

Reframing connections between media and politics in the digital context: the mobilization of journalism by parliamentarians and the reorganization of the Brazilian media system

Reformulando conexões entre mídia e política no contexto digital: a mobilização do jornalismo pelos parlamentares e a reorganização do sistema midiático brasileiro

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Abstract

Recent changes in the digital communication flows have transformed the relationship between the political and media spheres in Brazil over the past two decades. Although this connection is historically rooted, political instability and the ongoing crisis in journalism have blurred these ties. This is evident in the ways politicians reference media organisations and professionals, as well as in their engagement with journalistic content. Organisations, content, and professionals inherent to the media system are strategically mobilised by political actors, particularly due to the benefits and advantages they provide, and are therefore fundamental to the construction of political discourse. Despite the prominence of anti-media discourse, the media continue to serve as key sources of information, support the ideas promoted by political groups, legitimise discourses, amplify visibility, and even act as contributors to attacks against opponents. Based on 2,102 posts published by 61 Brazilian parliamentarians on X in 2024, this study seeks to systematise how such positively oriented associations are constituted in the digital sphere. The findings—derived from Content Analysis—demonstrate the complexity of the Brazilian media system and the ideological interconnections embedded in the mobilisation of media groups by political actors. Furthermore, the results highlight the centrality of mainstream media as a reference point for the political sphere and identify alternative media as actors aligned with distinct ideological groups, reinforcing the reorganization and repositioning of media groups within the media system. Finally, the study underscores the significant role of regional media, particularly in relation to the advantageous use of informational resources.

Keywords: media and politics, media references, Brazilian media system, parliamentarians

Resumo

As mudanças no fluxo comunicacional digital transformaram as relações entre política e midiática no Brasil nas últimas duas décadas. Embora a conexão seja histórica, considera-se que a instabilidade política e a crise atravessada pelo jornalismo embaralharam esses vínculos. Essas mudanças alteram também o próprio sistema midiático, em especial sua composição, a partir da forma como políticos mencionam grupos midiáticos e profissionais e fazem referência ao jornalismo. Parte-se do pressuposto de que organizações, conteúdos e profissionais são articulados pelos atores políticos de forma estratégica, em função dos benefícios e vantagens que proporcionam, o que indica quais são os agentes mais e menos centrais do sistema midiático, conforme a visibilidade imbricada nessa relação. Apesar da iminência do discurso antimidiático, os meios de comunicação servem como fonte de informação, respaldam ideias defendidas pelos grupos políticos, legitimam discursos, amplificam a visibilidade e servem como agentes contribuidores para a emissão de ataques a opositores. Com base em 2.102 posts feitos por 61 parlamentares brasileiros no X em 2024, busca-se sistematizar como essas associações se constituem no âmbito digital. Os resultados – a partir da Análise de Conteúdo – demonstram a complexidade do sistema midiático brasileiro e os atravessamentos ideológicos inerentes à mobilização que os atores políticos fazem da mídia, especialmente os nativos digitais. Além disso, nota-se a centralidade dos meios mainstream como referência à esfera política e dos alternativos como agentes articulados aos distintos grupos ideológicos. Por último, destaca-se o papel relevante da mídia regional, especialmente conectada ao uso vantajoso dos subsídios informacionais.

Palavras-chave: mídia e política, referências midiáticas, sistema midiático, parlamentares

1. Introduction

The Brazilian political context, particularly over the past two decades, has undergone significant transformations. The impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff, the imprisonment of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and the Lava Jato investigations exemplify this instability. The bipartisanship between the Workers' Party (PT) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), which had structured presidential elections since 1994, has broken down. New parties and actors have emerged, largely right-leaning and gaining digital visibility after the June 2013 protests (von Bulow; Avritzer; Santana, 2024). Strengthened in the 2018 elections, they deepened conservatism in Brazilian politics, leading not only to the election of a far-right president but also to a more right-leaning Congress (Figueiras, Sena Júnior, Miguel, 2023). Amid extremist and authoritarian rhetoric (Avritzer & Rennó, 2021), conflict with the traditional press (Marques, 2023), and a poorly evaluated COVID-19 response (Meneguello & Porto, 2021), Jair Bolsonaro became, in 2022, the first post-redemocratisation president not to be re-elected.

This complex political landscape is also shaped by the platformisation of political communication (Sued & Sáenz-Leandro, 2025). Politicians are elected through online dynamics and, beyond Jair Bolsonaro—elected in 2018 with only eight seconds of television airtime—others have gained visibility via platforms, maintaining YouTube channels and producing content systematically. Political action is increasingly mediated by platforms, structured by algorithms, and driven by engagement and monetisation (Sued & Sáenz-Leandro, 2025). Politicians thus orient their activities towards platforms.

For this purpose, these actors engage with media actors to construct their discourses. A shift in information circulation has already been identified: a 'visibility disorder' in which other actors—both institutional and non-institutional—gain prominence at the expense of traditional media (Alves, 2022). These new agents contribute to changes in the Brazilian media system, alongside a broader crisis of trust and institutional legitimacy affecting journalism (Broersma, 2013; Ross Arguedas et al., 2023; Hanitzsch et al., 2018). In addition, consumption of digital platform content negatively affects trust in news (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019), while the use of alternative—often digital-native—outlets is also associated with distrust of mainstream media (Andersen et al., 2023). This context reshapes the organisation of the Brazilian media system.

