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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | REVIEW ARTICLE

The contribution of the liberal-conservative press to the crisis of Dilma Rousseff's second term

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Abstract: In this paper we analyze the role played by the “liberal-conservative” press in the course of governments by the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil. We introduce the problem examining Lula’s terms in office (2003–2010), defined by political stability, his charismatic leadership and the emergence of corruption allegations in the press. With the effects of the economic slowdown and the emergence of the June 2013 demonstrations, corruption demands adopted a relevance that was instigated by the press. Finally, we discuss the role played by the press in the presidential elections of 2014 and the crisis of Dilma’s second term. We analyze the role played by the “liberal-conservative” press at this critical conjuncture and its influence in producing the political polarization that emerged in Brazilian society after the 2014 elections, which led to Dilma’s impeachment. Through its engagement in a moralistic campaign in the context of the crisis of Dilma’s second term, we argue that the liberal-conservative press repeated an elitist pattern in Brazilian history, causing an imbalance in the sustainability of Brazilian democracy.

Subjects: Politics & International Relations; Politics & the Media; Political Communication

Keywords: Dilma; crisis; Brazil; Lula; press; politics

1. Introduction

In this paper we will analyze the role played by the “liberal-conservative” press in the course of governments characterized by the hegemony of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil. We will introduce the problem by examining Lula’s terms in office (2003–2010), defined by political stability, his

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

On August 2016, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was displaced from her functions by an impeachment instrumented through the Congress. This political fact finished with 13 years of governments by the Workers Party (PT), producing numerous discussions and analysis. In this article, we consider the contribution of an elitist and conservative actor to this political crisis: the mainstream press.

Considering and reconstructing the role played by this press on the last years in Brazil, we comprehend how these newspapers engaged in a moralistic campaign that was a key to explain the legitimacy obtained by this conservative impeachment that ended with Dilma’s second term. In this sense, we state that the mainstream press has become an elitist actor that intends to stand against radical transformations in Brazilian democracy.

charismatic leadership and the emergence of the “*mensalão*” scandal, originating in corruption allegations in the press. We will then consider Dilma Rousseff’s first term, starting in 2011, accompanied by the slowdown of the economic cycle and the emergence of the June 2013 demonstrations, which changed the political scene. Finally, we discuss the role played by the press in the presidential elections of 2014 and the crisis of Dilma’s second term. We analyze the role played by the “liberal-conservative” press at this critical juncture and its influence in producing the political polarization that emerged in Brazilian society after the 2014 elections, which led to Dilma’s *impeachment* and her displacement from the presidential office at the end of August 2016.

As a conclusion, we state that with its engagement on a moralistic campaign in the context of the crisis of Dilma’s second term, the liberal-conservative press repeated an elitist pattern in Brazilian history and tended to produce an imbalance for the sustainability of Brazilian democracy.

Our theoretical approach is based on the interdisciplinary field opened by Brazilian studies of “Media and Politics” (Azevedo & Rubim, 1998; Lima, 2006; Porto, 2002), involving sociology of communication and political science, more precisely the dimension of “media and reconfiguration of public space”, an area which includes research on the construction of the public agenda, political speeches, public opinion and political representation scenarios (Azevedo & Rubim, 1998). This research area is focused on the relationship between the media and political communication processes, as well as media positions adopted before the power centers within and outside the State, concentrating, in this case, on Lula and Dilma’s governments.

In Brazil, the military regime (1964–1985) consolidated a media market characterized by oligopolies which involve a dense network of relationships with regional political elites (Lima, 2006; Porto, 2012; Rubim & Colling, 2006). A few family groups hold cross-ownership of major newspapers, magazines and television networks, which represents a reduction of diversity with respect to the confrontation of opinions and a narrowing of the public debate. The Brazilian media system is characterized by little pluralism (Azevedo, 2009) and reflects from its foundation an authoritarian and scarcely tolerant vision from the elites, which reject social reforms and expect to conserve social order and privileges as a ruling class. Some of the owners of these media are the Frias family (*Folha Group*), the Marinho family (*Globo Group*) and the Mesquita family (*Estado Group*).

The “liberal-conservative” press confronted the populist and reformist leader Getúlio Vargas in his second term in office (1951–1954) through a critical vision centered on corruption allegations and a rejection of the social gains addressed by this new form of political hegemony in Brazilian society (Weffort, 1999). Sixty years later, in a seemingly similar fashion, the liberal-conservative press responded to the social inclusion of the PT governments of Lula and Dilma with corruption allegations.

