

# EDITORIAL JOURNALISM AND POLITICAL INTERESTS

## Comparing the coverage of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in Brazilian newspapers

### Abstract

The article investigates how *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo* – two of the leading Brazilian quality papers – expressed their editorial positions on the impeachment of the ex-president Dilma Rousseff. The comparative study encompasses quantitative and qualitative methods to examine 506 editorial texts published between 2015 and 2016. By using Content Analysis, the research found out that FSP and OESP take different positions along the process: each newspaper presents particular arguments to justify the impeachment's legitimacy; regarding the solution for the political situation, OESP fully supports the impeachment, while FSP asks for the then-president and her vice-president to resign. In the end, both organizations agree in their editorials that Rousseff has to be removed from office. At the same time, FSP and OESP try to avoid being seen as actors conspiring against democracy, which makes them dispute whether Rousseff's impeachment was or not a coup. This research provides the opportunity to investigate to what extent journalism loosens its place as a watchdog to behave as a demanding actor.

Keywords: Editorial Journalism; Political Communication; Brazil; Impeachment; Newspapers.

## 1. Editorial journalism as a statement of political positions

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing belief that the separation between news and opinion would not be enough to avoid position-taking in journalistic coverage (Adam et al., 2017; Hagen, 1993; Kahn and Kenney, 2002). Notwithstanding, such a division continues to be among the essential strategies for guaranteeing newspapers' credibility (Conill, 2016). Indeed, one of the key elements for commercial journalism is the so-called "wall" between editorial and news pages (Esser and Umbricht, 2014; Kahn and Kenney, 2002) – even if some argue that such a wall is dissolving (Fisher, 2019).

Editorials – defined as unsigned texts that display a media organization's opinion (Firmstone, 2008; Hallock, 2007) – contribute to the principle of keeping opinion apart from reporting facts. However, if editorials allow journalistic institutions greater freedom to express support for authorities, candidates, parties, or specific agendas, they also may eventually feed

distrust over how much periodicals favor their interests over the public's (Gronemeyer and Porath, 2015; Humprecht, 2019; Meltzer, 2007). Therefore, publishing their own opinions makes it clear that newspapers are autonomous agents holding particular values and beliefs (Eilders, 1999; Page, 1996).

An additional role editorial journalism plays is distinguishing a newspaper from its competitors (Firmstone, 2019). The opinion of a journalistic organization influences its relationship with the audience (Scarrow and Borman, 1979; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008); the interaction between a newspaper and its professionals (Sigelman, 1973); and the transactions a newspaper establishes with political or economic agents (Ansolabehere et al., 2006; Billeaudeaux et al., 2003; Chiang and Knight, 2008). In addition, it is through editorials that a publication works as an opinion leader and enjoy a kind of autonomy not only in terms of favoring its political positions but also regarding its independence from the daily news agenda (Eilders, 1999; Pfetsch et al., 2012). To sum up, editorials reveal the journalistic institution's interpretation of facts, the strategies it uses to claim authority, and the possible transitions of a newspaper's opinions over time.

This article examines the editorial positions adopted by newspapers in contemporary journalism. Among the scholars who study editorial journalism (Adam et al., 2017; Eilders, 1999; Firmstone, 2019; Gronemeyer and Porath, 2015; Pratte and Whiting, 1986), there are works examining not only how opinionated pieces favor some candidates (Donsbach, 1997; Kahn and Kenney, 2002; Klein and Maccoby, 1954), but also considering the political effects that position-taking can have on the public (Chiang and Knight, 2008; Druckman and Parkin, 2005; Scarrow and Borman, 1979).

In 2016, Brazilian politics drew international attention since the first female President of the country, Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party – PT), faced an impeachment process. In fact, editorials from different foreign publications expressed their opinions on this subject, discussing if the process was or not a coup (Guazina et al., 2018). In this article, our intention is to understand the positions adopted by newspapers in times of political crisis. Specifically, this research aims to examine how editorials published in two mainstream national newspapers covered the impeachment of the former Brazilian president Rousseff.

Even before Rousseff's election for a second term in October 2014, the political scene in Brazil had already fallen out of favor with her government, mainly due to the so-called Car Wash Scandal<sup>1</sup>. Despite the coalition that re-elected her being made up of 300 elected

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<sup>1</sup>

See:

<http://lavajato.mpf.mp.br/entenda-o-caso>

and:

representatives (out of 513 seats)<sup>2</sup>, the House of Representatives accepted – nine months into her second term – to examine one of the impeachment requests handed in by the opposition. The document at stake accused Rousseff of having committed crimes of malversation – such as transferring public funds without legal authorization<sup>3</sup>. After the House of Representatives accepted the piece for analysis in September 2015, the parliamentarians initiated the investigation in December 2015. The former president was removed from office in August 2016.

The process was turbulent and aggravated by both the economic crisis and the accusations of corruption in the PT governments. At the same time, part of the Brazilian society argued that there was not enough evidence to remove Rousseff from the presidency, claiming that impeaching her would be a political coup (Santos and Guarnieri, 2016).

