

# NEW POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN BRAZILIAN TELEVISION? GLOBO'S "JORNAL NACIONAL" IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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On April 1, 1996, an important change took place in Brazilian television. After 27 years presenting Globo TV's prime time newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, Cid Moreira was not on the screen as the main newsreader that evening. He did appear for one minute, but this time only to read the editorial. From that day on, this would be the only role for the man who, for decades, had presented the most important and popular newscast in Brazil. Cid Moreira had been a constant presence in Brazilian living rooms during a period of deep changes in Brazilian society and politics. As a consequence, his image was deeply associated with that of Globo.

Why did Globo replace Moreira and his main partner, Sergio Chapelin, as the presenters of *Jornal Nacional*? What is the relationship between this change and Globo's political strategy? Did this change have any consequences for the form in which Globo covers political and social issues? These are some of the questions this paper will deal with. I will try to show that the change was an important one and that it did have an impact on the form in which Globo represents the political life in Brazil. Moreover, I will argue that this change is better understood if placed as part of the network's new political strategy.

The text is organized in the following way: first, I present a brief account of *Jornal Nacional*'s history and political role, including the replacement of its main newsreader. After considering the possible explanations for the change, I introduce the hypothesis of the study and its methodology. Finally, I discuss the results of a comparative content analysis of *Jornal Nacional*. The aim of the analysis is to investigate how the change of newsreaders influenced the ways Globo covers political, economic and social issues in Brazil.

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<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Daniel Hallin, Venicio A. de Lima, Afonso de Albuquerque and Fred Turner for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

## ***Jornal Nacional* and Politics in Brazil**

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969, Globo television launched the first Brazilian national newscast, *Jornal Nacional*. All previous TV programs had a regional character, as Nationwide direct television broadcasting was initiated only after 1969 with the inauguration of EMBRATEL (Brazilian Enterprise of Telecommunications), the State company that made possible the interconnection of television stations through satellites (see Lima, 1988, p. 117). Several authors have pointed out Globo's important role in the national integration policy of the authoritarian regime as a key element in the creation of a national consumer market (Caparelli, 1982; Kehl, 1986; Lima, 1988). The development of Globo as a virtual monopoly was therefore directly associated with the military dictatorship established in 1964.

*Jornal Nacional* was born in a critical moment of Brazilian political history. It appeared just after the 1968 "coup inside the coup," when the Institutional Act 5 (AI-5) abolished all formal remaining democratic institutions and initiated the most repressive phase of the authoritarian regime (1968-1976). It was also a period of great economic expansion. The years between 1969 and 1973 became known as the *Brazilian Miracle* ("Milagre Brasileiro"), when the country experienced very high rates of GNP growth combined with a high concentration of wealth. Globo's emergence as monopolistic company in the 1970s was deeply associated with the regime's economic policy and ideological aims. Because of the direct censorship, but also because of Globo's alliance with the regime, *Jornal Nacional* became an important instrument for legitimating the military dictatorship. In the beginning of 1973, President-General Medici commented on the role of the evening news during this period:

"I feel happy, every night, when I turn on the TV to watch the news. While the news tells on strikes, agitation, assassination attempts and conflicts in several parts of the world, Brazil marches in peace, on its road to development. It is as if I took a tranquilizer after a day's work" (quoted by Lima, 1988, p. 116).

The quotation reveals the ways the evening news presented a distorted image of one of the most violent periods of Brazilian history, a period marked by a “internal war” against left-wing armed groups and any form of opposition movement. Certainly, censorship played a central role in the building of such a portrayal of the country’s reality. Nevertheless, even after the direct censorship of the mass media was abolished in 1980, the news coverage of Globo continued to show its alliance with the regime. Venicio A. de Lima (1988) showed how Globo deliberately distorted information in its newscast with specific political purposes during the final years of the military regime (1982-1984). Particularly important was the coverage of the 1984 national campaign for the direct presidential election, *Diretas Já*, a broad national movement that demanded the end of the dictatorship. In the beginning of the campaign, *Jornal Nacional* did not provide nationwide coverage of the mass rallies or presented them in a distorted way. Only two weeks before the Congress voted and rejected the proposed constitutional amendment that would have restored direct elections for the presidency Globo changed its behavior and provided its audience with broad national coverage (Lima, 1988; Tosi, 1995).

This kind of coverage created a conflict between Globo and the civil society that emerged in the end of the 1970s and brought new political actors and organizations to the Brazilian political scene. During the rallies of the 1984 campaign, one of the most frequent slogans was “O povo não é bobo, abaixo a Rede Globo” (People are not fools; down with Globo Network). The campaign *Diretas Já* sparked one of the most important conflicts between Globo’s partisan coverage and its audience. Roberto Marinho, the owner and head of the Globo Organizations, explains how the popular pressure imposed the change of *Jornal Nacional*’s coverage:

“Because of its gigantic size and the fact that *Jornal Nacional* is attentively followed by the government, Globo is always more careful ... We thought that the pre-elections rallies could represent a factor of national anxiety and that is the reason why, early on, we presented only regional reporting. But the popular passion was so strong that we decided to deal with the issue in the network” (quoted by Tosi, 1995, p. 174).

The 1994 campaign showed how the network was pressured by a popular movement and changed its coverage. This example suggests that the level of organization and mobilization of the civil society is very important to explain changes in journalism practices. Even after the end of censorship, Globo's political role led to an increasing feeling among several sectors of Brazilian society that it was associated with the regime.

In spite of the fact that the Congress rejected the proposed constitutional amendment that would restore direct elections, the military regime was in its final days due to popular pressure. When it became clear that the military would not be able to hold onto power, Globo joined the new articulation in the ruling bloc that led to the 1985 indirect election of the first civil president after 21 years of a military dictatorship, Tancredo Neves (Guimarães & Amaral, 1988).

