

## Media systems and anti-system media in Brazil

*Sistemas mediáticos y*

*medios antisistema en Brasil*

*Sistemas de mídia e mídia*

*antissistema no Brasil*

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Over the past 20 years, the analytical framework proposed by Hallin and Mancini has influenced studies on media systems worldwide, being applied in contexts and conditions quite different from those in which it was originally formulated. To what extent does this theoretical framework continue to explain a world that is very different from the one in which it was conceived? Based on the Brazilian case, this study proposes to consider the problem of anti-system media and suggests that the characteristics of each country's media system influence the way anti-system forces develop within it.

**KEYWORDS:** Media systems, Brazil, anti-system media, right-wing.

*En los últimos 20 años el marco analítico propuesto por Hallin y Mancini influyó en los estudios sobre los sistemas de medios en todo el mundo, aplicándose en lugares y condiciones muy diferentes a aquellas en las que fue formulado. ¿En qué medida este marco teórico sigue explicando un mundo muy diferente de aquel en el que fue concebido? Basado en el caso brasileño, se propone considerar el problema de los medios antisistema y sugiere que las características del sistema mediático de cada país inciden en la forma en que se desarrollan al interior de los mismos las fuerzas antisistema.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Sistemas mediáticos, Brasil, medios antisistema, derechas.

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Sistemas de mídia, Brasil, mídia antissistema, direita.

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## INTRODUCTION

The book *Comparing Media Systems* (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) turned twenty last year. Its central argument is that media systems are structured and interact with political forces in different ways across the world. The authors propose that it is possible to identify relatively coherent patterns of media organization across different societies, allowing for the classification of distinct media system models. The book's original focus was on Western countries: the United States, Canada, and Western European nations. Since its publication, however, the framework has faced the dual challenge of expanding beyond its initial geographical scope and rethinking the historical conditions under which it was first developed.

At the time Hallin and Mancini formulated their argument, the assumption that Western media systems rested on stable foundations appeared self-evident. This no longer seems to be the case. The rise of far-right forces with little commitment to liberal democratic institutions has introduced an element of uncertainty and presents a significant challenge to their theoretical model.

This article seeks to examine the problem of anti-system media (and politics) through the lens of Hallin and Mancini's framework. The authors introduced the concept of "system" to explore how media are organized within a given context and how they interact with political institutions in a limited number of societies. In their original conception, the distinction between analog and digital media was not considered relevant, a difference that has since become less significant, as even originally analog media now circulate in digital environments. Therefore, the media considered in this article include both analog media that have migrated to digital platforms and digital-native media, mainly within the realm of alternative media.

We suggest that the characteristics of a country's or region's media system shape the way anti-system forces emerge and develop within it. Our analysis focuses specifically on the Brazilian case. Previous studies have pointed to the disproportionate political role played by traditional media in Brazil, which are often perceived as political actors in their

own right. As a result, depending on the configuration of political forces, these media can either act as stabilizing agents or as drivers of governmental destabilization.

The phenomenon of anti-system media has drawn increasing attention worldwide, yet much of the debate remains centered on Western examples (particularly Western Europe) (Henriksen, 2024; Holt, 2018; Schwarzenegger, 2021). In these contexts, anti-system media are typically associated with political actors who oppose not only rival parties, but also the foundational principles of the political system as a whole. In Western settings, this anti-system role tends to be occupied by fringe media organizations. But how relevant is this framework to understand other societies? We argue that the concept of media systems provides a useful tool for approaching this question. If media systems differ from one another, then the definition and expression of what constitutes an anti-system force should also vary.

This article explores the hypothesis that Brazil's media system has itself become permeated by anti-system logic. Contrary to the assumptions of Western orthodoxy, traditional media in Brazil have played a prominent role as agents of political destabilization. Throughout the 2010s, these outlets radicalized their anti-system stance in a concerted effort to remove the Workers' Party (PT) –which had held the presidency since 2003– from power by any means necessary. This effort laid the conditions for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 (van Dijk, 2017) and the imprisonment of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2018 (Gagliardi et al., 2022).

