Crisis of Democracy, Journalistic Coverage of Political Corruption and press freedom in Portugal

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Abstract

Throughout this paper we intend to discuss the media coverage of the phenomenon of political corruption in Portugal, its relation to the crisis, and the impact of these phenomena in the freedom of the press. Democracy is not a stable or continuous phenomenon, as it is in constant development. Indexes on democracy published annually by "The Economist" magazine, which disclose the annual changes in regional and global trends, have shown how the European crisis has affected the quality of democracy, particularly in relation to pluralism and freedom of the press (The Economist, 2012). In almost all of Europe, the economic and financial crisis has overlapped phenomena of political corruption, involving leading figures of democracies, and resulting in a situation of growing discredit of the democratic system. In Portugal, in recent years the corruption perception indices, published by Transparency International, have shown the visibility of this phenomenon amidst the public opinion. In this context and reflecting initially on democracy and the transformations of democracy in Europe, we base this paper on theories on corruption, including political corruption, and on theories about the news, with emphasis on agenda-setting. Firstly, we define political corruption and practices associated with it, benefitting from classical studies such as Rose-Ackerman’s (ROSE-ACKERMAN, 1999). As regards news theories, agenda-setting, framing and priming are the essential concepts (SCHEUFELE, 2000), as well as the principles underlying the cascade model (ENTMAN, 2004). By summoning these theories we intend to explain how public attention is activated toward political corruption issues, according to a logic of synergy between the various news media. Methodologically, we singled out four notorious cases of political corruption that have garnered national visibility and extensive media coverage, and we analyzed a corpus consisting of two daily newspapers, one radio news service, and three prime–time television news services in non-subscription broadcasters. The data from newspaper and radio news were collected from the online editions of these media outlets. The television data resulted from the material supplied by the Marktest / Telenews company concerning the Portuguese non-subscription channels RTP1, SIC and TVI. The cases of violation of the freedom of the press and freedom of expression were chosen with regard to their relation to political corruption allegations in the media and the direct involvement of government. The text aims to be an exploratory contribution toward the clarification of the relation between the signs of crisis in democracy, the visibility of political corruption cases, the increasingly negative image of governments in public opinion and complaints about violation of the freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

Keywords: Crisis of Democracy; Journalistic Coverage of political corruption; Constraints on Freedom of the Press; Portugal
Democracy in Times of Economic and Financial Crisis

Democracy is a political system characterized by the election of governments by the citizens, equality between citizens before the law, respect for human rights, and by the separation of judicial, legislative and executive powers. Democracy is part of the general history of humanity and, in particular, of the history of particular peoples, states and nations. It is an achievement of peoples and societies and therefore it is not a stable or continuous phenomenon, hence its constant change. Democracy requires some principles of action, such as a government of the people by the people, or by their freely elected representatives, respect for human rights, constitutional limits that restrict the exercise of power by political rulers, and procedures that guarantee equal citizenship and ensure the prevalence of civic, political and social rights. This system of governance is based on political parties, which are organizations representing the ideals and legitimate aspirations of citizens, whose funding and performance must be transparent and public (DAHL: 1998).

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the debate on democracy and democratic government has been based on the ideas of liberal democracy and social democracy. Proponents of liberal democracy (especially early advocates Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill) understood that the state is the guarantor of fundamental rights, such as freedom of thought, religion, press and expression. This idea of democracy is primarily based on fundamental human rights and political participation of individuals based on autonomy and representativeness. In its economic dimension, liberal democracy conceives the market as means to organize the interests of the community, being an obligation of the state to provide the conditions and to foster the functioning of the economy and of the market laws. Social democracy has its origin in Christian social democracy and in some aspects of Marxism. From Marxism it inherited the principle of economic and social empowerment, advocating equality of relations between capital and labor and a fair distribution of resources. From social democracy, it sought to retain the deepening of citizens’ representation, the state's role in protecting individual and family rights, and the principle of social responsibility of the press and of the media. The state, in a social democracy, is the guarantor of the general interest, preserving the
collective interest at the expense of individuals. The State ensures and enforces economic and cultural solidarity among citizens, basing its intervention on policies aiming to compensate for market principles and unequal starting points.

