

# DEMOCRACY, MEDIA AND CORRUPTION: FROM GLOBAL TO PORTUGAL

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## Abstract

The subprime crisis in the United States and the sovereign debt crises in Europe in the second decade of the second millennium brought, among other things, a new discussion of the role of the media (mainstream, alternative and social networks) in democratic societies. At the same time, a new typology of phenomena emerges, associated to the use, abuse and control of social networks, due to acts of piracy and technological mechanisms such as algorithms and the use of big data. In this paper, we aim to discuss the orientation changes in the mainstream media since the second decade of the second millennium, in particular the mediatization processes, taking as example the journalistic coverage of corruption events in Portugal.

**Keywords:** Democracy; Media; Corruption; Portugal; Mediatization

## Democracy: Crisis or Change?

We live in a complex time of technological, political, economic and social changes. Globalization distributed economic dividends worldwide, withdrew westward economic and financial supremacy and, denationalized and internationalized companies as consequence of the mobility of capital and stock market participation. At the same time, globalization has created elites with transversal global loyalties, founded on the defense of financial and corporative interests.

While the system of domination implemented by the West is at stake, democracy, as a form of fairer governance, continues to expand, albeit under different threats. We can report multiple risks: from the capture of the democratic state by national and international economic and financial interests, to the use of democratic rituals to

validate the appropriation of resources by oligarchies, which evoke the interest of the people to perpetuate themselves in power.

Globalization has given rise to new pathologies of democracy, which rely on sophisticated financial and technological tools, often resorting to legal tricks such as offshores, tax incentives, and others, recruiting highly specialized personnel in international operations that governments can't afford.

Corruption, as a phenomenon of misappropriation of public funds, has become an endemic problem for democracies, involving, in various forms, an increasing number of governments and rulers. Crimes such as influence peddling, privileged use of information, economic crimes against the state, in addition to tax evasion and money laundering, are frequent accusations against rulers, constituting, according to several international political barometers<sup>1</sup>, serious risks to the maintenance of democracies.

In this way, we are facing a climate conducive to political populism and authoritarianism, which finds conditions for expansion among the disinherited from the globalized economy or those who consider themselves threatened in their national and religious identity. There are innumerable and different understandings of populism, equally supported by multiple theories, paradigms and methodologies of interpretation.

In Europe, as in the Americas (North and South), right- and left-wing populism has been growing, manifesting itself in party deployment and in elections of leaders with these characteristics. What determines populism is a political equation involving three actors: the people, the elites or other enemies of the people and the charismatic "chief / savior". The relationship is based on the assumptions of a "unique people" dominated by "corrupt elites" (national or international) and a "populist chief" capable of restoring popular sovereignty through a targeted communication strategy <sup>2</sup>.

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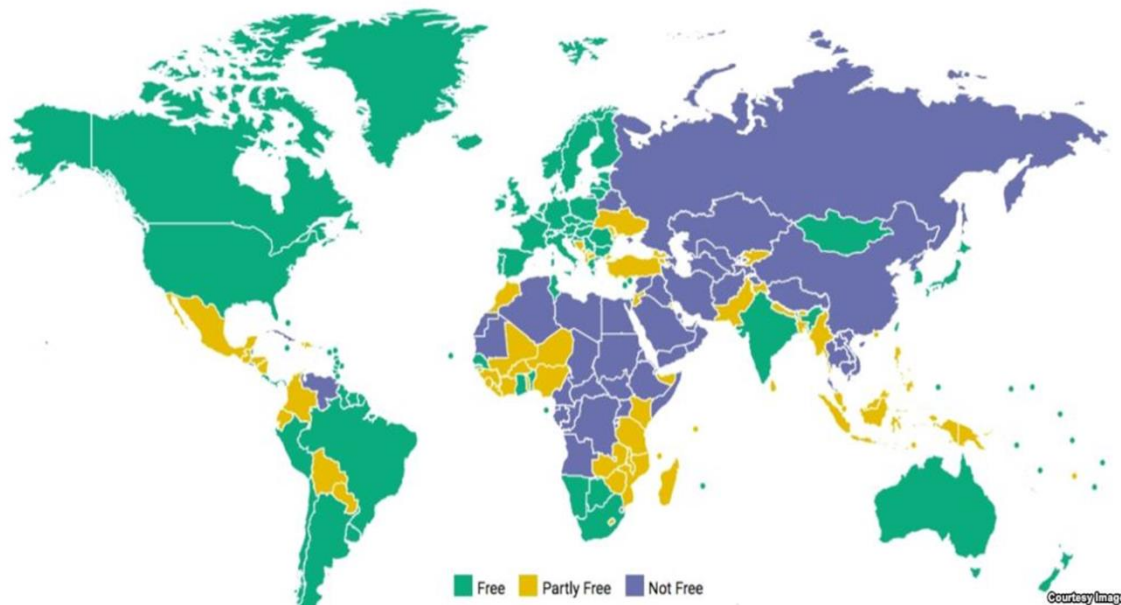
<sup>1</sup> International Transparency Report, 2017 ([https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016)).

