

The Financing of TV Brasil

Limitation of Resources or Political Choice?

by

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The federal funds allocated to Brazilian public television are insufficient for its adequate maintenance and could be increased. Instead of advertising on public television, which was the flagship of the Brazilian public communication system, the Lula and Rousseff administrations turned to private broadcasting systems in the hope of co-opting them. In addition to robbing public television of critical funding, this proved a political mistake when TV Globo became one of their harshest critics.

Os recursos federais direcionados ao sistema público de TV brasileiro são insuficientes para sua manutenção adequada e poderiam, portanto, ser ampliados. Ao invés de fazer propaganda na televisão pública, que a propósito fora a bandeira do sistema público de comunicação, as administrações Lula e Rousseff voltaram-se para o setor privado de comunicação, na esperança de nela fazer aliados. Além de reduzirem os recursos críticos para a TV pública, essa estratégia provou-se um erro político quando a TV Globo tornou-se um de seus críticos mais crueis.

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Mass communication systems exert so much influence over individuals that they can sometimes determine the destiny of a society. This influence may be negative or positive, depending on how the system is regulated. As Venício Lima (quoted by Pignotti, 2015) has argued, “Nowadays, the big media no longer hold the power they once did. Now their power is boundless.” Although Article 220 of Brazil’s constitution claims that “the means of communication may not, directly or indirectly, be the object of a monopoly or oligopoly,” they are concentrated in the hands of a few families or corporate conglomerates. According to James Gørgen (2011), up until July 2007 the five major commercial television broadcasting systems owned 75 percent of the main stations and 95 percent of the affiliated stations. For instance, Rede Globo de Televisão (hereaf-

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ter TV Globo) owns 122 television stations (5 directly) (Rede Globo, n.d.). The Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão owns 58 stations (10 directly), Rede Record owns 46 (18 directly), Bandeirantes owns 39 (10 directly), and Rede TV owns 26 (5 directly). In contrast, the Brazilian public broadcasting system owns 18 (5 directly).

TV Globo is the largest and most powerful television network in Brazil and the world's second-largest (Melo, 2012), and it has historically attempted to hamper the Brazilian democratic process. The network and its newspaper, *O Globo*, were suspected of trying to rig the gubernatorial elections in the state of Rio de Janeiro in 1982. Leonel Brizola, the candidate of the Democratic Labor Party, won the election, to the displeasure of the military dictatorship and of the Organizações Globo. According to *O Jornal do Brasil* (November 27, 2012), both the dictatorship and *O Globo* supported Wellington Moreira Franco, the candidate of the Social Democratic Party. According to the Press Observatory, TV Globo supported the military and its allies in their efforts to prevent Brizola's election that year. The case became known as the Proconsult affair for the firm hired by the Rio de Janeiro Electoral Court to count the votes. The company had created a computer program called Diferencial Delta that nullified some of the votes won by Brizola and counted blank votes as if they had been cast for Moreira Franco. Other press outlets discovered this fraudulent process "by comparing the fraudulent results with the results produced by the counting system that *Jornal do Brasil* Radio conducted. In fact, that radio station's election coverage drew a larger audience than the one conducted by the hegemonic state media, the Organizações Globo" (Egypto, 2004). *O Jornal do Brasil* (November 27, 2012) also pointed out that TV Globo participated in the fraudulent election scheme. During the vote counting, the television station systematically broadcast that Moreira Franco was leading in the polls, reporting the results of polls in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro (where Moreira Franco would indeed have had the majority of the votes) and announcing that votes cast for Brizola had been annulled as a result of procedural irregularities. Thus "the Organizações Globo—especially TV Globo—hoped that the coup would be assimilated. As they spread the idea of the victory of the military's candidate, they allowed Proconsult technicians to convert the null and blank votes into votes for the candidate favored by the military." Moreover, the former all-powerful general director of TV Globo, José Bonifácio de Oliveira Sobrinho, said in an interview on the show *Dossiê* on November 26, 2011,¹ that Fernando Affonso Collor de Mello had received help from Globo in winning the 1989 presidential election.

In reaction to the big media's disproportionate power and illegal political interference in Brazilian social life, many social movement organizations, especially those associated with the campaign for the democratization of the communication media, have demanded the regulation of the media and the construction of a sustainable and solid system of public television in the country. One of the fundamental problems in this regard is the financing of the public communications system, and this is the subject of this article. We will examine how much funding the federal government has devoted, directly or indirectly, to financing that system and especially TV Brasil and consider whether this amount could be increased.