Although elements of the polarised pluralist model have been used to classify the Brazilian media system—such as political parallelism to frame mainstream media (Azevedo, 2006)—and despite its proximity to the captured liberal model (Guerrero, 2014), the adequacy of these frameworks has been questioned for over a decade (Albuquerque, 2021). Critiques highlight the strength of regional private media (Albuquerque & Pinto, 2019), the diversification of sources that complicates party–media alignment (Alves & Albuquerque, 2024), and the role of anti-system outlets within the system itself (Albuquerque, Gagliardi & Magalhães, 2025). This debate, following Hallin and Mancini (2004), underscores the system's complexity. This article, however, focuses solely on identifying the media actors currently composing the system and their positions.

Large Brazilian conglomerates in print and television—such as Folha, Estadão, Band, SBT, Globo, and Record—have historically represented mainstream media. Many have also expanded into digital platforms, such as UOL. At the same time, digital-native outlets have emerged, often grouped under the notion of 'alternative' media (Haller & Holt, 2018; Ihlebæk et al., 2022), recently applied to Brazil (Comel, 2025). From the mid-2000s, the progressive blogosphere took shape (Magalhães, Albuquerque & Alves, 2020; Aldé,

Escobar & Chagas, 2007). Defined by editorial stance, these outlets position themselves as alternatives to, and watchdogs of mainstream media (Guazina, 2013), alongside traditional formats such as *Revista Fórum* and *Carta Capital*. Their emergence coincided with personal blogs by mainstream journalists (Aldé, Escobar & Chagas, 2007).

Later, within the ecosystem of social media platforms, far-right-aligned outlets emerged, becoming more visible from the 2014 elections onwards. These actors gained prominence within Bolsonaro-aligned networks, particularly in debates on the COVID-19 pandemic (Recuero et al., 2021), and as recurrent sources in messaging app groups (Santos et al., 2021). Amid these transformations, it is also necessary to consider traditional outlets that have shifted rightwards over the past decade (Tavares, 2020; Santini, Salles & Mattos, 2023).

The result is a media system in which established groups compete for space and visibility with diverse digital-native and alternative actors with distinct positions. Their centrality can be assessed by examining how politicians mobilise the media in their discourse. This approach reverses the traditional perspective on media–politics relations. Historically, research has focused on how politicians are covered, through reporting or editorials (Marques et al., 2021; Porto et al., 2020; Albuquerque, 2019). However, politicians also strategically incorporate media into their own discourse, whether to gain advantage or to criticise (Heidenreich et al., 2024; Paatelainen et al., 2022).

Media mobilisation in political discourse is largely benefit-driven (Egelhofer et al., 2021). For media organisations, political references enhance visibility, especially for those without an established trajectory (Heidenreich et al., 2024). In a platformised environment, their influence on public debate increases, as politicians sharing their content redirect audiences (Buyens et al., 2025). For politicians, media content legitimises positions and opinions (Paatelainen et al., 2022; Baptista, Gradim & Fonseca, 2024) and supports policy advocacy (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016). Shared visibility amplifies this effect (Heidenreich et al., 2024) and media content can also be used to attack opponents when coverage is negative (Ekman & Widholm, 2024).

Connections with media take varied forms, including both strategic use and anti-media discourse (Egelhofer et al., 2021; Orchard & Fergnani, 2024). Any linkage, however, signals the relevance of a given outlet or professional within the system. This study focuses specifically on cases where in which actors are mobilised as ‘collaborators’, reflecting interdependence between media and politics (Ekman & Widholm, 2015). Mentions based on perceived benefits exclude discrediting uses, instead indicating recognition of journalism’s capacity to add value to political content. Assuming that political actors mobilise media for symbolic value and strategic gain, and that this offers a valid lens on system dynamics, the study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does this mobilisation (re)position different media groups within the Brazilian media system?

RQ2: What is the role of regional media within the system mobilised by parliamentarians?

RQ3: How does ideological alignment—to the left and right—shape connections with the media system?

The article analyses a subcorpus of 2,102 messages selected from 27,789 posts by 61 Brazilian parliamentarians on X in 2024. These posts mobilise media for the advantages they provide, enabling identification of the most frequently cited media groups and types. Such mentions serve as indicators of the

positions communication organisations occupy within the system. The data offer an overview of evolving configurations in a context of multiple transformations. Here, position refers to the place media groups occupy within the system, measured through political mobilisation. Political change and platformisation have enabled new actors to gain relevance and be incorporated by political actors, potentially reshaping the status of established outlets. This process reorders media groups as central or peripheral depending on how they are mobilised by politicians, an indicator used in this study to map the system.

2. Methodology

To address the research questions, the analysis focuses on media references—operationalised through the sharing of news, mentions of media organisations, and citations of professionals—articulated by Brazilian political actors in their public discourse on the platform X. Although it is not the most widely used platform among Brazilians (Newman et al., 2025), it is where politicians and journalists maintain reciprocal relationships (Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2016) and where distinct political conflicts emerge (Campos-Domínguez et al., 2021). Moreover, X itself has become a source for journalists covering politics and economics, including those at quality newspapers (Kapidzic et al., 2022), placing the platform in a privileged position for examining the relationship between the political and media spheres.

The analysis begins with the 513 parliamentarians holding seats in the Brazilian Chamber of Parliamentarians in the 57th Legislature (2023–2026). A sample was constructed based on criteria of geographical representation. A threshold of 12% of the total number of parliamentarians was established to ensure at least one representative per state, resulting in a sample of 61 parliamentarians. Selection was based on the candidates elected with the highest number of votes in each federal unit in the 2022 elections, until the quota per state was reached, thereby ensuring proportionality. Their accounts on X were then manually identified, and automated data collection was conducted using the software Zeeschuimer¹. When selected parliamentarians did not have an account on X (or had inactive accounts), they were replaced following the same criteria².

