What is news in the countryside of Bahia?[1]

JULIÁN DURAZO-HERRMANN

Université du Québec à Montreal (UQAM) – Montreal, Quebec, Canadá.
E-mail: julian.durazo@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-4459-6729

LIA DA FONSECA SEIXAS

Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) – Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.
E-mail: liaseixas@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-4459-6729

Abstract

This article aims to show how local political culture can influence what makes news, i.e., how it becomes a newsworthiness factor. A highlight on a news site can become news without any attribute (intrinsic factor), only because of the power of the local elite (extrinsic factor). We analyze the elite power factor in eight regional news sites from the two richest and the two poorest regions of Bahia, a northeastern Brazilian state, during the 2020 municipal elections campaign period. As an alternative to traditional classifications, we analyzed news values by differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic values and then studied the focus-event. We conclude that one in every 10 highlights from the eight news sites in the Bahia countryside during the 2020 campaign period has elite power as its only newsworthiness criterion.

Keywords

Introduction

What is news? What should be news? For political science, this is a question about visibility. For journalism, it is a question about newsworthiness. For both fields, it is a question about social practices, culture, and power relations. For both fields, framing is important (Leal, 2007; Gingras, 2009). In this paper, we propose an interdisciplinary and mixed-methods approach (content analysis and ethnographic research). Events exist in seemingly spontaneous ways within the culture in which journalistic products are embedded, that is, within a locally produced network of symbols and meanings that give coherence to the text beyond its specific content (Ross, 1997). Logically, the cultural apparatus precedes the journalistic text (Mouillaud, 2012). Despite technological changes, cultural apparatuses continue to support journalistic practices, enabling them to adapt to new circumstances such as the democratization of political life or the emergence of new media. The inherent conservatism in this process upholds the reproduction of social power by local elites (Nunes Leal, 2012 [1949]).

This renewed pattern of mediation is known as "electronic *coronelismo*" (or what we refer to as "mediatized *coronelismo*") to emphasize the conjunction between the media and the local social fabric. Mediatized *coronelismo* allows traditional patterns of social domination to reproduce themselves, increasing the proximity of the media and limiting political pluralism through selective coverage and biased framing of local social conflicts, all while negotiating political support (and votes) for state and federal politicians in exchange for tolerance of local antidemocratic practices (Santos, 2008; Durazo-Herrmann, 2017).

Antidemocratic practices thus constitute regional cultures. These regional cultures, heavily influenced by local politics, allow us to observe normative biases and journalistic choices that differ from those driven by the shared knowledge of "sense communities"[1] based in the state capital, influenced by academic perspectives and political expectations more aligned with the global world than regional realities. We hypothesize that extrinsic factors, such as the political context, especially that of local elites, can supplant intrinsic factors, often called substantive news values in Brazil, in deciding what is news or not.

In this analysis, we disregarded reference media but worked rather with news websites from the countryside cities of Bahia, a state in the Northeast region of Brazil[2] , during the 15 days leading up to the 2020 municipal elections (November 1st to November 15th). We studied independent news blogs focused on local coverage that do not belong to large national or state media conglomerates (known as independent media in Brazil).
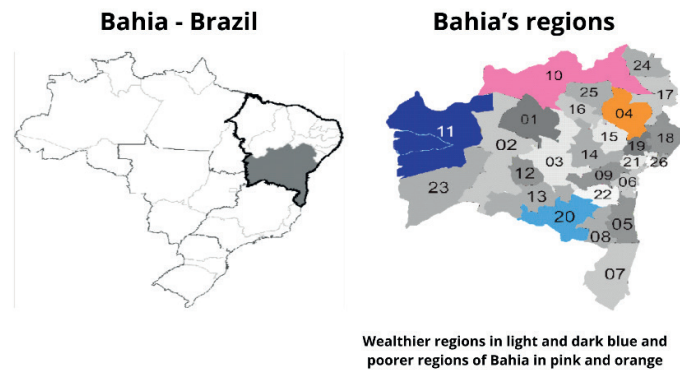
We argue that regional media, through contemporary technological means, reproduce traditional mediation practices that have been used since the late 19th century to integrate remote areas of Brazil into national politics.

To account for possible variation due to different levels of economic prosperity, we analyzed the highlights of regional journalistic products from two sites in the two wealthiest regions of Bahia (West and Southwest) and the two poorest ones (the São Francisco Valley and the Sisal region, as shown in Figure 1). We argue that the relative degree of prosperity has little relevance to the coverage provided by news websites in the countryside of Bahia, thus allowing for a clearer identification of the impact of elite power.

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1 We conceive the coexistence of multiple sense communities (Zelizer, 1993; 2013) that inetract with one another, but that are strongly influenced by sense communities from reference countries and media. As an example, we can cite The Guardian,The New York Times and Le Monde.

2 It was in the Brazilian North-East that Luís Inácio Lula da Silva had his best electoral score in 2022, winning 98,9% of the region's municipalities. In Brazil, the North-East is even considered responsible for Lula's victory.