It was in this context that far-right political forces and media outlets found fertile ground to expand. When Jair Bolsonaro assumed the presidency in 2019, he lacked both a solid party base and an established network of far-right media. His rise took place amid a broader crisis of democracy, ironically enabled, in large part, by institutions and actors ostensibly tasked with defending it.

If media systems differ from one another, then the definition and expression of what constitutes an anti-system force should also vary. These outlets regarded traditional media as part of the same establishment as the center-left forces that had governed before. Throughout Bolsonaro's presidency, far-right media operated as part of a systematic

assault on democratic institutions, relying heavily on disinformation and hate speech to advance their agenda.

### COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS: TWENTY YEARS LATER

The publication of *Comparing Media Systems* two decades ago marked a turning point in comparative media studies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For the first time, the book offered the promise of an analytical framework with broad applicability, grounded in empirically derived categories rather than normative assumptions.

Hallin and Mancini chose to focus their analysis on a limited group of developed democratic countries located in North America and Western Europe. Their methodological strategy was to adopt a “most similar systems” approach, aiming to reduce the number of analytical variables and allow for deeper engagement with the subject matter. Specifically, the authors proposed four analytical dimensions to assess media systems: 1) the development of media markets, 2) the degree of political parallelism, 3) the development of journalistic professionalism, and 4) the degree of state intervention in the media system. Based on these dimensions, they identified three models of media systems: the liberal model, encompassing primarily Anglophone countries (United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Ireland); the democratic corporatist model, associated with countries in central and northern Western Europe; and the polarized pluralist model, characteristic of Southern European countries.

A different concern arose regarding the applicability of the *Comparing Media Systems* framework beyond its original scope. One of the earliest efforts in this direction was the volume *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, co-edited by Hallin and Mancini (2011), which brought together contributions from researchers examining cases such as Russia (Vartanova, 2011), South Africa (Hadland, 2011), China (Zhao, 2011), and Israel (Peri, 2011).

The original models proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) did not include Latin America in their analysis, although other scholars have pointed to similarities between media systems in the region and the polarized pluralist model (Azevedo, 2006; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos,

2002; Porto, 2007). Since then, Latin American scholars have begun engaging more directly with the framework, and two key contributions deserve special attention.

The first is the proposal by Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014) of a specifically Latin American media system model: the captured liberal model. The term suggests that, in the authors' view, Latin American media systems align more closely with the liberal model than with the polarized pluralist one. What defines this Latin American model as liberal, and why do the authors describe it as "captured"? Its liberal character stems from the historical predominance of private and commercial media –across print, radio, and television– throughout the region. Moreover, Latin American media regulations formally resemble those found in the United States. The "captured" aspect of the model draws from economic literature, describing how regulatory agencies become controlled by the very actors they are meant to regulate, thus rendering them ineffective. According to Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014), the Latin American media system suffers from severe regulatory inefficiencies, resulting in extreme concentration of media ownership. This issue worsened in the wake of neoliberal reforms, which allowed dominant media conglomerates "to expand their power and face even fewer constraints from national forces by capitalizing on more lax regulation" (p. 1).

The second perspective focuses specifically on the media-politics relationship in Brazil. Albuquerque (2011) argues that Brazil's mainstream media plays a far more active role than what is observed in any of the three models proposed by Hallin and Mancini. He grounds this claim in a unique interpretation of the concept of the Fourth Estate, drawing from the idea of a "moderating power". In this view, major media outlets position themselves as arbitrators between political rivals and even between the three constitutional powers. In later works, Albuquerque notes that the traditional media have tended to portray left-leaning governments, particularly from the center-left, as populist and hostile to democracy (Albuquerque & Gagliardi, 2020). According to Albuquerque (2011, 2013a), this media behavior significantly diverges from what Hallin and Mancini refer to as "political parallelism". Under political parallelism, media outlets play a relatively passive role,