From an institutional perspective, this feud started by the initiative of the then president of the House of Representatives, Eduardo Cunha (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party). However, lawyers, politicians, national and international entities described the process as a coup motivated by Cunha's revenge (since he had not received support from the PT to block corruption investigations against him). The vice-president, Michel Temer (from the same party as Cunha), assumed the presidency immediately after the impeachment.

The timeline below lists the official events of the impeachment process tied to the National Congress.

Table 1 – Impeachment process timeline

MONTH	PROCESS STEPS
September/15	A group of lawyers hands in <i>impeachment</i> request to the House of Representatives
December/15	<i>Impeachment</i> request accepted by then-House President, Eduardo Cunha
March/16	Special Commission is formed to analyze the <i>impeachment</i> request in the House
April/16	The rapporteur (congressman Arantes) presents his approval for the <i>impeachment</i> of Rousseff
April/16	Special Commission votes in favor of <i>impeachment</i>
April/16	Plenary sitting approves <i>impeachment</i> process

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/11/world/americas/brazil-corruption-dilma-rousseff-operation-car-wash.html>>. Access on May 20, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/27/world/americas/brazilian-presidential-election.html>>. Access on May 20, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/20/world/americas/dilma-rousseff-impeachment -brazil.html>>. Access on June 22, 2019.

April/16	The process moves to the Senate
April/16	Special Commission is formed to analyze <i>impeachment</i> in the Senate
April/16	Special Commission is installed in Federal Senate
May/16	Rapporteur (Senator Anastasia) presents approval to continue with <i>impeachment</i> process
May/16	Special Commission votes in favor of <i>impeachment</i>
May/16	Senate authorizes <i>impeachment</i> process
May/16	Rousseff is removed from office for 180 days
May/16	Michel Temer assumes interim presidency
August/16	Rapporteur Antonio Anastasia presents approval of Rousseff's <i>impeachment</i>
August/16	The Senate's Special Commission approves the report
August/16	Senate plenary sitting approves Commission's decision
August/16	Beginning of the final stage of the trial in Federal Senate
August/16	Senate plenary sitting approves <i>impeachment</i> of Rousseff

Source: The Authors (using official information from the Federal Senate and the House of Representatives' websites).

It is worth mentioning this was not the first time that a president was removed from office in Brazil due to an impeachment process. In 1992, Fernando Collor (the first president elected in direct elections after more than two decades of military dictatorship) was impeached as well (Sallum Jr and Casarões, 2011).

When investigating the removal of presidents from office in Latin America, Pérez-Liñan (2007) identified three major actors in a successful deposition: the media; the Congress; and the public opinion. Referring specifically to Rousseff's deposition, Van Dijk (2017: 217) believes that editorials from *O Globo* newspaper – which belongs to one of the largest media conglomerates in the country – were responsible for “manipulating public opinion” in favor of her removal. Albuquerque (2017) reinforces the idea that the Brazilian press was involved in Rousseff's deposition, working against the democratic order.

However, no empirical studies combined quantitative and qualitative methods to study the position-taking process of leading Brazilian quality papers regarding Rousseff's impeachment. This article addresses this gap and discusses journalistic practices in a context of political crisis. We hold that it is essential to outline the role newspapers play in regimes featured by political instability as the ones in Latin America (Matos, 2008; Waisbord, 2000). In other words, the article contributes to reflect on how journalism can act to support some political outcomes, what is especially important in cases surrounded by controversies.

Another relevant implication from this study is that it allows us to discuss to what extent opinionated journalism deals with democratic principles. On the one side, members of the parliament can present a wide range of arguments to justify their positions concerning Rousseff's impeachment, even if some of the claims have nothing to do with the original accusation (Prandi and Carneiro, 2018). On the other side, when journalism companies use allegations not related to the charges to legitimize their impeachment's defense, it might be an indication that newspapers care more about their own political interests than about respecting the rules of democracy.

Furthermore, since editorials are elite-oriented texts (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018), they target the agents responsible for deciding the impeachment directly. In this case, their goal may not necessarily be to persuade the general public, but the decision-makers – what has an impact on the role that journalism plays in democracies. Studying Rousseff's impeachment provides then the opportunity to investigate to what extent newspapers loosen their place as watchdogs to behave as demanding actors.

Hence, the main research question is: *What editorial opinion did the two newspapers take regarding the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff?*

We chose to investigate two leading newspapers in the Brazilian market: *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP) and *O Estado de S. Paulo* (OESP). Even though both publications are based on São Paulo, they have national reach and figure among the most read newspapers in the country<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, these publications have regularly emphasized the coverage of political and economic events. Plus, some scholars accuse both newspapers of providing an adversarial coverage regarding the PT governments (specifically the ones led by Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff) (Albuquerque, 2017; Azevedo, 2016; Goldstein, 2017; Nava and Marques, 2019).