<sup>2</sup> Laurent Bernhard, *Left or Right? Populist communication of political parties in recent Western European elections*, National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century Working Paper No. 92, July 2016 ([http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/publications/workingpaper/pdf/wp\\_92.pdf](http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/publications/workingpaper/pdf/wp_92.pdf)).

The map presented by Freedom House at the end of 2017 presents the threats to democracy and freedom of expression that the globalized world faces today.

Figure 1 - Freedom House "World Threats to Democracy and Freedom of Expression"

## Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy



Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>

In this figure 1, Freedom House points out that the world is facing the eleventh consecutive year of global decline in freedom and that there is an increasing attraction to totalitarian and autocratic models in many governments today. The report notes the growth of nationalist and populist forces and the setbacks in political rights and civil liberties in countries considered "free", such as Brazil, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Tunisia and the United States. At the same time, the report attributes these phenomena to different causes, such as social consequences of the Great Crisis, terrorist threats, populisms, corruption, drug trafficking and social violence.

The voracious expansion of neoliberalism withdrew the ideological connotation of democracy and turned it into a utilitarian tool of the political, economic, and financial system. Newcomers to globalization, with non-democratic traditions, have assumed new governance models that are considered more efficient, respecting only a set of rules or procedures for the constitution of governments and the

management of public interests. The sub-prime crisis, which began in 2007/2008, created a distrust of democracy, as well as of European institutions and mainstream media, particularly in Europe. It has become clear to most Europeans that governments decide according to the pressure and interests of international and financial markets, against citizens' interests: replacing social justice for market justice.

### **Democracy and Media**

To this scenario must be added the role of media and information and communication technologies that promote the emergence of differentiated ways of "knowing" and building "identities" (collective and individual). For many citizens, the media, especially television, is the only information source and the primordial way of experiencing the world. At the same time, the use of mobile and digital devices, such as social networks and mobile phones, are the main link connecting the community.

Media mainstream orientation to the market, competition between corporations and the need to attract audiences has favored populist guidelines. Journalism, with emphasis on the so-called populist newsroom<sup>3</sup>, through popular programs and genres - talk shows, aggressive phone calls in opinion programs, interventions in television political programs and interviews with politicians, popular parliaments and others - confronts democratic institutions and rulers, decontextualizing actions and restricting political soundbites.

At the same time, large events and civic causes mobilize crowds from social networks and generate attitudes and opinions that constitute the sharing of a "global public sphere," which is generally not embodied in effective global movements.