The resulting dataset comprises 27,789 messages published on X by the 61 Brazilian parliamentarians between April and November 2024³. To construct the specific corpus analysed in this article—limited to references to the media sphere that entail beneficial or advantageous relations for politicians—three complementary procedures were applied. First, a guided manual search using keywords was conducted to identify posts referring to: (1) journalism as an activity, (2) media professionals, and (3) traditional or digital outlets⁴. A set of approximately 60 keywords and their linguistic variants was employed.

¹ One of the authors of the article carried out the mapping of the accounts. The authors also thank researcher Raquel Miriam Pereira de Souza, who was responsible for extracting the data from the X accounts. Data extraction was conducted from December 2024 to January 2025, following the period analysed in the study (April to November).

² In the case of the state of Roraima, none of the parliamentarians elected to the current legislature maintained an updated X account. As a result, this was the only state left without representatives in the final sample composition.

³ Due to the blocking of X within Brazilian territory, the study considered the period from April to November. Initially, six months of data were to be collected, but this period was later extended to eight months.

⁴ This methodological strategy was inspired by the discussion developed by Figenschou and Ihlebæk (2019), as well as by the selection criteria adopted by Egelhofer et al. (2021). In addition, unlike the strategy adopted by Alves and Albuquerque (2024), only references to the media system were selected, since the objective was specifically to examine relations with media organisations.

In total, 2,594 posts (9% of the dataset) contained some reference to the media sphere. This subcorpus was subsequently stratified using a binary variable labelled 'positive reference to the media'⁵. Only messages indicating advantageous use were retained, resulting in 2,102 posts. Finally, the messages were coded based on a codebook (Egelhofer et al., 2021; Cushion et al., 2021; Haller & Holt, 2018; Comel, 2025).

Chart 1. Variables and categories used in data coding

Identification of media outlet (V1)	Descriptive variable to include the name of the media outlet mentioned. When no specific outlet is identifiable (e.g. references to professionals or general mentions of the press), or when multiple outlets are referenced, code 99 is used
Type of outlet (V2)	1 – Traditional; 2 – Digital-native; 3 – Professionals/journalists; 4 – Public media; 5 – International media; 6 – Media in general/more than one
Scope of coverage (V3)	1 – Local/Regional; 2 – National; 3 – International; 4 – Not identified

Source: the authors

Variables 2 and 3 derive from Variable 1, which records the name of the outlet mentioned. The coding subsequently underwent standardisation to correct typographical inconsistencies and ensure uniformity. Identifying the outlets mentioned allows for the assessment of which media groups are most frequently cited by each political group. The variable 'type of outlet' enables analysis of whether different logics underpin parliamentary references, while 'scope of coverage' captures the relevance of local and regional media in parliamentary communication. In addition, Brazilian parliamentarians were classified according to the ideological position of their parties (Bolognesi et al., 2023): Left (21.3%), Centre (11.5%), and Right (65.6%). Data analysis combines statistical testing with standardised residuals (SR), used respectively to assess associations between variables and to identify cells in contingency tables where relationships are strongest.

3. Data analysis

The data comprised 2,102 messages, representing 81% of all references and mentions of media outlets during the analysed period. Although the remaining 19% are linked to anti-media discourse, media organisations are more often referenced from a favourable perspective, namely through the benefits they provide to political discourse. It is therefore relevant to identify which media groups politicians consider most valuable for establishing relationships and whether this varies by ideological position. This indicator helps explain how recent transformations in information flows and the political system reorganise relations with the media system and reposition different outlets within it.

The discussion highlights: (a) the prioritisation of traditional and digital media and their association with ideological position; (b) the near absence of public media within the Brazilian media system; (c) the centrality

⁵ As this article is part of a broader research project, one variable ('positive media use') was employed to segment the dataset according to the study's objectives. Positive use was defined as cases in which content or mentions provided some type of benefit or advantage to the politician involved. In other words, mentions were not based on criticism, but rather on some perceived benefit, whether simple visibility through an interview or the opportunity to criticise an opponent through news coverage exposing a corruption scandal. Intercoder reliability testing produced a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.66 for this variable. Although considered moderate, the value was deemed acceptable given the novelty of applying the procedure within the Brazilian context and the previous refinements made to the codebook, following three rounds of training and testing.

of national outlets and the strategic role of regional media; (d) the selective use of major media conglomerates beyond anti-media discourse; (e) the limited prominence of progressive media within left-wing parliamentary communication flows; and finally (f) the far right’s parallel media system.

3.1.Types of media: traditional and digital outlets in parliamentary information flows

Although scholarship has emphasised transformations brought by the digital environment, particularly the visibility generated through content sharing (Alves, 2022), traditional media remain the outlets most frequently mobilised in line with parliamentary interests (50.5%). One example is a post by a parliamentarian sharing, without commentary, the O Globo article ‘*Inquérito do golpe: o indiciamento de um general que mais preocupa os militares*’ [Coup investigation: the indictment of a general who most concerns the military] (Rogério Correia – 31 October 2024). Digital-native outlets appear next, accounting for 24.7% of mentions. Other categories – such as journalists, public media, and international outlets – are mobilised less frequently

Table 1. Types of media mobilised (N=2102)

Type of media	N (%)
Traditional	1061 (50.5)
Digital-native	520 (24.7)
Professionals/journalists	132 (6.3)
Public media	116 (5.5)
International media	137 (6.5)
Media in general	136 (6.5)
Total	2102 (100)

Source: the authors

The centrality of traditional media in advantageous uses reinforces previous discussions on the complexity of political relations with the media sphere (Orchard & Fergnani, 2024; Massuchin et al., 2022). In Brazil, these same outlets are also frequent targets of criticism from politicians (Marques, 2024) and unofficial pro-Bolsonaro pages (Massuchin et al., 2022). This finding supports the notion of selective media use, whereby media criticism coexists with uses based on the benefits that such content provides.