As another example, we can mention the campaign of accusations against Joao Goulart’s reformist government (1962–1964), which acted as a source of legitimacy for the military coup, in a clear manifestation of the elitist and authoritarian character of the media (Carvalho, 2010). In March 1964, the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Correio da Manhã* labeled the coup with the editorials “Fora!” and “Basta!” (Capelato, 2013). Further, Grupo Globo’s editorial line supported the authoritarian “revolution” of 1964, being rewarded with a dominant position in the media market by the military regime. Those economic advantages transformed that group into a media empire at the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the democratic transition (Amaral & Guimarães, 1988; Porto, 2012).

In analyzing the Brazilian press, some authors have made reference to the mainstream newspapers and magazines as “liberal-conservative” (Biroli, 2004; Cardoso dos Santos, 2015; Fonseca, 2005), alluding to *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Veja* and *O Estado de S. Paulo*. At various junctures in the country’s history, this press has invoked liberal principles and promises. But when, during some reformist governments, it was possible for those promises and principles to abandon the ideal world and become actual measures, with the incorporation in the public sphere of the excluded masses, the liberal-conservative press emphatically rejected that inclusion. In this regard, the

liberal-conservative press rejects the political participation of working class sectors, dismissing them as “ignorant”. On the other hand, the press stands for the “light” of Enlightenment ideals (Capelato, 1989) or the *Poder Moderador* (moderating power) (de Albuquerque, 2005).

2. The role of the press in Lula da Silva’s terms (2003–2010): political scandal and charismatic leadership

The emergence in Brazil of the Workers Party, one of the most powerful parties in the history of the Latin American left, has been the object of different studies (Avritzer, 2005; Keck, 1995; Sader, 2009; Samuels & Zucco, 2014; Secco, 2011). The PT was founded in 1980 in Sao Paulo by several groups, such as left-leaning sectors of the Church, radical intellectuals, ex partisans against the dictatorship, and the new unionist movement which was emerging in the ABC region of Sao Paulo (Secco, 2011). Furthermore, although the party was composed of groups which had belonged to a radical left, it intended to highlight the differences with the traditional left as represented by the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB).

In that context, Lula emerged in 1980 as a unionist, organizing strikes against the Brazilian dictatorship, leading what is known as “new unionism”. He was supported at that point by the most important newspapers and magazines (Paraná, 2010). Nevertheless, when Lula decided to change his unionist role for a political one, expressing political ambitions at a national level and participating in the creation of the Workers Party, the most influential media groups began to engage in negative coverage against him.¹

The preference of the Rede Globo (*Grupo Globo*) was made explicit in the edition of the debate of the second round of the 1989 elections. That debate was edited by the leading newscast of Brazil, *Jornal Nacional* (National Newspaper), which presented a bias in contents selection and timing of the interventions which favored Collor de Mello (Pilagallo, 2012; Porto, 2012). In that election, multiple accusations against Lula and PT emerged in the media, stating that a PT government would finish with private propriety and encourage the “invasion” of middle class houses (Kucinski, 1998). Reversely, Lula’s contender and representative of the Brazilian Northeast oligarchy, Fernando Collor de Mello, was shown in a positive light by the media, not only due to the ideological affinity between the liberal conservative press and the candidate, but also because of the candidate’s deployment of a clever marketing campaign (Porto, 2012).

During 1990, the presidency of the Workers Party was exerted by José Dirceu, a former partisan from the radical left who centralized authority on his leadership, reducing the gravitation of PT left tendencies as a political strategy. This allowed his group (*Campo Majoritário*) to change the political orientation of the party from the left to the center-left (Secco, 2011). That shift in political orientation to the center was a key factor that allowed the party to be more competitive and presented Lula da Silva as a national candidate able to win the 2002 elections against the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) leader, José Serra. The media system accepted this ideological and political change in the party as a sign of “maturity” and recognized PT as adapted to the political order (Azevedo, 2009).

Also, the media system in Brazil during the years of the democratic transition became more open and pluralist (Porto, 2012) and furthermore experienced a period of professionalization (Abreu, 2005). As *O Globo* Editor Aluizio Maranhao told in an interview², *O Globo* newspaper started in 1990 to allow diverse views in their pages. This process of growing openness in the media system during that decade is key to explaining the conditions that allowed Lula’s and Workers Party’s victory in the presidential elections of 2002.

The advent to the presidency and the Planalto of a man of humble extraction from the Northeast such as Lula in 2003 was a twister that shook Brazilian politics. It was the first time that a representative of the working class and the poorest had access to the highest political office, in a country characterized by intra-elite agreements tending to exclude the working class sectors and their political participation.