Figure 1 Maps

Bahia - Brazil   **Bahia's regions**

Wealthier regions in light and dark blue and
poorer regions of Bahia in pink and orange

Source: Elaborated by the authors

News values: a review of the literature

In journalism studies, a news value is considered to be an attribute of an event, meaning a substantive criterion that transforms an event into journalistic material. Elite power is one of them since Galtung and Ruge's groundbreaking article (Galtung, Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Golding, Elliott, 1979; Wolf, 1985 [2001]; Harcup, O'Neill, 2001; Silva, 2005; Traquina, 2005 [2008]). Newsworthiness also involves factors external to the events, although the proposed classifications of news values, even the most recent one (Harcup, O'Neill, 2016), do not make any distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Seixas, 2018). It is precisely at this distinction that we look when examining the weight of the sociopolitical context in journalistic choices.

While the breadth of newsworthiness factors is fully recognized, the focus of the literature has been on news content, namely the events already constructed by journalists (Seixas, 2018). If we want to understand journalistic selection criteria, we need to address the elements of newsworthiness extrinsic to the reported event, namely the political culture in which they are embedded.

We thus distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Our purpose is to understand what constitutes an intrinsic criterion or event attribute, and what qualifies as an external criterion. This distinction reveals that elite power, relevance, transgression, death, and celebrity are understood as attributes, while frequency, agenda, audiovisual, exclusivity, and shareability are extrinsic to the events[3]. Elite power becomes a news value, but also an extrinsic factor.

This distinction emerged from a comprehensive literature review combined with our ethnographic experience in the countryside of Bahia. It allows us to identify which elements of news coverage in this region are influenced by the institutional values of journalism and which ones depend on the local political culture. However, a definitive systematization of our proposal would require a systematic comparison with other locations, which goes beyond the scope of this article.

Bednarek and Caple (2017) focus on the constructed discourse in order to observe the highlighted aspects of events. This methodological choice highlights the discursive phenomenon. Although the two authors acknowledge the existence of different dimensions (material, cognitive, social and discursive), they think that it is critically important to understand how news values are transmitted through discourse:

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3 The full table entitled "Systematization of extrinsic and intrinsic factors" is available at njor.ufba.br, tab Essays (Ensaios).

"[...] The question is not how an event is selected as news, but how an event is constructed as news" (Bernareck; Caple, 2017, p. 43). In a way, they reaffirm the possible separation between selection and construction that Traquina suggests when he coined the term "construction criteria" (Traquina, 2005).

At the core of discursive construction, there is a sort of shared knowledge regarding which attributes should be highlighted. Undoubtedly, selecting what should be prioritized, what should be featured on the homepage, or as a headline, is the result of a team effort. This relational aspect is emphasized in De Maeyer's analysis (2020).

> Valuations are "rules of methodical procedure in the conduct of the investigations," and as such they can be "personal" (individual) and/or "associated" (collective) (MW: 13 p. 242), but there is no fundamental difference between the individual and the collective. (...) But this is not an afterthought: his whole philosophy is devised to think of the individual and the collective in the same movement (De Maeyer, 2020, p. 119).

Journalists interact within an environment that is heavily influenced by elite power. How power is exercised is determined locally, depending on the local configuration of the cultural universe, and requires focusing on a specific space and time, distancing oneself from purely universalistic claims about how social systems should function (Geertz 1983 [1973], p. 239). In reality, two social understandings coexist within the local space, guiding the various actors' behaviour. One is purportedly universal, originating in global scientific and intellectual thought, while the other is directly conditioned by local experiences and practices. The result is a combination and contextual adaptation of local practices to "universal" standards, whether political (democracy) or journalistic (investigation, impartiality, etc.) (Mouillaud, 2012).

Classic theories of journalism assume that they have, or should have, universal validity (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). The notion of "journalistic culture" (Hanitzsch, 2007) aligns with the concept of "interpretive community" (Zelizer, 1993, 2013), in that it considers that journalists share knowledge, whether consciously or unconsciously, in seeking the legitimation of their institutional role. According to Zelizer, there are values that permeate social groups within specific organizations in specific countries, thus being universal (1993, 2013). There should thus be a certain degree of homogeneity regarding the institutional values of journalism.

In contrast, other authors (Carlson, 2015; Deuze and Witschge, 2016) argue that in post-industrial journalism (Anderson; Bell; Shirky, 2013), the emergence of a growing range of independent collectives in Brazil (Figaro, 2018) and around the world, along with the emergence of new actors and changes in professional practices, it is no longer possible to consider the existence of "ideal types" (Deuze, 2005) or universal values. In our view, there exists a heritage of meanings forged in social knowledge (Schutz, 1971). More than a "collective reasoning" (Galtung, Ruge, 1999, p.64), this heritage is derived from everyday interactions and is therefore a collectively constructed common sense. These everyday interactions, grounded in the social and political world, gradually transform into shared knowledge, but are constantly evolving. Ultimately, these shared understandings determine the journalistic selection of events and the news that is published.

Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) propose a circular structure in the model of the journalistic roles process. They identify four dimensions within the internal process of journalistic practice: normative, cognitive, practical, and narrative. These dimensions are related to "what should be done" (normativity), what one would like to do (cognitive), what one does (practice), and what one claims to do (discourse). According to the authors, these tendencies are in constant tension and renegotiation. Although news values are part of institutional knowledge, they can be strongly influenced by local cultures, thus redefining them for a professional group. The highly valued journalistic investigation may not be called for as much in small communities with strong local powers, where the journalist's primary role is often to select what cannot be covered.

