

Editorial vol. 37 n. 2

Presentation: Challenges of Political Communication after the Coup

The legal-parliamentary-mediatic coup of 2016, which brought Dilma Rousseff's administration to an end, caught political scientists and researchers in Political Communication entirely by surprise. Some decades after the end of the military dictatorship, the consolidation of Brazilian democracy was taken for granted. The collapse of Brazilian democracy was and was not spectacular, depending on how we look at the process. It was not spectacular as it did not occur by means of an act of force: differently from the 1964 Coup, the 2016 Coup did not involve troops and tanks in the streets, but it was executed by the warped behavior of democracy's fundamental institutions, such as the Legislative, the Judiciary and the Public Prosecution. However, the 2016 Coup was spectacular in a way that the 1964 Coup was not, given the leading role played by the media – particularly mainstream press – in the process of delegitimizing representative political institutions and criminalizing the political left wing, making way to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment.

Nevertheless, the coup was not fulfilled when vice-president Michel Temer took office, replacing the vacant spot of the elected president. More than simply removing Dilma Rousseff from the Presidency, the plot of the coup sought to promote the dismantling of social policies developed by the Workers' Party administrations since 2003 and, more importantly, made it impossible for any left-wing forces to return to power by electoral means, using, for this purpose, a selective application of the laws. As a result, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was arrested after a second-instance conviction based on extremely fragile evidence, while his political rivals had their proceedings discontinued, albeit based on much more solid evidence. Additionally, political repression has become increasingly common and, like in the military regime, they have in the universities their primary target. Some examples are the systematic persecution of UFSC's rector Luiz Carlos Cancellier Olivo, the case of UFMG's rector Jaime Arturo Ramirez and vice-rector Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, who were coercively taken to testify to the federal police, in addition to the moral harassment promoted by the Education Minister Mendonça Filho against professor Luiz Felipe Miguel, due to a course about the coup offered by him at UnB.

It seems strange that, in the midst of the coup process hurricane, universities have been quite shy on bringing academic responses to these recent events. Some people seem to believe that the topic is too recent to allow rigorous scientific analysis - the equivalent of saying that the only possible medical science is that practiced by the legists. It is worth noting that the ascending of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States has been the object of a considerable amount of academic papers which have highlighted the risks that his political style implies for democracy. Similarly, the rise of far-right populism in Europe has sparked concerns that translate into numerous academic papers about this topic. There is no valid reason, therefore, for an "Olympic" attitude towards the assault on democracy in Brazil to become compulsory among the country's researchers.

Particularly, it must be recognized that the dynamics of the assault on democracy that has taken place in Brazil has entirely different characteristics from the processes that have been taking place in the United States and Europe. While in these countries what is emphasized is the relative inability of

accountability institutions to prevent populism and anti-system politicians, in Brazil the warped behavior of these same agents have been transformed into the central element of a dismantling process of the democratic order. It is important to note that this pattern of democracy destabilization did not occur only in Brazil, but also in other Latin America countries and Egypt. This present dossier represents, therefore, an unique opportunity to discuss this political phenomenon.

Four papers are included in this dossier. “The normalization of the coup: the emptying of politics in the journalism coverage of Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment”, written by Kelly Prudêncio, Carla Rizotto and Rafael Cardoso Sampaio (UFPR), examines the ascertainment made by the three main Brazilian newspapers – O Estado de São Paulo, Folha de S. Paulo and O Globo – about the impeachment process of the former president, based on the analysis of more than two thousand news pieces from the perspective of the multimodal analytical framework, which considers, in an articulated way, elements related to the type of framing, narrative and visual representation of the phenomena described. The paper conclusion is that the coverage of these three newspapers contributed to the coup naturalization. In this perspective, the contribution of the press to the coup process was not an explicit positioning on its favor but rather its casual treatment, as “politics as usual”, which systematically ignored the possibility that the process, as it happened, could represent a crisis for democracy.