After the rise of democracy in Brazil in 1985, Globo continued to play an important political role. During the first presidential election after the dictatorship in 1989, Globo was an active participant in the dispute. In this election, Fernando Collor de Melo, an unknown politician and Governor of the small state of Alagoas, was elected with no party structure backing him. Some studies have argued that the reasons for Collor's victory were rooted in the political scenario constructed by the media, especially Globo (Rubim, 1990; Lima, 1993). As far as *Jornal Nacional* is concerned, studies indicated a disproportionate and favorable coverage given to Collor (Lima, 1993, pp.106-107). One of the most polemical moments of the campaign took place just before the second round of the presidential election, when the candidates who were still competing, Collor and Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, a left-wing trade union leader, participated in the last television debate. The next day, *Jornal Nacional* presented an edition of the debate that clearly favored Collor, raising broad concern in the public debate about its partisan news coverage.

When political scandals revealed a corrupt scheme inside Collor's government in 1992, another national mass movement gained Brazilian streets demanding his impeachment. A Parliamentary Investigation Committee (CPI) was established by the Congress to investigate the charges. The role of the mass media in all the investigations and in the impeachment process was a central one (Rubim, 1993; Lattman-Weltman et al., 1994;

José, 1996; Waisbord, 1996). And again, as in the 1984 campaign, Globo's initial coverage of this broad mass movement revealed its alliance with the government. In a first phase, *Jornal Nacional's* coverage of the charges and the CPI's work was characterized by a strong presence of governmental sources, with few references to the links between Paulo César Farias - Collor's campaign treasurer and a leading figure of the corruption scheme - and the president (Porto, 1994, pp. 141-142). In the initial stage of the campaign, *Jornal Nacional* constantly presented the government version that the Parliamentary Committee was a result of a "struggle for power", being moved by a feeling of revenge from those who lost the election. But the mass movement for the impeachment was rapidly growing and Globo finally changed its news coverage when the Parliamentary Committee presented its report in October, 1992 considering the president guilty and initiating the impeachment process (p. 143-145). Globo then became an active participant of the movement that led to the impeachment of the President it helped to elect in 1989.

On February 6, 1992, *Jornal Nacional* presented an editorial attacking a politician known for opposing Globo, Leonel Brizola, governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In the 1982 election, when Brizola was elected governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro for the first time, Globo was accused of organizing a scheme aimed at preventing Brizola's victory, by initiating the reporting of returns from the rural interior, where the party supporting the dictatorship (PDS) was in the majority (Lima, 1988, p. 111). In 1992, Globo's editorial called the governor "senile, lackey and paranoid" because Brizola asked the Mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro not to allow the network to gain the exclusive right to cover the schools of samba parade during the carnival<sup>2</sup>. Brizola appealed to the justice and two years later got the right of response. On March 15, 1994, Globo was obliged by the judiciary to air Brizola's response and Cid Moreira read the text in which Brizola said that "everything in Globo is biased and manipulated"<sup>3</sup>.

In the 1994 presidential election, Globo's news coverage was again an important issue. In the first months of the electoral campaign, *Jornal Nacional's* coverage favored the

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<sup>2</sup> "Governador comemora vitória sobre a Globo", *Jornal do Brasil*, March 17, 1994, p. 20.

governmental candidate and Minister of Economy, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Albuquerque, 1994). Later on, probably because of more rigorous legislation that demanded equal coverage by the media, the newscast presented a more balanced coverage of the candidates. Nevertheless, the newscast emphasis on the *Plano Real* (Real Plan), the economic plan created and implemented by the Minister and candidate Fernando Henrique, established a scenario favorable to the governmental candidate (Maciel & Fabricio, 1995).

The way Globo's coverage of the *Plano Real* influenced the 1994 electoral process was revealed by a curious episode. On the first of September, a month before the election, the Minister of Economy, Rubens Ricúpero, was talking with journalist Carlos Monforte in Globo's studios while waiting to give an interview. Not knowing that the conversation was already being sent to the satellite, Ricúpero started to speak with the journalist about how he was aiding Globo to support the governmental candidate, Fernando Henrique, in an indirect way. Ricúpero said that he was very useful to Globo because instead of supporting "him" (Fernando Henrique) openly, it could put him as the Minister of Economy in the air and than nobody could complain. The "informal" conversation was recorded by some people who had parabolic antennas and made public, mainly by the candidates opposing Fernando Henrique. The Minister inadvertently revealed how he was making possible Globo to offer a coverage favoring Fernando Henrique in an indirect way. As a result of the scandal, Ricúpero was fired by President Itamar Franco.

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<sup>3</sup> The whole text read by Cid Moreira was reproduced in the main newspapers through ads paid by Brizola (See, for example, "Direito de resposta", *Correio Braziliense*, March 20, 1994, p. 10).

More recently, during the 1996 local elections, the political role of Globo was again discussed. On September 17, 1996, Globo aired a campaign advertisement of the candidate José Serra 37 minutes before the time determined by law, making it appear in one of the breaks of *Jornal Nacional*<sup>4</sup>. Serra was the government supported candidate in the election of São Paulo Mayor and the “technical mistake” of Globo was interpreted as a manipulation in favor of the candidate. Judge Dyrceu Cintra Júnior, from the of the 1<sup>st</sup> electoral zone of São Paulo, condemned the network for “manipulating public opinion”<sup>5</sup>. Six days after the Judge sentenced Globo to pay a 18,000 thousand U.S. dollars fine, the Regional Electoral Tribunal (TRE) of São Paulo canceled his sentence<sup>6</sup>, but the episode raised again concern about Globo’s partisan attitudes.