RESTRUCTURING BRAZILIAN PUBLIC TELEVISION: THE CREATION OF TV BRASIL

TV Brasil and the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (Brazil Communications Company—EBC) were established in October 2007 under Provisory Measure 398, which became Law 11,652 in April of the following year. TV Brasil emerged from the combination of three preexisting public broadcasting companies: TV Nacional of Brasília, TV Educativa of Maranhão, and Rio de Janeiro's TV Educativa.² One of its purposes was the democratization of Brazilian communication, and another was the diversification of native television programming with the ultimate goal of forming citizens rather than mere consumers.

Even before it was created, TV Brasil embodied hopes and aspirations about the role of public television in Brazil. For instance, at the swearing-in ceremony of the secretary of social communication, Franklin Martins, on March 29, 2007, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva expressed his wish that a public television system be created and told his minister that he had "great expectations" for its future. He added that he did not want an organization unconditionally favorable to the government. Instead, he hoped that it would do what commercial stations did not—educate the public and report the facts as they were: "We must start a serious project. It is not a television network designed to support or attack the government. It is aimed at informing the population. It is to portray information as it is, neither rose-colored nor damaging. That's what we want" (*Folha de São Paulo*, March 29, 2007).

The president's speech echoed the proposals made by the movements that were calling for the democratization of the Brazilian communication system, especially the National Forum for Public Television.³ This forum, for instance, aimed at the creation of public television programming that would contribute to the conceptualization of plural citizenship and avoid subjecting the public to a market-driven, individualistic, and white ethnocentric worldview. The proposed network would also be "autonomous and independent of the government and markets." It is no coincidence that TV Brasil (2017) points to "Brazilian society's long-standing aspiration for a national, independent, and democratic public television. Its goal is to complement and enlarge the available offerings with artistic, scientific, and cultural programming that informs the public and develops citizenship."

Despite its limited budget, TV Brasil has initiated important conversations in the public arena. Important issues that are virtually invisible in the commercial media landscape have received ample and frank treatment, among these racism against black Brazilians and other instances of racial inequality in the country (Santos and Lopes, 2010), the role of social movements in the conceptualization of citizenship, and homophobia. In March 2016 TV Brasil began broadcasting the first LGBT show on network television, *Estação Plural*.⁴ In almost 70 years of television in Brazil, inaugurated with the founding of TV Tupi in São Paulo in September 1950, no commercial broadcasting station has ever dared to host a show focused on the world of the LGBT community.

Managed by the EBC and initiated in December 2007, TV Brasil was the flagship of the public communications system to be developed. Constructing this system, however, required combining the country's existing educational television

stations, and this was not without its challenges and problems (Lopes, 2015a). The development of a public communications system was a part of the 1988 Constitution and represented the historical efforts of movements for the democratization of the communications system such as the Associação Brasileira das Rádios Comunitárias, Intervezes—Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores, the União Brasileira das Mulheres, the União Nacional dos Estudantes, the Movimento Negro Unificado, and the União de Movimentos Populares de Saúde e Direitos Humanos. Many of these groups were participants in the National Forum for Public Television and the 2009 National Communications Conference in Brasília.

The creation of TV Brasil and the effort to build a national public communications system were criticized by groups on both the left and the right. The criticism from the right came primarily from private media groups and their representatives in Congress. For example, Congressman Onyx Lorenzoni, at the time leader of the Democrats,⁵ said, “We will fight against Lula’s television. There’s no question but that public television will be Lula’s television. Its purpose will be to spread propaganda on behalf of the president” (quoted in Ulhôa and Jayme, 2007). In his blog on the web site of *O Globo* on March 17, 2007, the journalist Ricardo Noblat quoted part of an article published in the right-wing news magazine *Veja* that harshly criticized the proposal to create “a national state-led television broadcasting system.” As an employee of the Organizações Globo, Noblat here referred to TV Brasil not as public television but as Lula’s television in the same way as Lorenzoni. Moreover, he used *Veja’s* expression “national state-led television broadcasting system” instead of “national public communications system,” assigning the future television station a clear politico-ideological character. We hypothesize that he was expressing not only his personal view of the future Brazilian public television but also the opinion of the organization for which he worked. Although the *Veja* article was not explicit about TV Globo’s position on the matter, one should not forget that it began operating a year after the civil-military coup of 1964, a coup that the Organizações Globo explicitly supported.⁶ Thus it stands to reason that the Organizações Globo, along with other hegemonic private media outlets, opposed the creation of public television, the goal of which was to democratize access to communication and knowledge (Lopes, 2015a). This support for the regime of exception allows us to infer that the journalist’s opposition to public television was congruent with the position of his employer. According to Marco Aurélio Weissheimer (2013), democracy in communications “means, among other things, a communications system that operates in terms of values of freedom of expression, the guarantee of diversity of positions, and the protection of the truth and the public interest and rejects ownership of the media of communication.” This view is contrary to the monopolistic and conservative interests of the Organizações Globo, which today covers “98.44 percent of the national territory, reaching 5,482 municipalities, and 99.5 percent of the population” (Globo, n.d.) and is one of the largest owners of media, especially television, in Brazil. It follows that the democratization of communications, particularly through a public television system, is not advantageous to Globo.