Whereas these are the "historical" visions of democracy, one should also take into account the formal meaning and the relation between formal and substantive democracy today. Firstly, we observe that democracy today is conceived not as an ideology, but as a method or a set of rules or procedures for the formation of governments and management of public interests (STREECK, 2013). In this sense, democracy no longer offers an ideological connotation, and has thus became a utilitarian tool for the political and economic system, although incorporating certain (more or less formal and substantive) universal procedures, such as representation of the people for the people, equality of all citizens before the law, freedom to vote, separation of powers, freedom of the press, etc. (BOBBIO, 2004). Therefore, a system may be classified as democratic when featuring all or most of those formal attributes, while still remaining as somewhat less than a full democracy due to the existence of barriers to the exercise of certain rights and duties.

Bobbio (2004: 303-306) defines crisis as a moment of rupture in the functioning of a system, and considers that crises can be defined through three elements: unpredictability, limited duration and impact on the operation of the system. To understand a crisis it is necessary to consider the internal and external contexts that precede it, and the changes in the system that have generated it. In the course of a crisis itself, special attention should be paid to the issues pertaining to the time and space involving the situation and to the actors and protagonists at play. Political crises and economic crises are inextricably linked, both at the national and international levels, and their origin may be internal or external to the system, and may progress through peaks, which means that over the lifespan of a crisis other crises may overlap, bringing about overloads onto the political, economic, legal and social systems.

According to Streeck (2013: 25) the current crisis in Europe is a continuation of the tensions between democracy and capital which have worsened after the 60s, as a form of dissolution of the democratic capitalist regime, established after the end the Second World War. This crisis, which the author considers the cause of a permanent transformation in European society, is due to internal and external pressures affecting capitalism and aims to replace social justice for market justice in a liberal
macroeconomic and financial context. This process, which has begun in the 80s with the first experiences with economic deregulation and reduction of the welfare state, has fostered decreased democracy within capitalism through decreased economics within democracy. At this time, and along with the advance of capitalism in its neoliberal financial form, we witness in Europe the end of redistributive mass democracy and the establishment of a combination of rule of law and public distraction (STREECK, 2013: 30) where the media have a decisive role in legitimizing the mainstream narrative.

**Press Freedom in Democracy**

One should remember that all definitions and characterizations of democracy include freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The revolutions of the eighteenth century in Europe and the United States used the press as an instrument of assertion of opinions and struggle against absolute monarchies. However, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mass media and the propagation of radio created anxieties and mistrust between political leaders and large sections of the intelligentsia. The latter have discovered in the press, especially in propagandistic press and radio, uncontrollable weapons of social agitation, propaganda and change in values and behavior in Western societies (ADORNO, 2003; LAZART, 1995). This pessimistic view of the role and effects of the media in society worsened with the introduction of television in the 50s of the twentieth century. In the United States, there is a broad debate about television and television networks that, assuming that the expansion is due to a combination of democracy and capitalism, tends to equal media activity to any other capitalist activity. That is, scholars note that these companies are guided by corporate standards that do not differ from those used in other business areas, as they are guided by goals stipulated by shareholders and markets. It is claimed that even in spite of the indicators of pluralism and diversity in information and entertainment, the media are ultimately funded through advertising and eventually audience shares, which tactically control the operators (KELLNER, 1990).

This situation cannot be dissociated from the concentration of media groups, and the dispersion of their interests by banking, telecommunications and other entrepreneurial activities that tend to provide the central core of the groups’ interests. Insofar as media companies become dependent on external resources and, in particular,
financial interests, we can observe that a decrease in the degree of pluralism and in the investment in democracy soon follows. This process is common to all Western democracies and tends to increase in times of political and economic crisis. In these contexts, media corporations’ funding depends on their ability to garner "good press", i.e., a "favorable opinion" disseminated through governments and companies, which determines to a significant degree their attractiveness to State institutional advertising, as well as to the advertising campaigns of public and private companies (DI TELLA AND FRANCESCHELLI, 2011). Simultaneously, the assumption that information and journalism, both in public and private media, are business areas, leads to a weaker position of professionals, plagued by threats of cost reduction and increasing job insecurity, thus vulnerable to the pressures from political rulers and companies with interests in media groups.

The indexes of quality of democracy published annually by "The Economist" (2012) magazine have confirmed these trends by noting that after 2008, the beginning of the financial crisis and the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, we have been witnessing the rise of constraints on democracy, free press and freedom of expression. The report emphasizes, among the latter constraints, the concentration of media, which is to blame for the decline in pluralism, increasing attempts from governments to control information, as a result of its growing weakness, as well as practices of self-censorship as a consequence of unemployment and job insecurity.