This brief history of *Jornal Nacional* shows its active political role and points to the ways it has contributed to building a public image for Globo as a pro-government network. In the discussion that follows, I will present the hypothesis that the change of the newscast’s newsreaders is better understood if we relate it to Globo’s image and political role. In the next section, the change of *Jornal Nacional*’s newsreaders will be presented and its implications discussed.

### **The “new” *Jornal Nacional***

During all this period of deep social and political changes in Brazil, *Jornal Nacional* was presented by Cid Moreira. But on April 1, 1996, Moreira and his main partner, Sergio Chapelin, were replaced as the newsreaders. To take their position, Globo chose two of its journalists, William Bonner and Lilliam Witte Fibe. Bonner was previously the newsreader of *Jornal Hoje* (Today Newscast), the lunch time news program, and Fibe of *Jornal da Globo* (Globo’s Newscast), the late evening news program.

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<sup>4</sup> “Para justiça eleitoral, Globo agiu com ‘má-fé’ ao alterar propaganda eleitoral”, *Folha de São Paulo*, September, 21, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> “Para justiça ...”.

The change was not an abrupt one, since Moreira had been presenting the news with different professionals, mainly Fibe, during the months before the change. But after April 1st, the landscape of Brazilian television was different: Cid Moreira was not on the screen when *Jornal Nacional* began that evening. This innovation was important because, among other reasons, it replaced professionals who limited themselves to reading the news with journalists who also acted as news editors. After the change, Bonner started acting as editor of national and Fibe of economic issues, making them closer to the role of anchors than of traditional newsreaders.

The reasons for the change were very different from those leading Globo to chose Cid Moreira in 1969 to be the newsreader of its main newscast. According to José Bonifácio de Oliveira, Globo's Vice-President, Moreira was chosen because of his good appearance and smooth voice. The aim was to attract the female audience of the soap-operas preceding and following *Jornal Nacional* (see Souza, 1984, p. 226). In 1996, Globo has chosen professional journalists with the aim of changing the image of the network in a period of increasingly declining audience ratings.

After the change, Cid Moreira was responsible for reading the editorials of *Jornal Nacional* and Sergio Chapellin for presenting *Globo Repórter*, a weekly documentary program. Editorials were rare in *Jornal Nacional* and became part of the new phase. Another innovation was the introduction of a Commentator, the film maker Arnaldo Jabor, who appeared frequently to comment with “humor” on some political issues. Jabor was criticized for supporting President Fernando Henrique's policies and became involved in polemical episodes. On May 29, 1996, Jabor used his commentary in *Jornal Nacional* to accuse the Congress of being dominated by corrupt practices. The reaction in the Congress was strong, including some attempts to include more severe penalties in the press law being discussed at the time<sup>7</sup>.

These are some of the features of the “new” *Jornal Nacional*. How can we explain the change? Is it related to the political role of Globo in the last decades of Brazilian

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<sup>6</sup> “TRE suspende condenação à Globo por ter alterado grade do horário eleitoral”, *Folha de São Paulo*, September, 27, 1996.



history? Did it have an impact on the form in which Globo covers political issues? These are some of the questions that I will discuss in the next sections.

### **Why did Globo replace Cid Moreira? Possible explanations.**

#### a) The demands of the audience

One first possible explanation of the change is that it was a response to the demands of the audience. After 27 years in the screen, Cid Moreira could have become over exposed and Brazilians tired of his image. Globo would be simply responding to the needs of its audience.

This hypothesis does not explain the change. The DataFolha Institute undertook a survey with 1,080 inhabitants of São Paulo on May 4-5, 1995, and found that 88% of the viewers were in favor of Cid Moreira staying on as the newsreader of *Jornal Nacional*<sup>8</sup>. More recently, The magazine *Imprensa* asked Gallup Institute of Public Opinion to undertake a survey with the aim of verifying how Brazilians evaluated the change<sup>9</sup>. First of all, it is important to stress that the audience noticed the change. From the 541 individuals (86% of the sample) who said they had the habit of watching *Jornal Nacional*, 77.8% noticed the replacement of newsreaders. It was also discovered that the public preferred the Moreira-Chapelin pair in comparison to Bonner-Fibe in all aspects of evaluation. When those who had the habit of watching the newscast were asked to give individual scores to each newsreader, ranging from 0 to 10, Cid Moreira got an average of 9.2, Sergio Chapelin 8.8, William Bonner 8.0, and Lilliam Witte Fibe 7.2. When asked which pair transmitted more credibility, 69.7% chose Moreira-Chapelin and 20.1% Bonner-Fibe. When asked which were better in transmitting the news, 71.2% mentioned Moreira-Chapelin and 18.7% Bonner-Fibe. In all aspects, the public preferred the pair Moreira-Chapelin. Thus, the hypothesis based on a demand of the audience does not explain the change.

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<sup>7</sup> “Uma lei em discussão”, *Correio Braziliense*, June 2, 1996, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> “Cid Moreira deveria ficar, diz pesquisa”, *Folha de São Paulo*, tvfolha, March 17, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> “Quem é o melhor?”, *Imprensa*, n. 104, May 1996, pp. 36-41. Gallup interviewed 627 individuals in the city of São Paulo, between April 27 and 30, 1996.