We must also highlight that São Paulo is the most populous and richer state in Brazil. Its citizens have consistently voted against the candidates from Workers' Party for the presidency since 2006 elections. São Paulo, then, has lost the national elections several times and part of the literature claims that the most influent newspapers from that state have reflected this through an adversarial coverage towards the PT – even though there is a disagreement concerning how different this coverage really is when compared to the one received by politicians from other parties (Mundim, 2018). The aspects presented above evince why both newspapers are essential to study a democratic conflict such as the impeachment process.

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<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.anj.org.br/maiores-jornais-do-brasil/>. Access April 27, 2019.

Since the publications use editorials to convince readers about their point of view, the article proposes a first specific research question:

*RQ1.1: What arguments do the editorials hold for or against the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and how do the newspapers differ in presenting such arguments?*

Furthermore, both newspapers actively cover national politics and have credibility towards Brazilian political and economic elites (Lattman-Weltman and Chagas, 2016) – what might lead them to have similar views on the solutions to the country's political problems. Then, a second specific question emerges:

*RQ1.2: What is the best solution for the political crisis according to the editorials published by FSP and OESP?*

Moreover, OESP and FSP ascribe different values to their institutional opinions. This is evident considering the number of editorials they publish per day (OESP offers three pieces to its readers, while FSP publishes two). In addition, while OESP has a history of clearly stating its opinion on issues of national matter or supporting political candidates (Capelato and Prado, 1980), FSP avoids aligning with political candidates or groups (Lattman-Weltman, 2003; Pilagallo, 2012).

Another feature of the Brazilian media system is that it is highly concentrated and the major news companies in the country usually agree about controversial issues (Azevedo, 2016; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Concomitantly, both newspapers try to differentiate themselves from their competitors, since they need to reinforce their brand. This means that even if FSP and OESP have similar agendas regarding the coverage on political topics, there is some autonomy to editorial opinion as a way of marking the publication's identity (Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018). It is possible that both publications foresee different consequences regarding the aftermath of Rousseff's impeachment, which leads to the third specific research question:

*RQ1.3: What are the possible consequences of the impeachment process according to the editorials published by both FSP and OESP?*

The next section details the methods of data collection and data analysis.

## 2. Methods

This comparative study examines the editorials published in FSP and OESP from January 2015 to December 2016. The *corpus* encompasses 506 editorials (FSP =155; OESP =351) that mentioned “impeachment” or “*impedimento*” (the translation of impeachment to Portuguese). Part of the difference regarding the number of texts in each newspaper is because OESP publishes three editorials per day while FSP offers only two pieces. In both newspapers, such opinionated texts are signed by their own editorial staff (Guerreiro Neto, 2016; Mont’Alverne et al., 2018).

All texts were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to find out which arguments the newspapers presented regarding the Rousseff’s impeachment – including the solutions they offered for the political situation and their speculations on the consequences of the impeachment to the Brazilian democracy. We hold that examining arguments, solutions, and consequences that editorial articles present is an appropriate strategy to identify the newspapers’ positions.

The dependent variable is the newspapers’ positioning in terms of whether they are for or against Rousseff’s removal from office. We consider, firstly, the newspaper as an independent variable (FSP or OESP). We then grouped the independent variables into three axes: a) Legitimizing arguments present in editorials; b) Solutions that the newspapers propose for the political situation; c) Consequences of the impeachment according to the opinionated texts. Based on Content Analysis (Bardin, 1977; Krippendorff, 2004; Lacy et al., 2015), we observed if the variables that make up these axes were or not present in each editorial text from each newspaper. It is essential to highlight that a single text can register more than one variable within the same axis (Table 2) since the variables are independent of each other, and each of them is binary (i.e., *yes* or *no*). We believe that this procedure makes it possible to understand how both newspapers build their discourses on the impeachment.

Since there is no similar codebook assigned to investigating journalistic editorials when impeachment processes are at stake, it was necessary to settle these variables inductively. There is indeed another article investigating the editorial coverage of the Brazilian impeachment qualitatively (Guazina et al., 2018). However, the present research brings a different perspective since it aims to analyze a larger corpus and to provide a framework that could be applied to the study of other impeachment processes, what enables comparisons regarding the behavior of journalism in different political, cultural and professional contexts.

Table 2 – Axes and variables

**“LEGITIMIZING ARGUMENT”**

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Legal Norms	A text that mentions the Constitution or other laws to underpin that <i>impeachment</i> is a legitimate process
Crimes of malversation	Reference to the practice of crimes of malversation by the President (the specific charge presented against her)
The People's Voice	Reference to the government's popularity or street protests
Economic Crisis	Reference to the economic crisis in the text
Political Crisis	Reference to political crisis
Corruption and Patronage	Reference to the use of the public machine, repercussion of denunciations and scandals.
Incompetence	Reference to arguments of Rousseff's traits, portraying her as an inept and incompetent political agent.
Not enough reasons for impeachment	Reference of no reasons supporting the impeachment of Rousseff.
Other	When it does not fit under previous descriptions
Does not present a legitimizing argument	When there is no argument for justifying the <i>impeachment</i> process.