The control and constraints on freedom of expression in the mainstream media have been accompanied by the development of social networks and participation in the deepening of democracy. The citizens’ use of tools like websites, blogs, facebook and twitter, enabled the introduction of new actors and the diversification of voices in the public space. Institutional uses of these same tools have promoted new forms of democratic participation and citizenship, while also increasing the complexity of the forms of political communication and the capacity of these actors to transmit and manipulate convenient information. The democratization of public space through digital tools has, in this sense, brought about conflicting situations, sometimes increasing and enhancing citizens’ participation, sometimes giving rise to information and counter-information wars aimed toward influencing elections and political decision-making.

Regarding the former case, the campaign for the first election of American president Barack Obama (2008), as well the worldwide social movements of recent years
(CASTELLS, 2012) are generally referred to as examples. As for the latter, one can cite the revelation of scandals and political corruption phenomena, as well as the dissemination of American strategic information through WikiLeaks.

**The coverage of political corruption**

Studies on political corruption often associate this phenomenon with economic, political and social crises, including changes in moral standards (ROSE-ACKERMAN, 1999). The notion of corruption bears three different meanings; in one sense, corruption concerns the degradation of the ethical standards of (public or private) agents, involving a lack of moral integrity and, hence, a certain prevalence of depravity; according to another perspective, corruption is associated with a set of social practices resulting from the degradation of public and private institutions, and therefore finds its focal point in institutional relations and the organization of society; considering yet another definition, corruption accentuates certain social practices, bearing a strong cultural component, such as gifts, etc., in order to encourage or reward decisions of public or private agents (GAMBETTA, 2002).

In Europe, as a result of the transformations brought about by globalization in recent decades, major changes have taken place in the business world, with the introduction of a growing climate of great competition and struggle for resources. After the turn of the millennium, financial strategies within the economy resulted in a growing decline of capital flows in countries of southern Europe, particularly in Portugal. At the same time, many European countries were forced to abandon centuries-old protectionist habits, particularly as regards the domestic industry, and to invest in infrastructure (such as rail, airports, telecommunications, and postal services) to facilitate the installation of multinational corporations and international trade. The scarcity of funding, including for the functioning of the parties associated with the increasing privatization and concentration of economic interests, tends to stimulate illegal appropriation of public resources that emerge in public space in the form of "political corruption scandals." This economic model has cleared the path to growing interdependence between business and politics, feeding a clientele-based structure.

In this context, in the 80s and 90s, the GATT agreements, as well as the liberalizing impositions from the World Bank, and the creation of free trade zones in Europe, America and Asia, resulted in the opening of national markets and forced
privatization of state-run companies. These privatizations simultaneously provided opportunities for new businesses, but also for new forms of political and economic corruption. The advance of globalization and economic practices that this process required, namely homogenization procedures for tendering and concessions, led to the institutionalization of mechanisms to combat corruption: *Fighting corruption on the side of bribers as well of the bribed has been one of the credos of the globalization efforts* (BLANKENBURG, 2002:154).

Countries and governments collectively assume that corruption is an enemy of international competition, thereby forcing the promotion of fair competition standards within a free market and sanctioning those that fail to comply with them. At the beginning of the millennium, the increasing volatility of the financial markets, which replaced the real economy-based capital markets, followed by the crisis in Europe as a result of the US banks’ downfall of 2007/2008, generated increased difficulties in attracting investments, especially in countries of the European periphery, such as Portugal. Political corruption emerged under new forms in this context where the media tend to act as the voice of nationalist moralization, engaged with international political interests that tend to present nations as moral agents with collective responsibility, ignoring the internal and external relations based on class and power (STREECK, 2013: 145). At this stage, with the ongoing downfall of distributive capitalist democracy, as it has existed in Europe since the end of World War II, the media oscillate between an allegiance to "market justice" and loyalty to "social democratic justice", and one of the major themes of this tension is, according to Streeck (2013: 110), made up by the revelation of political corruption cases.

To understand and analyze the factors underpinning the coverage of political corruption we must take into account the quality of institutions (public and private), the autonomy of the state regarding existing interests at play, as well as the participation and inequalities between citizens. We must also consider the structural and functional characteristics of specific institutional frameworks and standards that govern the relations between different interest groups (ECONOMAKIS, RIZOPOULOS, SERGAKIS, 2010: 16).