Just as social values are constantly negotiated within journalism, both the functions (Schudson, 1978) and purposes (Reginato, 2019), as well as the knowledge developed in professional practice, are also subject to ongoing tension and exchange with social knowledge. The understanding of newsworthiness, even though it belongs to the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 1997), is constantly influenced by the culture of a given society or even locality. Our research on newsworthiness in media outlets in the countryside of Bahia contributes to this reflection by attempting to establish the relative importance of cultural factors of newsworthiness in journalistic production.

The electoral campaign period, a time when the structural elements of social governance merge with contingent elements of choice and potential change, provides an ideal timeframe for our analysis of the role of extrinsic elements in newsworthiness, particularly elite power. Media coverage of this process allows us to study the intersections between political culture and journalistic work in a specific region - in our case, the countryside of Bahia.

Power elite: a cultural factor

Understanding culture as a set of shared codes and symbols that enable group members to interpret and understand social dynamics, power, and mechanisms of domination has a cultural dimension that requires one to analyze specific spaces and times (Geertz, 1983 [1973]). The systematic use of media to highlight the top of the social pyramid, encouraging a perception of the common good that aligns with the interests of this social class and discouraging the emergence of differentiated political demands from other sectors through biased coverage, is what we refer to as elite power (Mills, 2000 [1956]; Savoie, 2010). This power is expressed in journalistic production, regardless of the intrinsic value of the reported facts.

Given that the political field is arguably a field of power, with " elite people", the news value "elite power" is emphasized. As we have seen, elite power is an extrinsic substantive criterion. Here, we seek to understand the level of influence that elite power has on the type of news selected by regional news sites in Bahia during the campaign period. Perhaps Galtung and Ruge were right. In 1965, they suggested that some factors would be "culturally free" (eight factors, more universal[4]) and others (the last four) would be "cultural factors," which influence the "transition from event to news" outside the normal rules of newsworthiness (Galtung and Ruge, 1999 [1965], p. 67).

> But there is a little doubt that there are also culture-bound factors influencing the transition from events to news, and we shall mention four such factors that we deem to be important at least in the north-western corner of the world. They are:
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> *F9: The more the events concern elite nations, the more probable that they will become a news item.*
>
> *F10: The more the events concern elite people, the more probable that they will become a news item.*
>
> *F11: The more the events can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item.*

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4 In this paragraph, the authors explain what they mean by "culturally free": "As we said, these eightfactors are based on the pure and simple discussion of what facilitates and what hinders perception. They are considered culturally free because we do not expect them to change much across human culture – they do not depend much on cultural parameters. More precisely, we do not expect them to vary much on the North-South, East-West or center-periphery axes, which we usually use to structure the world. [...]" (Galtung e Ruge, [1965]1999, p. 67).

F12: The more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item. (Galtung; Ruge, 1965, p. 68).

The academic literature considers elite power as a culturally-free factor because, in general, the actions of elite nations and individuals have a greater impact on people's lives, aligning with the definition of relevance (Wolf, 1985; Harcup, O'Neill, 2016). However, the level of influence can reach the point where an event is publicized without any other newsworthiness factor other than the person involved (who belongs to a powerful group), or it could be based on a future expectation, as long as it is framed as a promise from a member of the elite. While it does not erase social conflicts, culture provides coherence and meaning to them (Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Mouillaud, 2012). In this process of translation, elite power allows what is extrinsic to be considered an intrinsic factor of the reality object, ensuring its publication.

Following Bourdieu (1997), we pay attention to *faits divers*, empty stories without any journalistic interest that fill the space and time of news outlets. By erasing conflicts and excluding alternative perspectives, the publication of faits divers contributes to the reproduction of the existing structure of social domination. Therefore, this journalistic silence is a tacit but clear expression of elite power.

Methodology

Various approaches have been employed since Galtung and Ruge began to study the factors responsible for newsworthiness in 1965. Most commonly, content analysis, ethnography with interviews, and participatory observation have been utilized (Harcup, O'Neill, 2016). More recently, multimodal analysis has been conducted, including the analysis of images (Bednareck, Caple, 2017). Over the span of just 50 years, newsworthiness theory has been primarily based on the analysis of front-page news, although Bednareck and Caple have recently focused on a less prominent topic (cycling).

Traditionally, the corpus often consists of leading news media. A strong assumption followed: if news value acts as a factor for selection and non-selection, then we should be able to "find it" in the highlights of traditional news outlets (Seixas, 2018). However, more recently, Harcup and O'Neill (2016) included free newspapers and tabloids in their corpus for the analysis of news sites' homepages.

In line with this reflection, our research examines the focus-event of posts on news sites in the countryside of Bahia, rather than analyzing the news as journalistic discourse. We conducted the exercise of identifying the event and subsequently comparing it with the headline to distinguish the relevant aspects.