reflecting political positions that originate within the political field. In Brazil, however, traditional media often assert an independent political role and actively shape the political agenda of certain political forces. These outlets frequently portray media regulation initiatives as inherently authoritarian, potentially undermining democratic institutions. Other scholars have observed similar patterns in the relationship between dominant media and left-leaning governments across the region (Kitzberger, 2022; Kitzberger & Schuliaquer, 2022; Lupien, 2013).

Despite their conceptual differences, all of these analyses reveal systemic characteristics shared by media-politics relations across Latin America: high levels of media concentration (Becerra & Mastrini, 2009), resistance to regulatory frameworks, and a strong pattern of political interference –even to the point of contributing to institutional crises (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014; Hallin et al., 2025).

#### MEDIA SYSTEMS AND ANTI-SYSTEM MEDIA

This paper argues that it is necessary to consider the concept of “system” more carefully in order to assess the relevance of the model proposed by Hallin and Mancini to address the phenomenon of anti-system media. It is worth noting that in their book, Hallin and Mancini (2004) provide a rigorous definition of what they understand by “system” or “media system”, and the implications of its use as an analytical tool. However, it should also be noted that in a recent text, Hallin (2020) updated the concept of media systems to address issues such as the emergence of digital media and the transformations in the political and media landscapes of the countries analyzed in the original study. In this text, Hallin incorporated new dimensions into the concept of the system, which help explain recent changes. Drawing on Lazlo’s work, he identified three fundamental characteristics that define a system: irreducibility, boundary maintenance, and autopoiesis, that is, the system’s ability to redefine itself in response to its environment. This last dimension is particularly relevant to the issue at hand.

The concept of system has a long history in the social sciences and communication studies. Simply put, systems theory is primarily concerned with understanding the relationship between the whole and

its parts. In the social sciences and communication studies, the use of systems theory has been associated with functionalist perspectives or developments derived from them (Luhmann, 1995; Parsons, 2005). The systemic approach is particularly effective in describing how the elements of a system interact with one another in specific contexts and tends to emphasize elements of stability over transformation in the objects it analyzes.

The post-World War II period was particularly promising for the systemic perspective on social phenomena. This was especially true for Western industrialized countries, such as those analyzed in *Comparing Media Systems*. In the United States, the so-called “Cold War consensus” established common elements on the political agenda of both major parties. In Western Europe, a multiparty agreement with centripetal characteristics laid the foundations for a stable political order. An additional factor of stability concerns the role the state assumed as the organizer of national media systems across different countries. The term “media systems” has been used since the end of World War II to describe the various models of media organization present in these countries (Hardy, 2008).

The notion of systems is central to the analytical model of political parties proposed by Giovanni Sartori (1976/2005). Originally published in 1976, his book *Parties and Party Systems* argues that a systemic approach provides a privileged analytical perspective on political parties and maintains that, from an etymological standpoint, the word “party” is related to “part”, derived from the Latin *partire* (p. 4). From this understanding follows the idea that, to comprehend the role political parties play in the political order, they must be seen as parts of a whole, and the way these parts interact (interplay) with one another must be examined (p. 23). Reference to Sartori’s work is particularly relevant to this paper’s argument, as it serves as a theoretical bridge for both the literature on media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and on anti-system parties (Capoccia, 2002).

Hallin and Mancini expand on Sartori’s original argument by incorporating the media into the equation. The three models they propose –liberal, democratic-corporatist, and polarized pluralist–

strongly correlate with Sartori's three types of party systems typically found in democracies: two-party, moderate pluralist, and polarized pluralist systems. Capoccia (2002), in turn, focuses on the concept of anti-systemness as a central element in Sartori's theory. According to him, anti-system parties are characterized by two main features: 1) their distance from other parties within the system, and 2) their opposition to the fundamental values underpinning a given political regime (p. 14).