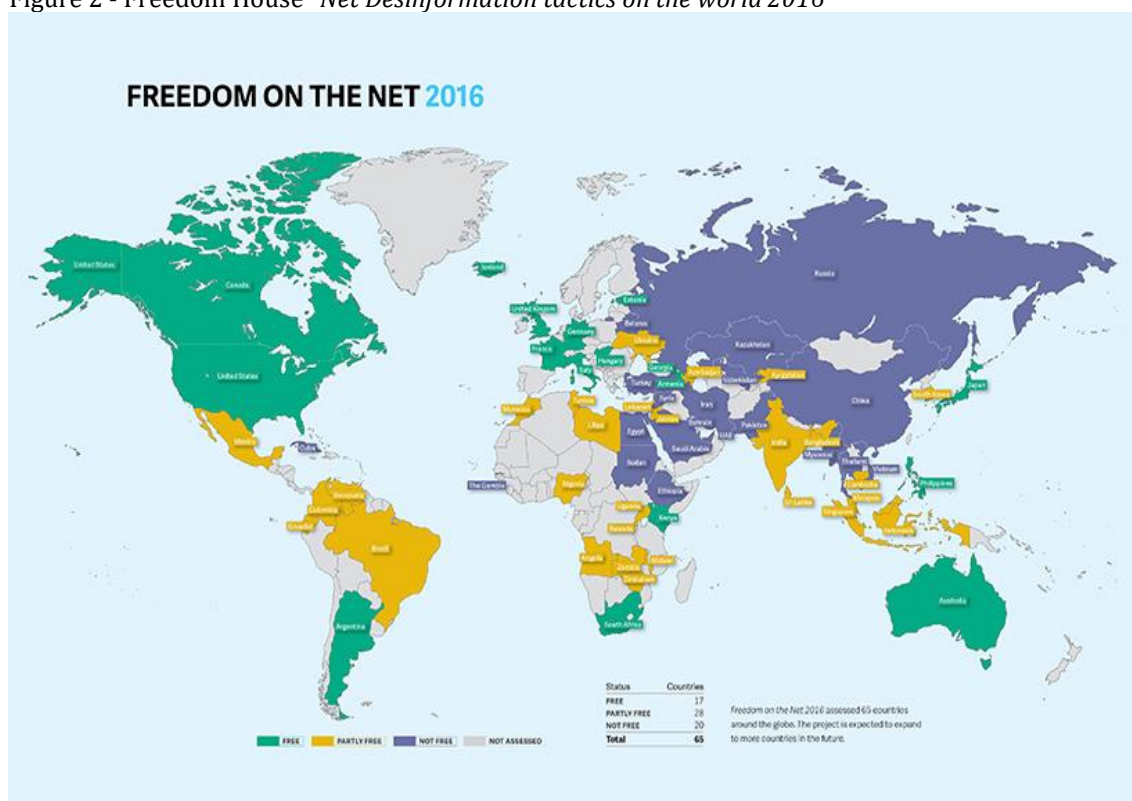
The internet has, for this reason, become an element of freedom, but also of political domination. The manipulation of information on the Net through the injection of

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<sup>3</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Casten Reinemann, Jasper Stromback and Claes De Vreese, *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, London, Routledge, 2017.

“fake news”, particularly in periods of elections in the West, poses more of a threat to democracies.

Figure 2 - Freedom House “*Net Desinformation tactics on the world 2016*”



Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017>

The above report stresses that disinformation tactics contributed to the seventh consecutive year of declining internet freedom. Manipulation and disinformation strategies had played a decisive role in elections in at least 18 countries (e.g. USA, UK, France, Catalonia) between 2016/2017. A growing number of governments have restricted mobile internet services and implemented additional surveillance measures. China leads the countries that control most of the content on the internet, but countries such as Russia attach increasing importance to the "information war", creating departments and sites for its development and dissemination in Western countries.

“Fake news” take on a major role in the “information war”, particularly in social networks, where the verification of sources and the right to a fair hearing are more complex. The big data and the algorithms that are at the basis of the construction and diffusion of “fake news” are a further threat to democracy. Big data is a

comprehensive concept that includes strategies and tactics that involve massive data sets and diverse technologies. Among the “fake news” most damaging to democracy are: foreign interference in domestic elections; news about public figures using parody and satire; news without source verification and without the right to a fair hearing; de-contextualized news which reinforce ideologies, hate speeches and others; news which defy democratic authority and favor market interests, criminal organizations and harmful interests of ordinary citizens<sup>4</sup>.

On media and pluralism in Europe, the data compiled by *Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 Monitoring Risks for Media Pluralism in the EU and Beyond*, systematized around four key areas for pluralism in the media - Basic Protection, Plurality of Market (Political Plurality), Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness - point to a critical diagnosis, which highlights the lack of transparency of the relations between political, economic and media powers. The report also refers to the concentration of the media, the reduction of pluralism, self-censorship practices stemming from unemployment and increased insecurity at work, as well as the dubious origin of financing, particularly from money laundering.

The content produced and spread by the mainstream media and by users who become producers and users (producers), as well as technological evolution, digital development, and what are generically called algorithmic encodings, has provided a favorable climate for the emergence of political and media populism.

In the mainstream media, indicators favoring the emergence of a populist environment are associated with the need to "increase audiences". These indicators span formats and genres of a very different nature, such as journalism, entertainment and fiction, and use technical and discursive devices with the aim of attracting the attention of ordinary citizens. "Calling attention" involves resorting to content and formatting selection strategies, which focus on sensationalist issues that emphasize conflict and confrontation, appeal to emotion, or provoke moral outrage. The same objective also uses strategies of repetition, omission and truncation, illuminating or erasing certain elements capable of attracting more

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<sup>4</sup> Damian Tambini, *Fake News: Public Policy Responses*, in “Media Policy Brief” 20, London, Media Policy Project, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017.

attention, as it happens in the news about corruption and organized crime. These strategies defining media populism are in line with what in Europe has been written about mediatization, since the second decade of the new millennium.