## b) The influence of the American model

In the literature about Brazilian journalism, the most common argument used to explain changes in journalist practices has to do with the influence of the "American model". It is commonly argued that this model had the "biggest impact" in Brazilian journalism, in spite of other influences (Melo, 1985, p. 132). According to Lins da Silva, the development of a modern commercial press takes place when (mainly after the 1970s) the urban elite demand the "local mass media to have quality patterns comparable to those of American society" (Silva, 1991, p. 58). In the case of television news, the transition from newsreaders to presenters whose role and style are closer to those of American television's anchormen has been also explained as a matter of adopting the American pattern. In a book devoted to explaining the most important experience of an anchorman in Brazilian television, Boris Casoy from SBT, the conclusion is that the model adopted by Brazilian television's journalism is the American one (Squirra, 1993, p. 171). This literature suggests another explanation about the changes of newsreaders practices in Brazil: the promotion of newscast presenters who are closer to the American anchorman style can be seen as another example of the American journalism's influence. Therefore, one can explain the changes in *Jornal Nacional* as a result of a "modernization process," the adoption of the American model's practices.

This argument has been strongly influenced by the normative theory of the press as developed by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in the classic text book *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Paterson & Schramm, 1956). According to these authors, it would be possible to classify the different forms of the press in different countries in four main categories: the "libertarian theory," which has the American journalism as its best expression; the "social responsibility theory," practiced in the US after World War II and in most countries of West Europe; the "authoritarian theory," common in the third world countries; and the "soviet communist theory," adopted by the Soviet Union and other communist countries. The authors who raise the argument on the American model's influence are based on this scheme. Lins da Silva (1991), for example, argues that Brazil has

a journalism currently guided by the principles of the libertarian school (p. 58). He affirms that, in spite of being a “precarious scheme”, the classification proposed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm reflects the essential divisions between the different ways of conceiving and practicing journalism in different societies (p. 57).

Several authors have raised doubts about the usefulness of a normative theory of the press as developed by *Four Theories*. The book has been interpreted as an example of how comparative research in the US has been shaped by the role of the country in international politics during the cold war (Hardt, 1988, p. 129). The normative approach has been interpreted as a obstacle to the understanding of how journalism works in reality because, among other reasons, it does not consider the necessity of taking into account that journalism and political society interact with and affect each other (Mancini, Unpublished paper). A recent book which revised the work of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm criticized several of its standpoints and argued for a more adequate schema of analysis (Nerone, 1995). In spite of its dominant position in media studies, this growing criticism indicates the necessity of developing better theoretical frameworks to explain differences in journalism practices around the world than those offered by the *Four Theories*' model. I have developed the present study with the hope of contributing to the theory building effort towards explaining not only differences in journalism practices in different countries, but mainly processes of change in the same country using a cross-time comparison. The normative theory is a too simplistic and linear model to explain the changes that took place in Brazilian television news practices. As I will try to show later on, it is necessary to develop theoretical models that take into consideration the ways journalism practices change because of their relations to political processes and institutions.

### c) The pressure of competition

Finally, another important possible explanation of the changes in *Jornal Nacional* has to do with the pressure of competition. In spite of its monopolistic position in the Brazilian communication system, having about 80% of the national audience (Amaral & Guimarães, 1994), Globo has been confronted on the news front by its main competitor, the SBT

(Brazilian System of Television). In 1988, SBT hired a prestigious journalist from the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, Boris Casoy, to be the anchorman of its evening news, *TJ Brazil*. Casoy became the first anchorman in Brazilian television, as he received the task of not only reading the news, but also of acting as a managing-editor of the newscast. In a 1991 internal report of its journalism department, SBT presents the features of its newscast project. The combination of audience ratings and credibility is presented as the main aim of SBT's strategy. The document develops an interesting comparison between the company's news and Globo's *Jornal Nacional*: "We want a newscast as good as *Jornal Nacional*, with rhythm, aesthetic beauty, great news stories ... In sum, show and emotion. Nevertheless, we want not only this, but also neutrality" (see Squirra, 1993, p. 141). Therefore, SBT builds a strategy based on *Jornal Nacional*'s lack of neutrality, identifying one of the main weaknesses of its main competitor: its image of a pro-government newscast.

The role of Boris Casoy as an anchorman in this project was a central one. He developed a new style of news presentation giving his own opinion on controversial issues, breaking the "cold" way Globo's newsreaders traditionally appeared in the screen. The anchorman became nationally known because of the way he showed his indignation in the video. After some news stories, usually about corruption or the failure of the State to fulfill its tasks, a close up shows the face of the anchorman and he says to his audience: "That's a shame". Casoy brought important innovations to Brazilian television and to the role of the anchorman: a more active and aggressive style and explicit opinion to the news.

SBT challenged Globo news coverage not only through *TJ Brasil* and Boris Casoy, but also through a "reality based" news program called *Aqui Agora* (Here Now). In its actual version, the program started in May, 1991, with a sensationalist style and an emphasis on crime. *Aqui Agora* brought to television a popular radio journalist known for covering urban violence cases in the city of São Paulo, Gil Gomes. Gomes became one of the main attractions of *Aqui Agora*, presenting stories with his characteristic dramatic style. The program also innovated as it developed a realistic model of news presentation. It gained a sense of naturalism through the precarious production and low quality of images, with the reporter shaking the camera while running with policemen in some tense action (Bucci,

1993, p. 104). The program proved to be popular mainly in São Paulo, the biggest Brazilian city, where the initial average audience of 10% of the dwellings has grown to 20% in October, 1992<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, one could argue that when replacing Cid Moreira Globo was responding to the new style of news presentation of its main competitor, SBT. The fear of losing audience would pressure Globo to adopt a more neutral and at the same time more active kind of journalistic practice. To undertake such change, it would be important to replace Cid Moreira since his image was deeply associated to Globo's lack of neutrality. There is some evidence suggesting that this hypothesis is correct. In fact, *Jornal Nacional* lost part of its audience ratings in 1993. If in the 1980s the average audience rating of the program was around 60% of the dwellings, between 1993 and 1994 it decreased to approximate 50%<sup>11</sup>. According to magazine *Imprensa*, the decline took place when SBT created a second edition of *Aqui Agora* at 8pm, the same time as *Jornal Nacional*<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, *Jornal Nacional* keeps its leading position in Brazilian television with a daily estimated audience of 41 million people<sup>13</sup>. SBT's strategy of gaining audience was only achieved in a very limited way: its news programs (*TJ Brasil* and *Aqui Agora*) do not achieve 20% of the audience in comparison to more than 50% of *Jornal Nacional*.