**Visibility of political corruption and public opinion**
The role of the media, and their relation to the political system and democracy have never been peaceful, although always cited as elements that guarantee democracy, freedom and equality to all citizens (McQUAIL, 2003). Democracy involves the existence of a public sphere, where it is assumed that a permanent debate about public affairs and decision-making aimed at managing such affairs to the benefit of all takes place. One of the essential factors of the public sphere is freedom of the press and freedom of expression, which include not only the freedom of access of all citizens to the public sphere, such as journalists' access to diversified sources and their ability to publicize, in a pluralistic way, diverse opinions and worldviews. However, with increasing pressures from financial capitalism on media companies and the assumption that the system should be oriented to market goals and to profit-making, new logics of information that tend to confuse information and entertainment became settled in, limiting not only the amount of time available for certain topics, as well as the access to the public space of voices that stray away from the dominant line of thought. As we know, public opinion is sometimes a controversial and ambiguous concept, that can either be a qualitative (when dealing with informed and conscious opinion), or a numeric one (as in surveys), which is associated to freedom of expression and debate of opinions. In a society where the public space is typically focused in the media, the ability to express opinion and to make oneself heard is directly dependent on the access to the media. Who has such access, under what conditions and to which media are today some of the factors that contribute to the strengthening of public space, as well as to the lack of plurality in mainstream media. These issues become crucial when considering the role of the media in the European crisis, particularly its action to strengthen financial capitalism, by reinforcing the orthodox position of international financial institutions on the lack of alternatives to austerity policies in order to tackle the problem. This role of reinforcement is also exercised through the constraints imposed on access to public space, by creating more or less visible filters to ideas and people with thoughts unaligned with those of the dominant powers.

As exhaustively evidenced through research, the visibility of issues, events and themes in the public sphere depend on the agenda-setting activity carried out by the media regarding these issues, so that those exist only if they are present in the media through television news, headlines, opinion, etc. While reviewing the theory of agenda-setting (McCOMBS and SHAW, 1972; 2000) we stress the idea that the media may not
be able to tell people how to think, but somehow still manage, to a significant degree, to tell their readers/ viewers/ listeners what to think about. Agenda studies have consolidated the role of the media as visible tools that can be used strategically by different actors and agents, including politicians. In the discussion on the concept of agenda-setting, the media’s influence on the focus of public opinion through the prominence assigned to a particular topic or event in news and messages is also present. Higher prominence is likely to correspond to greater visibility and, therefore, a selective focus, implying the erasure of other information lacking similar weight. The agenda-setting process thus operates as a routine of deletion and highlight of themes that may result from early selection between politically, economic and socially appropriate themes and those that are deemed inconvenient. In this formulation of the agenda-setting process, but at the receiving end, Lang and Lang (1981) argued that it is not sufficient for a subject to be made visible in order for it to be understood, as the ability of the receivers to understand it, by contextualizing it in their daily lives, is more important. In order for this to happen it is necessary that the agenda retains a certain continuity, is reinforced by multiple approaches, presents agents and actors that are easily identifiable, in addition to a plausible plot to all those who gain contact with it. This agenda-building process is also associated to cycles of attention, i.e., the ability of a topic, event or phenomenon to maintain the public’s interest. Cycles of attention tend to be progressively shorter, generating rapid saturation and abandonment. Thus, maintaining the interest of the audience in a given agenda will depend on the ability of the media to resort to varied and sophisticated frameworks that may be of interest to the greatest number of potential consumers.

Theories, concepts and principles described above also allow us to identify certain political communication strategies implemented in the coverage of corruption, where tensions between political advisers, as well as the power struggle between factions and parties, are always present, either highlighting or deleting, through insider information, and information control, certain aspects of the phenomena that are reported. On the other hand, the visibility of the journalistic coverage of political corruption depends on internal and external (financial and economic) trends and (external and internal) contexts pertaining to political parties and on the "voices" that have access to public space, though "always" controlled through the amount of "air
time" distributed according to varying political geometries, between pundits and opinion makers.

In contrast, the framing (SCHUEFELE, 2000) in the analysis of the visibility of journalistic coverage of political corruption allows the media to confer certain continuous and persistent attributes to certain themes. The public highlight assigned to a news story (priming) consists in the selection procedures that the media and journalists use while introducing certain issues into their agenda and identifying the main political actors. Agenda-setting procedures give greater prominence, emphasis or importance to certain themes or political actors and facilitate the internalization, by the public opinion, of their "projection", while aggregating around it certain attributes that act as "cognitive shortcuts". For example, the visibility (priming) granted to a certain politician is always associated with specific themes and attributes. The enunciation of these themes and attributes leads to the identification, by the citizens, of that politician; the naming of that politician by the media carries in itself, in turn, the issue and a set of attributes that are associated with him.