Mediatization has been used to describe languages, procedures and techniques employed by the media, not only as a hegemonic institution, but also as an institution with its own "logic" capable of overlapping and "colonizing" the remaining social institutions<sup>5</sup>. It is also defined as a process of incorporation of media logics by social institutions (politics, justice, education, etc.) and by individuals / citizens / social actors in their daily lives. These logics involve the essence of the know-how of the media, such as formats, content, editing, layout, graphics and infographics, as well as rhythms and discourses that tend to shape, in a cumulative way, in the medium and long term, the citizens' understanding and knowledge of the world. In journalism, more specifically, this process is characterized by affinities with populist tendencies - which optimize journalistic matters and appeal to the audience - and, on the other hand, a propensity to privilege themes of potential impact, such as corruption, or even the use "fake news" as a means of telling a story and beat the competitors.

In short, the commercialization of the media and the hegemony of the great global internet companies (Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Amazon, Alibaba and others) have turned media into active players in deciding the destinies of democracies. The discretionary responses and strategies of democratic institutions to the growing power and independence of the media emphasized their dependence on market forces (audiences, advertisers, sponsors, etc.) and the withdrawal of democratic designs, such as freedom and plurality of expression. Cases of corruption are a good example of how a subject, phenomena or event that meets certain features of newsworthiness - such as social impact, people with power involved, rupture with procedures or conflicts between people, institutions and interests - becomes "raw material" of appreciable value for the media market.

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<sup>5</sup> Andreas Hepp, *Mediatization and the "Moulding Forces" of the Media*, in "Communications", 2012, v. 37, p. 1-28; Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, *Conceptualizing Mediatization: Contexts, Traditions, Arguments*, in "Communication Theory", 2013, v. 23, n° 3, p. 191-202.

## Media and Corruption

In the last decades, corruption has been one of the events which have contributed more to the mediatization of democracy, promoting the disqualification of democratic institutions, especially those of the political and judicial system. Corruption is characterized as an abuse of power for its own benefit and articulates areas of politics, economics, justice and the media<sup>6</sup>. Corruption tends to clarify certain social characteristics because the disclosure of these events makes evident the political and economic inadequacies of society, as well the failures of its agents and institutions, whether public or private. These events have the "capacity" to make visible the weaknesses of democracy, exposing not only the weaknesses of the state, but also the proficiency of institutions and actors in the fields of politics, justice, media, economy and finance<sup>7</sup>.

From the perspective of Blankenburg<sup>8</sup> as well as Johnston<sup>9</sup>, corruption is directly linked to national culture, in particular to how elites relate to the *res publica*. Determinants of the degree and characteristics of corruption in each country or region are the economic and political pressures of international interests - such as investors (majority shareholders), investment funds and multinationals - and the positioning of these countries and regions in the global market. Each country has its own cultural specificity, in addition to factors such as the degree of deepening of democracy, the functioning and transparency of political and social institutions and the capacity and availability of citizen participation and mobilization.

Studies on political corruption often associate this phenomenon with economic, political and social crises, including changes in moral standards<sup>10</sup>. In Europe, as a result of the transformations brought about by globalization in recent decades,

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<sup>6</sup> Erhard Blankenburg, *From Political Clientelism to Outright Corruption - The rise of the Scandal Industry*, in *Political Corruption in transition: a sceptic's handbook*, Kotkin, Stephen and Sajó, Andras (edited by). Budapest, Central European University Press, 2002, p. 149-165.

<sup>7</sup> Veronica Pujas and Martin Rhodes, *Party Finance and Political Scandal in Italy, Spain and France*, in "West European Politics", 1999, vol. 22, n° 3, p. 41-63; Antoine Vauchez, *Le pouvoir judiciaire*, Archives Ouvertes, 2009. Consulted in July 2017 (<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00384034>).