Some authors see the emergence of new technologies as the reason for the decline of *Jornal Nacional's* ratings. Squirra (1995) interpreted the implementation of cable TV as a challenge to television journalism, foreseeing a decline of the networks audience ratings. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact of having 1.7 million of subscribers, the so called "paid TVs" do not offer a real challenge to the networks in the Brazilian case. According to research undertaken by the Ibope Institute of Public Opinion on March, 1997, the networks have 75% of the prime time (20:00) audience ratings while only 1% is taken up by the paid TVs<sup>14</sup>.

Competition was an important element in explaining the changes in *Jornal Nacional*. Nevertheless, as the internal report of SBT's journalism department has shown, its strategy

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<sup>10</sup> "O rosto da periferia", *Veja*, n. 47, November 18, 1992, pp. 98-103.

<sup>11</sup> "Turbulência na rota do boeing", *Imprensa*, n. 80, may 1994, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> "Turbulência...", p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Data from Globo's home page in the internet (<http://www.redeglobo.com.br>).

was based on Globo’s image of a pro-government network. Therefore, to understand the growing instability in the relation between Globo and the audience it is very important to stress its negative image that is a result of its political and partisan role in the last decades of Brazilian politics.

### The Problem of Credibility

Before presenting the hypothesis of the study and the results of the content analysis, some remarks are necessary on the problem of credibility. As the SBT’s strategy to gain audience was only partially achieved, it seems that the results were better in the area of neutrality, the image of a network independent from external political or social influences. The magazine *Imprensa* sponsored another survey which was undertaken by the Gallup Institute of Public Opinion with the aim of verifying how Brazilians evaluate the newscasts performance<sup>15</sup>. Table 1 presents some of the results.

Table 1  
Question: Which of the following networks has newscasts that ...

	... present the facts exactly as they happen	... distort more the facts	... inform more correctly	... defend more economic interests	... are more concerned with sensationalism
Globo	40.1 %	37.0 %	40.1 %	45.4 %	31.5 %
SBT	30.3 %	29.8 %	26.4 %	26.6 %	41.7 %

Base: 571 respondents who watch television news.

Source: “A imagem dos telejornais: o povo acusa”, *Imprensa*, n. 105, September 1995, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> “TV paga ainda não ameaça grandes redes”, *Folha de São Paulo*, March 9, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> “A imagem dos telejornais: o povo acusa”, *Imprensa*, n. 105, September 1995, pp. 24-28. Gallup interviewed 639 individuals in the city of São Paulo, between May 25 and 27, 1996.

The survey presented some contradictory results. How can we explain that the same people who said Globo presents the facts as they really happen and informs more correctly said it distorts more the facts? This contradiction shows how credibility is a complex issue. Some authors suggest that the credibility of the television news among the mass public is based more on the *form* than on the *content*: the tendency to concentrate in the personality (Hallin, 1996, p. 89). In the case of *Jornal Nacional*, there is evidence of a low level of credibility related to its links with the government and other interests. As Table 1 shows, *Jornal Nacional* is seen as the newscast that defends more economic interests. In a 1988 survey, more than half of the program's audience (53%) affirmed that the information it presents is "not very reliable" or "not reliable", while 44% affirmed it is "very reliable". In spite of being preferred by 90% of those interviewed, *Jornal Nacional* had a low level of credibility among more than half of its audience (see Squirra, 1993, pp. 14-15). At the same time, as we have already seen, the newscast's anchorman, Cid Moreira, had a very high level of credibility when he was replaced. This apparent contradiction can be explained if we consider the possibility that the mass public may trust in the *form* of the news as a direct and neutral source of information<sup>16</sup> and in the newsreader as a personality, but may be critical of the network's image and political role. In other words, the genre "television news" and the personality "newsreader/anchorman" can enjoy a high level of credibility, while the network's image remains negative.

## **Hypothesis and methodology**

After considering the main possible reasons for the replacement of Cid Moreira, this section is aimed at developing an explanation of this change. The general hypothesis of the present study is that *the replacement of Cid Moreira is part of Globo's new political strategy aimed at developing a more active and "independent" journalism that would be*

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<sup>16</sup> Part of the credibility of television comes from the fact that images give the audience a sense of direct and not mediated access to reality. For a discussion about this effect in the case of television journalism, see Stam,

*able to build a new image for the network.* The main objective of this strategy would be to change Globo's negative reputation as a pro-government network due to its role in the last decades of Brazilian politics. In this way Globo would be able to manage the dangers involved in colliding with its audience and losing it to its competitors.

Some words of caution are necessary here. The present study is developed as a case study about the changes in *Jornal Nacional's* newsreaders, interpreted as a result of Globo's new political strategy. It is not aimed at testing this general hypothesis; instead, it seeks to contribute to the development of theoretical perspectives that can account for changes in television journalism practices through the consideration of its links to the political process. Therefore, in the case of our general hypothesis, we are more interested in theory building than in theory testing<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, the present case study is also aimed at presenting a more specific hypothesis to be tested. As I have argued, the change of *Jornal Nacional's* newsreaders is better understood if we relate it to Globo's political role and strategy. According to this perspective, the replacement of Cid Moreira was not only a change in the form of the newscast, but also in its content. The more specific hypothesis of the study argues that *the changes in Jornal Nacional's newsreaders did have an impact in the form in which it represents politics, leading to a more active role of the newsreader and a less government-based and more plural coverage.* The news coverage will continue to favor the government and dominant groups' interpretations, but governmental sources will be less frequent in the news stories.

