

Jair Bolsonaro’s Populist Communication on Brazilian Television: An Analysis of Television Newscasts on Globo and Record during the COVID-19 Pandemic

BRUNO ARAÚJO¹

Federal University of Mato Grosso, Brazil

LIZIANE GUAZINA

University of Brasilia, Brazil

News media continue to play a central role in promoting public debate and the visibility of populist messages. This study discusses how Brazilian television journalism reacted to the populism of Jair Bolsonaro during the COVID-19 crisis. We adopted a content analysis and a framing analysis to identify the main themes and frames in reports at the beginning of the crisis by the country’s 2 main television news programs. The corpus consists of 26 editions of *Jornal Nacional (JN)* and 26 editions of *Jornal da Record (JR)*. Our hypothesis is that these news programs had significantly different interpretations of the Bolsonaro government’s actions. The data show that *JN* voiced its opposition to the president, while *JR* assumed the role of the government’s official voice, creating mechanisms to normalize populism. These results have important implications for understanding how the political positions adopted by traditional media affect how populism is promoted in the public sphere.

Keywords: populism, pandemic, Jair Bolsonaro, TV Newscasts, framing

Studies on communication and populism have demonstrated how the media continues to play an important role in the dissemination, spread, and normalization of populist messages (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). Jair Bolsonaro’s rise to power in Brazil posed several challenges to those studying his communication style and media representation, in dialogue with the literature on populism (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2016; Mudde, 2019; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Since the democratization of the country in 1988, Brazil has never voted in favor of an extreme right-wing politician with an open authoritarian and antidemocratic rhetoric. Similar to other populists,

Bruno Araújo: brrunoaraujo@gmail.com

Liziane Guazina: liziane.g@uol.com.br

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Bolsonaro makes use of old and new elements of populism, resorting to the "us" versus "them" antagonistic division of society: "the pure people" or "good citizens" on one side and "the enemies of the fatherland" on the other (Mudde, 2019; Taggart, 2000). This antagonism was voiced in the 2018 elections toward whom Bolsonaro called "red enemies," a reference to the Workers' Party and the political left. Throughout his mandate, from 2019 to 2022, he continued to use elements of populism in his rhetoric such as authoritarianism, moralism, and nationalism, while voicing an antisystem and antipolitical view.

One year after Bolsonaro took office, Brazil was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's response to the crisis was affected by Bolsonaro's populist actions. While the number of COVID-related infections and deaths rose exponentially, Bolsonaro voiced his denialist discourse, disrespecting health measures. In fact, previous works have analyzed the president's disinformation strategies, finding that he and his followers disseminated false information about protective measures and promoted a sense of mistrust about vaccines (Alcantara & Ferreira, 2020; Recuero & Soares, 2022).

There are other studies on news coverage of the crisis, focusing on the themes, sources, and other elements that comprise the editorial choices of media, yet no specific focus on populism (Cajazeira, Souza, Antoniutti, & Neto, 2020; Silva, Veloso, & Cardoso, 2020). That discussions on the media's role in the pandemic can be furthered with analyses that seek to more specifically understand how populist discourse was interpreted by traditional media outlets, especially television, given its impact as a news source.

Brazil, which became the country with the second-highest COVID-related deaths after just a few months, is capable of providing relevant contributions to the study of populist communication based on how much scrutiny traditional media has of Bolsonaro populism. Thus, this study analyzes news coverage from two of the most-watched television news programs in the country, *Jornal Nacional (JN)* from TV Globo, and *Jornal da Record (JR)* from Record TV, and focuses on the frames these news programs adopt when reacting to Bolsonaro's populism in the early stages of the pandemic. The methodology combines content analysis with framing analysis to explore a corpus of 52 broadcasts from the month of April 2020, a time that experienced a significant increase in COVID-related cases coupled with a political crisis.

JN and *JR* are primetime broadcasts on Brazilian television and represent the main news product their stations want to convey. Open television is still an important source of information in the country. According to the 2022 Reuters Institute Digital Report, TV is a source of news for 55% of Brazilians. During the pandemic, the media, especially television, experienced a considerable increase in audience rates, expanding the reach of these sources of information ("TV in the Times," 2020).

In this study, we start with the hypothesis that the two news programs built very different frames around Bolsonaro's stance on the pandemic, even in the face of all his denialism and the serious situation of public health. *JR* incorporated the president's agenda and used their broadcast as the official voice of the government, portraying Bolsonaro as a leader who was concerned about the pandemic and its impacts. *JN*, on the other hand, was closely associated with health authorities and framed the president as a denialist leader, investing in mechanisms to counteract the former president's discourse.

We argue that the different media interpretations and the position adopted by *JR* can be explained by the political alignment that Record TV had with the former president since the 2018 elections. If confirmed, our hypothesis will have relevant implications for the field, as it suggests that the media sector's response to populism does not always respect previous normative standards of commitment to democracy and science; it may attach itself to framing disputes around circumstantial ideological alignments, at least in terms of populist leaders and their intense politicization of the pandemic.