Anti-system parties have attracted increasing attention over the past two decades, particularly in response to the rise of the alt-right in global politics. The terms of this debate have been largely shaped by the experience of Western European countries—which have also influenced the academic discourse on political parties more broadly—and then applied to other parts of the world.

More recently, this debate has expanded to examine the role of the media in either sustaining or challenging the (liberal) democratic order (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). From this article's perspective, Holt's (2018) contribution is especially noteworthy. In his book *Right-Wing Alternative Media*, he adopts Capoccia's model to describe the different stages of anti-systemness that media outlets can exhibit. Other scholars have highlighted the anti-democratic potential of right-wing alternative media. In all such cases, these actors operate at the margins of the system and are portrayed as threats to liberal democracies.

However, these analyses do not encompass the full spectrum of political and anti-system media possibilities. In other parts of the world, experience shows that threats to democracy may also emerge from actors traditionally situated at the political center, including segments of the political elite. Latin America's long history of democratic breakdowns through *coups d'état* offers robust evidence in this regard. In many instances, sectors of the political elite and major media conglomerates have mobilized against institutional order when their interests are directly challenged (Alvear & Lugo-Ocando, 2016; Damgaard, 2018; Mastrini et al., 2021). To justify such actions, they portray the established order as being under threat from radical forces and position themselves as bulwarks against this perceived danger. When this occurs, the defeat of political adversaries does not necessarily result in the ascension of elite-aligned allies. At times, forces previously marginal-



ized within political life prove capable of gaining significant power in contexts where democratic institutions are weakened.

From this, one can conclude that no single theoretical model can fully capture the dynamics of politics and media. The actors who seek to disrupt the established order, and the strategies they employ, vary according to specific political and media contexts. In short, any definition of media and anti-system politics must consider the structural features of the media systems in each country or region.

#### COMMUNICATION MEDIA AS A DESTABILIZING FORCE: MAJOR BRAZILIAN MEDIA AGAINST THE WORKERS' PARTY (PT) GOVERNMENTS

Although several representatives of the mainstream press supported the outbreak of *coups d'état* in Latin America (Alvear & Lugo-Ocando, 2016; Mastrini et al., 2021; Porto, 2012), the end of a long period of dictatorial regimes gave way to expectations of a more democratic role for the media. Once the external restrictions imposed by the context were lifted, a wave of optimism took hold, marked by the emergence of new media outlets and faith in their democratic potential.

Since Brazil's redemocratization after more than two decades of military rule (1964-1985), the media have played a central role in electoral processes. For a long time, the bias in this mediation between political projects and society was evident, and the most emblematic case was the editing of an electoral debate in 1989 between the candidates Fernando Collor de Mello and Lula da Silva, broadcast by TV Globo. The version aired on *Jornal Nacional* highlighted Collor's best and most assertive moments, while showcasing Lula's weakest ones, in which he appeared defensive (Albuquerque, 2013b; Porto, 2012).

After 1989, the following six presidential elections were dominated by the rivalry between the two main parties in the Brazilian political scene at the time: the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB)<sup>4</sup> and the Workers' Party (PT). In 1994 and 1998, Fernando Henrique

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<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the PSDB lost its leading role in the presidential elections and lost ground to other parties.

Cardoso, from PSDB, won the elections with broadly favorable media coverage (Porto, 2012). In 2002, the media provided a more balanced coverage of the elections, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the Workers' Party (PT), emerged victorious (Miguel, 2003). In the three subsequent elections, the media returned to their pattern of favorable coverage towards PSDB, but this did not prevent Lula from being re-elected in 2006, nor Dilma Rousseff from winning two consecutive elections in 2010 and 2014.