**“SOLUTIONS”**

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Impeachment	Direct reference to the Impeachment
Resignation	Reference to government resigning as the best solution
New elections	Reference to call for new elections as a solution
Something must be done	Reference to having to have a solution to the political situation, even though the newspaper does not specify which would be best
Rousseff continues her mandate	Reference to Rousseff staying in office
Other	When does not fit under previous descriptions
Does not offer a solution	No reference to a solution for the situation

**“CONSEQUENCES”**

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Political Instability	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> elements of political instability
Economic Instability	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> elements of economic instability
Improved Economic situation	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> elements of an improved economy
Improved Political situation	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> elements of improvements to the political crisis



Overall Improvement	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> elements of improvements in various areas
Uncertain Future	Indicates post- <i>Impeachment</i> background of uncertainty
Other	When does not fit under previous descriptions
Does not offer a result	When a (no) <i>Impeachment</i> result is not indicated

It is important to stress that the codification process of the 506 editorials took place after four researchers familiar with Content Analysis techniques were trained specially for this study<sup>5</sup>. For running the reliability test, we employed the Cronbach's Alpha – which is a coefficient used to measure the internal consistency of analytical categories' groups – to classify 6% (30 texts from both newspapers) of the entire *corpus* (Field, 2005). The results of the inter-rater reliability test for the classification of each group of variables among all the four codifiers were 0.833 (arguments), 0.833 (solutions), and 0.778 (consequences) – i.e., the groups of categories had satisfactory levels of consistency so that we could follow the classification of all the pieces.

Reading the *corpus* in the pre-analysis stage allowed us to map out different points of the political process at stake. The researchers identified the elements integrating the variables inductively from reading the texts and, from that, build the codebook presented in Table 2. After that, all editorials were coded looking for such elements, following the same procedures adopted in the complete analysis, as presented before.

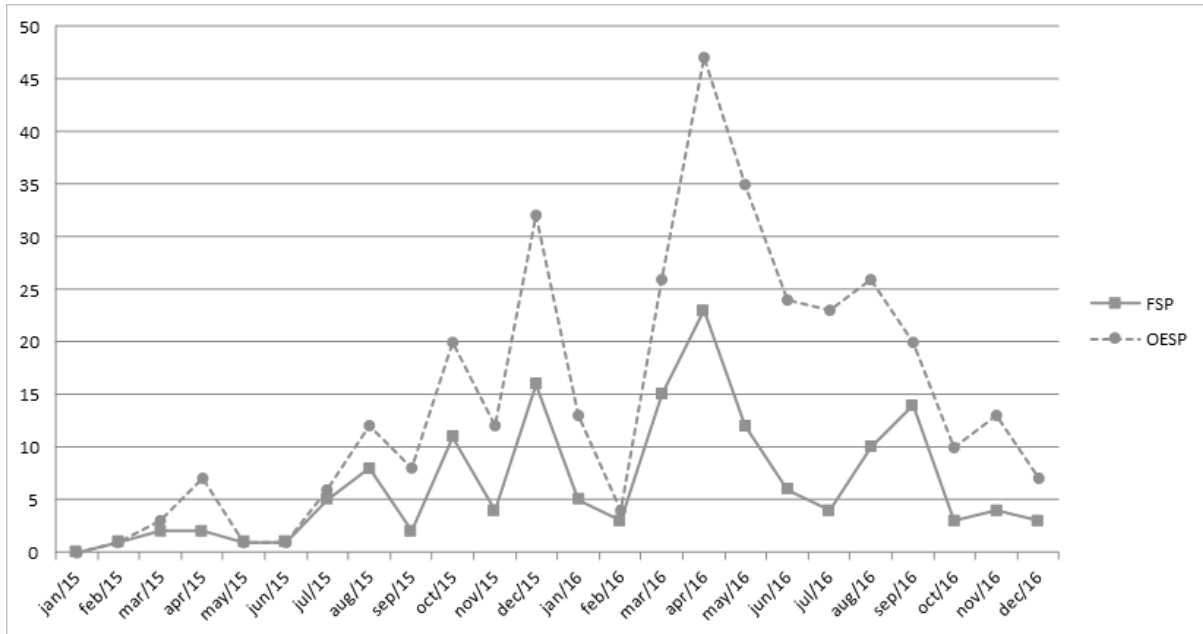
### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Timeline and frequency of editorials on the impeachment

The analysis starts by observing the frequency of editorials on the impeachment. Graph 1 shows that FSP and OESP started to discuss the possibility of Rousseff's removal in February 2015, immediately after the then-president had started her second term (January 1st, 2015).

Graph 1 – Monthly number of editorials mentioning “impeachment.”

<sup>5</sup> The codebook is available upon request.



As the voting on her deposition progressed in the House of Representatives, the number of editorials published on the matter rose significantly. Between January 2015 and December 2016, FSP published 1,462 editorials in total, among which approximately 10% brought the keywords “*impeachment*” or “*impedimento*.” Over the two years, then, FSP published a monthly average of 6.5 editorials on Rousseff’s impeachment.