Populism and Media

Although containing marks of classic populism, the political style of figures such as Bolsonaro has incorporated other elements of populism since the beginning of this century. Some of these other elements come from a content point of view, such as antiestablishment and antielite discourses; however, there are also ideological elements from the international right claiming God is systemically superior (Mudde, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

This ideology has ties to a traditional agenda that violates the rights of certain social groups that populist rhetoric tends to label as "others." The traditional, conservative, and religious morality on which Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric is based is a set of authoritarian values that place individual freedom over collective rights, attempting to suppress diversity through explicit antigender and antisocial actions and discourse, effectively criminalizing anything that is different through a friend-enemy logic. Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that 21st century populisms are fed by resentments and fears in reaction to progressive cultural values and further social changes. Even though their work focuses solely on the United States and Europe, it makes valid points that can help toward understanding Bolsonaro's rhetoric, which clearly emulated the behavior of his American counterpart with his permanent attacks on vaccines, claiming they were Chinese and did not work (Recuero & Soares, 2022).

In fact, in Brazil, the extreme right successfully mobilized and instilled fear, anger, an emotive use of language, and other stylistic elements that make up communication strategies of populists (Hameleers et al., 2021). Bolsonaro knew how to use corruption as an electoral benefit; he labeled the others as posing a communist threat, encouraging hatred toward the left. Doing that helped him to unite conservative groups and reactionary sectors of society, which include the middle class, the military, religious organizations, and ultraliberal economists (Rennó, 2022). In addition to these groups, traditional media outlets have built pro-Bolsonaro biases, like Record TV in the 2018 elections (Porto, Neves, & Lima, 2020), and the Jovem Pan group throughout his government (Chagas & Cruz, 2022).

During the pandemic, Bolsonaro summarized this "threat" to authoritarian populism as coming from scientists, journalists, and health authorities, based on the dissemination of false content on social networks (Ferreira, 2021; Recuero & Soares, 2022). These studies suggest that he effectively used digital media to mobilize his followers, which shows that the networks have the necessary structural and discursive conditions for direct communication between a populist and his or her audiences (Engesser et al., 2016; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). However, despite being relevant to the dissemination of populist messages, social networks do not, by themselves, explain the current visibility of populism.

As Chadwick (2017) argues, a hybrid media system contains a permanent interaction between practices and discourses of old and new media that affects everything from production to the circulation and consumption of content. Traditional media content also circulates across networks and is disseminated by various actors on different channels. This content can be appropriated in different ways by the public and political agents; it can be used to attack a media outlet or to reaffirm one's political positions.

Thus, media discourses continue to contribute to forming opinions that can influence public debate on many levels (Langer & Grubner, 2020). Mazzoleni (2008) argues that the symbolic representations disseminated by media can, intentionally or not, "provide a significant degree of support for the rise of populism phenomena" (p. 50).

The literature has used this to understand the relationship between media and populism by analyzing how these leaders are represented in media discourse. Mazzoleni (2014) reminds us that populism is a communicative phenomenon strongly linked to the populism of the media itself (media populism). In this sense, the discursive construction, especially in journalism, of in-groups and out-groups, of hostilities toward elites and institutions, and of appealing to feelings of morality, combined with the communication of populist leaders, can lead the public to support leaders who exploit their discontent with the political system, thus giving themselves electoral and communicative advantages. Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, and Wirth (2018) showed that media populism can provide populists with the opportunity to present their messages to the public as being legitimate. These same authors point out that, even though most journalists do not necessarily intend to promote populism, the simple dissemination of populist messages in the media is a mechanism in itself to make it more visible, thus legitimizing populist demands.

Ekström, Patrona, and Thornborrow (2020) point out that journalists can use mechanisms to normalize the agendas of far-right populist leaders by normalizing hate speech against social minorities in the media. These mechanisms mainly involve the constant presence of these actors in the news and the absence of anything that contradicts them. Bos, van der Brug, and de Vreese (2011) point out how news reports shape the public image of right-wing populist leaders by boosting their visibility in coverage, making them appear to be more effective and knowledgeable about the topics under discussion.

Bolsonaro's popularity cannot be explained solely as a result of a successful digital strategy. The normalization of his discourse occurred gradually, with media playing an important part before and during the elections (Araújo & Prior, 2020). The media not only portrayed Bolsonaro in satire programs and covered his politically incorrect phrases and extreme views; they also covered topics related to the electoral strategy of the extreme right. An example of this is the coverage of corruption scandals, which increased feelings of criminalization of politics and opposition to the Workers' Party.

Langer and Grubner (2020) argue that the media continue to play an enormously important role in the public debate. They analyzed how a traditional media outlet was important for defining the political agenda on immigration policy in the United Kingdom. They concluded that British newspapers not only helped draw attention to the case but actually kept it on the agenda (including on social media) for long enough that public authorities were forced to respond. The permanent processing of information

in the hybrid media system does not decrease the importance of mainstream media in the public space; it increases it.

During the pandemic, social networks became a space for spreading the populist rhetoric of Bolsonaro, whose denialist posture, as shown by Alcantara and Ferreira (2020), helped to aggravate the ideological differences of opinion about the crisis. Given current interactions between traditional and digital media, as Chadwick (2017) points out, it is reasonable to assume that media coverage, especially broadcast television, can expand the reach of populist discourse, as we shall analyze below.