Table 2. Distribution of media types by ideological group

		Traditional	Digital-native	Professionals	Public media	International media	Media in general	Total
Left	N	581	139	53	78	34	85	970
	%	59.9%	14.3%	5.5%	8.0%	3.5%	8.8%	100%
	SR	4.1	-6.5	-1	3.3	-3.7	2.8	
Centre	N	124	32	16	20	14	3	209
	%	59.3%	15.3%	7.7%	9.6%	6.7%	1.4%	100%
	SR	1.8	-2.7	0.8	2.5	0.1	-2.9	
Right	N	356	349	63	18	89	48	923
	%	38.6%	37.8%	6.8%	2.0%	9.6%	5.2%	100%
	SR	-5.1	8	0.7	-4.6	3.7	-1.5	
Total	N	1061	520	132	116	137	136	2102
	%	50.5%	24.7%	6.3%	5.5%	6.5%	6.5%	100%

Chi-Square: 246.485 p=0.000

Source: the authors

Although traditional media still occupy a central position within the media system, there is a significant association between media type and ideological position ($p=0.000$). Across all three groups—left, centre, and right—mainstream media are the outlets most frequently mobilised in line with parliamentary interests. However, they are more strongly associated with left-wing parliamentarians ($SR = 4.1$) than with the right ($SR = -5.1$).

Even though mainstream media have historically been accused of negatively covering left-wing candidates and governments (Azevedo, 2006), the left still appropriates and references their content. This finding reinforces the idea of selective use while also challenging the concept of political parallelism, often applied in the Brazilian context but increasingly questioned due either to its inadequacy (Albuquerque, 2012) or the absence of stable relations between parties and media organisations (Alves & Albuquerque, 2024). By contrast, the right relies more heavily on digital-native outlets ($SR = 8$), highlighting a shift in the structure of the media system driven particularly by one political group.

3.2. The (almost!) absence of public media

The previous data (Tables 1 and 2) highlight private outlets as the main drivers of debate and information flows in Brazil while revealing the limited relevance of public media (5.5%). On the one hand, this may reflect their weaker adaptation to platforms (Cañedo & Segóvia, 2022), limiting references such as link sharing or the circulation of online content. On the other hand, Brazilian audiences neither associate these outlets with credibility and legitimacy nor use them as primary news sources (Newman et al., 2025). The near absence of public media from the communication flows mobilised by politicians is particularly significant because, in other contexts—whether characterised by greater political interference (Spain) or less (Finland and England)—public broadcasters occupy a central role in public debate (Goyanes, Costa-Sánchez & Demeter, 2021), even where citizens recognise high levels of political parallelism (Lamuedra-Graván & Alonso-Jiménez, 2022).

In Brazil, the data further indicate that the limited integration of public media into the media system occurs almost exclusively through governing parties (centre and left). Their possible lack of independence, a recurring issue in other contexts (Lamuedra-Graván & Alonso-Jiménez, 2022), may help explain this pattern. Left-wing ($SR = 3.3$) and centrist ($SR = 5.5$) parliamentarians reference public media content more frequently. These mentions include programmes such as *Roda Viva* on TV Cultura, as well as references to the EBC website, TV Câmara, and Rádio Câmara. Such uses are generally linked to parliamentarians' own appearances in programming, as illustrated by the post: 'LIVE | Reginaldo Lopes on TV Câmara <https://t.co/I8zmJXGQID>' (Reginaldo Lopes, 26 November 2024).

3.3. National versus regional media: references beyond convenience

Although the long-standing ties between regional media and political actors (Pinto, 2014; Albuquerque & Pinto, 2019), there has been little evidence of their continued role within digital information flows. The present data (Table 3) show that regional outlets occupy not a central but a strategic position in parliamentary communication. When media are advantageously mobilised, 68.7% of mentions refer to national outlets, indicating strong dependence on broadly circulating media. Regional outlets account for 10.7% of mentions.

Table 3. Distribution of media scope across content with and without positive mentions

	Absence of positive mention		Presence of positive mention	
	N (%)	SR.	N (%)	SR.
Local/Regional	3 (0.6)	-6.1	225 (98.7)	3
National	266 (54.1)	-3.2	1445 (68.7)	1.6
International	7 (1.4)	-3.9	138 (6.6)	1.9
Unidentified	216 (43.9)	12.1	294 (14)	-5.9
Total	492 (100)		2102 (100)	

Chi-Square: 259.583 p=0.000

Source: the authors

Although quantitatively less prominent, regional outlets become significant when compared with content lacking positive mentions ($p = 0.000$), which likely corresponds to anti-media discourse. Positive references are more strongly associated with regional media ($SR = 3$), whereas their absence strongly correlates with the absence of regional outlets themselves ($SR = -6.1$). This suggests that anti-media discourse is rarely directed at regional media because these outlets maintain closer ties with political actors.