Regarding the number of editorials mentioning the keywords, OESP had an average of 14.6 texts per month on the impeachment. I.e., the newspaper dedicated about 16% of its 2,193 opinionated texts to this issue between January 2015 and December 2016. These numbers show that OESP offered more coverage on Rousseff’s removal from the office than FSP did.

Even though both newspapers started covering the event at the very beginning of 2015 – and considering that they registered high numbers of editorial pieces in practically the same months –, OESP had a decrease in the number of editorials on the *impeachment* between August and September 2016 (exactly when the political process was formally over), contrarily to FSP.

### 3.2 Arguments, solutions, and consequences: position-taking in newspaper editorials throughout the process

For a qualitative investigation of the political positions expressed in editorial pieces, we need to look at the descriptive data on the frequency of variables for each of the axes this study considers.

For the axis “Legitimizing Argument,” the goal is to verify which were the most recurring reasons used in both newspapers’ editorials for justifying the need (or not) for Dilma Rousseff’s deposition.

Table 3 – Number of editorials presenting “Legitimizing Argument.”

Newspaper		N	%
FSP	Editorials presenting Legitimizing Argument	137	88.4
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	155	100
OESP	Editorials presenting Legitimizing Argument	316	90.0
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	351	100

Table 3 shows that 88.4% of FSP’s editorials and 90% of OESP’s editorials among our *corpus* use at least one of the legitimizing arguments considered in our codebook, which means that both publications had an ongoing interest in building (or questioning) the legitimacy of Rousseff’s removal.

Furthermore, there was a convergence between FSP and OESP regarding the nature of the legitimizing arguments they considered more critical regarding the discussion on Rousseff’s deposition. Table 4 highlights this finding.

Table 4 – “Legitimizing Argument” variables in the editorials

Argument	N - FSP	% - FSP	N - OESP	% - OESP
Corruption and Patronage	72	25	137	20
Economic Crisis	62	21.5	129	18.8
Crimes of malversation	22	7.6	68	9.9
Political Crisis	46	16	57	8.3
Incompetence	18	6.3	82	12

Not enough reasons for impeachment	4	1.4	3	0.4
Legal Norms	34	11.8	94	13.7
Other	0	0	15	2,2
The People's Voice	30	10.4	101	14.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>100</b>

Both FSP and OESP considered “Corruption and patronage” as the most recurring Legitimizing Argument: it reaches 25% of all the arguments presented by FSP and 20% in the case of OESP. In the second place, there is “Economic crisis,” mentioned in 21.5% of FSP editorials and 18.8% of OESP editorials. Such arguments are often presented together, as can be seen in the following excerpt: “Numerous aspects explain why people are dissatisfied with the president: the perception that corruption grew as never before in the Workers’ Party government, the fact that Dilma’s mistaken ideas led the economy to get much worse than acceptable (...)” (FSP, 16 Aug. 2015, p. A2).

FSP and OESP differ regarding the number of times they use the following arguments for legitimization: FSP privileges “political crisis,” “legal norms” and “the people’s voice,” while OESP stresses “the people’s voice,” “legal norms” and “incompetence” respectively. “The people’s voice” refers to the fact that in 2015 and 2016 large manifestations were asking for the impeachment of President Rousseff (Alonso, 2017). “The people’s voice” is often used to defend Rousseff’s impeachment, as follows: “Brazil now expects a political cleaning after Dilma and Cunha’s removal from public life. This depends on the Congress, that is the appropriate constitutional forum to decide an essentially political issue. Moreover, the will of the vast majority of Brazilians will surely be taken into account” (OESP, 4 Dec. 2015, p. A3).

Four aspects need our attention at this point. The first is that arguments of legal order (“Legal norms” and “Crimes of malversation”) were not among the most significant justifications that newspapers presented in their editorials. This similarity reveals a convergence concerning the main points that both FSP and OESP raised about the ex-president’s removal process: corruption is frequently mentioned, although it is not directly related to the formal denouncement since Rousseff was not investigated for corruption.

Indeed, according to Brazilian law, the motivation for an impeachment process must refer to an alleged crime committed by the president. In this view, the consistent presence of arguments referring to “Economic Crisis” is somewhat out of place.

Secondly, OESP (when compared to FSP) increased its criticism towards Rousseff after giving more visibility to street protests demanding the deposition of the then-president.

Moreover, OESP places emphasis on negative character traits of Dilma Rousseff, such as calling her “arrogant” or “clumsy,” as can be seen in the following excerpt: “the incompetence and clumsiness of the chief of the government [led] to major popular disapproval of her work” (OESP, 7 July 2015, p. A3).

Thirdly, the last similarity regarding the two newspapers’ editorials is the fact that the variable “there are not enough reasons for impeachment” is one of the least used throughout the study period. This means that both newspapers left behind the arguments raised by different agents against the impeachment.