The hegemonic media's resistance to the construction of a public television system was reflected in the Brazilian government's policies at the time. Thus, the public television established in 2007 (full of shortcomings as a result of this resistance) also received—and continues to receive—harsh criticism from the social agents that were campaigning for the democratization of communication in Brazil. During Lula's administration (2003–2010), a center-left and pro-social administration (see Santos, 2014), there were more national conferences aimed at debating important themes for Brazilian society (among them the democratization of the media of communication) than under any previous government. According to the political scientist Leonardo Avritzer (2012: 7–8), of the 115 national conferences that took place between 1940 and 2010, "74 occurred during Lula's terms, which shows the administration's importance in the participatory politics of the period." Approximately 6 million adults participated in these conferences (Avritzer, 2012: 12). Moreover, 28 of those 74 conferences took place for the first time during Lula's administration (see Costa, 2010). Thus the Lula administration was responsible for the realization of more than 60 percent of the national conferences held. It facilitated public dialogue on important themes with the goal of building citizenship and democratization, an objective rarely observed in previous governments. Some of the themes advanced more than others in the arena of public debate (without necessarily advancing in concrete terms) or at least faced less discursive resistance from the governing elites in their respective areas, among them two conferences on women's policies (2003 and 2007), two on science, technology, and innovation (2005 and 2010), and two on the promotion of racial equality (2005 and 2009). However, the first (and so far the only) conference on communication took place only in December 2009. Delaying the debate on communications until the end of the administration's term made it impossible to implement the conference's proposals. In fact, the conference had been postponed several times and took place only as a result of public pressure: a number of regional conferences mobilized political efforts for the realization of the national conference, electing some 2,000 delegates that represented them at the event. Six hundred thirty-three proposals were approved, but they did not become concrete government measures. The Lula administration's failure to implement the proposals (many of which had been included in the Brasilia letter [Carta Maior, 2007]) that aimed at the sustainable and solid construction of the Brazilian public television system prompted criticism of public television from the movements struggling for democratization in the communications arena. When TV Brasil was created in 2007 it was with deficiencies that threatened its survival.

THE FINANCING OF BRAZILIAN PUBLIC TELEVISION

One factor in the disappointment with the Lula and Rousseff administrations with regard to communication was their failure to implement the principle that the financing of public television "should have multiple sources, with meaningful participation of public budget and unconditional funds" (Carta Maior, 2007). TV Brasil's budget does not come from multiple sources.

TABLE 1
The EBC's Budget and Expenditures (reais), 2008–2014

Year	Budget	Rate of Increase	Cumulative Rate of Increase	Amount Expended	Proportion of Receipts Used
2008	293,471,208.00	–	–	134,524,378.78	45.84
2009	387,305,820.00	31.97	31.97	285,414,133.43	73.69
2010	488,210,399.00	26.05	65.24	471,566,261.35	96.59
2011	445,773,429.96	– 8.69	55.30	424,466,926.95	95.22
2012	459,700,286.58	3.12	56.64	455,560,733.58	99.10
2013	493,003,573.06	7.24	67.99	481,423,764.50	97.65
2014	540,357,290.34	9.60	84.02	535,646,004.84	99.13
Total	3,107,822,006.94				

Source: EBC site (<http://www3.transparencia.gov.br/TransparenciaPublica/jsp/execucao/execucaoPorProgGoverno.jsf>) and data compiled by the authors

It is practically linked to the federal government's budget,⁷ and as a result the government participates heavily in it. It follows that if this participation were reduced, TV Brasil's financial health might be damaged. Thus Brazilian public television is vulnerable to changes in government and political or economic crises. In other words, the organization has no budgetary security, and there is evidence that the EBC's budget (along with, by extension, TV Brasil's budget) has already suffered cuts.