Another issue to consider is the idea advocated by Entman (2004), that the stories and viewpoints that circulate in the media are produced by top decision-makers, politicians or managers of major economic and financial interests that seek to influence the public opinion in general through other "elite agents" (as political commentators and opinion leaders). In cases of journalistic coverage of political corruption a greater degree of indecision or disagreement between the "elites" as regards the procedures to be adopted legally and politically results in an increased ability of the media to set the frameworks of these topics. Such indecision also increases the ability of the media to generate parallel and autonomous agendas and to influence the political system and public opinion. In this context, we may reasonably assume that the continuing agenda of political corruption cases incorporate both the "tensions" between "elites" and the possible parallel agendas of the media.

The news coverage of political corruption in Portugal: a preliminary approach

In a first approach to the coverage of political corruption we analyze the nationwide visibility of four cases, which share the common feature of involving major
figures of democracy (President1 and Prime Minister2), as well as members of the parties of the democratic center, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Centre party (CDS). The BPN, Hidden Face, Freeport, and Submarines3 cases (in alphabetical order) are characterized also by having raised doubts on the funding of parties and draw suspicions over institutions and public and private, national and international, companies. The media coverage of these cases, too, evidences the interactions between political power, banking and big energy and telecommunications businesses, which were still State-owned in Portugal at the time, as well as the pressures on the justice system and the public prosecution.

As regards the press, the corpus comprises mass media targeted to distinct audiences that belong to two different owners. DN is owned by Controlinveste Media Group. It was founded in 1864 and today has an average circulation of around 29,000 copies (2011) and a country-wide distribution. CM, a tabloid, is a daily newspaper owned by Cofina Corporation. It is the best-selling newspaper in Portugal, reaching a 40% market share (2011). We also analyzed data regarding TSF, a news radio established in 1989 as a cooperative, which currently belongs to Controlinveste Media

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1 Aníbal Cavaco Silva is the 19th President of the Portuguese Republic, elected by universal suffrage in 2006 and reelected in 2011. President Aníbal Cavaco Silva has won two consecutive absolute majorities in general elections and served as Prime Minister between 1985 and 1995.

2 José Sócrates was Prime Minister of the XVII Constitutional Government (March 2005 to September 2009) and the XVIII Constitutional Government (September 2009 to May 2011).

3 BPN (Portuguese Business Bank): in November 2008, BPN was nationalized due to accumulated losses of around 700 million Euros. Investigations carried out by the police led to the suspicion that there may had been criminal activity involved, notably forgery, swindling, serious tax fraud, corruption and money laundering, amounting to 100 million Euros. Among the individualities with connections to the business of BPN there was a high-profile figure of State, the President, and former members of the inner circle of the X Constitutional Government of Portugal (Dias Loureiro, José Oliveira e Costa, Duarte Lima and Miguel Cadilhe). The organizations involved included BPN, Lusa Business Society and the Insular Bank. One defendant is under house arrest. Hidden Face (Face Oculta): this case was brought to public attention in 2009 in the course of an investigation by the Investigation Police pertaining to alleged economic crimes by a corporate group, whose leader had built up a network involving former members of Government, local officials and executives from State-owned companies, and military high ranks, with the aim of benefitting his businesses of public waste disposal. The case is still on trial, with three defendants sentenced thus far, one of them a prominent member of the Socialist Party. Freeport: triggered in 2005 by an anonymous letter accusing the Minister of Environment of having received bribes in return for authorizing the construction of an outlet shopping mall on protected land located by the estuary of the Tagus river, financed by the British consortium Freeport. In 2005 the Minister of Environment rose to leader of the Socialist Party and candidate to election that year, which he would win, thus becoming Prime Minister. In spite of the speculation, he was never actually accused or even heard as a witness; The Submarines Case: a case that rose to notoriety in 2005 due to the sale of two submarines to Portugal by a German consortium whose initial cost exceeded 800 million Euros. Protests from a French competitor led the Portuguese public prosecutor (DCIAP) to investigate the deal based on suspicions regarding allegedly illegal payments made to CDS (the party farthest to the right on the parliamentary spectrum) whose leader was Minister of Defense at the time and who, nevertheless, never became defendant nor was heard as a witness.
Group. The analytical dimension in the press stems from the survey of content related to a convenience sample of online daily press, including DN and CM, and radio (TSF). The identification of the pieces in the press and radio universes was carried out by searching through digital editions by means of keywords.

In relation to television, the analysis focuses on data provided by the company Marktest Telenews on the four cases, as featured on RTP1, SIC and TVI channels, between 2005 and 2012. RTP1 is a public channel, while SIC and TVI are private channels belonging respectively to the groups Imprensa and Prisa/Media Capital. A first exercise conducted on the online press, which focused on the national daily newspapers Diário de Notícias (DN) and Correio da Manhã (CM), reveals the visibility peaks conferred in the press to such cases from 2005 to 2012.