Last, both newspapers defend a “body of work” for legitimizing her removal, which represents a sum of several arguments in defense of her ousting. The variety of arguments presented by FSP and OESP is somewhat aligned with how different political actors – such as members of parliament – justified their support for impeaching the then-president. Even though the allegations against that president were related to crimes of malversation, most of the representatives’ votes in favor of Rousseff’s deposition mentioned aspects such as corruption and economic crisis (Prandi and Carneiro, 2018).

We now move to the axis “Solutions for the political situation.” FSP and OESP set their minds on different possibilities for solving the Brazilian political crisis at that time. The editorial positions ranged from the vague idea that “something has to be done” to the impeachment approval as an unavoidable solution. The following data evince the newspapers’ political positions.

Table 5 – Number of editorials presenting “Solutions for the political situation.”

Newspaper		N	%
FSP	Editorials presenting “Solutions”	46	29.7
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	155	100
OESP	Editorials presenting “Solutions”	129	36.8
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	351	100

Both publications have different percentages regarding the solutions they suggest for the political crisis: only 29.7% of FSP editorials and 36.8% of OESP texts in our sample allude to some way out. In other words, their editorials often did not present any clear suggestions as to which measures should be taken to solve the political situation.

Table 6 shows how FSP and OESP differ on what they believe to be the most efficient solution to Brazil's political problems during the period.

Table 6 – Variables for “Solutions for the political situation” in editorials

<b>Solution</b>	<b>N - FSP</b>	<b>% - FSP</b>	<b>N - OESP</b>	<b>% - OESP</b>
Impeachment	22	37.4	119	84.4
Resignation	11	18.6	12	8.5
New elections	13	22	3	2.1
Something must be done	9	15.3	1	0.8
Rousseff continues with her mandate	2	3.3	2	1.4
Other	2	3.4	4	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100</b>

More than 84% of OESP editorials mentioning some “solution” defended the impeachment. The newspaper does not speculate much over other solutions to the political situation, leading us to believe it did not consider seriously any other alternative during the 24-month study period. FSP also pointed at the “impeachment” as a way out, but only in 33% of its texts – a much lower index than OESP. This indicates that FSP conceived different alternatives to solve the problem: “new elections” (22%) and “resignation” (18.6%) were among the most recurrent exits it suggested. Indeed, FSP often presents these two solutions together, asking for Rousseff and Temer resignation to be followed by new presidential elections. Curiously, FSP mentions the impeachment as a solution more frequently right after its approval by the House of Representatives, attesting that the newspaper's position changed according to the stage of the political process, as can be noticed in the following excerpt: “There is no doubt that approving the impeachment this Sunday means, to most Brazilians, the fair punishment of a government that due to its incompetence, arrogance, and its own delusional isolation, destroyed the economy, sunk into corruption, and mocked the institutions” (FSP, 17 April 2016, p. A2).

Continuing to explore the solutions to the political crisis, the least-used exit considered by both organizations was “Rousseff continues her mandate.” I. e., editorial pieces in the two

newspapers did not consider the preservation of her term as a plausible alternative. The few editorial pieces bringing this solution were published at the beginning of 2015 – when the newspapers did not believe there was enough evidence for impeachment: “Everything has its time – and this is not the impeachment’s” (OESP, 15 March 2015, p. A3). As soon as they believed there was no other solution to the situation, both FSP and OESP supported the removal of Rousseff from the presidency, whether by impeachment or resignation.

The last axis considers the evaluation that both newspapers made about what the “Consequences of the impeachment or its rejection” would be.

Table 7 – Number of editorials presenting “Consequences of (no) *impeachment*.”

Newspaper		N	%
FSP	Editorials presenting “Consequences”	39	25.2
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	155	100.0
OESP	Editorials presenting “Consequences”	95	27.1
	Number of editorials mentioning keywords	351	100.0

According to Table 7, both newspapers have similar indexes of editorial pieces considering the consequences of the impeachment (FSP = 25.2% and OESP = 27.1%). Thus, the two publications somewhat disregard speculations about the future, which contradicts the expectations of editorials working as a guide to readers (Ryan, 2004). FSP and OESP invest more work in convincing the audience that Rousseff’s deposition is necessary than in forecasting the impacts of the process. However, there are distinct positions between FSP and OESP in pieces that speculate about the “Consequences.”

Table 8 – Variables for “Consequences of (no) *impeachment*” in editorials

Result	N - FSP	% - FSP	N - OESP	% - OESP
Improved Economic situation	11	25.6	40	36.4

Political Instability	5	11.6	15	13.6
Uncertain Future	17	39.5	8	7.3
Economic Instability	3	7	3	2.7
Improved Political situation	4	9.3	10	9.1
Overall improvement	2	4.7	25	22.7
Other	1	2.3	9	8.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The most recurring consequence estimated by OESP editorials (registered in 36.4% of its texts presenting variables in this axis) is the country's improved economic situation in the case of a successful impeachment. This newspaper envisages an overall improvement in the country's situation as the second more frequent consequence (22.7% of its texts with variables in this axis; while only 4.7% of FSP's texts mentioning "Consequences" register this result). An example is the editorial in which OESP defends a fast ending for the impeachment process: "It is more rational – and serves the national interest – Dilma's impeachment to be completed soon so that Temer's government can fully dedicate itself to solve issues in economics, politics, and traditions" (OESP, 27 May 2016, p. A3).