The Context: Bolsonaro and the Coronavirus Crisis in Brazil

With the emergence of the pandemic, Bolsonaro used a denialist strategy to intensify his populist rhetoric while downplaying the health crisis, even when it was showing clear signs of escalating. The first case in Brazil was identified in February 2020. Within a few months, Brazil became the country with the second-highest COVID-related deaths, behind only the United States, which, at that time, was also being governed by a right-wing populist.

Despite the public health authorities' recommendations, Bolsonaro directly opposed this measure, insisting that the economy could not stop in the face of what he called a "small case of the flu" (Alcantara & Ferreira, 2020, p. 137). What's more, he began to publicly defend the use of unproven medical products, such as hydroxychloroquine, which led to backlash from health workers and scientists (Soares, Recuero, Volcan, Fagundes, & Sodré, 2021). At the onset of the pandemic, the Minister of Health, physician Luiz Henrique Mandetta, refused to follow the president's ideas in favor of following the WHO's recommendations. He was then dismissed from his position on April 16, 2020, and replaced by oncologist Nelson Teich, who stayed on as minister for less than one month. He too was dismissed over a difference of opinion with Bolsonaro and his view of the pandemic.

The former president then appointed General Eduardo Pazuelo as Minister of Health. During his term and the worst period of the pandemic, Pazuelo did not take any measures to encourage social isolation. What's more, the Ministry of Health began to slowly release (and even omit) data on the number of positive COVID-related cases and deaths, forcing media outlets to unite and systematize the data released by the states.

Bolsonaro even stated that these data were not to be broadcast by TV Globo's *JN*. Under Pazuelo's administration, there was also a lack of oxygen being supplied to public hospitals in cities such as Manaus not to mention reports of experimental drugs being administered by doctors without patients' consent. Added to this is that the Brazilian government did not respond to vaccine proposals from pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer for months, thus delaying the start of vaccination in the country which directly affected the number of COVID-related deaths, currently over 700,000. Once the vaccination campaign began (implemented largely because of pressure from state governors, the courts, and Congress), Bolsonaro promoted actions to discourage immunization, spreading misinformation about the vaccines (Recuero & Soares, 2022). He even suggested that a vaccinated person could turn into an alligator and likened the vaccine to the HIV virus.

Bolsonaro increasingly harassed the press, governors, and democratic institutions that were looking to him for answers. He called journalists "vultures" ("In a New," 2020), threatened the Supreme Court with an "institutional crisis" and participated in demonstrations calling for the closure of the Congress and a return to military dictatorship, encouraging rallies and disrespect for health measures (Mercier, 2020). The president attacked governors who issued isolation measures and suspended nonessential activities. When the country reached 5,000 COVID-related deaths, Bolsonaro declared to the press: "So what? I'm sorry. What do you want me to do? I am the Messiah, but I do not perform miracles" (Garcia, Gomes, & Viana, 2020).

Methods

This study seeks to understand how the two most-watched Brazilian daily newscasts, *JN* and *JR*, framed the populist communication of Jair Bolsonaro at the beginning of the pandemic. We will seek to understand which interpretative proposals were mobilized by these two newscasts and to what extent their framings contributed to normalizing or criticizing the president during the crisis. The Globo and Record primetime newscasts are the major newscasts of the Brazilian media conglomerates. Globo Group still is the most relevant political-media actor in the Brazilian media system. Record Group is now the second-largest media company in the country and has connections to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a leader group of neopentecostalism in Brazil. The Globo and Record groups are rivals in the dispute for the audience and operate in the print, radio, television, and online media market.

An analysis of *JN* and *JR*'s coverage of the 2018 presidential elections, carried out by Porto et al. (2020), shows that their coverage did not differ significantly; however, *JR* presented a pro-Bolsonaro stance, thus supporting the extreme right's political project and the reshaping of political parallelism in Brazil. Cajazeira et al. (2020) show that *JN*'s news coverage from January to May 2020 was exclusively on the pandemic. Silva et al. (2020) showed how TV Globo's television news adopted a critical angle of government decisions.

Although these studies do give us insight into the media outlets' positions about Bolsonaro, and do produce relevant data to help understand how the pandemic was interpreted in the coverage, they are general in nature and do not specifically discuss the framework of populism in the pandemic. The particularities of Brazil and the different forms of interaction between media outlets and the government clearly require analyses that propose a new approach to investigating the pandemic.

How did the two television journalism programs react to Bolsonaro's populism? And did their support and criticism of the president in the elections (Globo and Record, respectively) remain the same during the global public health crisis? Using these questions as a starting point, we conducted an analysis of the news coverage based on the following research question:

RQ: How did JN and JR frame the populist action and communication of Jair Bolsonaro in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil?