However, the first months of Lula's administration were marked by tensions between the left wing of the PT and the National Bureau, since Lula sent to Congress a retirement reform bill with the aim to achieve a balance in the state expenditures, which was contested by the party's left wing. The latter perceived that reform as affecting the historical rights of the public officials. Some left intellectuals, social movements and trade unions interpreted these policies as affecting Lula and the PT's left identity. At the same time, liberal-conservative press representatives as *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* took an active role in support of these political measures which implied a limitation on the budget assigned for the retirement of public officials. Both newspapers framed that measure as the struggle of a mature and pragmatic leader (President Lula) in defense of the general interest, against corporations that intended to maintain their privileges³. These years of Lula's first term were defined by those tensions between the left wing of the Workers Party, which demanded more coherent political measures within the left tradition, and opposition parties, like the PSDB, as well as the main-stream media supporting the government's main decisions.

Suddenly, in May 2005, an important political scandal emerged in the ruling coalition when the Federal Deputy for Rio de Janeiro, Roberto Jefferson (PTB), denounced, alongside *Folha de S. Paulo* reporter, Renata Lo Prete a corruption system of payments which was to become known as the "*mensalão*," which entailed the disbursement of a monthly fee to parliamentarians for voting for government projects in Congress. That indictment manifested the problems of the government in facing the "coalitional presidentialism" dilemma in the Brazilian Congress. "Coalitional presidentialism" implies that a President requires the support of the majorities in Congress to pass his bills in order to govern.

Jefferson, who had been involved in corruption accusations and who knew he wouldn't receive any support from the Planalto (Pilagallo, 2012), decided then to make a series of allegations that had an explosive effect. In an interview with the *Folha de S. Paulo* on June 6, he accused Lula's government of paying a monthly fee to their allied parliamentarians in exchange for their support in Congress. The shock produced in public opinion by the disclosure of these scandals provoked a significant erosion of the government's political capital, an increase in polarization between government and opposition, as well as the opening of several Parliamentary Commissions of Inquiry (CPI) with the role of investigating the events in Congress.

The political crisis of the *mensalão* initiated in May 2005 meant a time of greater tension during Lula's terms in the relations between the Government and the private media groups. A conflict scenario developed which transformed the relationship between the PT government and the media, which assumed a prominent place. Afterwards, according to Rubim and Colling (2006), the media virtually sought to have anticipated elections and cut Lula's term short to bring about the end of a government that was always perceived as alien by the traditional elites of the country (Rubim & Colling, 2006). Media coverage during the political crisis of 2005–2006 focused on a search for journalistic scandal and the reduction of politics to a moralizing dimension (Rubim & Colling, 2006). In turn, Venício Lima (2006) contends that, from May 2005 until the 2006 elections, the Brazilian media practiced a journalism of innuendo and aligned themselves with the opposition parties in a campaign to reduce President Lula's chances of re-election and to anticipate the end of his first term. For this author, who analyzed the coverage of the political crisis of 2005–2006 by major newspapers, the media adopted a position of "presumption of guilt" (Lima, 2006).

Faced with the deterioration of this crisis and the difficulties of the government in disclosing an alternative agenda because of the "media siege," Lula would reinforce his appearances alongside organizations and social movements in political rallies in various parts of the country in an attempt to consolidate support, which would allow him to overcome those difficulties (Secco, 2011). In speeches, the rhetoric employed by the President recalled the rhetoric used fifty years before by another popular leader, Getúlio Vargas, appealing to the support of the poorest against the conspiracy of the "rich". In this context, Lula and the Workers Party used the argument that some power factors were trying to destroy the government, to reject the accusations of corruption emerging from the media and opposition parties.

Within this framework, as we have recently argued, a dominant frame shared by the newspapers *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* to characterize Lula's leadership during this political crisis was that of "chavista populism", so as to condemn and reduce his public appearances and speeches directed toward social movements (Goldstein, 2015a). *O Globo* editorial denounced: "Chavista discourse serves only as an illusion to protect the corruption scheme constructed near Planalto"⁴. The affinity of the liberal-conservative press with the reproduction of social order exhibited, at that conjuncture, all its depth. The stereotypes of Lula as a "chavista" leader, equating him with a Brazilian version of Venezuelan populist leader Hugo Chávez, pretended to discredit and limit his public appearances and speeches.

The bias presented by the mainstream media in the coverage of this scandal has been analyzed by several studies (Porto, 2012; Mundim, 2010; Nunomura, 2012; Goldstein, 2015a). The liberal-conservative press used this scandal to frame government corruption as a key issue of the public sphere, affecting the image of the Workers Party and Lula.

