, but the newscast *Jornal Nacional* introduced almost no interpretations about these events. The

episodic nature of the coverage offered by the Brazilian media, particularly by television, might have contributed to prevent local audiences from putting the post-election conflicts in a broader context.

The results of the content analysis of the coverage of the 2000 U.S. presidential election by two of the most important Brazilian news media have therefore important implications. On one hand, they show similarities with the types of framing applied by U.S. journalists, providing further evidence of a greater convergence of both journalistic cultures. On the other hand, they suggest that the type of coverage provided might not always have helped Brazilian audiences in assessing the substance of the electoral campaign or the significance of the events.

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