<sup>8</sup> Erhard Blankenburg, *op. cit.* p. 149-165.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power and Democracy*, Cambridge, University Press, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences and Reforms*, Cambridge, University Press, 1999.



major changes have taken place in the business world, with the introduction of a growing climate of great competition and struggle for resources. After the turn of the millennium, economic and financial strategies resulted in a growing decline of capital flows to the countries of southern Europe, particularly in Portugal. At the same time, many European countries were forced to abandon centuries-old protectionist habits, particularly as regards the domestic industry, and to invest in infrastructure (such as rail, airports, telecommunications and postal services) to facilitate the installation of multinational corporations and international trade. The scarcity of funding, namely for the functioning of the political parties associated with the increasing privatization and concentration of economic interests, tends to stimulate illegal appropriation of public resources that emerge in the public sphere in the form of "political corruption scandals." This economic model has cleared the path to a growing interdependence between business and politics, feeding a clientele-based structure.

In Portugal, the relationship between the state, the government and the private sector tends to be characterized by great ambiguity. There is unlimited permeability between public and private interests which add an uninterrupted transit between public offices and CEO, between the exercise of governmental functions, the activity in the public business sector and the representation of the interests of major national and international private groups. The rotation and accumulation of positions and public offices in the various sectors (governmental, public and private), tends to turn public offices into a preliminary stage towards future functions of "trust" in public and private corporations. The same political / professional process also allows the self-capitalization of influence in business and politics. Therefore, political corruption involves a wide range of crimes committed by current or former political agents, which occur mainly in the competition for political positions, as well as in the exercise of public office, in the act of legislating and after the abandonment of governance positions<sup>11</sup>. Corruption cases that have emerged in the last fifteen years in Portugal demonstrate these political and professional trajectories, where major interests arise as active corruptors and

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<sup>11</sup> Erhard Blankenburg, *op. cit.* p. 149.

politicians (or ex-politicians) as passive or corruptors actors. In this dynamic, the state and governments appear as "trading platforms" for economic and financial interests.

### **Corruption Mediatization: concepts and Portuguese examples**

The visibility of issues, events and themes in the public sphere depend on the agenda-setting activity carried out by the media regarding these issues. They only exist if they are present in the media through television news, headlines, opinion, etc. While reviewing the theory of agenda-setting<sup>12</sup>, we stress the idea that the media may not be able to tell people how to think, but is able to tell their readers/ viewers/ listeners what to think about. Agenda studies have consolidated the role of the media as an instrument that can be used strategically by different actors and agents, including politicians. Agenda-setting stresses the media's influence on public opinion through the prominence assigned to a particular topic or event in news, images and messages. Higher prominence is likely to correspond to greater visibility and, therefore, to a selective focus, implying the erasure of other information lacking similar weight. The agenda-setting process thus operates as a routine of deletion and highlighting of themes that may result from an early selection of politically, economic and socially appropriate themes, excluding those that are deemed inconvenient. Lang and Lang<sup>13</sup> argued that it is not sufficient for a subject to be made visible for it to be understood, it is more important the ability of the receivers to understand it, by contextualizing it in their daily lives. For this to happen, the agenda must retain certain continuity, be strengthened by multiple approaches; introduce easily identifiable agents and actors as well as a plausible plot. This agenda-building process is also associated to cycles of attention, i.e., the ability of a topic, event or phenomenon to maintain the public's interest. Cycles of attention tend to be

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<sup>12</sup> Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*, in "The Public Opinion Quartley, vol. 36, n<sup>o</sup>2, Summer 1972, p. 176-187.

<sup>13</sup> Engel Lang Gladys and Kurt Lang, *Watergate: An exploration of the agenda-building process*, in *Mass Communication review yearbook*, Wilhoit, Cleveland and Bock, Harold de (edited by), 1981, vol.2, p. 447-468.

progressively shorter, generating rapid saturation and abandonment. Maintaining the interest of the audience in a given agenda will depend on the ability of the media to improve frameworks and capture the interest of potential consumers.

Theories, concepts and principles described above also allow us to identify certain political communication strategies used in the coverage of corruption, where power struggles between factions and parties are always present. The visibility of political corruption in journalistic coverage depends on internal and external financial and economic trends, and external and internal contexts. The news also depends on the political and economic forces that have access to the public space, as well as on the "airtime" available to the different agents, including pundits.

In contrast, the framing<sup>14</sup> of the analysis of the visibility of political corruption in journalistic coverage allows the media to confer certain continuous and persistent attributes to certain themes. The public highlight assigned to a news story (priming) consists in the selection procedures that the media and journalists use while introducing certain issues into their agenda and identifying the main political actors. Agenda-setting procedures give greater prominence, emphasis or importance to certain themes or political actors and facilitate the internalization of their "projection" by the public opinion, while aggregating around it certain attributes that act as "cognitive shortcuts". For example, the visibility (priming) granted to a certain politician is always associated with specific themes and attributes. Their enunciation leads to the identification of that politician by the citizens; the naming of the politician by the media carries itself, in turn, the themes, cases and attributes that are associated with him.