In 2005, the case known as “Mensalão” broke out, involving an alleged bribery scheme supporting the PT coalition government. Although it was hailed, especially by the media, as a turning point in the fight against corruption in Brazil, this episode marked the beginning of continuous and growing negative coverage directed at the party and, above all, at Lula (Damgaard, 2018). The media coverage was responsible not only for focusing attention on this episode among the countless misdeeds committed by the political elite, but also for the intense moralization of the surrounding debate (Biroli & Mantovani, 2014), framing corruption as a central topic in political discourse (Barros & Lemos, 2018).

The same pattern of judicialization of politics was repeated in 2014 with “Operation Lava Jato”, a large anti-corruption initiative led by former federal judge Sergio Moro. Among the consequences of the context created by Lava Jato were the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and Lula's imprisonment at a time when he was the clear favorite in the 2018 elections (Datafolha, 2018), while other politicians similarly accused of corruption had their charges dismissed, such as former president Michel Temer, due to “lack of evidence”. In all cases, coverage by traditional media played a central role. Regarding the impeachment, the media emphasized its feasibility while downplaying the crimes committed by other politicians (Damgaard, 2018), in addition to calling for Dilma Rousseff's removal.<sup>5</sup>

Media coverage was responsible not only for focusing attention on this particular episode among the countless corrupt acts committed

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<sup>5</sup> An example that particularly reinforces this perspective is the edition of the newspaper *O Globo* from April 18, 2016.

by the political elite, but also for the intense moralization of the debate surrounding it (Biroli & Mantovani, 2014), crystallizing corruption as a central theme in political discourse (Barros & Lemos, 2018). Other studies show how major media outlets provided adversarial coverage of Lula's politics, government, and base of support (Guazina, 2011), resulting in the construction of heroic narratives around certain figures, such as Joaquim Barbosa (Araújo, 2017), and narratives of opposition against others, such as Lula and the PT (Gagliardi et al., 2022).

Years later, the judicial system dismissed the case investigating the alleged tax fraud that had facilitated the impeachment and exonerated Dilma and the other implicated individuals. In 2022, the case was closed and Lula's sentence was overturned after the Supreme Federal Court found Sergio Moro's actions in the case to be questionable.

#### THE RISE OF FAR-RIGHT MEDIA IN BRAZIL

The 2018 elections marked a sharp shift in Brazilian politics toward the far right. Following Jair Bolsonaro's victory in the presidential race, politicians aligned with a far-right agenda assumed office in several states across the country. In total, of the 27 governors elected, 12 had allied themselves with Bolsonaro during the campaign.

What makes these results fascinating is the fact that they occurred without any far-right party supporting these politicians. Three of the elected governors ran under the PSL, Bolsonaro's party. Unlike Germany's AfD or France's Rassemblement National, this party had no historical ties to the far-right movement. It was a "rental party" serving the occasional interests of opportunistic candidates (Hunter & Power, 2019). Likewise, the far right lacked institutionalized media outlets aligned with its political agenda. After the 2013 protests—initially called by left-wing demonstrators in response to the rise in public transportation fares—the Brazilian far right began to organize itself around Jair Bolsonaro on social media. Originally, this movement relied on a network of apocryphal Facebook pages, such as "Revoltados Online", "Bolsonaro Zuero", and others (Santos, 2019). In the following years, this movement became more organized and gained greater visibility amid large demonstrations that, in the wake of Operation Lava

Jato, targeted corruption, the Workers' Party (PT), and President Dilma Rousseff. Mainstream media coverage was largely favorable to these protests (Mourão, 2019).

Rousseff's removal in 2016 did not quell the demands for change from the emerging far-right sectors. The government of Vice President Michel Temer, who succeeded Dilma, was extremely unpopular and faced successive political crises. Taken together, these factors helped cement the narrative that not only the Workers' Party (PT) but also the "old politics" were part of the same system.