After a preliminary analysis of the television news broadcasts in April 2020, we put together some research hypotheses to guide our interpretation of the data:

- H1: The coverage of the two newscasts frames the figure of the president quite differently during our analysis period.*
- H2: JR addressed topics that were of interest to the populist agenda and framed Bolsonaro as a leader concerned with the impacts of the pandemic.*
- H3: JN focused more on the perspective of health authorities and the importance of adopting isolation measures that were rejected by the president, thus framing Bolsonaro as a denialist leader.*

We conducted a three-stage analysis to understand how the two newscasts framed Bolsonaro's populism. First, we collected all news reports from the month of April that referenced the president and that were related to the pandemic. We then analyzed 52 editions of the news broadcasts between April 1 and 30, 2020: 26 editions from *JN* and 26 editions from *JR*. As a result, in the 52 editions based on the theme "Bolsonaro-pandemic," the corpus consists of 101 reports, 35 from *JR* and 66 from *JN*.

We chose April because it is a particularly important month from a health and political point of view. At the beginning, Brazil had less than 6,000 infected and about 200 deaths. On the last day of the same month, statistics showed more than 87,000 infected and 6,000 deaths. In addition, it was in April that the Minister of Health was dismissed over disagreements with Bolsonaro about the adoption of health measures.

In the second step, we designed a quantitative-qualitative strategy, using content analysis first to systematize Bolsonaro's visibility conditions, the main themes, and their frequency in news reports. Then, in the last step, based on the framing analysis, we qualitatively studied how the five main themes were framed; that is, we organized them to interpret Bolsonaro's presence and rhetoric on the COVID-19 pandemic by the two newscasts.

Content Analysis allows for a systematic and quantitative description of the corpus to be analyzed (Berelson, 1952). After transcribing and describing the audiovisual material in the corpus, we defined the themes of the reports in an analytical attempt to identify the main topic of the story. The database was built from the following categories: (1) newscast; (2) date of edition; (3) dominant theme in the story; (4) length of the story; (5) Bolsonaro's screen time; (6) number and length of soundbites.

We then isolated the five main themes of coverage and, through a framing analysis, removed the predominant frames of meaning. This provided us with a more specific and qualitative study of how the most relevant themes were framed about Bolsonaro in the pandemic. Framing analysis studies the production of meanings by identifying "interpretive packages" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) of how a social event/actor is represented in the media. According to Entman (1993), the framing verifies how reality was perceived in terms of identifying problems, defining causes and consequences, moral evaluations, and building solutions. Empirical studies that use the framing method to analyze the relationship between media and populism range from analyses of populist frames in the media to attempts at understanding the extent

to which these frames influence political preferences and attitudes (Busby, Gubler, & Hawkins, 2019; Hameleers, Bos, & Vreese, 2017).

This methodological option allows us to understand the two newscasts' specific reactions to Bolsonaro's populism, using data to reveal the frames of meaning these media outlets proposed to the public in their pandemic coverage. These data are discussed in the next topic in the following order: visibility of the president in news coverage, dominant themes in the reports, and careful examination of the mainframes.

Results and Discussion

In this part, we present our research findings. We start by quantifying the length of the COVID-19 reports that mentioned Bolsonaro and their distribution over the 26 days of analysis in April 2020. The research shows a relevant difference in the number of stories that link Jair Bolsonaro to the "pandemic" theme. As we can see in Table 1, the 35 reports from *JR* add up to 72 minutes and 2 seconds, while the 66 reports from *JN* add up to 150 minutes and 81 seconds. It is interesting to note that, despite that the number and length of *JN* reports on issues that link Bolsonaro to the COVID-19 crisis is double that of *JR*, proportionally speaking, Bolsonaro receives much more visibility in Record TV reports.

Table 1. Distribution of the Time Allocated to Bolsonaro in COVID-19 News Reports on TV Newscasts.

Newscast	Bolsonaro screen time	N ^o of Bolsonaro soundbites	Length of Bolsonaro soundbites	Total Length of Time of Reports
JR 35 reports	25.36% (<i>n</i> = 18.3)	24	11% (<i>n</i> = 7.95)	100% (<i>N</i> = 72.2)
JN 66 reports	13.52% (<i>n</i> = 20.4)	34	8.77% (<i>n</i> = 13.23)	100% (<i>N</i> = 150.81)

Bolsonaro's screen time in *JR* is 18 minutes and 3 seconds, which is equivalent to 25.34% of the total time of the reports linking the president to the pandemic, while in *JN* the president's screen time is only 13.52% of the total. Something similar happens when one looks at the time of Bolsonaro's statements in these reports in relation to the total number of soundbites in each newscast. *JN* published 34 statements made by the president throughout the month of April, compared with the 24 in *JR*. However, soundbites with the president in *JN* are equivalent to 8.77% of the total time of the reports, a drop from 11% in the second. Thus, proportionally, Bolsonaro is given more of a voice on *JR* than he is on *JN*.

These data can be explained by a set of factors. One of these factors is that *JN* has a more fragmented reporting style than *JR*. While the latter concentrated references to Bolsonaro in more in-depth reports that dealt with the president's day-to-day activities in Brasilia, such as his daily speeches to supporters outside the Alvorada Palace. In terms of meetings and other official commitments, *JN* had quite a different approach. Although most of the soundbites were included in the reports, they related to specific themes, each one dealing with a different issue, contrary to the strategy of packaging the president's agenda

observed in the Record TV news. In addition, *JN* echoed Bolsonaro's statements in shorter times, almost always interspersed with speeches of contextualization.

