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**Angolan Politics and the Portuguese Press.
Media-politics interaction in a context of political crisis***

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to examine the role of the Portuguese press in Angolan political dynamics during 1991/1992 and in the political relations between Portugal and Angola at two main levels: the effects of press on political decision-making and on political action and the ways political actors use the media.

In order to fulfill these objectives I interviewed about 20 Portuguese and Angolan political decision-makers, diplomats and journalists, and analyzed around 200 news articles. The views of those politicians and journalists about the interaction between media and politics will be presented in the paper.

Keywords: media; politics; Angola; Portuguese press

The Angolan Politics and the Portuguese Press

Media-politics interactions in a context of political crisis

This paper focuses on the interactions between the media and policy processes. The relation between media and politics has been frequently and thoroughly studied. The originality of this study lies in the fact that the foreign and not the national press was examined in its relation to politics. I have studied the role of the media of one country - Portugal - for the domestic and foreign politics of another country - Angola.

The goals of this paper are the following:

- 1 - examining the perceptions of Angolan and Portuguese politicians and of Portuguese journalists regarding the interactions between media and policy processes in a specific context;
- 2 - evaluating the applicability of P. O'Heffernan's model to the situation I have examined;
- 3 - discussing the validity of the model of "agenda-setting" to examine and conceptualize media effects.

Angola was a Portuguese colony until 1975. It received many cultural influences from Portugal, the language being, no doubt, the most important. Many ties between the two countries remain in the present.

Since its independence, the country has been stricken by a civil war led by the two main political movements: MPLA (Movimento para a Libertação de Angola), the ruling power with historical ties to the Soviet Union and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola), traditionally supported by the USA.

Angola went through dramatic events during 1991-1992, the period of time that was considered for this analysis: war, peace negotiations, the Bicesse Agreement (a major peace agreement), transition to peace and democracy, general elections for government and presidency, and the re-starting of war.

I interviewed about 20 Portuguese and Angolan political decision-makers, diplomats and journalists in order to examine their views of the role of

Portuguese press in Angolan political dynamics during this period of political crisis and/or war, and in the political relations between Portugal and Angola.

I

In the first part of this paper I am going to present the perception of the politicians and journalists I interviewed about some general consequences and ways of interaction between the Portuguese press and the Angolan politics.

In the perception of the politicians and the journalists that were interviewed the Portuguese press is an important tool of domestic and foreign politics for both of the main Angolan political movements. Angolan domestic politics takes place in multiple levels - inside and outside the country. Portugal is, undoubtedly, one of the principle stages abroad. The Portuguese press permitted the amplification and the internationalization of Angolan domestic issues.

O'Heffernan (1991) mentioned that for the United States the domestication of foreign policy was a transformation introduced by the media into the policy process. In the situation that I analyzed, the opposite effect occurs - a process of internationalization of domestic problems, by media's influence, and due to their use by political actors.

The media, specially the Portuguese and the American (see Windrich, 1992) have modified the structure of information flows between Angola and other countries. In many aspects, the media have overcome the diplomatic channels, diffusing information and mediating negotiations.

At the same time, the Portuguese media have elevated the status of national and international public opinion, in the Angolan conflict, inducing some changes in the political practices of its political agents (for instance leading to more moderate discourses about the political opposition). Angolan politicians have become more conscious of the international public opinion and their international image.

Simultaneously, the same media have been used to reach that foreign public opinion and to create international support.

The use of the media may have increased the negotiating and demanding power of the parties, mainly of UNITA in the view of the Portuguese politicians and journalists.

In a context of national conflict, UNITA, as a movement opposed to the holder of the political power, tried to have some expression in foreign media, promoting its causes and exerting pressure on domestic problems.

Given the clear political manipulation of the media in Angola, the Portuguese newspapers were preferred by the Angolan political actors to make important declarations or denunciations, as they were viewed as more credible news outlets. In what I have termed a "boomerang effect", Angolan political actors intended to cause an impact in their own country.

For Angolan issues, the Portuguese press is an international reference in the sense that it influences the coverage of Angola by many foreign media. This reinforced its strategic importance for Angolan politicians.

In the first part of this paper, we can conclude that most of Angolan and Portuguese political actors and journalists that were interviewed believe that the Portuguese press has been an important arena for Angolan domestic politics and that it has also played a significant role in Angolan foreign policy making (in relation to Portugal and to other countries) and in Portuguese foreign policy making (in relation to Angola).