We do not believe in the purity of an event or the possibility of isolating it as one isolates a cell. The event is understood as a unit marked by a given action, whether verbal or non-verbal, a factual event, an action with specific time and space (Gomes, 2009), an ongoing event, or a future event enunciated as a commitment (Seixas, 2009; Seixas and Borges, 2017). The emphasis on the campaign period, a political process defined by the Federal Constitution of Brazil and conducted simultaneously throughout the country regardless of the economic or social structures of each region, helps us delineate the contours of the focus-event.

To identify the focus event, we used Iramuteq software (available on www.iramuteq.org) to generate word clouds. However, as the software requires selecting word types with specific syntactic functions, it was a challenge for us to have a simple view of compound words. We thus examined editorial elements: headline, deck, and lead (sometimes the nut graph). Every proper noun had to be joined with hyphens so that the word-cloud generation tool could display the nouns as they are recognized in social knowledge. Thus, whenever the focus event was a judicial decision, it could be understood within the set of "judicial decisions". The comparative analysis allowed us to see the highlighted words and analyze them to determine if they indicate any news values.

For example, the focus-event of the article titled "Federal Public Prosecutor's Office [MPF] sues former mayor of Luís Eduardo Magalhães for fraudulent contracts worth more than R$6.6 million"[5] (Blog Sigi Vilares, November 3, 2020) is the filing of two lawsuits against the former mayor for administrative misconduct. To compare them, we generated word clouds with the keywords of the focus-event (Figure 3) and the keywords of the titles (Figure 4). We composed the written text with words for each focus-event. The main focus was on the subject, action, and object. In this example: Federal-Public-Prosecutor's-Office, sues, former-mayor-of-Luís-Eduardo-Magalhães.

We analyzed regional news sites from the countryside of Bahia in the 15 days leading up to the 2020 municipal elections (November 1st to November 15th). We chose two news sites in the two wealthiest regions of the countryside of Bahia (West, in dark blue, main city: Luís Eduardo Magalhães, and Barreiras, and Southwest, in light blue, main city: Vitória da Conquista) and two news sites in the two poorest regions (Valley of São Francisco, in pink, main city: Juazeiro, and the Sisaleira region, in orange, main city: Santaluz).

Although Bahia is the fourth largest state in Brazil in terms of population, it also has the fourth highest rural population in the country, accounting for 28% (or nearly four million people). At the regional level, the rural populations of the Southwest and the Valley of São Francisco region are at around 35% (SEI 2018). In 2018, the Southwest region of Bahia had an estimated population of 733,276 inhabitants, a *per capita* GDP of R$9,860 in 2016, and a Gini index of 0.559. Its main city is Vitória da Conquista (population 306,866, *per capita* GDP: R$16,785). In the same year, the Valley of São Francisco region had an estimated population of 544,737 inhabitants, a per capita GDP of R$8,460, and a Gini index of 0.582. Vitória da Conquista and Juazeiro are the third and fourth most important urban areas in Bahia, respectively, but due to significant income concentration in the Salvador Metropolitan Region and the western agro-exporting municipalities, they rank only 43rd and 61st among the wealthiest municipalities in the state (Cidades 2018; SEI 2018).

In addition to the news site analysis, we conducted ethnographic research in the months of August 2018 and May 2019 in the Southwest and Valley of São Francisco regions. We used the SPEAKING method to identify settings, participants, ends, acts (content and meaning of written and oral production), instrumentalities, norms of interaction and interpretation, and genres (De Blasio *et al.*, 2017). We examined how these elements come together to create a unique media system embedded in a specific social and political environment. This inductive approach allowed us to identify the significant presence of *coronelismo* (local boss system) in the countryside of Bahia, and strongly suggested focusing our analysis on the elite power as an extrinsic news value to the reported event.

Our analysis is based on six semi-structured interviews with local journalists[6] and a content analysis study of regional media products, focusing on coverage, audience, and citizen contributions to the media. Together with the news site analysis, we worked with secondary sources from the four regions, which included academics, journalists, non-journalist content producers, and public relations professionals. A substantial amount of secondary sources from the two regions were also used, including academic and journalistic works, as well as testimonial and memoir texts (Motta, 2002; Oliveira, 2005; Tavares, 2008).

In selecting the corpus, we used three criteria: 1) the most accessed news sites in each region, as indicated by a journalist covering the countryside news sites for one of the major state-level news sites (Bahia Notícias), 2) news sites with frequent advertising investment from the state government - information obtained through an access-to-information request to the state communication office (Secom

5 This and all other translations are our own.

6 Besides six semi-directive interviews, we undertook participant observation in local news sites and free conversation with local people to gain a better grasp of local culture.

2020), 3) the ethnographic results from our field research conducted in August 2018 and May 2019.

The news sites selected are *Blog do Sigi Vilares* and *Mural do Oeste* (in the affluent region of Barreiras), *Blog do Marcos Frahm* and *Blog do Anderson* (in the Southwest), *Rede GN* and *Preto no Branco* (in the Valley of São Francisco), and *Notícias de Santa Luz* and *Vem ver Cidade* (in the Sisal region, the poorest region in Bahia). We worked with the top three highlights from each news site, which we captured in the evening, the time slot when internet access is at its highest in Brazil[7]. We are confident this is a representative sample of journalistic production in the countryside of Bahia, as the news sites represent the only regular information channels, given the fact that printed newspapers no longer exist in the countryside of Bahia (Carvalho 2019; personal observation).