However, this bias in media coverage became more evident in the 2006 election, which confronted Lula as PT candidate with PSDB's Geraldo Alckmin. At that conjuncture, the agenda of the press focused on corruption accusations against PT, trying to maintain the *mensalão* scandal alive as an important issue to attack the government with a moralistic discourse. The headline on page 3 of *O Globo* on August 6 was "On the ghost of *mensalão*". In this respect, the positions adopted by the liberal-conservative press were convergent with the campaign strategy sustained by the opposition candidate Geraldo Alckmin, who attacked Lula and the PT based exclusively on corruption allegations (Goldstein, 2015b). Conditioned by those media framings, the 2006 campaign functioned as a first moment of political polarization. Working class sectors supported the government with the vote, appraising its social policies, like *Bolsa Família*, and Lula's leadership, while middle class sectors, irritated by corruption scandals, expressed open disagreement with Lula's continuity (Mundim, 2010).

Lula's 2006 electoral victory by a significant margin (60.8 to 39.2) in the runoff against the candidate of the Social Democratic Brazilian Party (PSDB), Geraldo Alckmin, resolved this critical juncture for the government, resulting in a situation where the President could transform his electoral capital into important political capital.

Lula's second term was characterized by political stability as the result of his social policies, the most relevant of which was *Bolsa Família*, which stimulated the upward mobility in the poorest sectors of the Northeast, transforming the economy of that region and confirming those sectors as a key support base for the Workers Party and Lula's charismatic leadership (Singer, 2009). The consolidation of his popularity afforded Lula more autonomy during his second term to sketch initiatives of governmental activism in the media sphere (Kitzberger, 2012) which could conflict with the expectations of the media system's key actors. In this more favorable scenario, during his second term, Lula appointed Franklin Martins as Secretary for Social Communication (SECOM). He produced a preliminary draft reform of the media system, which would fall on the next government to assess⁵. However, this project was not resumed at the outset of Dilma Rousseff's subsequent government, and more regulation initiatives were postponed, an action relating to the appointment of politicians, alongside the Democratic Brazilian Movement Party (PMDB), as heads of the Ministry of Communications (Kitzberger, 2012).

Lula concluded his government with an approval rate of 80%, a high standard of popularity that enabled him to define his successor. However, the destruction of public image that the *mensalão* scandal produced on key politicians of the Workers Party, such as José Dirceu, José Genoino and Antonio Palocci was a difficult matter for that political force (Truffi, 2015, *Interview with Lincoln Secco*). That was the context in which Dilma, Chief of the Casa Civil, a politician with a technical orientation, was chosen by the President to be his successor.

In the 2010 elections, Lula campaigned for his candidate, a key aspect for Dilma's consolidation as a competitive option in the electoral challenge. She won the election in the second round against José Serra (55.7 to 43.7) of the Social Democracy Brazilian Party (PSDB), enabling a third consecutive term in office for the Workers Party.

3. The press on Dilma's first term and the political demonstrations of June 2013

Despite the continuity of her policy of "unstable balance", Dilma Rousseff's term may be characterized, as a whole, by certain differences over the relation it wove with the media. From the outset, Rousseff demonstrated a willingness to establish greater approximation between the government's agenda and that set by the main mass media by demanding that those officials and ministers in her government team who were tainted by corruption accusations from certain press media to step down⁶. The President intended to define her term based on a greater emphasis on institutional matters, and her "liberal" stance with respect to the leading communication media was a part of this mark that she wished to make. As a result, when the *mensalão* reached the Supremo Tribunal Federal (Federal Supreme Court, STF) in 2012, which generated harsh criticism on the part of intellectuals and PT activists for her "moralization" and involvement in the municipal elections campaign, it was not the target of public statements from the President, who considered that the judicial power should try the case and that there should be no "interference" from the presidential office.

Since she did not possess Lula's foundational charisma and because she insinuated a line of greater conciliation and less confrontation with the media, Dilma Rousseff's presidential decisions generated tensions within the PT, which boasts a history of significant vindications over the "democratization of the media." Unlike Lula, who during the 2006 and 2011 campaigns established a political boundary, targeting certain media as adversaries, Rousseff showed a greater willingness to achieve a balance of power free of tension with these sectors. Indeed, the "liberalism" characterizing the vision of the current President may constitute a greater obstacle to regulation demands.

In addition, Dilma visited *Folha de S. Paulo* to congratulate the newspaper for its 100th anniversary, stating at that event that she prefers "the noise of free press than the silence of dictatorships". This expression obtained laudatory comments by the National Newspapers Association (ANJ) former President Judith Brito⁷ and other press establishment representatives, but did little to fulfill the expectations of the President's own party in the way of introducing any form of media regulation and more diversity in a concentrated media system.