The many soundbites by Bolsonaro on *JN* is also explained by sharing that the newscast used statements made by the president in previous reports, whether to reflect reactions and criticisms from politicians and experts or to show how he minimized the severity of the disease at different points during the crisis. The sequences in Table 2, corresponding to one single edition, try to exemplify the distribution of reports that include statements made by the president.

Table 2. Sequence of Reports on Bolsonaro in a Single Day of Coverage.

<i>JR</i> (April 8, 2020)	<i>JN</i> (April 8, 2020)
Report 1 Anchors: President Bolsonaro and the minister of health [. . .] met today to define the course of action to combat the new coronavirus. Bolsonaro will soon make a statement to talk about health and economic measures to be taken. (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020a, 00:20:11).	Report 1 Anchors: President Jair Bolsonaro has just made his fifth speech since the beginning of the new coronavirus crisis. . . . Bolsonaro has once again stated that there are two problems to be solved: the virus and unemployment (<i>Jornal Nacional</i> , 2020a, 00:37:37).
	Report 2 Anchors: Shortly before this statement in which Bolsonaro said he respected the autonomy of local authorities, Minister Alexandre de Moraes published an injunction prohibiting the president from suspending measures enacted by governors and mayors (<i>Jornal Nacional</i> , 2020a, 00:38:40).
	Report 3 Anchors: As we have just seen, President Bolsonaro defended the use of chloroquine to treat Covid-19. There is no consensus among the scientific community on this subject (<i>Jornal Nacional</i> , 2020a, 00:41:15).

The sequences shown in Table 2 also show a significant difference in approach to how the two newscasts represented Bolsonaro. This difference was confirmed after we used content analysis to systematize the main themes of the reports linking Bolsonaro to COVID-19, in Tables 3 and 4. The five most relevant themes highlighted by *JR* and *JN*, respectively, demonstrate significantly different approaches to the president.

In Table 3, we can see that *JR* linked Bolsonaro to the pandemic, particularly his government's attempts to reduce the impacts of the crisis (25.71% of the reports on actions against the pandemic) without mentioning the measures he resorted to when trying to prevent local authorities from adopting health authority recommendations. This newscast's second and third most relevant themes were the president's

agenda of commitments (20%) and the protests of people who, like Bolsonaro, were against social isolation as a measure to contain the virus (17.14%).

Table 3. Dominant Themes Involving Bolsonaro in JR.

Theme	Frequency
Actions against the pandemic	25.71% (<i>n</i> = 9)
Agenda	20% (<i>n</i> = 7)
Action/Demonstration against isolation	17.14% (<i>n</i> = 6)
Mandetta Conflict	14.28% (<i>n</i> = 5)
Cloroquina	8.58% (<i>n</i> = 3)
Reactions/Criticisms	5.72% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Other	5.72% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Legal Action	2.85% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Total	100% (<i>N</i> = 35)

These data suggest that the Record TV news program was the "official voice" of the government when covering the pandemic. What's more, if we consider the focus given by *JR* to reports on demonstrations against social isolation (17.14%) and the unproven effectiveness of using chloroquine (8.58%) to treat COVID-19, we are led to the conclusion that television news becomes a sounding board for the president's rhetoric. As both contain themes of Jair Bolsonaro's populist communication, the data reveal a media populism stance on the part of *JR*, which appropriates and normalizes the perspective of Bolsonaro supporters on the pandemic.

As shown in Table 4, the *JN* focused on the president's conflict with his Minister of Health (19.70%). Quite different from what we observed on the other newscast, *JN* relies on different actors and institutions to criticize and react (13.64%) to Bolsonaro. This reactive content on the president is the focus of the theme "Legal Action," which makes up 13.64% of the analyzed corpus. It includes several actions taken by the Supreme Court against Bolsonaro to determine which measures would be used to combat the pandemic, either to prevent him from further actions, or to decree the end of isolation measures as determined by states and municipalities.

Table 4. Dominant Themes Involving Bolsonaro in JN.

Theme	Frequency
Mandetta Conflict	19.70% (<i>n</i> = 13)
Reactions/Criticisms	13.64% (<i>n</i> = 9)
Legal Action	13.64% (<i>n</i> = 9)
Disregard of health measures	12.12% (<i>n</i> = 8)
Assessing Government Performance	10.60% (<i>n</i> = 7)
Other	10.60% (<i>n</i> = 7)
Action/Demonstration against isolation	7.57% (<i>n</i> = 5)
Actions against the pandemic	6.06% (<i>n</i> = 4)
Fake News	3.03% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Cloroquina	1.52% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Decree	1.52% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Total	100% (<i>N</i> = 66)

Similarly, the content analysis made it possible to perceive the emphasis given by *JN* to the president's constant attitudes of disregard for health measures (12.12%) defended by the Ministry of Health, by doctors and scientists, and by the WHO. In view of the president's stance, the newscast focused its coverage on public opinion polls (10.60%) on the public's assessment of Bolsonaro.