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1985.

<sup>17</sup> As George and McKeown (1985) put it, "case studies will be particularly useful at an early stage of theory development, when considerations of theory development greatly outweigh those of testing" (pp. 51-52).



This more specific hypothesis will be tested through a content analysis of *Jornal Nacional* using a cross-time comparison perspective. The aim is to identify how the change of newsreaders affected the content of the newscast. The sample includes two series with 6 editions of the newscast each, in a total of 12 complete editions<sup>18</sup>. The main criteria in choosing the series was the replacement of the pair Cid Moreira-Sergio Chapelin by the pair William Bonner-Lillian Witte Fibe that took place on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996. The sample includes one series before and one after the change, separated by a period of four and a half months. The sample was composed in the following way:

Table 2  
Composition of the sample of *Jornal Nacional*'s editions

Series	Editions of <i>Jornal Nacional</i>	Number of editions
First	November 14, 15, 21, 22, 27 and 28, 1995	6
Second	April 1 <sup>st</sup> , 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8, 1996	6
Total		12

Which criteria was used to select the series? In the case of the second series, the criteria was simple: it was the first week after *Jornal Nacional*'s newsreaders had been replaced. In the case of the first series, an interval of 18 weeks was chosen as a good basis to verify how the change of newsreaders affected the content of the newscast<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> I am thankful to the "Working Group on Media and Politics" of the University of Brasilia, especially its Coordinator, Venicio A. de Lima, for allowing me to use their video archive. I am also thankful to Marcelo de Lima e Souza for recording the material.

<sup>19</sup> The initial plan was to analyze series composed of a complete week, from Monday through Saturday. Nevertheless, not all the editions recorded were complete, what explain some intervals between the editions chosen, mainly in the first series.

A content analysis of these editions was developed to verify how the change of newsreaders influenced the *form of representation*, the conventions of narrative employed by *Jornal Nacional*, mainly the coverage of political, economic and social issues<sup>20</sup>. For the content analysis of *Jornal Nacional*, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. In the quantitative approach, all the news stories were coded according to their subjects. Thus, in the first phase the unit of analysis was the news story. Each news story was coded and its time duration registered.

After this first phase, a qualitative analysis was developed of each news story on political items, economy and social items. Every news story on these topics was broken down into utterances which became the units of analysis of the second phase. The utterance can be defined by a main constitutive feature: the "change of speaking subjects". According to this view, an utterance has an absolute beginning and an absolute end defined by the change of "who" is speaking (see Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71). In the case of *Jornal Nacional's* news stories, the possible speakers were coded as newsreader, reporter, person in the soundbite or commentator.

After each utterance was coded and its time duration registered, a qualitative analysis of its function was developed. The following three possible functions of each utterance were identified:

1. Informative: the speaker reports a current fact/event/action or introduces an issue;
2. Interpretative: the speaker presents an interpretation of the fact/event/action;
3. Indirect Interpretation: the speaker reports a statement made by someone else that interprets the fact/event/action of issue;

Based on the function of each speaker (newsreader, reporter, person in soundbite or comentator), the news story was classified according to its form<sup>21</sup>:

1. Restricted: when only one interpretation of the fact/event/action or issue was presented;

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<sup>20</sup> On the concept of *form of representation*, see Hallin, 1994, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> The classification of the forms of the news stories is based on Murdock, 1989, p. 236.

2. Plural-Closed: when more than one interpretation of the fact/event/action or issue was presented, but were arranged in a hierarchy so that one was preferred over the others and presented as more valid/true;
3. Plural-Open: when more than one interpretation of the fact/event/action or issue was presented, but treated within a more indeterminate relation where no interpretation was presented more valid/true.
4. episodic: when there were no interpretations in the news story but only a report on some fact/event/action.

The above methodological procedures are aimed at testing the second hypothesis of the study: *the changes in Jornal Nacional's newsreaders did have an impact in the form in which it represents politics, leading to a more active role of the newsreader and a less government-based and more plural coverage*. This hypothesis was operationalized in the following way:

a) the more active role of the news reader: the research will verify if the newsreaders adopted a more interpretative instead of informative function after the change;

b) less government-based coverage: the research will verify if the number of soundbites with sources outside the government increased;

c) more plural coverage: the research will verify if the news stories adopted more Plural-Open forms and less Restricted forms after the change.

### **The content analysis**

a) The subjects of the news stories

I will present in this section the analysis of twelve editions of *Jornal Nacional*, six from the first series (November, 1995) and six from the second series (April, 1996). Table 3 presents the subject classification of all news stories that appeared in the two series. The data shows that the average duration of each *Jornal Nacional's* edition is 24 minutes and 50 seconds. Each edition presents an average of 18 segments and news stories in five blocks separated by breaks for advertising.