It is a fact, however, that OESP also sees political instability as a possible consequence (13.6% of its texts bringing "Consequences"), but its editorials generally believe that the benefits far outweigh the costs. There are cases in which OESP uses the political instability of the impeachment as an excuse to argue that Rousseff should resign to spare the country of the crisis. "If she had another trait, Dilma Rousseff would have the dignity of thinking in Brazil in the first place when she knows that her impeachment is inevitable. Instead of that, she tries to put the country on fire using the political thoughtlessness and lack of democratic feelings of 'social movements' manipulated by the PT" (OESP, 11 May 2016, p. A3).

The FSP newspaper adopts a more cautious position: the most recurring consequence in its editorials is "uncertain future" (this was the second-last consequence in OESP's rankings, showing a stark divergence between them). The following excerpt is an example of the doubts FSP cast about the implications of the impeachment: "For now, there is no consensus as in 1992 [during Collor's impeachment]. Even the supporters of the impeachment hold few positive expectations to a potential government by vice-president Michel Temer. The current political crisis has another nature – and the prospect to overcome it seems more remote" (FSP, 18 Dec. 2015, p. A2). However, at the same time, FSP admits that one of the positive consequences of the impeachment would be an improved economic landscape in Brazil. "Ironically, the context favors expectations that would be difficult for Temer to foster in other



circumstances. In these first months, there is an opportunity to enforce broad and indispensable economic policies – and political ones” (FSP, 12 May 2015, p. A2).

## 4. Discussion

The main research question of this article, concerning the editorial opinion of the two newspapers regarding the impeachment of Rousseff, can be answered by saying that both newspapers agree with her removal from office, but maintain some differences about how she should be ousted. This scenario can be better explored looking at the specific research questions the article proposed above.

Regarding RQ1.1, the data confirmed that the two newspapers, on distinct levels, opened space for the impeachment to be discussed mainly through economic arguments. In other words, the economic perspectives took center stage in a process that in principle should not be guided by this kind of debate – after all, impeachment is not a mechanism for recalling a mandate. Using arguments linked to the economic crisis for justifying Rousseff's deposition is far from what the Brazilian constitution prescribes. Notwithstanding, Brazilian newspapers insisted on highlighting that point.

The answer for RQ1.2 – on the best solution presented by FSP and OESP for the political crisis – shows that both want Dilma out of office, even though they disagree at some level on the way this should be done. FSP balanced its coverage mentioning as the primary solutions “Impeachment” (37.4%), “New elections” and “Resignation” (22% and 18.6%, respectively), while OESP mentioned “Impeachment” in more than 84% of its opinionated texts mentioning any solution.

RQ1.3, concerning the consequences of the impeachment process, highlights more precisely the differences between the publications. While OESP is mainly optimistic about the post-impeachment scenario, FSP is more cautious about that, expressing doubts concerning Brazil's political and economic improvement.

At this point, we hold that when both publications open space to discuss Rousseff's impeachment aiming at economic outcomes, they reinforce the arguments of oppositional political actors – for example, the president of one of the main opposition parties said the country's economy was going to stabilize only after the closure of the impeachment process<sup>6</sup>. In this case, there is some degree of political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) between

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<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2016/06/1777086-base-de-temer-diz-que-so-com-fim-do-impeachment-economia-volta-a-crescer.shtml>. Access on June 21, 2019.

the newspapers and some parties. It is possible that FSP and OESP are aligned to the opposition because their interests overlap concerning the impeachment (and not because they agree on every matter). At the same time, the fact that the leading national newspapers in Brazil present such similarities in their positioning indicates a pitfall to the country's media system, which is not diverse enough to have competing perspectives in the same level of reach and reputation (Albuquerque, 2012; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

Using economic arguments to justify an impeachment suggests a limited conception of democracy, which could be tailored according to the country's economic performance. This is inappropriate when done by politicians, but even worse when embraced by journalism organizations. If they argue their role is to protect democracy from threats posed by politicians, parties or society, it is crucial to use the proper arguments when defending a high impact process such as impeachment in presidential systems. When FSP and OESP use economic claims to support Rousseff's impeachment, they bring such arguments to the sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin, 1994), suggesting they are a valid venue for addressing the topic.

The same applies when OESP frequently uses "The people's voice" as one of its arguments in favor of Rousseff's deposition. Curiously, this argument represents a change in this publication's position on the 2013 street protests in Brazil (Mont'Alverne, 2017) and other rallies in 2015. A few months before the impeachment process had started, OESP editorials expressed their discontent with the people's participation in street demonstrations. The newspaper stated at that time that the parliament was the appropriate place to express diverging interests. However, during the period studied in this article, OESP leaned towards applauding the public's support for the impeachment in its editorials, saying, for example, that Rousseff's destiny (being impeached) was defined by the "majoritarian manifestation of Brazilian people" (11 May 2016).