The differences between the two newscasts become even more evident when we observe how they framed their reports. Tables 5 and 6 list, in order of importance, the frames used by *JR* and *JN*, respectively, in the five agenda topics identified in the content analysis.

Table 5. Framing of Topics Involving Bolsonaro in JR.

Theme	Discourse excerpts	Framing
<i>Actions against the pandemic</i>	Anchors: The Federal Government estimates it will spend 200 billion reais to help the economy, guarantee jobs, and fight the coronavirus crisis. Today, President Bolsonaro signed the emergency relief project for informal workers and micro-entrepreneurs (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020b, 00:34:04).	President acts to contain impacts of the pandemic. Protagonist of containment efforts.

<i>Agenda</i>	Anchor: President Bolsonaro held several meetings today at Palácio do Planalto and, in one of them, spoke with former minister [. . .] Osmar Terra. (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020c, 00:21:24).	President has several commitments in the crisis and keeps in touch with people. Hardworking and popular.
<i>Demonstrations against isolation</i>	Anchor: President Bolsonaro visited a hospital in Brasília and took the opportunity to greet supporters outside a local pharmacy (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020d, 00:18:56).	There is discontent about social isolation. You have to consider economy and health. Aligned with people's feelings.
<i>Mandetta Conflict</i>	Anchor: A demonstration was held in Brasília calling for the economy to resume and an end to social isolation. . . . Protesters held banners in support of President Bolsonaro. Social isolation is recommended by the WHO (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020e, 00:20:36).	
<i>Mandetta Conflict</i>	Anchor: President Bolsonaro greeted supporters at a rally this afternoon in Brasília. . . . He once again defended the opening of commerce and criticized the congressional project that obliges the Union to recover the loss of revenue from states and municipalities (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020f, 00:16:56).	The Minister of Health lost support from the president for disrespecting the hierarchy and contradicting him. Disrespected, seeks convergence.
<i>Cloroquina</i>	Anchor: The situation of Health Minister . . . is delicate as he loses support from ministers and President Bolsonaro (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020g, 00:15:19).	The president seeks a treatment for COVID-19, despite the lack of scientific evidence. Articulated and concerned about people's health.
<i>Cloroquina</i>	Anchor: Wednesday ends with Health Minister . . . in office, but his resignation is soon to come. And the government is already looking for a new minister to take office, one who is aligned with President (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020e, 00:16:56).	
<i>Cloroquina</i>	Anchor: Bolsonaro asked the Indian prime minister to continue supplying inputs for the production of hydroxychloroquine, a substance that has been used to treat patients who are seriously ill with the coronavirus (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020h, 00:23:17).	
<i>Cloroquina</i>	Anchor: President Trump consulted President Bolsonaro about the effects in Brazil of using chloroquine to treat patients with COVID-19. According to the ambassador for the Brazilian embassy in Washington . . . Trump wanted to know more about the administration of the drug during a telephone conversation (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020e, 00:06:45).	

In addition to incorporating the agenda of the Brazilian president, *JR* builds frames that boost the image of a leader who is working hard to reduce the impacts of the pandemic. To do this, the newscast fulfills an agenda with many commitments, seeking to prevent the implementation of restrictive measures that would have a profound impact on the economy, in addition to promoting the use of medication that the

scientific community has not advocated to treat patients with COVID-19. Even still, *JR* interpreted the events by claiming Bolsonaro was disrespected by his health minister, and that he was contradicting the president. This line of argument is built both in the themes analyzed in this study, and in the way in which the broader agenda of the television news is presented.

Although these reports do not directly make up the corpus of analysis, it is worth mentioning that in the 30 days we analyzed, the newscast produced numerous stories on the pandemic and its effect on people's income, on people who recovered from COVID-19 after having used the hydroxychloroquine treatment (there is no evidence of any direct relationship between the use of this product and the person recuperating—something the newscast does not comment on). Similarly, as of April 14, *JR* started to report on the number of recovered patients while mentioning the number of COVID-related deaths. As the cure rate is much higher than the mortality rate, this led to questions about the severity of the disease.

Another element that helps to understand how *JR* appropriated the agenda and framing of Jair Bolsonaro's populism is the importance it places on reports about accusations made by the United States against China. More than once the newscast repeated unproven statements by the then-American president that China had manufactured the virus as a way of attacking political enemies.

Unlike *JR*, *JN* adopts critical frames on Bolsonaro during the crisis, drawing attention to his contradictory stance and the denialism in his discourse, as we can see in Table 6.

Table 6. Framing of Topics Involving Bolsonaro in JN.