Another issue to consider is the idea advocated by Entman<sup>15</sup>, that the stories and viewpoints that circulate in the media are produced by top decision-makers, politicians or managers of major economic and financial interests that seek to influence the public opinion in general through other "elite agents" (such as pundits and other opinion leaders). In cases of journalistic coverage of political corruption,

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<sup>14</sup> Dietram Scheufele, *Agenda-Setting, Priming, And Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication*, in "Mass Communication & Society", 2000, vol. 3, p. 297-316.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News; Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign*, Chicago, University Press, 2004.

a greater degree of indecision or disagreement between the "elites" as regards the procedures to be legally and politically adopted results in an increased ability of the media to set the frameworks of these topics. Such indecision also increases the ability of the media to generate parallel and autonomous agendas and to influence the political system and public opinion. In this context, we may reasonably assume that the continuing agenda of political corruption cases incorporate both the "tensions" between "elites" and the possible parallel agendas of the media.

The idea of mediatization has been recovered in the last decade, mainly in Europe, by a group of researchers who attribute to the media a crucial role in globalized societies<sup>16</sup>. This perspective, which should not be confused with mediocentrism, considers that social institutions are more and more subordinated to media logics, especially those of television, and to the mastery of the image over the text (written or oral). These logics involve the essence of the know-how of the media, such as formats, content, editing, layout, graphics and infographics, as well as rhythms and discourses which cumulatively, in the medium and long term, tend to shape the citizens' understanding and knowledge about the world.

The mediatization of corruption's processes in Portugal openly incorporates the "capture of the State" by interests and agents, showing its bankruptcy due to the collapse of its institutions and actors. The earliest cases mediatized and involving prominent politicians date back to the beginning of the millennium. These cases, mostly filed by justice, pointed to crimes against the state, influence peddling, bribery and misappropriation of public benefits. In all these cases, in an obvious or subtle way, national and international interests of large corporations, from real estate to energy and telecommunications, are identified as corruptors. However, the media, particularly television, focuses on the cases and on the political actors, whether they are involved or not, and avoid naming corporations and their CEO. At

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<sup>16</sup> Andreas Hepp, *op. cit.*; Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, *op. cit.*; Sonia Levingstone and Peter Lunt, Mediatization: an emerging paradigm for media and communication studies, in *Mediatization of Communication, Handbooks of Communication Science* (21), K. Lundby (edited by), Mouton Berlin De Gruyter, 2014, p. 703-724; Jasper Stromback, (2011) *Mediatization and perceptions of the Media's Political Influence*, in "Journalism Studies", 2011, v.12, p. 423-439.

the same time, democratic institutions are being discredited, with special emphasis on parliament and judicial institutions.

We point out that Portuguese people watch television for a daily average of about 3 hours and 45 minutes, which makes it the citizens' most-used medium for information consumption. The visibility and mediatization strategies used by the media, notably television and online news sites, replicated in social networks, have a considerable impact on citizens' perception of democracy, as we can observe in International Transparency Reports and Eurostat Barometers.

The most common mediatization strategy is the visibility given to corruption issues. This can happen from the continuous and exhaustive repetition of information, from the prolonged time display of the same television frame or from the use of a decontextualized photography in the newspaper.

The mediatization of the detention of former Portuguese Prime Minister José Sócrates demonstrates the visibility given to the corruption of politicians. News frames repetition, television directs and newspaper highlights, replicated in the online sites and in the social networks, constituted the agenda of the informative space for weeks. For example, on the weekend of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2014, after the arrest of the ex-Prime Minister on suspicion of crimes of corruption, tax fraud and money laundering, the media made extensive coverage of the matter. According to MediaMonitor's Clipping service analysis<sup>17</sup>,

“In just two days, about 3,000 news items related to the former Prime Minister were released...Television and the digital media were the ones that were more attentive to the subject, dedicating to him more than a thousand journalistic pieces each. In the press, this subject motivated 69 news stories with a total of 63 pages, equivalent to tabloid. On TV, the subject was exposed for about 70 hours, while on radio it motivated 13 hours of information”.