In June 2013, in the context of the Confederations Cup in Brazil and the organization of the 2014 World Cup, new and unexpected demonstrations broke out in the major State capitals around the country. Those protests emerged initially with the demands of an inventive left-wing social movement, *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Pass Movement), for a reduction in the cost of public transport fares in Sao Paulo. Nevertheless, demonstrations changed their orientation almost immediately owing to the harsh repression by Sao Paulo police under the orders of Governor Geraldo Alckmin, from PSDB. Also, the alliance presented against the demonstrations between Governor Geraldo Alckmin and *Prefeito* Fernando Haddad (PT) in Sao Paulo led activists to identify both as part of the same political class.

The demands expressed in protests expanded fast to other groups, which started criticizing the high spending in connection to the construction of new stadiums for the World Cup, organized by the Brazilian authorities with the FIFA. However, since then, those demands expanded to wide sectors of the middle classes, the latter who continued the protests for a period of various months, demonstrating against the corruption of politicians and in defense of better public transport services, in a movement characterized by a wide spectrum of demands (Secco, 2013). The repressive attitude adopted by the police toward activists at the beginning of the demonstrations had the effect of increasing the number of participants, which decreased Dilma's popularity by a considerable percentage and compelled her to declare that she was "listening to the voice of the streets".⁸

During the June 2013 protests, the liberal-conservative press like *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* went from initial criticism—as they denounced the disturbance of public order posed by the demonstrators—to the vindication of these demonstrations, upon understanding that if these were to take the form of a conservative movement, they could affect the government’s political capital⁹. Demonstrations strengthened a moralistic discourse, encouraged by the liberal-conservative press, on the middle class, which tended to view PT and government politicians as essentially corrupt. As Singer stated, it was a return to a critical perspective against the political class that shaped the ‘40s and ‘50s of Brazilian politics:

The advantage of the anti-corruption banner is that it penetrates in all social strata, as it stands to reason. Who can be in favor of corruption? The traditional middle classes nourish the prejudice that lack of education of the lower classes would lead them to accept corruption (which is doubtful) in exchange for benefits. In any case, the slogan “He steals, but delivers” (*Rouba mas faz*), used to characterize the 1940s of Adhemar de Barros, more or less subtly, has served to frame Lulism. (Singer, 2013, p. 35)

The June demonstrations accentuated the political polarization and the gap of perceptions between the moralism of the middle class that slipped away from Lula and PT and the corruption scandals and popular sectors which experienced an improvement in their life standards thanks to social policies¹⁰.

During that period, some problems in the economy emerged, especially the low growth rates as compared with Lula’s governments. In this context, the mainstream newspapers started to attack Minister of Fazenda Guido Mantega for his “heterodox” measures, pressing for a shift to a more orthodox economic model. It became apparent that Brazilian society was suffering tensions in the model of development hegemonic between 2003 and 2013 and that some structural changes would have to be introduced by the Workers Party government in order to preserve and recover high levels of support. Some analysts like Tales Ab’Saber (2013) started to point out the “exhaustion of the social pact conducted by Lula’s policies”.

The June 2013 demonstrations broke out, challenging the political class as a whole, albeit with demands focused on the left of the political spectrum, demanding greater state presence and better transport and health services, while displaying complaints against corrupt politicians. There was a heterogeneity of demands, situated to the left of the ideological spectrum. However, after 2015 those demonstrations, which initially had that tendency, would be transformed into demands to the right of the ideological spectrum (Avritzer, 2015). As we have seen, the role of the liberal-conservative press in that transformation and redirection of emerging demands against Dilma’s government was relevant.

After the elections of 2014, the political polarization evidenced by Brazilian society, with demonstrations for and against the permanence of the President in office, would prove to be unprecedented vis-a-vis previous PT governments.

4. The role of the press in the 2014 elections and the crisis of Dilma’s second term

The campaign for the 2014 presidential elections opened amid an unexpected environment. Months before, Dilma had seemed to be leading opinion polls, far from her two main competitors: Aécio Neves, from the Social Democratic Brazilian Party (PSDB)¹¹, and Eduardo Campos, a Socialist Party (PS) former Minister for Science and Technology who now intended to run against PT.

Nevertheless, that atmosphere changed when Campos died in an airplane crash on 14 August 2014. That circumstance allowed Marina Silva, initially VP candidate in the Campos ticket, to compete within the remit of a political coalition between the Socialist Party and the small ecologist party *Rede Sustentabilidade* (Sustainability Network). After Campos’ death, the notion of Silva being Campos’ heiress was emphasized to audiences. Those events sent Marina Silva to the top of approval rating polls, indicating a ballotage between Marina and Dilma to be probable.

Folha de S. Paulo and *O Globo* tried to construct Marina Silva as a “promising candidate” who passed from ostracism to leading opinion polls following Eduardo Campos’ death. With this construction of Marina’s candidacy, two goals were served by the liberal-conservative press: to improve political influence on that campaign and to boost their sales, introducing a margin of uncertainty in the election results.