Figure 1. Journalistic Coverage of Political Corruption: DN and CM (2005-2012)

Source: DN and CM online (author’s elaboration based on data collected in January 2013)

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4 RTP1 belongs to the Radio Television of Portugal (RTP) public corporation, SIC (Independent Society of Communication) is owned by the Impresa private group, and TVI (Independent Television) to the Prisa/Media Capital private group.
In the analysis of online news relating to those cases in TSF radio we observed a similar oscillation of attention. With these two examples we can move forward to the thesis that upholds the existence of synergies between the different media in giving more or less visibility on certain issues.

**Figure 2. Journalistic Coverage of Political Corruption: TSF Radio (2005 to 2012)**

![Graph showing the coverage of Freeport, BPN, Face Oculta, and Submarinos cases on TSF Radio from 2005 to 2012.](image)

Source: TSF radio online (author’s elaboration based on data collected in January 2013)

We found a slightly different profile in news-reporting performed on television in the non-subscription channels in the years 2005 to 2012. Among those years, 2009 featured the highest number of news, and therefore the most visibility during that period. The *Freeport* case received the most attention, followed by the *BPN* and *Hidden Face* cases. The *Submarines* case garnered no more than a residual coverage. It should also be noted that the BPN case has received the largest media coverage over the years that were analyzed (2005-2012), with about 1200 news on the non-subscription channels. As reasons to such interest, one may speculate that it is due to the fact that it is still on trial, that it involves former ministers from the PSD government and a state councilor of the President of the Republic Cavaco Silva, as well as international
connections to offshore companies and several businesses. The total damage left to be
borne by the Portuguese State after 2012, amounts to EUR 7 billion.5

Figure 3. Number of news by non-subscription television channel and by analyzed
case (2005-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freeport</th>
<th></th>
<th>BPN</th>
<th></th>
<th>Submarines</th>
<th></th>
<th>Hidden Face</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RTP1</td>
<td>SIC</td>
<td>TVI</td>
<td>RTP1</td>
<td>SIC</td>
<td>TVI</td>
<td>RTP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marktest (developed by the team of Project Journalistic Coverage of Political
Corruption, from data provided by the Telenews / Marktest service)

We point out that, in Portugal, people watch television for a daily average of about
3 hours and 45m, and it remains the citizens’ most-used medium for information
consumption. For example, in 2009, the year when the Freeport case got more visibility
on television, all 4 non-subscription channels combined (RTP 1, RTP 26, SIC and TVI)
aired in their (morning, lunch time, prime-time and late night) news services  a total
number of 85303 news pieces. RTP1 and SIC delivered the largest number of news,
followed by TVI and RTP2.

Figure 4. Number and percentage of news by Portuguese non-subscription channel
in TV news: 2009

5 Cfr: http://sicnoticias.sapo.pt/economia/2012-12-22-buraco-do-bpn-pode-chegar-aos-7-mil-milhoes-de-euros
6 We chose not to include the RTP 2 public channel in the corpus, because it broadcasts the evening news
at a later time, 9:30 p.m.
While contextualizing these data on the media coverage of corruption within Portuguese democratic life we cannot forget that 2009 was the year of the reelection of then Prime Minister (PM) José Sócrates, who was reportedly involved, though never criminally prosecuted, in the *Freeport* case for bribery in exchange for authorizing the construction an outlet shopping plaza on environmentally protected land. Moreover, an analysis of the most widely reported cases in this year shows that the most visible actors include the main figures of democracy, such as the Prime Minister (*Freeport* and *Hidden Face* cases) and the President (*BPN* case) - that are directly involved in this cases - as well as the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney Generals (in all four cases).

We also noted that that news coverage in the press also grants great visibility to the relationship between main figures of democracy and defendants, identifying the social ties and circles based on friendship, professional interests, political and personal liaisons, as shown on the infographies presented as Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Who's who in the Hidden Face and BPN cases**

| Who's who in the Hidden Face and BPN cases |
Who's who in the BPN case

Source: Jornal de Notícias (accessed in July 2012)  
We also conclude that the focus of the news coverage of political corruption lies in the areas of Politics (government, parties, party structures and their agents), Justice (legal framework under which political actors, prosecutors and justice actors operate) and less markedly in the Economy field (corporations and deals and the actors involved). The routines of news coverage are also visible, with special relevance to the voices from the aforementioned fields, which are present in public announcements, declarations and interviews. The most common types of political corruption referred to...
in the news are bribery, influence peddling, selective favoritism and illegal party funding.