Table 3  
Subject classification of *Jornal Nacional's*  
news stories and segments

Subject	News stories of the first series November, 1995	News stories of the second series April, 1996	Total
Headlines	6 (4 min 0 sec)	6 (4 min 27 sec)	12 (8 min 27 sec)
Political Items	28 (49 min 30 sec)	10 (11 min 36 sec)	38 (61 min 6 sec)
Economy	7 (9 min 37 sec)	12 (23 min 9 sec)	19 (32 min 46 sec)
Social Items	4 (2 min 44 sec)	6 (7 min 23 sec)	10 (10 min 7 sec)
Crime/violence	15 (19 min 12 sec)	13 (30 min 58 sec)	28 (50 min 10 sec)
International	17 (25 min 27 sec)	8 (7 min 58 sec)	25 (33 min 25 sec)
Miscellaneous	17 (18 min 8 sec)	22 (27 min 7 sec)	39 (45 min 15 sec)
Sports	8 (8 min 24 sec)	13 (28 min 27 sec)	21 (36 min 51 sec)
Weather Forecast	6 (4 min 5 sec)	6 (5 min 2 sec)	12 (9 min 7 sec)
Announcements of Globos' programs	3 (2 min 40 sec)	5 (3 min 31 sec)	8 (6 min 11 sec)
Editorial	0	2 (2 min 47 sec)	2 (2 min 47 sec)
Commentaries	0	2 (1 min 51 sec)	2 (1 min 51 sec)

The data shows that politics was the main subject of *Jornal Nacional* in the 12 editions analyzed. Politics took up 20.5 % (61 minutes) of total time of the newscast. Nevertheless, there was a sharp decline of the political coverage between the first and the second series. How to explain such a decline? First of all, it is necessary to stress the fact that in November, 1995, most of the political items were due to a corruption scandal in the government related to the polemic project SIVAM, an expensive radar system for the Amazon. Thus, the high number of news stories on political items may be explained as a result of important events during the first series' period. It is necessary to investigate if this trend for less coverage of political items is more permanent or only due to the events that took place in the final months of 1995.

Nevertheless, the data suggests that the change of *Jornal Nacional*'s newsreaders was leading to a kind of journalism with less emphasis on political items. There are some evidences that this new direction may be a more definitive one. When trying to explain the reasons for the decline of the *Jornal Nacional*'s ratings, Globo blamed the coverage of political items. A report from Globo explained this decline in terms of the "excess" of political issues in the newscast, which are covered because of a "journalistic duty" but which drive away the audience<sup>22</sup>. In this way Globo blames the politicians to explain its own problematic relation with the audience and does not mention its active role in Brazilian politics in the last decades. Globo also indicates that it may start reducing the coverage of political items to avoid conflicts with the audience.

The consequences of the decline of the political coverage are complex, mainly when we observe a parallel growth of the time devoted to crime/violence, miscellaneous and sports. These three areas took up 44% to the total time of the 12 editions analyzed. This data suggests a move towards a "tabloid/entertainment" based journalism. Globo may be trying to avoid the decline of the ratings with more emphasis on violence, miscellaneous subjects and sports and less on politics and international issues. Nevertheless, there is an opposite tendency in the case of the economy and social items, with an increasing coverage after the newsreaders change. Again, further investigation may be necessary to verify these trends.

#### b) The form of news stories

As far as the qualitative analysis of the 67 news stories on politics, economy and social items is concerned, the data indicates some important changes. Table 4 presents the form classification of these news stories.

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<sup>22</sup> "Turbulência na rota do boeing", *Imprensa*, n. 80, may 1994, p. 33.

Table 4  
Form classification of the news stories on  
political items, economy and social items

Form	News stories of the first series November, 1995	News stories of the second series April, 1996
Restricted	9 (23%)	3 (11%)
Plural-closed	6 (15%)	6 (22%)
Plural-open	1 (3%)	2 (8%)
Episodic	23 (59%)	16 (59%)
Total	39 (100%)	27 (100%)

The hypothesis of the study affirmed that *the changes in Jornal Nacional's newsreaders did have an impact in the form in which it represents politics, leading to a more active role of the newsreader and a less government-based and more plural coverage.* As far as the more plural coverage issue is concerned, I proposed to verify if the news stories adopted more plural-open forms and less restricted forms after the change. The data presented in Table 4 confirms this trend. There was a decline in the number of news stories with a restricted form and an increase in the number of those with plural-open form. Thus, the analysis confirms the trend toward a more “plural” coverage.

The analysis also shows that the great majority of the news stories (58%) do not present interpretation and basically report some fact or event. The great majority of these episodic news stories were more simple in format and shorter in time: in 66% of them only the newsreader appeared on the video and their average time duration was 58 seconds, much less than the 2 minutes and 23 seconds of the others. Therefore, in spite of the high number of episodic news stories, they were much shorter in time and simpler in format than the ones that presented some kind of interpretation.

c) The role of the newsreader

The role of the newsreaders before and after the change was also investigated. Their utterances's function classification is presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
Function classification of newsreaders' utterances  
in the news stories on political items, economy and social items

Newsreader's function	Newsreaders' utterances in the first series November, 1995	Newsreaders' utterances in the second series April, 1996
Informative	21 (91%)	13 (57%)
Interpretative	0	3 (13%)
Indirectly Interpretative	2 (9%)	7 (30%)
Total	23 (100%)	23 (100%)

According to the hypothesis of the study, the newsreaders would develop a more interpretative role after the change. The data shows that before the change the newsreaders almost never interpreted the news, basically presenting information. In spite the fact that after the change the newsreaders continued to present information in most of the cases (57% of the utterances), they did play a more active role, as shown by the increase in the number of direct and indirect interpretations. Therefore, the changes in *Jornal Nacional* did lead to a more active and interpretative role of the newsreader.

Another aspect of the newsreaders' active role concerns the utterances that presented the closing lines of the news stories. In other words, it is important to investigate who was the last speaker to appear in the news stories, since the last one to speak usually offers some kind of conclusion or interpretation. If we consider the 27 news stories on political, economic and social issues that presented some kind of interpretation (see Table 4), the

more active role of the newsreader after the change will become more clear. Table 6 presents the data on the speakers who presented the closing lines.

Table 6  
Speakers who presented the closing lines of the news stories  
with a restricted, plural-closed or plural-open form

Speaker	News stories of the first series November, 1995	News stories of the second series April, 1996
Newsreader	4	10
Reporter	6	0
Person in soubite	3	1
Comentator*	3	0
Total	16	11

\* Joelmir Betting, *Jornal Nacional's* commentator on economic issues.