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<sup>17</sup> “José Sócrates motivates more than 11 thousand news in 9 days”. Consulted in July 2017. <http://www.marktest.com/wap/a/n/id~1e29.aspx>

Figure 3 - Arrest of former Prime Minister José Sócrates “It was on his arrival in Lisbon from Paris, on the night flight, that José Sócrates was arrested” (11/22/2014)



Source: SIC Television (11/22/2014, at 00.47 a.m.)

Figure 4 - “Sócrates (former Portuguese Prime-Minister) arrested in the airport” (12/22/2014)



Source: Front page of the daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã* (12/22/2014)

Another element of mediatization is the use of infographics, which can appear in the press, on television, in online news sites or even in social networks. The infographics arise to fix perceptions of relationships between elements, aiming to shape interrelated networks, and are an imagistic tool to suggest and conduct readings. For many journalists and academics, infographics is not only a way to make the information appealing, but also a way to present contextualized and complex information, although they admit that total understanding involves sophisticated

literacy skills<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, as suggested in the studies on the mediatization of politics<sup>19</sup>, the description and network representation of corruption phenomena in texts and infographics constitute a contribution to the consolidation of "knowledge" and the construction of a "public opinion" on corruption and democracy.

One of the cases that most stimulated the use of infographics in Portuguese journalism was the connection between corruption cases in Portugal and Brazil. These cases were investigated in the so-called *Marquês* case<sup>20</sup> (where a former Portuguese prime minister is involved) and *Lava Jato*<sup>21</sup> (where the former president of Brazil is involved).

The example was published on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2015, in *Semanário Sol*, with the title "Brazilian scheme arrived in Portugal by diplomatic bag". Signed by Carlos Diogo Santos, the news seeks to summarize the various relations between the *Lava Jato* case and the *Marquês* case and is organized according to the lead:

"Brazil has sent a request for international aid to Lisbon in the context of the largest money laundering in that country's history - *Lava Jato*. The letter rogatory sent to the Attorney General's Office (PGR) officialized what has long been known: the mega processes of the two countries are interconnected".

The news emphasizes that the investigations in both countries are directly interconnected and are centered on the Odebrecht Company — which is involved in the *Lava Jato* case in Brazil — and its associates in Portugal. The corruption scheme

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<sup>18</sup> Gray Jonathan, Chambers Lucy and Bounegru Liliane, *The Data Journalism Handbook*, Beijing/Cambridge, O'Reilly Media, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Stromback Jasper, *op. cit.* p. 423-439.

<sup>20</sup> The *Marquês* (Marquis) case, which is still ongoing, is an investigation of a supposed scheme of corruption, money laundering and influence peddling, involving former Socialist Prime Minister José Sócrates, as well as the banker Ricardo Salgado (BES), CEO of Portuguese corporations with state participation. At the center of the investigation are the 23 million euros collected in Switzerland in accounts of a businessman and best friend of the former Prime Minister (PM), transferred to Portugal between 2004 and 2011. The PM and others involved were accused in 2017.

<sup>21</sup> The *Lava Jato* (Car Wash) case, running in Brazil, began with the investigation of a scheme of fraud and misappropriation of the state-owned company Petrobras for the illegal financing of political parties and politicians. According to the federal police and the courts, company directors appointed by political parties favored several builders through huge over-invoiced contracts. Part of the amount was allocated by the companies benefiting politicians, parties and individuals responsible for getting the money through.

in Brazil, investigated in the *Lava Jato* case, centered on the state-owned oil company Petrobras, involved bribes paid to managers of the Brazilian oil company by a Portuguese bank – the BANIF, subsequently intervened by the Portuguese state<sup>22</sup> - as well as by Brazilian construction companies and Portuguese telecommunication companies. It should be noted that this process included influence peddling, money laundering and crimes against the state. The news discourse is centered, respectively, on the former Portuguese Socialist Prime Minister and on the former president of Brazil of the Workers' Party (PT). Also noteworthy is the involvement of ex-ministers, administrators of private companies (constructors and a pharmaceutical company) and Portuguese and Brazilian state companies, as well as offshores and two Portuguese banks collapsed between 2014 and 2015 (BANIF and BES)<sup>23</sup>.

This representation of graphic information often distorts, eliminates or simplifies elements which would allow the contextualizing of the facts. On the other hand, putting the faces of politicians in the center of the infographics and erasing the responsible and corrupting corporations tends to set up the perception of the process.

