Studies on Media Framing in Latin America
Introduction

Paola Ingrassia

CONICET
Universidad Nacional de San Juan
paoingrassia2@gmail.com
/0000-0002-2810-4632

Carlos Muñiz

Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales
Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León
carlos.munizm@uanl.mx
/0000-0002-9021-8198

Natalia Aruguete

CONICET
Universidad Nacional de Quilmes
nataliaaruguete@gmail.com
/0000-0002-1571-9224

Jamil Marques

Departamento de Ciencias Políticas
Universidade Federal de Paraná
marquesjamil@gmail.com
/0000-0002-5256-1964

Discourses on public affairs, in their competing approaches to a legitimate and generalized perception of social and political reality, resort to controversy, the spectacular and the dramatic registers. In this respect, discourses on the news reveal that the media, as political actors, frame their coverage according to a dynamic of polarization that goes beyond them, but in which they represent a central component. In this arena of conflicting meanings, politicians, the media, social movements, religious institutions and other social and public actors find themselves within the same community, where they dialogue and compete to impose their own definition of public issues, some more effectively than others depending on the circumstances, using the full range of available platforms of expression in today's complex digital media landscape. The public meaning that is ultimately established depends on the discursive strategies employed, and reveals the power relations at play, at any given moment, within the community.

The study of the convergent trajectories of these actors in the agora requires an exhaustive, global and structural vision, by considering the communication circuit in its entirety and examining all the dimensions of the conflicts of symbolic power at work in this process. This leads us to reject the hypothesis that strategic players, information professionals and audiences are merely the reflection of sanitized political and social realities. On the contrary, policies, questions and

events are subject to patterns of selection and interpretation defined through negotiation and contestation, which may evolve over time. With this critical analysis of political and social reality in mind, we bring forward the issue *"Studies on media framing in Latin America"*.

Discussing this topic in the journal *On Journalism* is largely motivated by the progress made in political communication research in recent decades, especially in relation to framing theory. Framing theory has gradually emerged in the field of political analysis as a multiparadigmatic research program (D'Angelo, 2012), with a growing production in Latin America of theoretical and empirical works developed from this perspective. Recent political, institutional and social events in the region reinforce the need for in-depth research, using a broad and flexible approach, to comprehensively address the production and circulation of public meanings.

More specifically, framings in the media, political discourses and framings of meaning for collective action, among others, are today effective tools for analyzing the characteristics of governmental communication, the polarizing narratives during election campaigns, the media coverage of gender inequalities, collective action by social movements and activism, the discursive configuration of immigration, the treatment of crime news or even the activation of framings in digital social networks, in capacity of escaping conventional information circuits. In short, this analytical approach provides the tools needed to reflect on the different stages of the communication process: from the framings of broadcasters to those present in texts, as well as from the interpretation frameworks of audiences to the framings influencing the political culture in which discourses are produced and circulated.

The concept of the "totality" of framing (Aruguete, 2021; D'Angelo, 2012) makes it possible to approach this process from different paradigms: critical, cognitive and constructivist. The critical paradigm focuses on the construction phase of media framing, studying the relationship between social movements, political elites and the media (Ingrassia et al., 2023). The cognitive paradigm looks at the influence of messages, how framings activate individual perceptual schemes to evaluate political or events of other nature (Matthes & Kohring, 2008), and how they interact with an individual's pre-existing knowledge to influence his or her interpretations. The constructivist paradigm holistically analyzes the social processes through which worldviews on political issues are formed. According to this approach, the dissemination of certain framings is explained by the coherence between cultural conventions, narrative traditions and individual consumer patterns, activated by specific elements of framing.

Drawing on interpretive sociology and cognitive psychology, the approach to framing adopted here focuses on the media, emphasizing their importance within a broader social process of defining reality. Historical and theoretical reviews of framing are combined with approaches based on the empirical application of different paradigms. The coexistence of these paradigms makes it possible to consider the processes of framing of communication from convergent, sometimes complementary, sometimes opposing theoretical viewpoints. Although this field has given rise to numerous theoretical debates (Entman, 1993, 2007; D'Angelo, 2002, 2012; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), its epistemological foundations have led to few in-depth studies. Yet this is an important aspect, given the various movements that have provided the epistemological foundations for this multiparadigmatic research program (D'Angelo, 2012).

The scientific articles gathered in this issue aim to address the themes outlined above, while exploring empirical avenues for analyzing the dynamics at play in the creation, circulation and reception of framings throughout the process of exchanging meanings.