In total, we examined 320 posts from eight regional news sites, particularly products aimed at the local population. Subtracting advertisements and repeated posts, we are left with a corpus of 226 unique posts (cf. Table 2). By observing regional journalistic outlets, we sought to determine the presence or absence of cultural interference in news selection. An exploratory analysis using the same corpus and methodology showed the strength of elite power in the highlights.

The power of the local elite can be observed regardless of editorial lines, as all evening homepages of our various news sites feature events that are not newsworthy but involve individuals from the local elite. More than half of the news sites (five) focus on political issues, whether local, subnational, or national: *Blog do Sigi Vilares* and *Mural do Oeste* (in the affluent city of Barreiras), *Blog do Marcos Frahm* (Southwest), *Rede GN* and *Preto no Branco* (Juazeiro). The other three news sites focus on local news: *Blog do Anderson* (Vitória da Conquista), *Notícias de Santa Luz*, and *Vem ver Cidade*(Sisal region), highlighting deaths, accidents, and tragic events.

Table 2 – Focus-events

Focus-events	Number of posts = 226	Percentage
City (weather, water and sewage service, fait divers, public transportation, potholes)	32	13.7%
COVID-19 (death and illness)	29	12.8%
Court decision and incidents during the campaign (assassination attempt, vote buying)	28 (concentrated in the last 5 days of our 15-day period)	11.6%
Murder (death), accident	21	9.3%
Electoral research, political mapping, campaign acts (campaign trailers, debates)	14	6.19%
Crimes (trafficking, theft, robbery)	05	2.2%
Celebrity (Harcup, O'Neill, 2016)	05	2.2%
Service (sick pay, emergency aid, welfare (FGTS), transit operation, registration)	6	2.6%

The thematic division highlights the three main topics of November 2020: the city, local coverage of weather and mobility issues or infrastructure; COVID-19, daily bulletins with official data from municipal and state health departments; and judicial decisions related to elections, especially during the last five days of the municipal electoral campaign. Of particular note is the emphasis on murders in the four regions we analyzed, including within the political field, particularly involving councilors.

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7 The 2015 Brazilian Media Survey, conducted by the Communication Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, shows that 67% of internet users use this time slot (between 7pm and 9pm (Communication Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, 2015, p.69).

Mediatized *coronelismo*

Like traditional *coronelismo*, mediatized *coronelismo* is a political exchange system based on weak actors who use each other to strengthen themselves. A state with low relative local presence exchanges material benefits and political privileges with local elites for calculated support in electoral outcomes. In turn, these elites use their control of the local media both to provide this support and to consolidate and reproduce their status in local society (Nunes Leal 2012 [1949]; Santos 2008). Considering the material weakness of local elites, their recourse to symbolic power is a logical mechanism to reinforce the existing political field, that is, to reproduce local social and political hierarchies (Bourdieu 1997).

Due to the very limited size of the local market, the financial revenue of regional media cannot increase independently. It is not, therefore, an instrument of capital accumulation. These outlets are extremely dependent on local government advertising[8] and subsidies from their owners' other businesses, or both (Santos, 2008). As Antônio Carlos Magalhães, Bahia's former political boss, once said, local radio has no commercial interest; it only interests politicians for its ability to reach citizens in small and isolated locations (Magalhães, 1995).

As a result, regional media outlets are inherently politicized. Their coverage is personalized and sensational, using select events and dramatic elements to present a specific, often emotional, perspective on a particular political issue. The use of elite power is significant, as the media personae of local leaders summarize entire political positions, with little room for nuance or background information. Furthermore, the small size of regional media allows for highly centralized control of all content by the organization's owner, who, in most cases, is the sole permanent staff member of the media outlet. The owners of these news sites are usually professional journalists who graduated from local or state universities. Except for *Preto no Branco* in Juazeiro, none of the media outlets we studied have a journalistic team beyond a few occasional freelancers, and are run entirely by a single person[9]. In this context, there are a few countervailing forces capable of preventing a completely biased coverage (Rubim, 2004; Gingras, 2009; Lebel, 2010).

Consequently, being economically and operationally independent from national and subnational media conglomerates, regional media in Bahia thrive on "low politics," reporting on scandals, crimes, and attacks on property rights. In so doing, these media isolate their localities from broader national and subnational trends, reinforcing both a local conception of politics and the centralized control of this ecosystem — a process known as boundary control (cf. Gibson, 2012).

The relative prosperity of certain regions (such as the West and Southwest of Bahia) compared to others (like the São Francisco Backlands or the Sisal region) is not a relevant variable in this process. The only outlet that appears to be unaffected by local elite influence is "Preto no Branco" (in the São Francisco region), a news site created by Sibele Fonseca, a former journalist from Rede Bahia in Juazeiro[10].

The crux of the matter lies in the relative regional isolation and low presence of both the federal and subnational state, which leaves the political and media landscape in the hands of local elites. In all cases, local media outlets align themselves with those in power, defending their interests to maintain their positions of power. This allows for the reproduction and perpetuation of mediatized *coronelismo*.