Theme	Discourse excerpts	Framing
<i>Mandetta Conflict</i>	<p>Anchors: As everyone knows, the minister defends isolation measures to combat the spread of the disease, while the president, who is his boss, is divergent and disagrees (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020b, 02:32).</p> <p>Anchors: The differences between Mandetta and Bolsonaro began to become more evident about a month ago, when the president ignored the recommendations of social isolation. Mandetta has always defended social distancing. The same stance adopted . . . by the WHO (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020c, 02:46).</p>	<p>The Minister of Health acts in accordance with science, but even so, it is criticized by the president.</p> <p>Denialist and antiscience.</p>
<i>Reactions/Criticisms</i>	<p>Anchor: Human Rights Watch claims that President Bolsonaro puts Brazilians in danger by encouraging them not to respect social distancing measures (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020d, 16:45).</p> <p>Anchors: Politicians and health representatives criticize President Bolsonaro's speech about the increase in deaths. What about his "so what?" It is just another of a series of statements by the president that, from the beginning, downplays the danger of the virus (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020e, 46:09).</p>	<p>Bolsonaro is the target of criticism because he disregards health measures and downplays the severity of the virus.</p> <p>Menacing and dangerous.</p>

<i>Legal Action</i>	<p>Anchors: An injunction from the Supreme Court prohibits Bolsonaro from suspending social isolation measures enacted by governors and mayors (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020a, 00:36).</p> <p>Anchors: Supreme Court Minister, Alexandre de Moraes, gave President JB and government bodies five days to present information on measures to combat the new coronavirus (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020f, 43:01).</p>	<p>Supreme Court tries to stop the president's attitudes which hinder the containment of the virus and transparency in his conduct.</p> <p>Obstacle and nontransparent.</p>
<i>Disregard for health measure</i>	<p>Anchors: President JB went to a bakery today . . . in Brasília. Met with hugs and handshakes from some and a chorus of boos from others, he again contradicted the WHO recommendations (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020g, 16:44).</p> <p>Anchors: This Friday, for the second day in a row, President JB showed disregard for social isolation measures recommended by the WHO and that the Ministry of Health has tirelessly been asking for (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020h, 10:26).</p>	<p>The president denies the severity of the virus and, therefore, disregards consensual health measures around the world, encouraging people to do the same. Denialist and repeat offender.</p>
<i>Assessing Government Performance</i>	<p>Anchors: Today, the Folha de S. Paulo published a new DataFolha survey on the government's performance in its handling of the coronavirus crisis. Support for the Ministry of Health is more than double that for the president (<i>Jornal Nacional</i>, 2020b, 36:16)</p>	<p>Brazilians are aware of the president's stance and disapprove of it, given how the disease has spread.</p> <p>Disapproved and losing face.</p>

As Table 6 shows, *JN* arranges Bolsonaro's conflictual relationship with Luiz Henrique Mandetta to show that while the Minister of Health followed consensus recommendations from health authorities and international organizations, the president denied the seriousness of the disease, undermining the minister's actions and ultimately leading to his dismissal. It is worth noting that *JN* places an emphasis on the minister's alignment with science, but it does not present the clash between the minister and the president as a simple divergence of opinion, as *JR* does. This emphasis on Mandetta's stance with science places Bolsonaro, his antagonist, as a nonbeliever of science and, ultimately, the pandemic itself, accentuating the denialist character of the Brazilian leader.

As a result, Bolsonaro appears as "a threat" or "a danger" to the health of the public, a frame that is built off the various reports on reactions/criticisms involving scientists, politicians, or national and international organizations. In this sense, the Human Rights Watch statement, used as a headline in the April 11 edition of *JN*, is revealing: "The Non-Governmental Organization Human Rights Watch said today that President Jair Bolsonaro places Brazilians in grave danger by encouraging them not to follow social distancing measures" (*Jornal Nacional*, 2020d, 00:25).

In fact, *JN* does not shy away from highlighting, in many editions, the disrespectful attitudes of the president, either for not wearing a mask in public or for encouraging large gatherings during a presidential

trip in Brasília. While nothing was heard from *JR* during our analysis period about Bolsonaro's failure to comply with health measures, *JN* insisted on reporting it and drew attention to the leader's refusal to follow health measures in the face of a crisis that was showing signs of getting worse. Table 7 shows the different representations of the president during the pandemic by comparing frames from the two TV newscasts on a single event: Bolsonaro's presidential trip to Brasilia on April 10, 2020. The frames in this example are consistent with frames from all the themes analyzed.

Table 7. Different Framings of a Single Event.

JN	Anchor: This Friday, for the second day in a row, President Bolsonaro showed disregard for social isolation measures recommended by the WHO which the Ministry of Health has constantly been asking for (<i>Jornal Nacional</i> , 2020h, 00:10:30).
	 Note: At around 9:00 a.m., the president visited the Armed Forces hospital, the same one where he took the COVID-19 tests last month. Then, the president visited a pharmacy, causing a large gathering to occur. . . . A few minutes later in the parking lot, the president rubbed his nose with his hand and then proceeded to shake hands with three members of the public. All this amid cheers of support, but also of the sound of pot-bashing and boos (<i>Jornal Nacional</i> , 2020h, 00:10:30).
JR	Anchor: President JB visited a hospital in Brasília, went to a pharmacy and, on his way out, took the opportunity to greet supporters.
	Reporter: President Jair Bolsonaro visited the Armed Forces hospital. Afterward, he stopped by a pharmacy in a middle-class neighborhood in Brasília and proceeded to take pictures with employees and greeted supporters. Asked if he thought he should be at home, he replied:
	Bolsonaro's soubdite: I have the constitutional right to come and go as I please. No one will take away my freedom.
	Reporter: Bolsonaro also visited one of his sons. . . . As he was leaving, he waved and greeted supporters. President Bolsonaro said that this Saturday, he will visit a field hospital currently under construction in . . . a city near Brasília (<i>Jornal da Record</i> , 2020d, 00:18:55).