Another essential feature of OESP's editorials is the frequent use of adjectives for criticizing Rousseff's traits. Her "Incompetence" [sic] was considered a justification for removing the then-president – something that FSP texts do not focus on. The arguments OESP uses refer to an alleged ineptitude of the now ex-president, going beyond merely debating the problems and strengths of her government.

It is relevant to highlight that – at least formally – both newspapers acknowledge that it is not acceptable to remove a president from office by breaking the constitutional rules, which explains why they try – at least to some extent – to justify Rousseff's impeachment by using legal arguments. I.e., even though legal arguments were not the most frequent kind of reason

in editorial pieces, their use was strategic as an effort to provide a legitimate aura to a controversial process. Since FSP and OESP believed the best option was ousting her from the presidency (whether by resignation or impeachment), they, therefore, help to build the legitimacy of the impeachment. Pérez-Liñan's (2007) belief that impeachments are used for dismissing "undesirable" presidents without going against the constitutional order seems to apply in this case.

It is also worth stressing that this was not the first time that mainstream media in Brazil engaged itself in defending the impeachment of a president elected by popular vote: both FSP and OESP endorsed a coup against president João Goulart in 1964 (Pilagallo, 2012) – after that, Brazil was under a military dictatorship that ended only in 1985. The deposition of Collor, in 1992, is another example in the recent past. The difference from that period to the present day is that before there was a kind of consensus among the political forces against Collor (Sallum Jr and Casarões, 2011). However, the same newspapers studied in this article also played an important role in legitimizing the impeachment process at that time, acting as watchdogs by revealing scandals involving that president and asking for his removal in editorials (Matos, 2008; Waisbord, 1997).

Similarly to what happened during Collor's impeachment, the arguments about corruption in the government were essential to justify Rousseff's ousting. In fact, corruption was addressed as a main topic by Brazilian mainstream media during PT four terms in the presidency (Goldstein, 2017). Even though Rousseff was not accused of that, the scandals involving her party were used as a way of boosting support for the impeachment.

Considering editorial production routines (Firmstone, 2008, 2019; Marques and Mont'Alverne, 2019), we may speculate that the high number of editorials on the impeachment in both newspapers in April 2016 (when the House of Representatives committee voted Rousseff's impeachment) is also related to the fact that FSP and OESP believed the removal of Rousseff from office at that time was the end for her. In other words, the publications' interest in addressing the issue in their editorials lowered after the House of Representatives approved her deposition – even though the process was still running in the Senate. Another explanation for the high number of opinionated texts published in April 2016 was the attempt by both publications to act as players in the political game: FSP and OESP were willing to pressure congressional representatives to choose a side regarding the removal of Rousseff from office. This pressure towards political agents in moments of crisis is something already documented in other studies (Baym, 2004; Fenton, 2012; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004). Thus, once the impeachment was "on its way," the enthusiasm on the issue tended to die down.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to examine the editorial position-taking of FSP and OESP on one of the most important political processes in recent Brazilian history: the impeachment of the former president Dilma Rousseff. The data presented and discussed in this article allow us to assert that the newspaper positioning (dependent variable) of FSP and OESP was in general similar, as both of them supported her impeachment.

The data prove that both newspapers privilege “Legitimizing Arguments” – more specifically, they highlight “Corruption and patronage” and “Economic crisis” as the main justifications for ousting Rousseff. Moreover, OESP also considered the traits of the former president to be relevant, using the argument “Incompetence” with some recurrence. These aspects are different from the ones expected to be formally used from a legal point of view, which emphasizes the newspapers’ role as political actors and holders of private interests.

In general, FSP and OESP agree on the removal of Rousseff from office, but they do not converge on the methods needed to do so, nor do they agree on what the consequences will arise from this process. What we can assert is that two of the most influential newspapers in Brazil had a clear political agenda behind their editorials, supporting the removal of a president from office, even if they use different mechanisms and strategies to do so.

Furthermore, the article evinces that FSP and OESP were discussing Rousseff's removal from office even before the impeachment process had begun in institutional spheres. Plus, both newspapers tried to prove the need for removing the then president, always arguing it was a lawful process – which means they disputed with other political and social actors whether the impeachment was a “coup” or not one. Notwithstanding, the newspapers’ efforts did not imply a discussion that stressed legal aspects of the crime of which the then-president was being accused. The unwillingness of editorials to reflect about this question becomes evident when they mobilized arguments on the country’s poor economic performance or the lack of popular support for the ex-president. In the end, it seems like the initial charges against Rousseff were used as an excuse to oust her from the office, on behalf of a “noble” agenda that outpaced the respect of democratic rules (Albuquerque, 2017). That is why we hold that the findings presented in this article give room for new hypotheses to be examined in articles interested in comprehending editorial positions in newspapers around the world.

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