But then in October, in the first round of the election¹², when Silva’s candidacy was defeated and she failed to advance to the second round, the liberal-conservative press changed their support for Aécio Neves. In that context, *O Estado de S. Paulo* defended an alliance between Marina and Aécio for the second round in order to destroy what was labelled as “lulopetismo”¹³ in an editorial.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, leader of PSDB and former President of Brazil between 1995 and 2002, declared that voters of PT in the Northeast of the country were “uninformed,” which was the reason why they were voting for the government party. On the other hand, Dilma and PT defined the election as a battle between the “rich” and the “poor” (Singer, 2014), claiming in their TV electoral propaganda that if the results of the vote led to a victory for Aécio Neves, there would cease to be food on Brazilian tables.

In this context, *Veja* magazine published a special Friday issue before its traditional Sunday one, with the title “They knew all,” with declarations of businessman Alberto Yusseff accusing Lula and Dilma of being aware of the corruption in Petrobras, the state oil company. This magazine, with an upper middle class readership, openly meant to have an impact on the second round the following Sunday, in articulation with the campaign by Aécio Neves centering on corruption allegations against Dilma. Again, as in 2006, the liberal-conservative press engaged in an agenda featuring corruption accusations against the government, which openly favored the opposition PSDB candidate.

Finally, Dilma came first in the second round (51.5) with Aécio Neves a close second (48.3). However, given the little distance of electoral performance between the main candidates, the results were contended by the PSDB opposition. Thus, the political climate that emerged was characterized by confrontation, and it was clear that those elections did not operate as a convincing moment of legitimacy for Dilma’s new government. One day after the election, the PSDB opposition leader Aloysio Nunes Ferreira declared that Dilma did not “have right to a honeymoon,” pledging an intransigent opposition against Dilma’s second term. That kind of opposition strategy is reminiscent of the Democratic National Union (UDN) in the ‘50s and ‘60s of the past century, rejecting upward mobility of the poor and articulating dirty tactics with the liberal-conservative press against *getulismo*.

In her first address after the election, Dilma emphasized the necessity of a political reform in her next term. In the following months, one of her first decisions was to confirm Joaquim Levy, a Chicago University-trained economist, as the next Minister of *Fazenda* of the future government. This decision gave a different orientation to the economy than that of the developmental profile defined by the previous Minister Guido Mantega.¹⁴

It was apparent that during the campaign Dilma created some expectation of political change on voters which was going to prove very difficult to achieve. From its inauguration in January 2015, her government was marked by economic adjustment, which implied costs for different actors, especially social movements closer to the government, as it involved cuts in social program budgets. Those decisions were contested by social movements such as the agrarian Landless Movement (MST) and branded as inconsistent with the party’s history and tradition, and some leftist intellectuals also denounced that this kind of “orthodox” economic policy was contradictory with the promises made during the campaign.

Additionally, the political polarization which emerged after the elections was reflected in demonstrations that spread around the better-off neighborhoods of State capitals, mainly Sao Paulo, since the early days of the government claiming for Rousseff's impeachment. Then, political polarization assumed a dynamic defined by the appeals to demonstrations with conflicting goals, both attacking and defending the government. This was reflected in the March 13, 2015, demonstration, convened by the Unified Workers Central (CUT) in "Defense of Dilma and Petrobras" in order to anticipate a large anti-government demonstration in the main State capitals on March 15. The same happened on August 16 with another demonstration claiming for the impeachment, and a counterdemonstration in defense of the government on August 20.

At the same time, the liberal-conservative press adopted a specific tone to cover this crisis, highlighting the plight of the country and constructing an agenda that meant to restrict all the country's troubles to the distinction between "honest" and "corrupt" politicians. This instrumental strategy of moralization is reminiscent of another moment of great political instability in Brazilian history, namely the short term in office of Jânio Quadros (1961), who was elected to the presidency with a moralistic campaign centering on the symbol of a "broom" to clean corruption. His resignation from government then contributed decisively to the instability that led to the 1964 coup.

These kinds of frames and agendas tended to exclude other issues from public opinion, such as social inequalities and the necessary end of the adjustment to guarantee a return to development, as Singer (2015) puts it. The media stimulated the 2015 protests against the government, which started with the demonstrations of 2013, characterized by a disenchantment of the citizenry with the political class.

As Secco (2011) states, if all politicians are discredited, the liberal-conservative press alone stands as the moral conscience of the nation, allied at this conjuncture with the judicial power. According to Singer (2016)¹⁵, the existing alliance between the liberal-conservative press and the judicial power benefits both: the press expands its sales and influence denouncing politicians to a disenchanted citizenry, and the judicial power obtains influence disseminating its message through powerful media vehicles.