This narrative played an important role in Bolsonaro's 2018 presidential campaign. Convinced that the liberal order was thoroughly corrupt, Bolsonaro and his followers began to promote an authoritarian project as the only way to save Brazil from corruption. The main institutional reference for this project, however, was not a far-right political party but the Armed Forces. In his discourse, communism was portrayed as the main driver behind the erosion of Brazilian political institutions. During the 2018 campaign, Bolsonaro relied on a broad and coordinated communication scheme based on social media, particularly WhatsApp. Coordinated by a group known as the "Office of Hate", these media outlets served as the foundation for a campaign largely based on the dissemination of disinformation and extreme rhetoric (Albuquerque & Alves, 2023).

It was only after Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency that the far right began to institutionalize itself in the country, albeit in a limited way. During his first year in office, Bolsonaro came into conflict with the PSL, the party under which he was elected, and tried to create a new party –Aliança pelo Brasil– to serve as the foundation for his government. However, this initiative failed. Subsequently, Bolsonaro joined the Liberal Party (PL). Historically a center-right party, the PL shifted toward the far right with the massive influx of Bolsonaro supporters.

In the media landscape, two key movements took place. On the one hand, some traditional outlets leaned heavily to the right, becoming part of Bolsonaro's support base. The newspaper *Gazeta do Povo*, the television network Record, and the radio station Jovem Pan are three notable examples.

*Gazeta do Povo*'s shift to the right actually began before Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency. Historically, the Curitiba-based newspaper –headquartered in the capital of the conservative state of Paraná– had a center-right profile and upheld the general principles of journalistic objectivity. However, the launch of Operation Lava Jato in 2014 offered the newspaper an opportunity to radically change its editorial profile. This happened because Lava Jato was led by Judge Sergio Moro and a team of federal prosecutors headed by Deltan Dallagnol, all based in Curitiba. In 2017, the newspaper became fully digital and redefined itself as a national conservative outlet (Tavares, 2020). Although Lava Jato and Bolsonarism were two distinct political phenomena –the former supported by Brazil's mainstream political and media currents, and the latter initially not– they became closely aligned after Bolsonaro's victory in 2018. In fact, Bolsonaro appointed Moro as his minister shortly after his election. Therefore, even if *Gazeta do Povo* was not strictly a pro-Bolsonaro outlet, it often acted as a political ally of the far right.

The Record case can be explained by pure political opportunism. Linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Record had maintained good relations with PT governments, but during the 2018 elections it showed signs of leaning toward Jair Bolsonaro (“Record amplia...”, 2018). In particular, Record saw the antagonism of Bolsonaro's supporters toward its rival Rede Globo –which, for them, was part of the same “communist” system as the PT– as an opportunity to gain greater visibility and public resources. Record became a tool to attract the evangelical audience to the Bolsonarist cause, while portraying its opponents as demonic forces.

Jovem Pan illustrates the radical shift of a conventional media outlet to the far right. Originally a music radio station aimed at young audiences, Jovem Pan became a national network in 2021 (Capone et al., 2024). With the rise of Bolsonarism, it rebranded itself as an audiovisual news platform, with subscription TV channels and on YouTube, openly aligned with Bolsonaro's political agenda.

There was also a wave of recently created platforms, born in the context of growing anti-PT sentiment in Brazil, whose activities reflected the aim of opening up more space for the far right. In this

sphere, representative examples include *O Antagonista*, *Revista Oeste*, and *Brasil Paralelo*.

The news portal *O Antagonista* was launched in 2015 by former journalists from *Veja* magazine, a conservative outlet extensively analyzed by Brazilian scholars of communication and politics. Diogo Mainardi was a columnist for the magazine, and Mário Sabino served as its editor-in-chief between 2004 and 2012, a period during which *Veja* underwent an ultraconservative shift marked by strong anti-PT sentiment. The network of actors behind *O Antagonista* also operates in other, more traditional conservative media. Mainardi participated in the conservative program *Manhattan Connection* on Globo News. Journalist Felipe Moura Brasil, also a former *Veja* reporter, hosted a political opinion show on Jovem Pan radio. Another journalist who joined the *Antagonista* team, Madeleine Lacsco, also worked at Jovem Pan.