We could not conclude, or even suggest that there is a cause-effect relation between the visibility of news about corruption and disbelief in democracy. It is also not possible to establish the relation between the frequency at which the journalistic narratives associate the main figures of democracy and their discredit as showed by opinion polls. However, the indicators of public opinion collected by the Political Barometer\(^7\) (Barómetro Político) of Marktest are nevertheless disturbing, as they evidence a growing erosion of the public image of both the President (Aníbal Cavaco Silva) and the Prime Minister (José Sócrates) during this period.

**Figure 6. Public Opinion about the President (PR) and Prime Minister (PM) (2005-2012)**

![Public Image of PR and PM: 2005-2012](image)

Source: Marktest (developed by the author from data provided by Barómetro Político Marktest, 2005-2012)

An analysis of the political barometer for the President and the Prime Minister over the years shows a continuous and rapid decline that the 2009\(^8\) and 2011\(^9\) elections failed to slow down.

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\(^8\) PM José Sócrates was reelected.
By comparing the data on the visibility of the protagonists in cases of political corruption with the shares revealed by the political barometer, and taking into account the objectives of our work, we noted that the visibility in the media of the President and the Prime Minister in cases of political corruption, such as *Freeport, BPN* and *Hidden Face*, tends to promote distrust and the erosion of public image.

On the other hand, the intensity and the focus of the coverage of these cases, centered in the two main political parties that alternate in government and in the most prominent political actors of democracy, contaminates all political actors, rather than only those who hold office positions. And finally, the public opinion rates, despite occasional fluctuations during election time, show a continuing decline, steeper in the case of the Prime Minister, but also present in relation to the President of the Republic.

**Constraints to information**

The reported situations of political corruption that led to criminal cases, which have either resulted in acquittals or are still awaiting final decision, had impacts on the operation of the media and on journalistic activity. Freedom of expression in Portugal is a recent value, given the historical conditions of the monarchy and the influence of the Catholic Church, but also due to successive authoritarian regimes and the dictatorship that lasted longer than forty years; as a result of these cases, this value was placed in question. Despite thirty-five years of democracy and liberalization of the media market, the "appetite" of Portuguese rulers from all political parties to interfere with the media, particularly at times when they feel threatened by allegations of political corruption, is still evident.

The "shock waves" of the abovementioned cases caused constraints to freedom of expression and had political rulers and media agents as their protagonists. We have identified three kinds of situations: a first one that we call "direct contact"; a second category, "flow control", and a last one, "incorporation of damage". The sequence of this list is not random, because it implies increasingly aggressive practices of

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9 PM José Sócrates resigned in 2011, when the new PM, Passos Coelho, was elected; PR Cavaco Silva was reelected.
governments, first using the State for their own purposes, then acting threateningly over the mass media, editors or journalists.

"Direct contact" involves situations where governments come directly into contact with the owners or shareholders of media companies, editors or journalists in order to suspend or change the news agenda built on specific cases of political corruption where these rulers are involved. These contacts aim to put pressure, or even threaten with lawsuits, layoffs, etc., media agents and journalists.

For example, the news about the Freeport case reported by TVI, before the 2009 legislative elections, gave rise to a controversy over the resignation of the TVI journalist and news anchor of Jornal Nacional on Fridays as a result of allegations incriminating the Prime Minister and his family of receiving bribes regarding the licensing of an outlet shopping plaza built on an environmental reserve area. The journalist, who was removed from the television news, later denounced in Parliament, during a parliamentary investigation, that the prime minister's advisors had made direct pressures in order to change the coverage of the case in which the prime minister was involved. She also revealed that one of the most prominent members of the Socialist Party had directly influenced the owners of the company, Prisa / Media Capital, for TVI’s friday Jornal Nacional to be suspended.

We emphasize also that this situation is not unprecedented in the period we analyzed. In an article published in the weekly newspaper Expresso of March 31, 2007, titled "Irresistible impulse to control", journalist Nuno Saraiva denounced pressures that had targeted this newspaper, as well as Radio Renascença, SIC-Notícias and the daily newspaper Público, following allegations of these media of irregularities pertaining to Prime Minister José Sócrates’ degree from the Independent University. After these allegations, the Media Authority (ERC) summoned all those involved to a hearing, including the Prime Minister’s press officer, who was subsequently acquitted.