Table 4. Distribution of media scope and purposes of positive media use

	Attacking opponents		Reinforcing opinions		Emphasising acquired visibility		Total
	N (%)	SR.	N (%)	SR.	N (%)	SR.	N (%)
Local/Regional	32 (14.2)	-3.9	120 (53.3)	0.4	73 (32.4)	4	225 (100)
National	443 (30.7)	1.8	727 (50.3)	-0.6	275 (19)	-1.2	1445 (100)
International	33 (23.9)	-0.9	83 (60.1)	1.4	22 (15.9)	-1.2	138 (100)
Total	508 (28.1)		930 (51.4)		370 (20.5)		1808 (100)

Chi-Square: 40.804 p=0.000

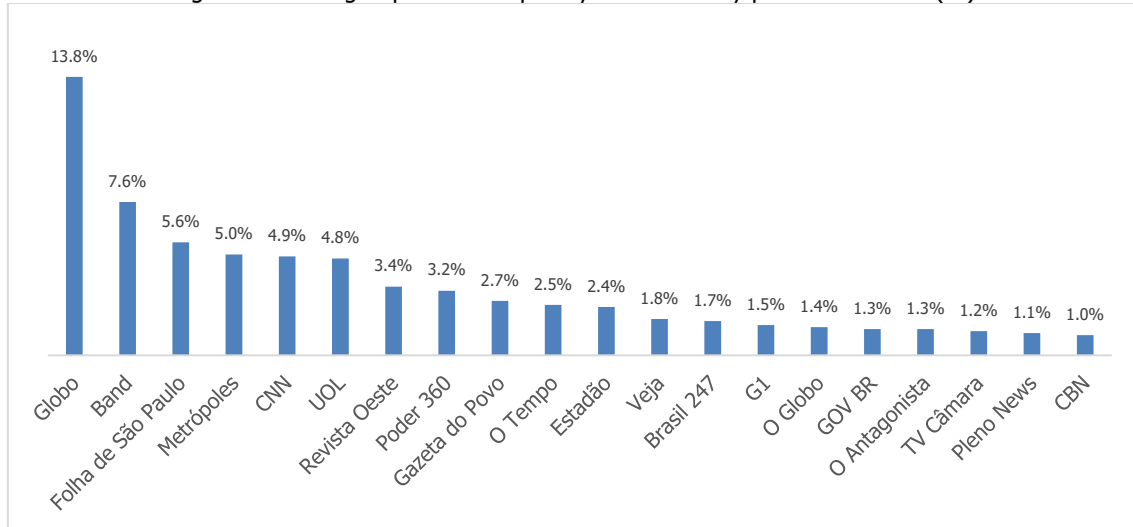
Source: the authors

Regional media serve two main functions (Table 4): political self-promotion through emphasis on acquired visibility (32.4%) and reinforcement of political discourse (53.3%). The latter function also characterises national and international outlets, whereas the former is far more strongly associated with regional media ($SR = 4$). Thus, although regional outlets are not quantitatively central to the media system, they play a strategic role by increasing political visibility—something less accessible through national and international media, where competition for attention is greater. In this sense, regional outlets provide political actors with a shortcut to visibility and access. National outlets, by contrast, are more closely associated with attacks on opponents, largely because they accommodate a broader range of political actors. This function is not characteristic of regional media ($SR = -3.9$).

3.4. Media groups: major conglomerates beyond anti-media discourse

The previous data already indicated the predominance of traditional over digital outlets, as well as the prominence of national media compared with regional (having a specific strategic role) and public-service media. However, it remained unclear which communication groups were most frequently referenced. Although a broad range of outlets appears in the dataset, some stand out as particularly relevant within the Brazilian media system. The data (Figure 1) include only outlets accounting individually for more than 1% of all mentions, resulting in 20 names that together represent 68% of references. In total, 233 distinct references were advantageously mobilised across the 2,102 posts.

Figure 1. Media groups most frequently referenced by parliamentarians (%)



Source: the authors

Major Brazilian media conglomerates—Globo/G1/O Globo, Band, *Folha de S. Paulo*/UOL, *Estadão*, *Veja*, and CBN—occupy a prominent position. Grupo Globo alone accounts for the highest number of mentions, serving as the main reference used to reinforce and legitimise parliamentary discourse (18% overall). Although it is also one of the primary targets of anti-media rhetoric (Massuchin et al., 2022; Marques, 2023), it is simultaneously appropriated to sustain political discourse. One example is the post: '*Projeto de nossa autoria para criar medidas protetivas a advogados foi aprovado na Comissão de Segurança Pública. Agora segue para a CCJ.* <https://t.co/MuxdtU8qep>' [A bill authored by us to create protective measures for lawyers has been approved by the Public Security Committee. It now proceeds to the CCJ] (Ricardo Ayres, 6 June 2024), in which the parliamentarian uses media coverage to validate his parliamentary activity. Another example is: '*Bolsonaro INDICIADO! Matéria completa da edição de hoje do Jornal Nacional sobre a participação do ex-presidente na trama golpista!* <https://t.co/OJgPg4v9at>' [Bolsonaro INDICTED! Full report from tonight's *Jornal Nacional* on the former president's role in the coup plot!] (Pedro Uczay, 22 November 2024), which appropriates content from Brazil's most watched television news programme to attack a political opponent, Jair Bolsonaro.

This reflects not only closer relations with traditional Brazilian media, as previously observed, but also concentration around a narrower set of outlets. Parliamentary choices ultimately reinforce the media concentration that structures the Brazilian media system itself. This concentration stems from two related dynamics. The first concerns the selective use of media, particularly major conglomerates, in which appropriation shifts fluidly between advantageous use and anti-media discourse.