II

In a second part of the paper I will compare the "Insiders Model" of P. O'Heffernan with the perceptions of the individuals I interviewed. Intending to update the classical work of B. Cohen (1963, *The Press and Foreign Policy*), O'Heffernan interviewed American policy-makers, concerning American foreign politics between 1977 and 1988. In 1991, O'Heffernan presents a theoretical model that is based on the perspectives of the politicians he interviewed. This is the reason the author calls it "Insiders' Model" - of those who are inside the policy processes.

Media-politics interactions are considered at two main levels:

- 1 - influence of the media on political decision-making and on political action;
- 2 - uses of the media by political actors. Politicians use the media to reach two types of public: the general public (where "public opinion" forms) and a specific public - the other political actors, who they want to influence. O'Heffernan speaks here of the "media as political outputs".

In this part, I will also consider the several stages of political decision-making and the role of the media in each stage. To that purpose it is useful to recall the moments of the decision-making process pointed out by James Anderson (1975):

1. Problem formation
2. Formulation
3. Adoption
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation

Going back to O'Heffernan, my inquiry, which, unlike O'Heffernan's, only focused on the press and not the other media, led to the identification of some differences in relation to his model.

The first part of O'Heffernan's model is presented below.

Insider's Model of Media-Influenced Foreign Policy - 1st part

A. Media Influence Inside the Policy Process

1. Media inform policy choices
2. Media can define acceptable policy performance
3. Media affect agency attention to goals
4. Media constrain government's options
5. Media set the pace of policy (fast-forward effect)

As for the influence of the press in policy processes, the appreciations of the political actors and journalists I interviewed, coincided to a large extent with O'Heffernan's formulation. Those persons identified almost all forms of media influence over the political sphere described by O'Heffernan. However, other modes of media influence were also singled out, from which I would highlight one, mentioned by the journalists. It is mainly connected to the stage of adoption (of an answer/solution for a public problem), the most determinant stage of the process. The media are classified, in some situations, as impelling forces towards the political action. In some cases, according to the journalists, the media drive the attention of politicians to the problems (first stage) and induce the political decision-makers to opt for a certain solution for those problems. If confirmed, this would represent an important power of the media.

Concerning the use of the press by political actors, the conclusions of this study present several differences in relation to O'Heffernan's model.

Insider's Model of Media-Influenced Foreign Policy - 2nd part

B. Media As Governmental Output

Chief's Use of Media as Output

1. To keep options open while establishing agenda priorities in government (prenegotiations in the media, media as trial balloon)
2. To create domestic support for issues and policy priorities
3. To signal other nations on U.S. policy and build support internationally

Staffers Use of Media as Output

1. To build support for their policies and undercut competing initiatives
2. To create the political climate estimated for success

Implementers' Media Outputs

1. To get Chief's attention and add or change Chief's agendas
2. To alter the political environment and build confidence for solutions
3. To stake out positions for solutions

A large number of the uses of the media that O'Heffernan mentioned were directed towards the political activity of the agents of that use themselves (that is of the politicians that used the press). In the case I studied, I noticed that the use of media as a political output aimed at obtaining effects over other parties - over the adversary inside the same political system, or over actors of other political systems.

For this study, we can state that, globally, in the relations that the politicians maintain with other politicians through the media, an "agenda-setting" function was identified, something new in relation to O'Heffernan. The politicians use the press to constitute problems - determine the problems in which the other politicians must think and act; to define the relative stand of a problem in a hierarchical scale; and to set the pace of policy - to set a deadline for the action of the aimed party. I will come back to the agenda-setting effect.

Besides what was mentioned, the politicians act, through the press, on the formulation and adoption of answers by other political actors. They close their range of options, forcing them into a certain option. By publicizing political

facts through the media, they force the adversary to take or not to take a certain decision or make it irreversible.

This effect may, as I mentioned, be pursued by other political systems (political spheres of other countries), such as was the case of Portugal in relation to Angola.

On the other hand, political actors, besides using the press to build support for their positions and interests, use it to create opposition towards the adversary, damaging their public image. In this way, they can affect the answers of the public and even of other political systems.

The political agents that I inquired also admitted to producing media outputs to interfere with the rhythm of political activity of the other parties - to accelerate it (O'Heffernan mentions a "fast-forward effect") or to slow it down, refraining political action.