The data shows that after the change it was almost the rule that the newsreader is responsible for presenting the closing lines of the news story. Only once did the newsreader not conclude the news, when the person in the soubite was the last one to appear<sup>23</sup>. Before the change, the reporters were more active than the newsreader and in the second series they never appeared last. The data confirms that the newsreaders did start playing a more active and interpretative role after the change.

#### d) The soundbites

Another issue related to the consequences of the change of *Jornal Nacional's* newsreaders is the weight of governmental sources in the coverage of political, economic and social issues. To investigate the hypothesis that the change would lead to a less government-based coverage it was proposed to verify if the number of soundbites with sources outside the government would increase after the change.



The soundbite can be defined as “a film or tape segment, within a news story, showing someone speaking” (Hallin, 1994, p. 133). It refers to the segments when the person speaking in the newscast is not an employee of the TV network. In the case of the United States, the historical tendency of shrinking the average length of the soundbite (from more than 40 seconds in the 1960s to less than 10 seconds in the 1980s) has been interpreted as an expression of the process by which the news became much more mediated by journalists (ibid., pp. 133-152). The fact that “outsiders” have usually less than ten seconds to express their thoughts in the newscast has very important implications to the nature of the political discourse. The short length of the soundbite indicates that journalists are responsible for building the unity and meaning of the story line. Politicians have their interpretations of the facts or issues presented by the news, but they depend on the way the news story is “packed” by the journalists to ensure that their interpretations will prevail. Thus, the presence of the person in the news story does not ensure that his or her interpretation will be accepted or valued positively. Nevertheless, the classification of the soundbites according to the person who speaks is an important variable to indicate the weight of different sources in the television news making.

We registered the presence of 82 soundbites in the 67 news stories on political, economical and social issues analyzed, 44 from the first series and 38 from the second. The average length of the soundbites was 8,9 seconds, less than in the case of the American television journalism (see Hallin, 1994, p. 133). Table 7 presents the classification of all soundbites:

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<sup>23</sup> It is suggestive that the person in the soundbite was President Fernando Henrique. Before the change, the three persons in the soundbites concluding the news story were President Fernando Henrique, a member of the Parliament, and a Congress lobbyist.

Table 7  
Classification of the soundbites in *Jornal Nacional*

Person in soundbite	First series November, 1995	Second series April, 1996	Total
Member of government (President, Ministers, members of Executive power)	9 (20,5%)	7 (18,4%)	16 (19,6 %)
Politician not member of government (Congress members, party leaders)	11 (25,0%)	0	11 (13,5%)
Member of Judiciary	1 (2,3%)	0	1 (1,2%)
Member of Non-government Organization	2 (4,5%)	1 (2,6%)	3 (3,6%)
Common person	17 (38,6%)	23 (60,6%)	40 (48,7%)
Business men, liberal professionals (doctors, lawyers)	4 (9,1%)	7 (18,4%)	11 (13,4%)

The hypothesis about the decline of governmental sources is confirmed, but the difference between the series is not a very important one (only 2,1%). The quantitative analysis does not offer a definitive confirmation of this trend and, again, more data is necessary. Nevertheless, it is important to note some important qualitative differences if the two series are compared. One first difference is that among the 9 government-member soundbites of the first series, the speaker of President Fernando Henrique, Sergio Amaral, was responsible for 3 of them. He never appeared in the second series. Another difference is that from the 11 politicians not members of government of the first series, 3 were leaders of the government in the Congress. Such politicians don't appear in the second series. The qualitative analysis suggests that before the change the Presidency has its interpretations presented more frequently by *Jornal Nacional*.

The most important change in the analysis of the soundbites has to do with the disappearance of politicians not members of government in the second series. Having taken 25% of the soundbites of the first series, these politicians do not appear after the change. This is another indication of the decreasing coverage of political items in the newscast. The second most important change has to do with the growth in the participation of “common persons”, taking more than 60% of the soundbites of the second series. The decline in the participation of politicians is accompanied by an important raise in the number of appearances of “ordinary citizens” in the newscast. This change suggests a move towards a more “populist” and less political coverage. It is also important to stress the few number of soundbites with members of non-governmental organizations what shows a virtual absence of the civil society in the newstories.

## **Conclusion**

The change of *Jornal Nacional*'s newsreaders had important consequences for the its form of representation of political, economic and social items. Thus, the replacement of Cid Moreira was not only a change in the format of the newscast, but also in its content. The content analysis showed that the “new” *Jornal Nacional* is characterized by a more plural and less government-based coverage and a more active and interpretative role of the newsreader. The results were less consistent in the case of the soundbites with governmental sources and other investigations are necessary to evaluate if these trends are definitive or transitory.

The content analysis also showed a move towards a kind of journalism with less coverage of the political items and more emphasis on crime and violence, miscellaneous subjects and sports. The decline in the time devoted to political issues has complex consequences for the political process. To understand the reasons for such change it is necessary to consider Globo's role in the last decades of Brazilian politics. The network may be diminishing the coverage of politics to avoid the frequent conflicts with part of its broad audience because of its partisan coverage.

To achieve a better understanding of television news practices, new theoretical approaches that take into consideration their relation with the political process and institutions are very important. The present study is aimed at contributing to this theory building effort by stressing the links between the changes in *Jornal Nacional* and Globo's new political strategy. Thus, the level of the mobilization of the civil society, the degree of consensus among the political elite, the relationship of the networks with their broad audience, are all factors which have a close relation to the changes in television journalism. The role and functioning of the contemporary mass media, and particularly of television journalism, cannot be properly understood if the analyst ignores these important political variables.

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