Data on the evolution of the EBC's budget and expenditures from 2008 through 2014 (Table 1) show that, even in the short term, the budget did not increase at a constant rate. It increased significantly in the Lula years and, after the negative rate of 2011 (the first year of the Rousseff administration), grew slowly from a much lower level. Furthermore, although the rate of increase reached its peak in 2009 (31.97 percent), in that year the proportion expended was lower than in any of the subsequent years.

In practice, TV Brasil has only one source of financing, the federal government's public budget, and the ECB's former president, Nelson Breve, has called this public budget insufficient to finance public television (quoted in Lopes, 2015b): "The budget has been exhausted and is insufficient. The public environment has to change its mindset and raise its own resources, either by offering services or through institutional publicity. It is important to diversify financing sources and to be creative." We do not disagree with his proposal, but we question his description of the condition of the budget. Is there really no public money to finance public television, or is the construction of this system simply not a priority? Obviously, we cannot answer this question here, but we can argue that the budget is increasing, although slowly, and that not financing public television has been a political choice.

Recently, as reported by the journalist Paulo Henrique Amorim (2015), Senator Roberto Requião (PMDB/PR) stated:

I used to think that Lula was an organic intellectual. However, I found out he is not. He was a union representative mediating between the people and big

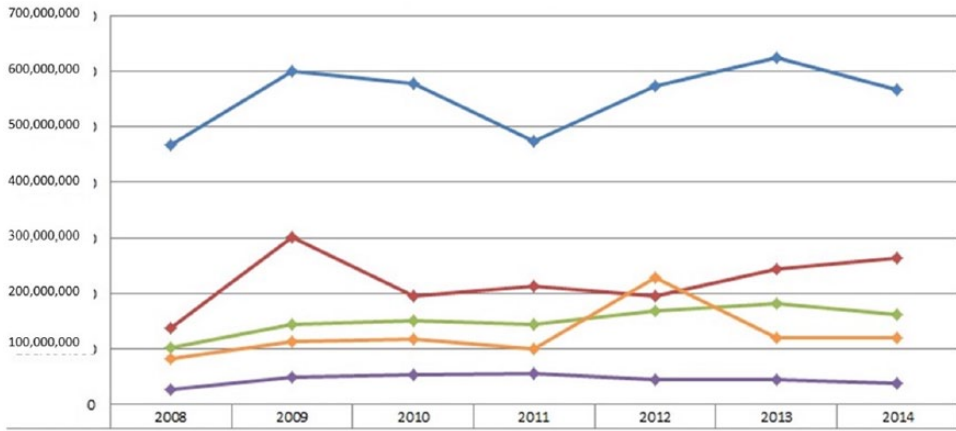


Figure 1. Government expenditures on publicity on the traditional television networks, 2008–2014 (Folha de S. Paulo June 30, 2015). Top to bottom, Globo, Record, SBT, Band, Rede TV!

capital. One day I told Lula how I treated communications in Paraná. I cut all the money for publicity. I invested in public television, educational television, and made an agreement with president Hugo Chávez to distribute the signal through Telesur. Lula listened, seemed very interested, and told me: “Go right over and tell [José, Lula’s chief of staff] Dirceu.” Dirceu listened and said, “But Requião, the government already has a television network: it is Globo.” They thought they could emulate Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s scheme, using government publicity money to win over Globo. Lula’s and Dilma’s technical media only favor large media groups!

Requião had proposed investing in communications on the model of a “state television network,” but state television is not necessarily public. There is broad debate about how autonomous and independent from the government such an organization must be (Lopes, 2015b). What is important in this context is that in the subtext we can see that there had been a political decision to invest in communications through commercial or private television, especially TV Globo. In other words, the minister had made a political choice that the Lula administration acquiesced in and the Dilma administration ratified. The confirmation and operationalization of this choice is indicated by data on the government’s spending on publicity through the traditional media (Figure 1). Between 2008 and 2014, the Lula and Rousseff administrations spent more than twice the EBC’s budget for these years on publicity on the five largest commercial television networks, R\$7,259,339,179, and Rede Globo alone, chosen by Dirceu to be “the government’s television,” received more than all the other private networks combined.

The political choice or, in other words, the neglect of TV Brasil’s financing is even clearer when we compare Petrobras’s expenses with the publicity costs related to TV Globo and TV Brasil in this period.⁸ TV Globo received R\$502,394,847.35 and TV Brasil received R\$32,424,248.71. In other words, Petrobras invested 18.27 times more in publicity with the private television network than with the public one.