In conclusion, for my domain of study, the research that I undertook points to the need of adjusting and completing O'Heffernan's model.

If compared to a certain stereotype of the American media as having a large power and a large capacity of penetration in the political sphere (at least, their domestic policy), it is surprising that some similarities have been identified between the Angolan and Portuguese realities and the American reality described by O'Heffernan, and moreover, that some new forms of interpenetration between the political and media systems were detected. One major difference between the two studies is the fact that O'Heffernan examines the American media in relation to American foreign policies and I have examined the Portuguese press in relation to Angolan domestic and foreign policies. Another major difference consists in the domestic context of Angola, where two major political and military movements have battled for power both at the national and international levels.

Studies about the impact of the media in the decision-making processes have located media influence, in a predominant or even exclusive way, in the two first stages - identification of problems and formulation of answers. The influence of the media would be more potent when issues are framed and be reduced when the issue has been developed.

The perception of both the politicians and the journalists interviewed in this study substantially diverges from the above-mentioned conclusions. They located the intervention of the press, mainly, in the central stage of the decision-making process - adoption of answers (mainly the journalists) and in the final stages - implementation and, specially, evaluation (mainly the politicians).

The Angolan political actors also considered that the use of the press was stronger in the stage of evaluation of the political action.

I underline that I am reporting the perceptions of both policy-makers and journalists. I am not evaluating effective influences, but personal views of those influences.

III

This study is also concerned with the "agenda-setting" effect. I first tried to evaluate perceptions of the policy agenda-setting effect (that is, the impact of the media in the political agenda). Second, when I tried to identify the forms of press use by the political actors, as a political output, I have mainly considered the media agenda-setting effect, politics being only one of the several spheres that try to define the media's agenda. Simultaneously, public agenda-setting (effect in the public's issue priorities) and policy agenda-setting (on political agendas) are involved in the use of press by politicians.

An evaluation of the applicability of the model of "agenda-setting" and of its expandability is the central purpose of the third part of this paper.

Both politicians and journalists have identified an effect of media representations on evaluations, hence on opinions. My point here would be whether or not this fits in with the agenda-setting model. McCombs, one of its founders, has recently defended a broad conception of agenda-setting that would subsume the influence on perspectives and evaluations.

"How a communicator frames an issue sets an agenda of attributes and can influence how we think about it. Agenda setting is a process that can affect both what to think about it and how to think about it." (McCombs, 1992:62).

Also, beyond the fundamental cognitive influence of the media in all the stages of the decision process, my study suggests that the media may have important behavioral effects. Due to media pressure, politicians have often to decide to act and to act in a certain way.

McCombs would label this effect as agenda-setting. In my perspective the transmission of saliences, which is the conceptual basis of agenda-setting, cannot explain the complex processes of opinions and behaviors. Quoting Kosicki (1993:108), "Agendas, no matter how broadly defined, are not enough."

I think that research on media effects has to be intertheoretical and interdisciplinary, given the complexity of its object of study.

Intended media effects have been lately abandoned by research. I think this type of effects should be reexamined.

One last point is the length of time considered for the agenda-setting effect. Research has been focusing on the long-term media effects, giving less importance to short-term effects. My study emphasizes short-term media effects on a specific public - politicians. Shouldn't they deserve a new consideration by researchers?

The agenda-setting model cannot remain limited to the conception of a simple causal relation that characterized its first formulations. It has to be reviewed at several levels. It must be conceived as contingent - depending on a set of circumstances of different types. On the other hand, this model must consider the conclusions of other research streams.

Final considerations

The goal of this paper was not to prove the occurrence of effects between media and politics but to examine the perceptions of politicians and journalists about them. Perceptions of past events are a framing structure for new initiatives and for the interpretation of acts of others. Thus, I think their study matters.

Studies about media and politics have led to conclusions that are sometimes radically opposed, the media being characterized as either an autonomous power in present societies or as an arbitrary tool in the hands of political actors. In my opinion the media have both roles - they are important participants in the political processes but are also used as political resources.

It is crucial to pursue research on forms of interaction between media and politics. It is necessary to enlarge the object of analysis - which should be not only the national but also the foreign media. Foreign media systems, as my study has shown, are sometimes as important and instrumental to political systems as national ones.

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