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8 The official advertising from the Bahia state government increased from R$42 million in 2000 to R$160 million in 2019 (Matos, 2011; Araújo 2020).

9 Interviews with Sibele Fonseca, Juazeiro, August 6, 2018, Caique Santos and Fábio Sena, Vitória da Conquista, May 20, 2019.

10 Personal observation. Interview with Sibele Fonseca, Juazeiro, August 6, 2018.

Results

Within the universe of 320 highlights, we considered 226 units, as 77 (24%) highlights are repetitions of previously published ones[11] , and 17 (3.47%) consist of advertisement or service information regarding contests or welfare payments (FGTS). Of the total highlights posted on the homepage during the 15 days prior to the 2020 municipal election, 29.7% of the posts have a combination of elite power and another news value, and 6.2% only have elite power as news value. Additionally, there is 14.2% of faits divers (tacit elite power, as described above).

Table 3 – Power elite in the highlights

Power elite in the focus-events	Number of posts = 226	Percentage
With only elite power (local person or company)	14	6.2%
Release without verification	11	4.8%
With elite nation or elite person + another news value	67	29.7%
With elite nation or elite person whose focus-event is commitment	05	2.2%
Faits divers	32	14.2%
Total	129	57.07%

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The number of highlights with only elite power may seem small when analyzed independently, accounting for 6.2%. However, we must consider that these actions have solely personal or private implications, but are publicized as one of the top three highlights on the outlet's evening homepage. The event is "seen in personal terms" (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). "Blogs form economic partnerships with politicians. [...] They [politicians] start to use blogs as a means of spreading information"[12] . This statement by Fábio Sena, responsible for one of the blogs in one of the richest regions, underscores the influence of elite power, highlighting the strength of an extrinsic factor and the intrinsic lack of newsworthiness of any given event.

Here are some representative examples: 1) a note titled "Luís Eduardo Magalhães: Oziel mourns the death of a friend and suspends campaign agenda", which begins with the statement: "With a broken heart, I announce the passing of my dear friend, Caio Felippe de Oliveira, which occurred this morning..." (*Mural do Oeste*, November 1, 2020); 2) a post titled "Educandário Construção do Futuro holds the IV Entrepreneurship Fair remotely to supports a transplant campaign", which remains highlighted for three days on *Vem ver Cidade* (from November 5thto November 7th, 2020); 3) the launch of a professor's book: "Univasf Professor launches book 'History of Suicide'" on *Rede GN* on November 9, 2020; 4) when the bishop of Juazeiro released a video on the electoral campaign: "Dom Beto, Bishop of Juazeiro (BA), records video with a message about municipal elections. Watch the video" (*Rede GN*, November 8, 2020); and 5) a post titled "LegislatorMarquinho Viana is discharged from hospital and thanks the staff at Hospital da Bahia and friends," published by *Mural do Oeste* (Barreiras) on November 12.

The only highlights with elite figures geographically distant from the countryside of Bahia (accounted for within the 29.7%) are those related to the contest between Joe Biden and Donald Trump for the presidency of the United States. In social knowledge, the United States is the wealthiest country in

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11 The reason for this is still unknown and must be elucidated through further interviews with these news sites' teams. As hypotheses, we believe that these teams' small size, their editorial line and the weekend break all have a role in keeping a posted highlight.

12 Interview with Fábio Sena, owner of the Blog do Sena, Vitória da Conquista, 20th May, 2019.

the world, with implications for people's lives, from those in the affluent region whose primary economic activity targets exports to those residing in poor regions like the Sisal region. Two regional news sites in Bahia highlighted these events: the *Blog do Anderson* with "US Elections | Biden poised to confirm victory, while Trump moves to take the dispute to court" on November 5th, and *Rede GN* with an "URGENT" notification on November 7th: "URGENT: Biden elected President of the United States." The remaining highlights with only elite power as a newsworthiness criterion pertain to national, state, or –mostly– local elites.

Another rather small, but cumulative data is the 2.2% of highlights for future events, generally marked as politician "commitments". The highlight can even become news just by bearing a politician's statement, as in the post "West Zone | Municipal Urban Park Lagoa das Bateias will be revitalized by the State Government of Bahia", based solely on the statement of federal deputy Paulo Sérgio Paranhos de Magalhães (PSD-BA). The news site even seeks to gain power by announcing privileged information: "The information reached BLOG DO ANDERSON through federal deputy Paulo Sérgio Paranhos de Magalhães (PSD-BA)" (*Blog do Anderson*, November 3, 2020).

Highlights for private company events reinforce elite power because even if it is a company party, this does not justify transforming it into one of the three main news stories on the homepage. In *Blog do Anderson*, the highlight "60 Years of Cooperativa Mista Agropecuária Conquistense | Contest recognizes the best coffees from the Planalto da Conquista" publicizes a private company party with no less than 202 photos (November 8, 2020). The *Mural do Oeste* publishes a flyer from the Instituto São Francisco de Arte e Cultura with the title "ABCD solidarity live promotes the rescue of the Barreiras choro club".