That is what happened with Curitiba's Judge Sergio Moro. When he decided, on 13 March this year, to make public recordings of a conversation between Lula and Dilma, the liberal-conservative press did not censor that attitude, but used it instead to strengthen the position of both. Those recordings were key to drive large demonstrations in Brasilia that night, demanding Dilma's resignation. *O Globo's* headline the next day: "Brazil goes to the streets against Lula and Dilma and in support of Moro" (03/14/2016). With this title, *O Globo* pressed on with its moralistic tone, highlighting the existence of a nation that would be organized in protest against the corruption of the government. Further, the next day, *O Globo* published this headline: "Dilma to give Lula superpowers in government", pointing to Lula's appointment as Chief of Staff as a corrupt maneuver. Further, as Nunomura (2016) pointed out, between election day and 12 May, *Folha de S. Paulo* cited the word impeachment 1,987 times, almost twice the number of times this word features in Collor's impeachment.

Disenchantment of the citizenry with the political class, especially with Rousseff's government, which emerged in the last months, was the expression of the upper middle classes, seduced by the corruption agenda constructed by the press and the frustrated expectations arising from the President's difficulties to honor the promises made during the last campaign. In that context of political weakness, the mainstream media adopted an agenda that pretended to subordinate the government, highlighting the depth of the crisis and the Dilma's inability to lead the country, stimulating "political disenchantment" and participation in demonstrations claiming for Dilma's impeachment.

With the triumph of the impeachment process and the removal of Dilma from her post as President, the liberal-conservative press is now facing some uncomfortable dilemmas. That press has vested interests and converges with Michel Temer's liberal economic program, captained by orthodox and experienced economic minister Henrique Meirelles.

Meirelles was praised by *O Estado de S. Paulo*, which called him “favorite of the market”¹⁶, and by *Folha de S. Paulo* columnist Fernando Canzian, who said that Temer’s team was sending good signs to the market “with the change of command at the Central Bank, the desire to once again become independent of regulatory agencies and tax expert discourse (“raise one and spend,” says Temer) having an effect on general expectations”¹⁷.

On the other hand, the liberal-conservative press is uncomfortable supporting an unpopular government such as Michel Temer’s. This support could lose that press significant audiences, and that is why it is now echoing corruption scandals involving relevant members of Temer’s cabinet, such as Romero Jucá (Minister for Planning).

5. Conclusions

As we analyzed in this paper, newspapers that belong to the so-called liberal-conservative press acted as a reactive agent against social reforms during Lula and Dilma’s governments. They thus played a similar role to the one exhibited by the dominant press throughout Brazilian history, as we have seen, rejecting, through a moralistic campaign, the upward mobility of those at the bottom of the social pyramid and accusing reformist governments of corruption and of being a danger to the nation, as was the case with Getulio Vargas and Jango Goulart in the twentieth century.

As Kitzberger (2014) stated, with the result of the 2006 elections, PT and Dilma thought it possible to advance a reformist project of government based on an “unstable balance” with the media, without reforms in that field. The facts proved how hard the consequences of that decision were. In 2014, Dilma won the election by a very short margin because of the negative coverage and corruption allegations spread by the liberal-conservative press. During her second term, dealing with economic adjustment and a crisis produced by political polarization, the press revealed itself as her most vigorous enemy, attempting to construct a scenario to remove her from government. The liberal-conservative press, once favored by the Brazilian dictatorship, stands as a corporate power which seems to be an obstacle both for deeper democracy and the implementation of social reforms in Brazil, serving to preserve elitist interests.

With its engagement in an instrumental moralization campaign in the context of the crisis of Dilma’s second term, the liberal-conservative press tended to provoke an imbalance in the sustainability of Brazilian democracy. Reproducing, under new conditions, the elitist pattern that subordinated the public agenda to moralistic issues and excluding inequality, the liberal-conservative press returned to a position that had already been a cause of great instability during the period of “populist democracy” (1951–1964).

With this moralistic discourse, symbolically transferring political power from the presidency to the judicial courts and legislative congress, the liberal conservative-press gave a legitimacy for the advance of the conservative impeachment of Dilma Rousseff from the presidency in August 2016.

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Notes

1. Interview with Ricardo Kotscho, Press Secretary to Lula in his first term, March 27, 2012, Sao Paulo.
2. Interview with Aluizio Maranhao, March 28, 2014, Rio de Janeiro.
3. See Opinión columns of 06/20/2003, “El buen combate (2)”, *O Globo* and “Desatando los nudos de la reforma”, 07/17/2003, *O ESP*.
4. “Idea fija”, 07/26/2005, *O Globo*.