CONCLUSION

Can it be said that the large sums of money spent by the Lula and Rousseff administrations on publicity with the five largest private networks in Brazil amount to investments in communication? We cannot answer this question with the accuracy it deserves in this article, but we will suggest that these expenditures represent political mistakes. Between 2008 and 2014, 53.52 percent of the publicity expenditure were channeled to TV Globo. The data presented here show that Nelson Breve's assertion may be incorrect. Influenced by the reasoning of economists, he argued that in a situation of "scarce resources" the ECB's budget was "exhausted," but there were in fact funds to be invested in the communication policy of the federal government. What there was not was the political will to prioritize investing those funds in TV Brasil.

The resources required for TV Brazil paled in comparison with those for commercial television networks. For instance, the smallest of the networks mentioned here, Rede TV!, presented in February 2011 a proposal of R\$516,000,000 to the so-called Club of 13⁹ for the right to broadcast the Brazilian soccer championship in 2012–2014 (Santos, 2013: 212). This amount was larger than the EBC's budget in all but one year (2014) since its inception.

The administration's effort to ingratiate itself with TV Globo through publicity expenditures proved to be a political mistake: TV Globo became one of the harshest critics of both Lula's and Rousseff's administrations, using its news programs and its soap operas to that end. Blogs and web sites such as Carta Maior, Diário do Centro do Mundo, Conversa Afiada, the journalist Luis Nassif's Jornal GGN, and O Cafezinho acknowledge that Globo was one of the media organizations that both supported and participated in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff on August 31, 2016, confirming the organization's historical tradition of derailing the Brazilian democratic process.

Both Lula and Rousseff turned a blind eye to Globo's history and its aristocratic worldview in choosing to restrict the EBC's budget, forgetting that such restrictions could make the solid and sustainable construction of the Brazilian public television system impossible. TV Brasil, theoretically conceived as building solid notions of democracy and citizenry against the commercial, individualist, conservative, and antidemocratic view of most Brazilian commercial television networks, suffered tremendous difficulties as a result of this situation.

Ironically, the first television network to interview the impeached president Rousseff for an interview was TV Brasil. In the interview she did not mention "democratizing communications, which are still in the hands of a minority" as she had in May 2018 on the Spanish network RT (Marcelino, 2016). Moreover, she never acknowledged that she had made a mistake in investing so little in Brazilian public television.

NOTES

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrpurEkmJkU> (accessed August 12, 2015).
2. The first began broadcasting on June 4, 1960, the second in 1969, and the third in 1975.
3. The Ministry of Culture organized the first and the second National Forum for Public Television in 2006 and 2007. On both occasions there were proposals for the construction of the

public television system. Representatives of public networks, as well as civil society activists, artists, and others, participated in these events (Carta Maior, 2007).

4. “*Estação Plural* is a talk show dedicated to debates and interviews. There are three recurring participants who have ties to the LGBT world: the singer and composer Ellen Oléria, the journalist Fernando Oliveira (Fefito), and Mel Gonçalves, a member of the band Uó. Every week they discuss social issues with a guest, aiming at a rich and plural debate taking into account distinctive worldviews. At the end of each episode, the show introduces a theme linked to the LGBT scene but broad enough to attract the attention of the general public” (EBC, 2016).

5. The Democrats arose from the old Partido da Frente Liberal (Liberal Front Party—PFL), a right-wing party founded on January 24, 1985. On March 28, 2007, the PFL changed its name to Democrats. It had been a dissident faction of the Partido Democrático Social (Social Democratic Party—PDS), which had supported the dictatorship. The PDS was the successor of the Aliança Renovadora Nacional (National Renovation Alliance—ARENA), a party that lent political legitimacy to the dictatorship. As a right-wing party, the Democrats take conservative positions with regard to political, social, educational, economic, and democratic achievements, including the democratization of Brazilian communication. The party’s origins are aristocratic and slave-owning (see Santos, 2015).

6. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OCvABY2pBg> (accessed August 12, 2015).

7. We use the word “practically” because, according to Article 32 of Law 11,652 of April 7, 2008, the EBC also receives 10 percent of the proceeds of the public radio tax from the Fundo de Fiscalização das Telecomunicações. Although this transfer did not represent a new tax or increase the amount that telecommunications companies pay, these challenged it in court, with the result that after 2009 the EBC’s annual budget was reduced (TeleSintese, 2011).

8. These data were obtained through Petrobras’s Citizen Information Service. On August 10, 2015, we requested information under the Information Access Law about the company’s advertising expenditures with TV Brasil and TV Globo, and it replied on August 24, 2015.

9. Also known as the Great Soccer Club Union, the Club of 13 was founded on July 11, 1987, with headquarters in Porto Alegre. One of its goals is to protect the right to broadcast the matches of national championships on the radio and television.

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