The highlights that are press releases are explicitly signed by public relations officers. At the end of these texts, the credit "Sources: Name of the publicist or office" is given. In these cases, interest is also restricted to elite individuals or companies. When *Rede GN* published a press release from the Petrolinense Athletics Association about organizing talks with candidates ("APA Petrolina organizes meeting with Petrolina mayoral candidates ", November 7, 2020), it was publicizing the action of a civil association on the news site, without any investigation. Therefore, publishing press releases with explicit public relations officers' signatures also reveals elite influence in news selection in the countryside of Bahia. Out of the 226 posts, the highlighted press releases account for 4.8%, which, added to the 2.2% of highlights focused on commitments and the 6.2% of highlights with only elite power, represent 13.2% of the three main highlights of one of the prime times of digital media.

The signature of the public relations officers, considered unacceptable in current standards in the journalism communities of meaning in the state capital and in Brazil at large, is a practice that the regional news sites adopted without embarrassment in the four regions we analyzed. Ten main news items are actually press releases published as highlights. The secretary of communication of the municipality of Vitória da Conquista confirmed that he organizes his work based on the willingness of all news sites in the municipality to publish his press releases, either in full or with minor modifications[13]. The way the secretary achieves the systematic publication of his press releases shows how he successfully uses both local and universal journalistic knowledge.

Elite power also interacts with intrinsic newsworthiness factors. The most frequent combination (Seixas, Francisco, 2014) of the news value "elite nation or person" is with death and infraction as newsworthiness criteria. Of the 66 highlights with elite power, almost 40% (25) are due to infractions committed by members of the local elite. The cloud below (Figure 2) contains the titles of the highlights and shows the highlighted words: 'dies', 'prohibits', 'heritage', 'research', in addition to proper names. The death of a former councilor, a known photographer, or the mother of a celebrity makes the homepage.

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13 Interview with Diego Gomes, Vitória da Conquista, May 21, 2019.

Figure 2 – Cloud from highlighted titles

Source: Elaborated by the authors using Iramuteq software

Despite its institutional importance, electoral coverage only started on November 10. More than 50% of the highlights explicitly within the political field were published just in the five days preceding the election. The campaign in the countryside of Bahia was marked by a judicial war with numerous fraudulent polls and attempts to disqualify other candidates and to prohibit rallies and demonstrations because of the coronavirus pandemic, and the publication of sham electoral polls. The number of highlights whose focus-event was a judicial decision shows the Regional Electoral Court as the main subject.

In response to the observed trend to judicialize the electoral dispute, we generated Figure 3 from a list of focus-events within the subject 'judicial decision', such as a bid to requalify Park-Lagoa-das Bateias, the electoral justice blocking the publication of a survey in the city of Vitória da Conquista, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) taking action against the former mayor of Luís-Eduardo-Magalhães, the electoral court prohibiting rallies, marches, and walks in the state of Bahia, the Regional Electoral Court prohibiting the publication of electoral surveys, the Superior Electoral Court allowing a show, the electoral justice prohibiting demonstrations with distribution of pamphlets and stickers, and the Electoral Court of Bahia prohibiting in-person campaign events.

Figure 3 Word cloud of focus-events on the subject of judicial decision
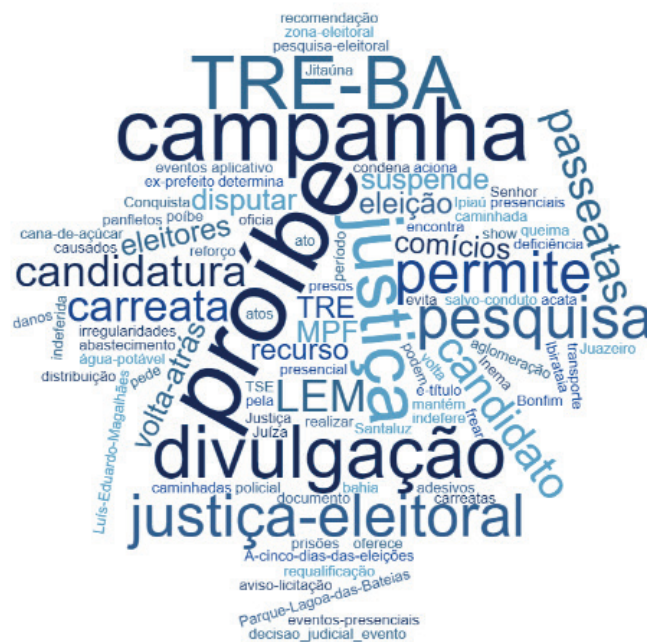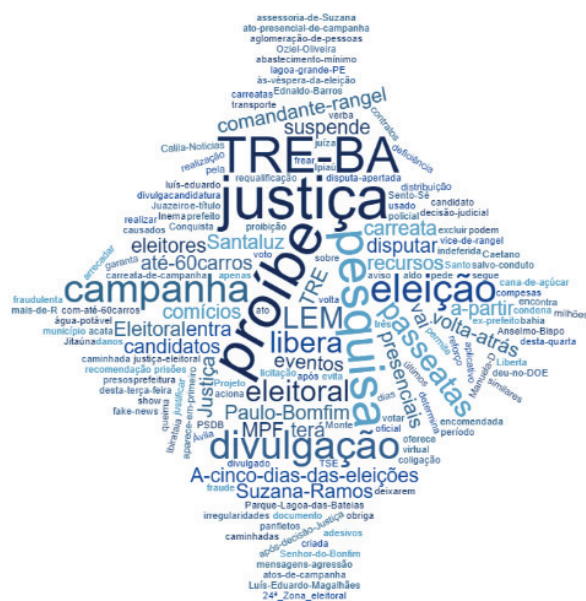