Two other papers consider the coup process beyond Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment using two different strategies. In “The role of media in the impeachment processes of Dilma Rousseff (2016) and Michel Temer (2017)”, written by Theófilo Machado Rodrigues (UFRJ), the author contrasts the views provided by the press to these two events, considering other attempts to depose Brazilian presidents in the past (as in the cases of João Goulart and Fernando Collor de Mello). The evaluation is made from published editorials in a diverse set of newspapers, some of which are considered as “national expression” (O Estado de São Paulo, Folha de S. Paulo, O Globo and, in lesser extent, O Correio Brasiliense) and others considered as more “regional” publications, like O Estado de Minas and Zero Hora. From this material, the author identifies a great convergence between the editorials of different newspapers in favor of Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, but not of Temer and, on the basis of this, the paper alerts to the danger that the oligopoly of the means of communication represents for the Brazilian democracy.

On the other hand, the paper “New steps of the coup: the framework of the Pension Reform on Jornal Nacional”, written by Luiz Ademir de Oliveira (UFSJ and UFJF), Carla Montuori Fernandes (UNIP and UNIFAI) and Genira Correia Chagas (UNESP and PUC-SP), discusses the coup from its impact on the government social policies. By doing so, it points out a fundamental aspect which has rarely been explored academically: the coup was not against a group of people or institutions, but a way to ensure the approval of certain unpopular policies that were difficult to be approved at the polls. The paper focuses on the coverage of the Pension Reform by mainstream press through content analysis methodology. The authors discuss in detail three aspects of this coverage: the emphasis on the Reform objectives, which are considered to be essential for the country; the dynamics of dispute between supporters and opposers of the Reform and the physiology of this project. The paper draws attention to the way in which resorting to patronage methods in the conquest of votes for the Reform was presented without questioning in the press. It should be highlighted that this attitude directly contrasts with the behavior of the press in regard to the Mensalão scandal that broke on 2005 – which, ultimately, was also a case of political patronage – and whose coverage extended over several years, helping to pin the image of the Workers’ Party administrations as utterly corrupt.

The paper “From ‘gay kit’ to the indoctrination monitor’: the conservative reaction in Brazil”, written by Richard Romancini (USP), closes the dossier. It explores the social dynamics of the moral panic construction in the formation of a conservative public opinion as regards Dilma Rousseff’s administration. For this purpose, the author explores two cases that have been especially mobilizing for conservative groups (especially for the evangelical right-wing community in Brazil): the “gay kit” and the “indoctrination

monitor”. The first case refers to a set of complains that characterize government initiatives to prevent bullying against homosexuals as an effort to induce young people; the second concerns the initiative promoted by the Gazeta do Povo newspaper of Paraná state to create a digital platform to collect complaints of ideological indoctrination in the classroom, in accordance with an agenda promoted by the Free Brazil Movement (MBL). The paper makes a relevant contribution by exploring evidence of a convergence between distinct sectors of the right wing around the project of overthrowing the elected president. Both cases report a new dynamics of dispute over the control of publicly disclosed information, the possibilities that social media have provided to previously marginal actors to exert greater influence, and, more recently, the effort of traditional media to restore its virtual information monopoly through the concept of fake news.

Taken as a whole, the papers that compose this dossier make way for a necessary effort to construct analytical alternatives that allow us to consider, in a consistent and systematic way, the new challenges that arise in the field of politics in Brazil and the world, particularly considering the central role of the media in these new circumstances.

Three papers in the free themes section complete this issue. In “2016 Elections in fanpages of regional newspapers”, Michele Goulart Massuchin (UFMA) analyzes how nine newspapers, each of them in a different state of Northeast region of Brazil, adapt their coverages to social media during the electoral campaign. The same social platform is the object of the paper “Facebook interactions and practices”, written by Alex Primo (UFRGS), Vanessa Valiati (FEEVALE), Ludmila Lupinacci (London School) and Laura Barros (UFRGS). Through a survey made with more than 800 respondents, this paper explores aspects related to how Facebook influences subjective expression and self-writing. Finally, in the paper “The musical dissemination of Brazilian radio: from ‘caituagem’ to the challenges of digital competition”, by Daniel Gambaro (USP), Eduardo Vicente (USP) and Thais Saraiva Ramos (Anhembi Morumbi), the authors explore the role played by professionals of the radio industry in the mediation of music, highlighting, in particular, their role in curatorship and in exploring the different strategies that they employ for this purpose.

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