The notion of 'selective media use' differs from both political parallelism and media instrumentalization (Mancini, 2012). Political parallelism presumes stable alignment between political and media groups. However, the same outlets—especially mainstream media—are mobilised by opposing political actors. Alves and Albuquerque (2024) previously identified this dynamic, and the present findings reinforce the dual nature of media–politics relations in Brazil. Nor does the concept of media instrumentalization adequately explain these references to traditional outlets. Although political pressure over coverage may exist, there is neither widespread ownership of media organisations by politicians nor the degree of opacity highlighted by Mancini (2012), whereby ownership structures become unclear. In many cases, the appropriated content

does not indicate direct political interference in news production. Rather, politicians reuse routine political coverage and reframe it through additional commentary.

At the same time, this process must also be understood within the broader context of political instability and the Brazilian government's far-right turn between 2019 and 2022. During this period, these media groups—especially Grupo Globo—increasingly opposed former president Bolsonaro's positions, reacted against his anti-media rhetoric, and adopted more critical coverage of his government (Araujo & Guazina, 2024). Although this did not necessarily translate into favourable coverage of Lula, neither did it benefit Bolsonaro and his political allies (Araujo & Prior, 2021). This dynamic provided material that could be appropriated by a broad range of political actors.

There is also space for digital-native outlets outside these conglomerates, as well as for some public-service communication channels (TV Câmara and GOV.BR⁶). However, they do not replace major media groups in shaping or prioritising the media system from the perspective of political actors. Thus, although new actors have emerged within digital information flows, they remain more common in non-institutional spaces shared by activist groups and supporters (Santos et al., 2021). Among politicians, the media system is still structured more cautiously. Moreover, these newer actors are closely tied to opposing ideological camps, as discussed below.

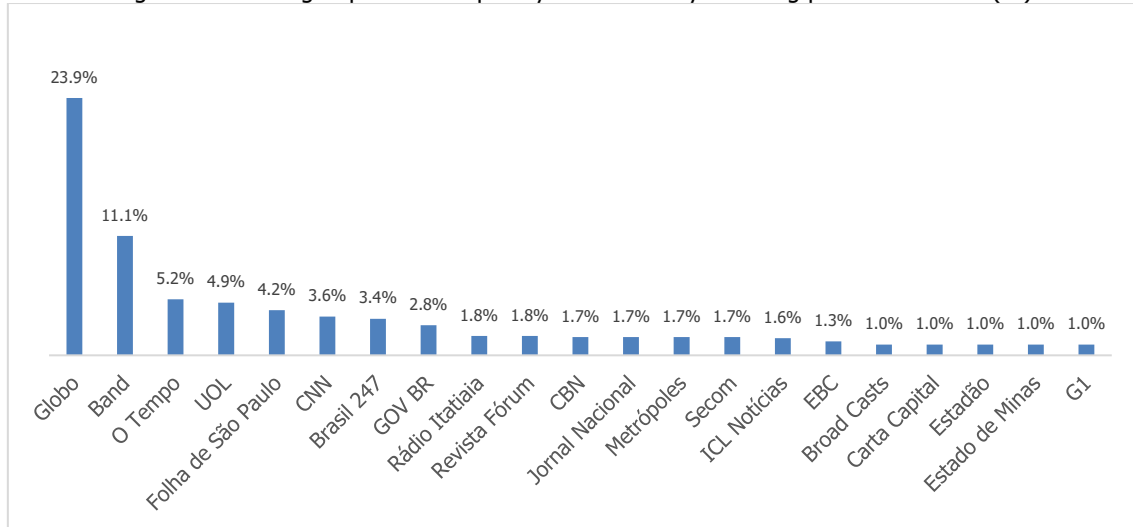
3.5. Progressive media: an ecosystem parallel to mainstream media in the left's communication flow

From the mid-2000s onwards, a new set of digital-native outlets gained prominence in Brazil: the progressive blogosphere (Magalhães, Albuquerque & Alves, 2020). The present analysis examines how this ecosystem is positioned within the media system from the perspective of left-wing political elites. Magalhães and Albuquerque (2017) had already identified links between these outlets and left-wing politicians on Facebook in 2016. Nearly a decade later, the findings show how this ecosystem has been incorporated into parliamentary communication.

This is a heterogeneous group bringing together journalists, activists, politicians, and organisations evolved beyond personal blogs into more professionalised and institutionalised actors (Magalhães, Albuquerque & Alves, 2020). These outlets represent a leftward shift within the Brazilian media landscape (Magalhães & Albuquerque, 2017), though not through formal party alignment as observed in polarised pluralist systems.

⁶ The GOV.BR platform was considered in cases in which links directed users to the website's news section, understood here as a journalistic product. From the politicians' perspective, it therefore functioned as an informational source within the broader framework of public communication

Figure 2 – Media groups most frequently referenced by left-wing parliamentarians (%)



Fonte: the authors

The data (Figure 2) nevertheless show that the left still prioritises mainstream media as the main source of political legitimacy. The progressive blogosphere therefore operates more as a parallel than a central informational ecosystem. Left-wing parliamentarians mentioned 110 different media actors, although 21 accounted for 77% of all references. Grupo Globo (including print, television, and online portals) remains dominant, representing nearly a quarter of all mentions. It is followed by Band, O Tempo, UOL, and Folha de S. Paulo. These findings again highlight the complexity of relations between politics and media in Brazil. Even after decades of negative coverage of left-wing governments, biased electoral reporting, and associations between Workers' Party administrations and corruption (Azevedo, 2006; Araújo & Prior, 2021; Albuquerque, 2019), these organisations remain the left's primary suppliers of information.