The contribution by Ângela Marques, Luis Mauro, Sá Martino and Vanessa Spirandeo focuses on the premises established by Erving Goffman (2002, 2012) and Judith Butler (2004, 2015, 2019), and invites to an in-depth examination, without excluding internal contradictions, of the epistemological foundations of framing theory. Some fundamental aspects emerge, enabling us to grasp how framing has evolved to become one of the main theories in the field of political communication. These aspects will also provide entry points for the epistemological and theoretical approach of this issue. Goffman's concept of framing helps us understand the interpretive exchanges at work in the communication process. Goffman uses the term "frame" to designate the elements that organize the principles governing the interpretation of social events and subjective participation in them. For Goffman, "frame analysis" means exploring how experience is organized in these terms (Goffman, 1974, pp. 10-11). Butler takes Goffman's concept and applies it to media framing, conceived as constructions that indicate positions of power and seek to regulate intersubjective experiences. This critical perspective on journalistic production and media images connects in turn Butler's approach to other works presented in this issue.

The concept of framing proposed here implies acknowledging that journalists also rely on constructs for understanding and interpreting reality in order to develop their news content. These contents are defined as sets of symbolic resources or "toolkits" (D'Angelo, 2002) that simplify the understanding of events by

society. These symbolic resources take shape through the images and meanings present in media representations, while being influenced by other factors, such as personal experiences, characteristics of the subject, prior cultural identifications and the collective memory of a community (Koziner, 2015, p. 28).

Pablo Pimentel's article explores how journalism structures narratives and reorganizes signs to address a socially constructed reality. Pimentel thus proposes to rethink the analysis of the framing process from a "critical Latin American perspective". In this sense, his contribution is fundamental, demonstrating the need to adopt a position that goes beyond "empiricist epistemological assumptions" and abandons the claim to objectivity often demanded for the study of the coverage of political issues. Pimentel argues that the construction of narratives is based on routinized professional logics, revealed in the format and content of the narratives, as well as on institutionalized mechanisms underpinning inter-organizational relations. He also identifies discursive resources in newspaper editorials that indicates the positioning and the authority of media organizations. Reflecting on the conflicts of meaning that have characterized recent political crises in Brazil, the author concludes that the interventionist tone of journalistic stakeholders is a good example of what he refers to as the "liberal-captive" media system, in which the press promotes its own agendas and interests, while maintaining an appearance of neutrality and impartiality. To present this production of meaning as an objective process is nothing more than a "strategic ritual of protection for journalists from the risks of their professional activity", and above all an unconscious and naturalized method of legitimizing the status quo within journalistic practice (Tuchman, 1999, p. 199).

A broad approach to framing implies recognizing its presence in all types of messages, as well as in the different stages of discourse production and recognition (Duckman, 2001). However, to date, studies have mainly focused on identifying and analyzing the framing present in news, drawing criticism for being too "mediacentrically biased" (Valera Ordaz, 2016). According to this mediacentric perspective, framings are defined as sets of discursive devices through which various political, corporate or media actors propose a way of defining issues of public interest (Schuck et al., 2013). They constitute a type of information translation that uses frames to propose a particular point of view on reality (D'Angelo, 2002; de Vreese, 2003; Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2012). However, this bias does not take into account the diversity that the framing process can bring and its ability to intervene in any communicative event that involves the creation, circulation and transmission of messages. This is particularly important to bear in mind when acting in today's digital environ-

ment. In this respect, Henrique Moreira Caixeta's article presents an interesting theoretical-methodological proposal to consider the relationship between TV series, the public, crime reporting and public opinion.