## Conclusions

The power of the mainstream media and information technologies, mainly the big technological companies, has increased exponentially and is out of the control of the democratic society, since the existing legislation is not able to regulate its activities. Globalized economic and financial interests assume a growing and privileged role in

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<sup>22</sup> BANIF (Banco Internacional do Funchal): In December 2015, BANIF was intervened by the Portuguese State. Under this process, assets considered of good quality were sold to the Spanish Bank Santander Totta. The business involved a total of € 2.25 billion in public support, of which € 1,766 billion were directly covered by the state.

<sup>23</sup> BES (Banco Espírito Santo) is a private bank founded in 1836 that has coexisted with the various Portuguese political regimes ever since. In 2013, losses above EUR 95 billion in the balance sheet and irregularities in the accounts were disclosed. In July 2014 the president, the banker Ricardo Salgado, was removed and replaced by a president appointed by the government. The BES license was canceled and the New Bank created. Thousands of shareholders were hampered by the separation between a Good Bank (New Bank) and Bad Bank (toxic assets and debt).



the mainstream media, through participation and ownership, and in the social media, through the use of algorithmic coding. Big Technological corporations use Media and digital media, and synergies between both, leading to the collection of large data and the construction of databases. Mathematical expressions, algorithms such as boots and others code processing, are used to produce automatic news and format contents, such "fake news" that threaten democracies, since there is no verification of sources or the right to a fair hearing.

In recent years, in Portugal and other countries, corruption has been a commodity of great economic and symbolic value to global economic and financial interests, weakening democracy, institutions and agents. Corruption exists and is a crime to be fought, but it is not a raw material to weaken democracy. The causes of corruption in democracy are identified and are situated in the political, financial and judicial systems. In the political system, the emphasis is on parties financing, on the practices of political patronage and on the rotation of agents in economic and political positions, as well as on the interdependence of the three previous systems. Practices that foster corruption are identified in the economic and financial system, such as privatization and nationalization, as well as companies with public and private responsibility. In the judicial system, the gap between the criminal framework and new crimes of "white collar", as well as the existence of effective instruments of control and dissuasion, are relevant to corruption. Moreover, the cultural system also contributes effectively to the way societies look at corruption, namely where *familiarism*, nepotism and influence peddling make public opinion complacent.

Combating the phenomena of corruption requires the involvement of society and the media in civic and cultural pedagogy. For this to happen, changes to the party system and attention to the forms of party and candidate funding are needed. It is also necessary to modernize the legislation on economic crimes, in particular on illicit enrichment, and to criminalize these crimes. Moreover, the economic structure of the state should be separated from its private structure, and vigilance on CEO who transit between these sectors should be increased.

The use of mediatization strategies in corruption reinforces what we initially stated: the media is a privileged actor in democracy by setting (by the agenda-setting and

priming process) and formatting (by framing) the facts or events that must be erased or have visibility. At the same time, corruption, especially when involving politicians, becomes an added-value matter (theme) that tends to weaken democracy. Mediatization strategies emphasize the constant and repetitive visualization of complex contents, the continuous presentation of the same political actors - through the repetition of the same images - framed by negative and hatred discourses which instigate extreme emotions, Manichaeian views of the world, and, finally, to the neglect of the emotions of social and democratic institutions<sup>24</sup>.

The global crisis of journalism, resulting from the technological changes and media business model, has increased the precariousness of journalists and the limitations to investigative journalism. Mediatization processes have been installed in journalism, mainly in journalistic coverage of issues of great impact on public opinion, such as corruption. In Portugal, given the constraints of media ownership and the political orientation of newsrooms, corruption tends to focus on complaints of illegal acts and political actors, forgetting corporations and their interests. Journalism tends to resort to anonymous sources, official and unofficial sources, and information leaks within the judicial system. The news media seldom invests in self-research, and when it does, it privileges media coverage, stressing elements of entertainment and spectacle. These characteristics are enhanced in social networks and online journalism, taking into account the role of algorithms and the data accumulation (big data).

Minimizing the damage caused to democracy by the mediatization of corruption involves, on the one hand, autonomous journalistic coverage of judicial investigation, using plural sources, identification of the judicial phases of cases of corruption and characterization of those illegal acts. On the other hand, it is for democratic institutions and citizens to develop programs on media literacy that emphasize a pedagogy on democracy and against corruption.

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<sup>24</sup> Giampietro Mazzoleni, *Populism and the Media*, in: *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Specter of Western European Democracy*, Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (edited by), Basingstoke and New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 49-64.