The Media Ownership Monitor 2017 survey showed that half of *O Antagonista*'s ownership was held by the company Empiricus Research, dedicated to information consulting services and responsible for producing the 2014 video "The End of Brazil", which framed the collapse of the national economy around attacks on President Dilma Rousseff's government (Pasti & Gallas, 2018). The group also launched the magazine *Crusoé* in 2018. That same year, *O Antagonista*'s YouTube channel had nearly 400 000 subscribers. Today, it has 1.33 million.

A second example is *Revista Oeste*, created in 2020 by journalists Augusto Nunes, Jairo Leal, and José Roberto Guzzo, also dedicated to conservative, right-wing news content. Although it is not, as *O Antagonista* is, recognized as a mainstream media outlet, its founders also come from traditional media. Nunes was a columnist for *Veja* and a presenter on *Jornal da Record News*, as well as a commentator on Jovem Pan. In 2004, he was one of the journalists awarded the Esso Journalism Prize for an article published in *Jornal do Brasil*.<sup>6</sup> Jairo Leal, in turn, came from Grupo Abril ("Fabio Barbosa assume..."),

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<sup>6</sup> The list of winners of the 2004 award can be found on the Brazilian Association of Communication Agencies' website (ABRACOM, 2004).

2013) –a Brazilian media conglomerate focused on the publishing market that produces, among other titles, *Veja* magazine– while Guzzo was *Veja*'s editorial director and a columnist for several newspapers, including *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *Gazeta do Povo*.

The third example is the company Brasil Paralelo (BP), created in 2016. BP represents a particular case. Unlike *O Antagonista* and *Revista Oeste*, this audiovisual production company did not originate within major media organizations. Its three main founders were students at Porto Alegre's Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing. Moreover, its work did not focus on political commentary but was defined by the creation of cultural and educational products –films, series, and courses– offering revisionist interpretations of historical events and recent analyses. An aggressive advertising investment plan contributed to massive engagement across its channels (Salles et al., 2023), including YouTube, where the company has around 4.3 million subscribers.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, the rise of political forces and anti-system media, generally associated with the far right, has attracted increasing attention from both the general public and the academic world. Many have suggested that this phenomenon threatens the very foundations of liberal democracy. For this reason, understanding the causes behind the emergence of these anti-system forces and the methods they employ has become particularly relevant.

To date, however, the literature on the subject has examined it mainly from the narrow perspective of a limited set of Western countries. This body of work has primarily highlighted the role of actors external to the political system as elements eroding the foundations of liberal democracy. This paper proposes that the issue of anti-system politics and media should instead be considered through the lens of the specific characteristics of the media and political systems in each context.

Using the recent crisis of Brazil's democratic system as a reference, this paper explored the hypothesis that actors located at the center of the political system –such as traditional media– can also function

as destabilizing forces. Contrary to the expectations derived from the experiences of the United States and Western Europe, we argue that the destabilizing and anti-system behavior of Brazil's major media outlets helped create the conditions for the rise of the far right in the country.

This paper is fundamentally exploratory in nature. Its aim is to connect two analytical agendas –one related to media system models and the other to the global advance of anti-system forces and media– which have traditionally been treated separately. Focusing the analysis on a single case, Brazil, is certainly a limitation, as one case alone rarely constitutes a model. Nevertheless, it is possible that, at least in some respects, the observations presented here may be generalized to other Latin American countries. Indeed, recent work by Hallin et al. (2025) suggests that there are common patterns in how traditional media in Latin America operate around an anti-populist agenda. The behavior of these outlets appears to diverge significantly from the patterns described in Western scholarship and, in some respects, seems to approach the destabilizing characteristics discussed in this paper.

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