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The second situation where we have identified constraints to freedom of expression, which we refer to as "flow control", aimed to restrict the information on the Freeport case, withholding institutional advertising of the State – one of the main sources of revenue – from the media that published adverse information. According to statements of the director of the Sol weekly newspaper, made to the Sábado magazine and published on November 26, 2010, someone from the inner circle of the Prime Minister, who was aware of the economic hardship endured by the newspaper and its problems with a creditor bank, claimed that all those problems would be solved if no more news about Freeport were published. The same director said that this pressure was accompanied by discrimination by the Government and public bodies in the distribution of institutional advertising to national newspapers.14

Another example dating from 2012 fits into this classification. It is about an investigation carried out by the newspaper O Público aiming to clarify the relationship between a PSD minister, which took office in 2011, and a former director of the Strategic and Defense Intelligence Service (SIED).15 The inquiry pointed to the exchange of SMS and emails between the then minister and the former head of the secret services, in order to propose reforms to the service that he had abandoned. The pressures not only focused on the journalist, with threats of disclosure of material facts of her private life, but also addressed to the newspaper O Público, particularly threatening to promote an information blackout by his ministry and other ministers to this newspaper. This situation was assessed by ERC and was not considered proven.16

The third situation, "incorporation of damage" focuses on the change of ownership of media organizations that, at some point, broadcasted "bad" information about rulers. PT’s (a company that was at the time partially owned by the Portuguese State) attempt to purchase TVI, in 2009, is provided as example.17 We should note two aspects that

made the attempted purchase a controversial issue. Firstly, since April 2009, TVI had been broadcasting on its Friday Jornal Nacional, information involving bribes to the Prime Minister and his family, as reported by British authorities. Secondly, the economic difficulties of Prisa / Media Capital and the state’s power in the company - through a golden share held by the state in PT- encouraged the government to move on with the proposed purchase of the television station. The deal was eventually denied by the Prime Minister, as well as the attempt to dismiss the director of the television station, who was the husband of Jornal Nacional’s news anchor. The government and the Prime Minister denied being aware of this transaction, which failed to proceed due to the political controversy that the news about such prospect generated. Further details on the political and economic contours of the case became known during the trial of one of the defendants of the Hidden Face case, who brokered the rapprochement between the PT and Prisa/ Media Capital groups.

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18 Cfr.: Silva, A. Semanário Expresso online, June 24, 2009 “Manuela acusa Sócrates de querer controlar a TVI” http://expresso.sapo.pt/manuela-acusa-socrates-de-querer-controlar-a-tvi=f522629.
Preliminary conclusions

The data presented above provide not only an exploratory approach to news coverage of political corruption - in the press, radio and television - but also to the indicators of public opinion. The research through which we tried to survey types of constraints on the freedom of the press and on freedom of expression that followed the news coverage of certain cases of political corruption also has an exploratory nature. As these studies are exploratory and have taken into account some cases where we analysed the manifest content of the news with that thematic, the results cannot be generalized.

Firstly, it seems possible to conclude that there is a growing trend of exposure of political corruption issues by the media, which meets the public perception indices of these phenomena, as disclosed in the reports of Transparency International since 2011. There are not necessarily more cases of corruption in Portugal, but there are certainly more cases involving political figures. The media coverage of consecutive cases results in a need to "draw attention" of the public and audiences, which requires a larger volume of news broadcasted and published for each new case. Paraphrasing Schudson (2004: 1231-2010), scandal seems to be at the center of political action and to constitute also the only political concern of the media today, simultaneously providing mass society entertainment and a guarantee of morals and order. The ability and continuity of these topics in the media tend to condition the minds of citizens about public affairs, determining the formation of public opinion and wielding an undeniable influence on the perception of political issues (McCOMBS and REYNOLDS: 2002).

Secondly, in the analyzed cases, we have to take into account that the media coverage involved, preferably, two elected political actors for the most prestigious roles in democracy: Prime Minister José Sócrates (case Freeport and Hidden Face) and President the Republic Cavaco Silva (BPN case). However, comparing the visibility of these political actors with that of the defendants we realized that the former are, in most news, under the spotlight of public debate. Although this visibility and scandalization was reflected in periodic surveys - which evidenced a continuing decline in approval
ratings -, it did not seem to affect the elections of these two politicians: Prime Minister José Sócrates was re-elected on September 27, 2009; President Cavaco Silva, on January 23, 2011.

Finally, we believe that the constraints on the freedom of the press and of expression, as noted by The Economist in 2012, tend to grow in a context of democratic crisis and involvement of politicians in corruption cases.

References