JN underlines the "disregard for social isolation measures recommended by the WHO," which the president repeatedly disregards "for the second day in a row" (*Jornal da Record*, 2020d, 00:18:55). However, *JR* focuses its coverage on the president's agenda (visiting a field hospital, a pharmacy, and one of his sons). While *JN* addressed the issue by presenting images of Bolsonaro without a mask in the middle of a public gathering, *JR* gave daily reports on the president's agenda. In this case, Bolsonaro's statement—"I have the constitutional right to come and go as I please. No one is going to take away my freedom" (*Jornal da Record*, 2020d, 00:19:22)—is devoid of any context by the journalist, and ends up normalizing the "freedom versus isolation" dichotomy, a common occurrence with Bolsonaro's communication and other populist leaders, who believe that imposing social isolation measures is a violation of the right to freedom of movement.

This normalizing effect is also evident when observing the prevalence of reports in *JR* that report on the impact of social isolation on the economy instead of underlining the effects of the pandemic on the health system, as the *JN* did in several of its reports during the month of April 2020. While *JN* highlights the deaths and argues that the state must provide relief measures to families, *JR* highlights the effects of social isolation on family income, further stressing (as the president's agenda does) that social isolation, and not the pandemic, is what causes economic hardship for families.

Conclusion

In this article, our objective was to investigate how *JN* and *JR*, the two major daily newscasts in Brazil, reacted to Jair Bolsonaro's populism by analyzing the themes of reports on the former president, focusing on the frames built around him in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this, we analyzed news coverage that directly involved the Brazilian president during the month of April 2020. We formulated some hypotheses that point to a marked difference in the two newscasts' coverage, which was confirmed through the data presented.

Thus, *JR* adopted the role of official voice for the government by creating mechanisms to normalize Bolsonaro's stance and discourse, while *JN* invested in strategies of discursive opposition, exploring the contradictory actions of Bolsonaro supporters in the face of the severity of the pandemic. In fact, the content and framing analyses showed that while *JN* placed its emphasis on the president and his clashes with his Minister of Health, reporting on the criticism of and reactions to Bolsonaro's actions during the health crisis, the Record newscast described Bolsonaro's performance as taking measures to contain the impact of the crisis and to fulfill the commitments in his agenda. *JR*'s framing of Bolsonaro built the image of a leader who would work hard to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, while *JN*'s framing of the president built the image of a denier and antisocial leader.

Indeed, *JN* highlighted the deaths and established critical coverage of Bolsonaro's discourse and actions. TV Globo's framing of the president was of a leader who is a dangerous threat, who downplays the disease and disregards its victims, as this excerpt from the April 29, 2020, edition illustrates: "The 'So what?' statement is just another of a series of statements by the president that, from the beginning, downplays the danger of the virus" (*Jornal da Record*, 2020i, 00:46:09). This illustrates Bolsonaro as a leader who has been losing popular support, contrary to governors and other world leaders who have been following WHO recommendations.

The analyses we carried out suggest that TV Record's newscast used normalization mechanisms—pointed out in studies such as Ekström et al. (2020)—that have shaped Bolsonaro's public image in a positive light, as indicated by Bos et al. (2011). On the other hand, *JN*'s critical coverage of the president's actions points to the ability of journalism to establish critical interpretations that can help, in some way, to neutralize the effects of denialism.

The findings lead us to think about the two newscasts and the role they play in promoting a highly polarized political environment in Brazil. As evidenced, *JR* maintained their support for Bolsonaro, as observed in the 2018 elections when evangelical segments aligned themselves with Bolsonaroism, including

the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which controls the broadcaster. *JR's* position, contrary to that of *JN*, promoted denialism and normalized themes and symbolic framings in Bolsonaro's discourse on the pandemic. Even though this kept the pandemic on the agenda, *JR* built frames that helped legitimize the government's choices. When we consider that the media, in a hybrid media system, are part of the information flow and have a relevant impact on the scheduling of the debate, then it is reasonable to assume that the content record produces and broadcasts on primetime Brazilian television helped spread the populist view on the pandemic.

In summary, the differences between Globo and Record show that not all media respond to populist discourse in the same way, not even in the face of a public health crisis. When the crisis is the target of intense ideological politicization, as was the case with COVID-19 during the Bolsonaro administration, the media reaction is not one that follows the normative standards of commitment to democracy and science. On the contrary, the media response to populism can lead to disputes over circumstantial ideological alignments between media sectors and the populist project. Further studies could be developed to compare and verify the extent to which these data can help understand other serious national events affected by right-wing populism, such as COVID-19.

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