5. See “Franklin defende agência reguladora para a mídia,” an article in the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, p. 19, about Franklin Martins, the Secretary for Social Communication of the Brazilian government, and his proposals on media regulation, October 8, 2010.
6. This initiative meant that several officials facing corruption charges would be stepping down: Minister of Agriculture Wagner Rossi, leader of the PMDB, who followed the Chief of Staff Antonio Palocci (PT) and the Minister for Transport Alfredo Nascimento (PR). Decisions generated tension within the governing coalition, especially in connection with the PT-PMDB alliances, of which VP Michel Temer and a significant number of representatives and senators were a part.
7. Interview with Judith Brito, Sao Paulo, April 2012 via e-mail.
8. President Dilma Rousseff’s speech, 07/21/2013, Brasilia. <http://www2.planalto.gov.br/acompanhe-o-planalto/discursos/discursos-da-presidenta/pronunciamento-da-presidenta-da-republica-dilma-rousseff-em-cadeia-nacional-de-radio-e-tv>.
The Workers Party and Dilma tried to face that heterogeneity of demands expressed in demonstrations with the promise of a Political Reform that would change the structure of the party system. The current system encourages “catch-all” parties (like PMDB) based on regional oligarchies, individual campaigns for deputies favored by private donations from enterprises, discouraging ideological proposals and party coalitions. However, the historical existence of oligarchic groups of power in Congress—even among PT allied forces—excluded the possibility of political reform.
9. See editorials “Retomar a paulista”, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 06/13/2013 and “Chegou a hora do basta”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 03/13/2016 (quoted at Breda, 2016).
10. Those years of economic growth driven by social policies and consumption produced the upward mobility of 39 million people between 2003 and 2011 (Neri, 2012; quoted by Tible, 2013). The uncertainty for the future experienced by those classes due to the economic slowdown that began in 2012–2013 generated a diffuse discomfort that led to demonstrations. Some authors like Singer (2013) associate those protests with a combination of two different sectors: the “post-material” aspirations of the traditional upper middle classes and the precariousness of a new working class. Those demonstrations reactivated a debate about the characterization of those sectors that had experienced upward mobility during those years. The debate revolved around whether they could even be regarded as a “new working class” or as a “new middle class”.
11. Aécio Neves expected to represent an alternative to the “tucanos” of PSDB, given that their main leadership and political figures—like ex president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), Sao Paulo governor’s Geraldo Alckmin and José Serra—were aged or had been defeated by candidates of the Workers Party in previous elections.
12. The first round of the election results ranked Dilma (41.61) first place followed by Aécio Neves (33.53), who was initially considered practically as excluded from the second round, and Marina Silva (21.32), who did not have the necessary votes to advance to the next instance. A striking aspect of that first round was the social and regional polarization around the country between Dilma and Aécio’s voters. The votes in the poorest states of the North and Northeast (Piauí, Ceará, Maranhão) expressed Dilma’s victory in figures close to 80%, and votes in the richest states of the South and South Center of the country (Santa Catarina, Sao Paulo) were also very high for Aécio Neves.
Our perspective is that for the first time in that election, the regional and social polarization that had existed in the Brazilian elections since 2006 adopted a political depth, i.e. social and regional cleavages were translated into political identification by the main actors, and the campaign for the second round was marked by this.
13. 08/10/2014, “Uma aliança em construção”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*.
14. The political cost of “economic adjustment” was deep because the new cycle of the PT between 2003 and 2013 entailed the upward mobility of the poor to a better standard of living. This sector was necessarily the first affected by economic adjustment. As Safatle (2015) puts it, those circumstances led the government to lose leftist alliances in the social movements because of the restrictive economic policy commanded by Joaquim Levy and to preserve right-wing alliances with the PMDB and businessmen in order to guarantee governability. Moreover, the international crisis that began in 2008 in the central powers expanded and expressed its consequences on the periphery (Latin America), acting as a factor that weakened the political situation of the leftist governments of Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil. For these governments which tended to center their politics on the reduction of inequality via redistributive policies to the lower classes, the crisis attacked their most important base: the support of the lower classes and lower middle classes. In that context, the “economic adjustment” adopted by the Brazilian government was not the best perspective for a party that took office in 2003 with the idea of changing Brazil’s historical social inequalities and extending political participation to the poorest in a true social-democracy.
15. Lecture delivered at University of Brasilia, 24 May. 2016, III Simpósio Nacional sobre Democracia e Desigualdades. Mesa 1—Desigualdades e política no Brasil. Speakers: Fábio Wanderley Reis (UFMG) and André Singer (USP). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmZx1-T1pzM>
16. “Perfil Henrique Meirelles: Do Banco Central a Fazenda, ele é o favorito do mercado”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 05/12/2016.
17. Fernando Canzian, “Temer come o almoço de Dilma”, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 06/09/2016.

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