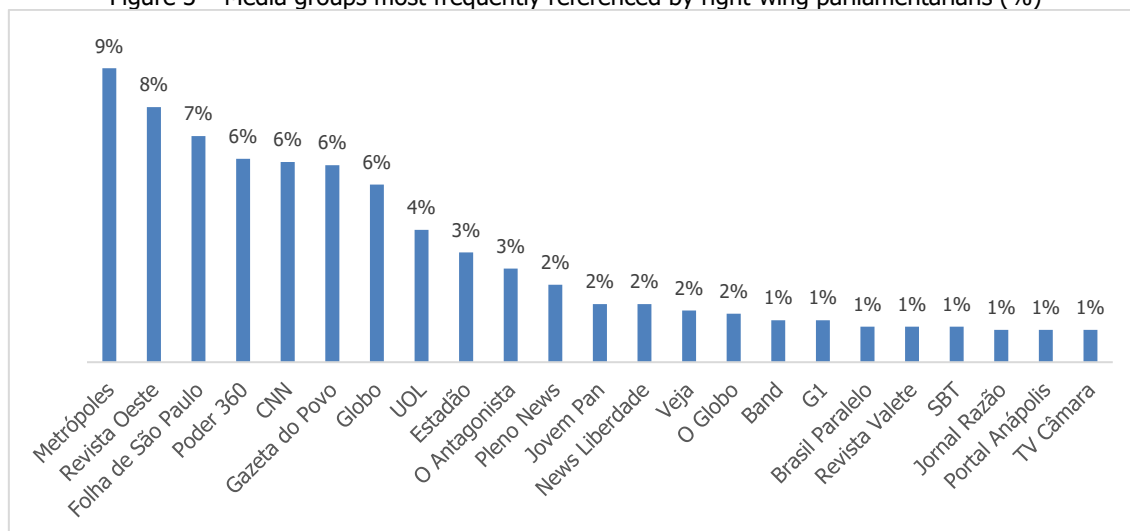
The progressive ecosystem is represented mainly by Brasil 247, Revista Fórum, and ICL Notícias among outlets accounting for more than 1% of total mentions. Although these organisations have professionalised and strengthened their presence on social media platforms, they still do not attract parliamentarians' attention to the same extent as mainstream outlets, which continue to provide the main symbolic legitimacy for political discourse. When mobilised, progressive outlets are generally used to reinforce positions or attack opponents, as illustrated in the following post: *'Até onde vai a certeza da impunidade e a sanha antidemocrática dos amigos de Bolsonaro? Segundo o @ICLNoticias um prefeito, bolsonarista, em agenda ao lado do ex-presidente (e atual inelegível) fala em vídeo em botar o Ministro do Supremo, Alexandre de Moraes, em uma <https://t.co/Fj3U5EKX4d>* [How far does the certainty of impunity and the anti-democratic zeal of Bolsonaro's allies go? According to @ICLNoticias, a Bolsonaro-supporting mayor, appearing alongside the former president (currently barred from office), stated in a video that Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes should be put in a [...]] (Erika Hilton, 25 July 2024). Notably, these outlets are referenced almost exclusively by the left and rarely become targets of anti-media discourse from other political actors.

3.6 Right-wing hyperpartisan media: a parallel ecosystem to the mainstream press

Right-aligned media organisations—sometimes adopting a more journalistic format, but often blending information, opinion, and even disinformation—expanded significantly after the 2018 elections. Many were created during the Bolsonaro administration, such as Revista Oeste, founded in 2020. These outlets have received different labels in the literature, including hyperpartisan (Recuero et al., 2021) and alternative

media (Comel, 2025), and have frequently served as sources within non-institutional spaces (Santos et al., 2021). The websites supplying links and content for political debate have grown considerably and achieved increasing professionalisation in terms of funding structures (Alves & Nichols, 2025). The analysis therefore examines whether these organisations are also incorporated into political discourse (Figure 3), thereby positioning them as part of the Brazilian media system. Right-wing parliamentarians mentioned 141 different media outlets; 23 accounted individually for at least 1% of total mentions, together representing 76% of all references.

Figure 3 – Media groups most frequently referenced by right-wing parliamentarians (%)



Source: the authors

The data show that, while the left-wing political elite still maintains strong ties with mainstream media because of the legitimacy these outlets provide to parliamentary discourse, the same does not apply to the right. This pattern is largely explained by the far right, whose parliamentarians make extensive use of the new media ecosystem, even displacing mainstream media from the top positions among referenced outlets. The two most cited actors, for instance, are digital-native organisations: Metr p les and Revista Oeste. Several others—such as Poder 360, O Antagonista, Pleno News, and News Liberdade—also appear prominently, reaching levels of visibility comparable to established groups such as Band and SBT.

Part of the more moderate right still engages with mainstream media, which explains their continued relevance among the most frequently cited outlets. These parliamentarians rarely reference actors such as *Pleno News* or *Revista Oeste*. By contrast, the more radical faction—including figures such as Bia Kicis, Carla Zambelli, and Eduardo Bolsonaro—tends to combine references to both this new ecosystem and traditional media. In the latter case, closer examination shows that mainstream outlets are mobilised mainly when coverage negatively targets political opponents or supports particular opinions.

One example is the sharing of content from Estad o: '*MENTIRA SE COMBATE COM A VERDADE [...]*' <https://t.co/dfzi9spMX4> [Lies are fought with truth [...]] (Carla Zambelli, 20 May 2024), in which the topic is former Supreme Court Justice Marco Aur lio Mello. At the same time, parliamentarians also circulate content from Revista Oeste: '*A charge da Revista Oeste nunca fez tanto sentido [...]*' <https://t.co/vSQ2JqPG1t> [The Revista Oeste cartoon has never made more sense...] (Carla Zambelli, 20 April 2024). These examples further illustrate the complexity of relations between political actors and the media system, particularly among groups that simultaneously engage in anti-media discourse.