In the field of political communication, it is common to refer to political discourses as important sources to the process of definition of the political agenda and debate. Media framing, for its part, identifies how events are presented through information that highlights or leaves out certain aspects of reality (de Vreese, 2005; Muñiz, 2015). In short, framing is conceived as a paradigm for enriching behavioral and critical approaches, whether quantitative or qualitative. Framing is a form of exercise of power, as it affects our understanding of the political world (Reese, 2007). However, there is a lack of studies which empirically address the issue of political framing and its impact on the effective treatment of events by the media. We refer more specifically to the analysis of communication strategies employed by various actors within the political system to defend a given vision of social reality and public policy, through advocacy devices (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; de Vreese, 2012). Although studies of this kind can be carried out in different spheres of the political field, they most often focus on the influence exerted by the framings proposed by governments in the case of parliamentary systems. Indeed, the framings promoted by governments or other political leaders constitute as many official representations that sometimes integrate with, and sometimes oppose, the various instances of discursive exchange, the framings then appearing as expressions of a conflict of meanings. Mario Luis Grangeia's contribution to the present issue eloquently addresses this topic of study. Taking up the concept of framing from the perspective of cultural sociology, he examines government discourses in the 30 years following the restoration of democracy (1985-2016) and during the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945/1951-1954), focusing on the imagery conveyed by these governments of social policies in Brazil. "During the phase of construction of the framing of news and public policies, the various stakeholders involved, such as journalists, media institutions, political decision-makers and civil society, engage in power struggles that leave an imprint in texts, both in the media and political documents." (Koziner, 2022, p. 197). From this point onwards, continues Koziner (2022), various actors, especially those with more clout in political and public debates, will represent interests and worldviews and attempt to establish them as universal and widely shared points of view. Here, the confrontation between two levels of framing becomes evident: on the one hand, framing in communication, which refers to the information transmitted, and on the other, framing in thought, which refers to the individual cognitive understanding of the information received (Druckman, 2001). To understand the

impacts of official framing, it is essential to understand the framing promoted and activated by the critical and constructivist paradigms.

Since the end of the 20th century, concern about the random risk of becoming a victim of crime has taken shape not only in public opinion, but also in political agendas and, above all, in media coverage (Dammert, 2010; Kessler, 2009). Crime, violence and public insecurity have become increasingly prominent in the media, especially in recent years. Fear of crime has gradually spread across large, medium-sized and small urban centers. The way in which news stories and violence of all kinds are presented and qualified, the way in which victims and perpetrators are described, and the characterization of geographical locations according to their dangerousness are just some of the features that shape such news coverage. This is especially relevant in authoritarian contexts, such as the former military dictatorship regimes of the region before re-democratization. It this particular context, Júlio César Rigoni Filho studies the role played by journalistic coverage during this period and highlights the existence of criminal framing, to the detriment of public health framing.

Another theme addressed in this issue of *On Journalism* is gender inequality and violence perpetrated by men, two major problems which affect many societies and have become of public interest in recent years. Social problems must be defined and legitimized in at least one of the competing arenas in order to reach the status of public interest matter (Ingrassia et al., 2023). The media constitute one of these competing arenas, not only because they produce public meanings in opposition to other political and social actors, but also because they enable social events to gain visibility. Scott (2019) points out that gender has not been historically defined in these terms, and is a construct which emerges "from historically situated social organizations and cultural representations" (Scott, 2019, p. 69). In this respect, feminist movements have played a key role in promoting this social problem as a matter of public interest. The article "Media coverage of violence against women in Amazonian newspapers: a framing analysis of news published in 2021", by Daniele Silva Lima, Wyldiany Oliveira, Gabriela Almeida Silva and Camilla Quesada Tavares, supports this suggestion. The authors present a review of theories and methods for studying the framing of news about violence against women in three media groups in the wider Amazon region (Amazon Legal), one of the areas of Brazil with the highest number of cases pertaining to this social problem during the period studied. They further suggest that Scott's thinking can be complementary to the framing functions proposed by Entman (1993), on a theoretical-methodological level, in order to analyze a range of frames with a gender perspective in regional media, such as penal, legal, statistical, dramatic or even awareness and gender frames, taking into account their strong power of social mobilization to respond to the social demands and needs of the population (Ghizzoni, 2013).

In "What is all about? Framing in Political Science", Druckman (2011) associates the term "framing" with the notion of "preference". We understand, assimilate and interpret objects, phenomena and events in the world according to our preferences. James (1869) further asserts that the selection of certain thought patterns activated by discourse approaches, considering that political and social events are also discursive constructions, depends on the ability of these frames to echo and not contradict pre-existing knowledge. In Butler's words, frames are definitively "forms of intelligibility that promote the functioning of the State and are therefore self-constituting" (p. 213).

In this issue, we seek to bring together the elements constitutive of the framing process in communication that takes into account all the additional information required to make sense of an interpretation or a reinterpretation of the world. Here, new discourses come into contact with one another, activating the prior information and evidence available for assessing issues. Our intention is to present some of the multiple perspectives that contribute to understand framing as an integral, comprehensive, dynamic and interactive program.

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