Figure 4 – Word cloud of headlines on the subject of judicial decision

Source: Elaborated by the authors using Iramuteq software

In journalistic coverage, the subject 'justice' indicates infraction, considered a substantive value, as shown by the headlines cloud (Figure 4). Even if the infraction has not occurred, the mere possibility, indicated in a judicial body's decision, implies newsworthiness, especially because it influences the political 'chess game' of the moment. We can see that the highlighted words are practically the same. Perhaps we could say that framing seeks the focus-event. The verb prohibit ("proíbe") brings conflict as a backdrop, a news value of an event in process. The difference between the two images lies in the words that name places, temporalities, and subjects, highlighting aspects such as geographical proximity, timeliness, and

accuracy. For example, Figure 4 reveals the enhancement of value judgment in the headline with the word 'releases' and the expression 'backtracks'. In all cases, newsworthiness criteria and the news values for conflict and infraction combine with elite power to enhance the journalistic visibility of the region's politicians. On the other hand, the journalistic coverage obtained from the news sites in the countryside of Bahia confirms the limited importance of municipal elections for the balance of power among local elites (Durazo-Herrmann, 2016).

Conclusions

One in every ten highlights from the eight news sites we studied in the countryside of Bahia during the 2020 campaign period, a year marked by the pandemic, has elite power as its sole newsworthiness criterion. Combined with other criteria, the local elite is visible in 40% of the articles. Local elite actors are thus capable of highlighting events on the news sites' evening homepage that would not be publicized in an outlet that follows the institutional values of journalism. Journalistic discourse –identified in the high proportion of faits divers –raises the rate of influence of the elite power to 57% of all articles.

Therefore, elite power is not an attribute of the event, but rather a factor of local reality, capable of transforming into news any event where the main actor is a member of the local elite. Galtung and Ruge (1999 [1965]) were right: elite power is not a "culturally free factor". Elite power in the countryside of Bahia is an extrinsic newsworthiness criterion with the capacity to become intrinsic to an event, even in those that have no other news value. The person of the elite is the "who?" of the classic inverted pyramid of news. In the political and cultural context of the countryside of Bahia, this may be the only news value. The journalistic practices and themes, as well as the actors represented, are defined by local political culture. This is not the case for media systems more strongly governed by institutional, so-called universal values. If it were, articles such as "Caetano Veloso parks in Leblon" would be common[14].

An important element that emerges from the analysis is the importance of the two areas of knowledge – local and universalist –in explaining the dynamics behind journalistic coverage in these regions. The fact that municipal elections only gained prominence in the last five days of the campaign shows how this institutional process in the interior of Bahia does not have the political weight the federal Constitution or subnational political discourse attribute to it.

The case of press releases explicitly signed by the public relations offices shows how the political and journalistic actors of the countryside of Bahia navigate these two areas of knowledge, and thus reproduce the local balance of power, both in the symbolic and material fields. Therefore, even though the media outlets are not directly owned by local politicians - as is the case at the subnational level - we find strong elements of mediated *coronelismo* in the countryside of Bahia: exchange of favors between weak political actors to benefit themselves, monopoly of political mediation and concentration of so-called democratic representation in a few hands.

Our research shows the importance of choosing an appropriate temporal framework for the analysis. A study of the last five days of the electoral campaign would have presented a dynamic image of the campaign, with many highlights on its developments in all media outlets. However, the analysis of the two preceding weeks shows that this dynamism was only present in the last five days, and that in the preceding period, it was the Covid-19 pandemic that dominated the news, as it did for the rest of the year. The health crisis trumped the electoral process, and elite power continued to show itself, both openly and implicitly, in the general coverage of the Bahian news sites.

Finally, beyond the news values themselves, our research reveals important political behavior in the countryside of Bahia, which move away from the assumptions of representative democracy —

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14 Famous article published on the *Terra* portalon March 10th, 2011. This article spawned debate in Brazil about the absence of newsworthiness.

even though its processes and institutions are present and important—, including the importance of elite power outside strictly political mechanisms and the instrumental use of judicial mechanisms to remove opponents from the campaign, rather than face them at the polls. These dynamics reinforce the importance of our culturalist, ethnographic, and inductive methodology.

This article confirms the relevance of both comparative analysis and interdisciplinary dialogue between journalism studies and political science. The systematic confrontation between theoretical assumptions and empirical reality is rich in learning and allows to constantly improve knowledge, while interdisciplinary dialogue makes it possible to offer new explanations for observed, but only partially understood phenomena. These two dimensions also show that the road is long and that much work is still needed to explain the multiple and complex relationships between media and politics.

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