Finally, it is important to emphasise the centrality of two specific outlets within the media system mobilised by right-wing parliamentarians: *Gazeta do Povo* and *Jovem Pan*. Both rank among the most frequently cited organisations and are traditional outlets that shifted rightwards over the past decade through the nationalisation of political agendas (Tavares, 2020). Their production has been described as a form of ‘facade journalism’ (Ernsen & Prudencio, 2025), often amplified through auxiliary platforms such as YouTube (Santini, Salles & Mattos, 2023). *Gazeta do Povo*, originally a regional newspaper in the state of Paraná, became a regular source for conservative politicians across different states, both because of its columnists and its editorial alignment with conservative values. Notably, every mention of these two outlets in the dataset comes from right-wing parliamentarians.

4. Final considerations

This article examined the technological and political transformations of the past two decades in Brazil, which have reshaped relations between the political and media spheres. The reorganisation of the Brazilian media system itself highlights the need to understand how new informational actors emerge and connect with political actors. To analyse the positions occupied by media groups within this system, the study examined 2,102 messages posted on X in 2024 by a sample of 61 Brazilian parliamentarians. The aim was to identify both the intensity and forms of these relationships. Although frequently targeted by political attacks, the media remain central in legitimising political discourse and supplying informational resources, making this strategic dimension particularly relevant. Through references to communication groups, it is therefore possible to identify the central actors of the media system and obtain a ‘snapshot’ of the articulations between the two spheres.

Despite the growing presence of new informational actors (Alves, 2022), their widespread use by non-institutional actors (Santos et al., 2021), and the discrediting rhetoric found in political discourse (Marques, 2023), the findings showed that traditional media remain central to institutional politics. These outlets continue to occupy the core of the media system because they remain highly relevant to political actors. Although signs of change are emerging—largely driven by how the right mobilises and selects media references—traditional outlets still function as key sources of legitimacy. Their use is associated with reinforcing political discourse, self-promotion, and attacks on opponents. Observing these different advantageous uses, the article argues that both left- and right-wing parliamentarians relate to traditional media not through stable alignment or pure antagonism, but through convenience. The relationship between politics and media therefore operates not through a single logic of connection, but through an ambivalent and unstable arrangement.

Major media conglomerates—such as the *Folha*, *Globo*, and *Estadão* groups, historically central to the Brazilian media system—remain the most frequently mobilised outlets by parliamentarians, reinforcing this logic of convenience. References to these organisations coexist with criticism and attacks directed at them by politicians themselves. This dynamic occurs alongside the negative coverage historically directed by these outlets towards both left-wing actors (Azevedo, 2006) and the far right (Araújo & Guazina, 2024). These nuances further support arguments against the existence of strong political parallelism in Brazil, particularly because the same media groups serve as sources for opposing ideological actors whenever their content proves advantageous.

Public media occupy a peripheral position within the communication flows coordinated by political elites and, when mobilised, are associated mainly with centre- and left-wing actors. This may reflect the use of public media by governing groups and possible political interference. At the same time, the findings highlight the distinct role regional media occupy within the system and in their relations with political actors: they perform a strategic function by enabling self-promotion among local constituencies, later amplified by parliamentarians on social media. This form of media use does not operate in the same way through national outlets. Thus, although references to regional media are less frequent and do not place them at the centre of the system, their use is 'more than convenient', since they are rarely targeted by anti-media discourse. In this case, there is stronger evidence of political-party proximity than in national media, as suggested by Pinto (2014), who identified close ties between regional outlets and local political actors.

The final point concerns how ideology shapes these connections and creates space for new informational actors. In this regard, the mobilisation of a distinct ecosystem is far more evident on the right than on the left. Left-wing parliamentarians do not grant extensive visibility to progressive outlets, despite these organisations having emerged precisely to provide alternative informational resources (Magalhães & Albuquerque, 2017). Instead, they continue to prioritise traditional media, especially major national outlets. By contrast, the right has more recently organised its own ecosystem and already uses it as a primary source of information, giving anti-system media increasing relevance within the media system itself (Albuquerque et al., 2025). Traditional media are still occasionally mobilised, reaffirming the convenient relationship with mainstream media, yet institutional actors increasingly appear to be replacing them with hyperpartisan outlets.

This analysis helped explain how institutional politics connects with the media system. Through these relationships, it also demonstrated both the continued centrality of established actors and the incorporation of new ones according to their recognition by the political sphere. These dynamics between the political and media systems reveal complexities often overlooked in existing analyses, particularly when the phenomenon is not examined comparatively and systematically. This is especially evident in the notion of convenient media use, which appears more suitable for unstable and multiparty contexts. One limitation of the study is that it focuses on a group of electorally prominent parliamentarians rather than a random sample. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to these connections and compare different political contexts. Another possible research agenda would examine how parliamentary references to media organisations relate to news production routines themselves, since media actors may strategically seek greater visibility within political discourse in order to strengthen their position within the media system.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research and did not require approval from an ethics committee.

Declaration of AI usage

No generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Contribution of the authors

	Michele Goulart Massuchin	Renata Copatti Salvador
Conceptualisation	X	
Data curation		X
Formal analysis	X	X
Funding acquisition	X	
Investigation	X	X
Methodology	X	
Project administration	X	
Resources	X	
Software	X	
Supervision		X
Validation		X
Visualisation	X	
Writing – original draft	X	X
Writing – review & editing	X	X

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